

VSCC English Department's Best Essays 2013-14

English Composition at VSCC: Expository Writing and Researched Argument

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Introduction

We are proud to share with you this tenth edition of the *VSCC English Department's Best Essays*. This publication is the result of many hours of hard work on the part of students and faculty. Each year, instructors in the English Department encourage students who have demonstrated excellence in their writing to submit an essay to the committee; that committee of Vol State faculty then works collaboratively to choose superior student work for publication. The purpose of this publication is twofold: first, to showcase exemplary student writing by Vol State students, and second, to provide our faculty with helpful tools for teaching writing and critical thinking skills to our students.

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

Section I focuses on ENGL 1010 expository writing, essays which are personal responses to a topic and include no research. These essays generally involve the rhetorical modes of narration, description, and illustration.

Section II includes researched essays specifically selected from ENGL 1010 students. This category gives first-semester English composition students the chance to show their research skills without competing directly with more advanced writers. Good research often employs the rhetorical modes of comparison/contrast and cause/effect.

Finally, Section III concludes the publication with research papers written by students in any class other than ENGL 1010. Most of the submissions came from ENGL 1020 students, though it is an ongoing desire of the committee to draw future submissions from other courses and even other disciplines.

The student essays included in this publication were submitted between the Summer 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters, and they are representative of the diversity of student writing found in composition and literature classes at Vol State. We would like to thank all of the professors who encouraged their students to submit, and to express our sincere congratulations to those students who are published here. Our goal is to continue to grow this project so that it remains meaningful for students and faculty alike.

Deb Moore, Committee Chair
On behalf of the Best Essays Committee
August 1, 2014

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SECTION 1:
EXPOSITORY WRITING

PRIZE WINNER

The writer of this essay provides a vivid description of a place by using images that appeal to all of our senses. The use of the first person is appropriate in this piece because this place in North Carolina embodies what the narrator is. Furthermore, the transformation of such an idyllic place through the seasons, which is described towards the end of the essay, helps the image transcend time from the distant past into the future, long after the narrator is gone.

The essay is focused, has an original voice and excellent details, and makes an important point. The sentence structure and the word choice convey the emotion created by the communion with nature and the identification with one's land.

Katherine Collins

Professor Daniel Kelley

ENGL 1010

30 January 2014

Ashe County, North Carolina: Where My Soul Sings

North Carolina is a greatly varying state; a wandering soul can start in the high peaks at the western side and travel due east until he or she meets the ocean, or more likely, the sound on the other. I love its diversity; from the Appalachians to Cape Hatteras and the Outer Banks.

However, it is not at the beach but in those isolated mountains where my soul flies free.

Ashe County is the northwestern-most county, of fairly unremarkable size and history, situated just in the corner formed by eastern Tennessee and Virginia. I suppose, to most, that's just what this little backwoods region is: unremarkable. There have been no great historical battles there.

No world-famous celebrities call it their birthplace or home although a few have visited. It was once part of the State of Franklin, which later evolved into the State of Tennessee. Perhaps I only see its beauty because I know its secrets and the stories it holds especially for me. My family has been in Ashe County since at least the late nineteenth century, and my father still owns some land there, "through the holler and way on up the mountain" as the old folks around there say.

We've built a small cabin at that place; it doesn't have a road leading to it or even running water, so one must take a four-wheeler or hike straight up the grade and bring enough potable water for the stay. Nevertheless, it's the closest to paradise I believe I've ever been.

To visit my remote little hideaway, one would have to first drive down, then up, and then down again, a narrow two-lane (really one and a half-lane) road that winds through the mountains with hairpin curves and turns that nearly make you double back on yourself. Just around a few of those "crash curves," you'll find a small glade. Don't blink; you'll miss it. On the left of the road lies a long-neglected tobacco field with a small ramshackle barn toward the front. Now greyed, splintering, and unsafe for use, this was once my great-grandfather's main tobacco barn and later my Pa-Pa's mechanic shop. Just on the other side of those trees that line the back of the field, the New River is babbling as it cuts its unique northern current as it has for many centuries. To the right of the road is a much smaller cleared area, large enough only for a small aluminum shed and to park a few vehicles. This is where our trek up the mountain begins. We disembark our vehicles, load up the four-wheeler (if we are fortunate enough to have use of one this time), and start the short but strenuous journey. The distance up the mountain is only about one-quarter to one-half a mile from where we park, but the grade is extremely steep. At times it feels like one could fall over backwards and right off the side of the mountain. Just when it feels like our lungs will explode and our calves will catch fire from the climb, the woods break open into a clearing, and there sits our little refuge. Modest as it may be, the view beyond makes all the efforts worthwhile. In the fall, one looks out upon a rainbow carpet of reds and oranges and yellows and even purples, with patches of bright green that I know are the area's many Christmas tree farms. In the summer I can see down the hollow, or "holler," and watch the cows grazing on what was once another part of my family's land. When winter comes, the snow

transforms the view into a wonderland, with the river glistening past its icy banks. Oh, but spring at the cabin is what makes my heart sing!

Here is where my soul can truly feel free and at home and connected to all that makes me, me. Here is where I feel the spirit of my great-grandparents as they worked and planted and struggled and persevered to care of seven children on a Great Depression-era tobacco farm. Here is where I can picture Uncle Freddie hunting in the woods as a child, long before he left for Vietnam and came back a different man. Everything is green and new, and yet ancient and time-honored and unchanged. These are the same cycles that have gone on in these mountains for millennia and will continue long after I am gone as well.

Kristine Dyer's short essay is a nice study in narration. She bookends her story with an introduction and conclusion which convey the importance of her grandmother, but the story itself gives us a true sense of who this woman was and how she lived. We understand the grandmother's sense of humor not so much because we are told she had one, but rather because we are shown she had one. The reader leaves this piece with an understanding of Kristine's family that goes far deeper than any vague, abstract discussion would have rendered.

Kristine Dyer

Professor David Johnson

English 1010

07 March 2014

Wouldn't Be Caught Dead

My maternal grandmother was Vivian Bowen Moore, or "Granny," as I affectionately called her. Granny was granted permission from the courts to raise me from the time I was five until the day she died, when I was twenty seven. Granny was of average height with the most beautiful salt and pepper hair, except for the streak of solid white swooping from left to right that framed her face. She always took pride in her appearance, never leaving the house without being "put together." That is just how the women of her generation were brought up.

The item of clothing she favored above all was her girdles. In fact, Granny was even known for mowing her grass with her girdle on under her shorts. So, at my Granny's funeral in 1996, my mother and I noticed that the girdle we had given the mortician had in fact not been used. Naturally my mother and I asked the funeral home to please put Granny in her girdle, and they happily obliged. Of course, I can just imagine the struggle these poor funeral home workers went through trying to figure out how to actually accomplish such a task. Having worked in a funeral home myself for a brief period, I know that the morticians don't actually put the dead

into their clothing. It is usually just split down the back, laid across the deceased, tucked in and then pinned tightly up under the body. I can picture the workers trying to desperately put one leg in at a time, pulling and tugging, as this stiff, rigid woman I loved chuckled silently at them from Heaven. If they had truly been able to meet my Granny, they would have understood the importance of the girdle. She always said that she would never be caught dead without her girdle on. It has always been a running joke in my family, Granny and her girdle fetish.

Two of my favorite aunts got wind of the incident and decided to check for themselves to see if it had actually been put on her body. Little did any of us know that one of my very round, well-endowed aunts had lifted herself up on the edge of the casket. She lifted herself up just enough so that her breasts would be resting inside the edge so she could reach in to feel.

What happened next would have embarrassed anyone, but not these two adorably plump, squatty women. As the one aunt was pushing herself away from the coffin to find solid ground, the coffin began to give way along with her. It was all so surreal to hear both of them yelling for help. Heck, my Granny was probably yelling for help too. Narrowly avoiding disaster, the entire room couldn't help but erupt into hysterical laughter. I know that if Granny could have spoken, she would have said something like, "I can't even rest in peace without you people bugging me."

Granny has been with the Lord for seventeen years now, and not a single day goes by that I don't think about her. She was larger than life in my eyes. This woman sacrificed her golden years to raise me, and I will always have her watching over me and my family. There is an 8x10 portrait-style photograph of her hanging in my living room, as a constant reminder of her great love for us.

Travis Ledoyt's success with this paper started with his title. It is clever, succinct, and informative. This ability to process his thoughts through the filter of an excellent vocabulary remains obvious throughout the entire essay. Though we generally do not use contractions in academic writing, Ledoyt uses them appropriately here to convey a slightly less formal tone. Tone is determined by audience and message, the two engines of every good piece of writing, and the writer appears to be well aware of both. He successfully maintains his authority and credibility while conveying a conversational mood, thus making his writing incredibly readable and his message clear.

Travis Ledoyt

Professor Deborah Moore

English 1010

18 August 2014

Civil Lies of the Civilized: Abandoning the Practice of Morally Ambiguous Deceit

We live in a culture of lies. In every step of society, we have come to expect a degree of lying. The old saying, “believe nothing you hear and only half of what you see” says a lot about our current cynical mindset. Why is this a problem? Let’s look no further than to those in charge, those with the influence and power to shape our world. From denials of sexual relations, to the search for weapons of mass destruction, to keeping your current health care, just in the United States alone we have countless examples of lying and deceit. Unfortunately, these sound bites seem to serve more as punch lines for late night talk shows rather than a warning that our moral compass may require a calibration. Though our country was founded with a goal of transparency, we have grown numb and practically accepting of the countless deceptions, deliberate omissions, half-truths, and misrepresentations of facts delivered to us almost daily by our leaders, both in politics and in business.

This is not exclusively an American issue. Recently, the Japanese government has been accused of lying about the threat of radiation from the Fukushima accident in 2011 – now

confirmed to be a nuclear meltdown. We shouldn't be blind to the fact that those in power will continue to push the edge of the envelope, especially when driven by greed and their own self-interests. The more power we give them, the more they will take. How does this level of deceit relate to you telling your friend her ugly baby is beautiful? The fact is, these little lies and deceptions make us more comfortable with the concept of lying; they help create an environment that is conducive to more dangerous lies. If we want to live in an honest society, we need to make a clear line in the sand as to what is acceptable; we need to bring a consistent policy on lying within reach. How do we accomplish such a seemingly impossible task? It is not by focusing on the dishonesty of the cold-hearted or mentally disturbed. The first step is to move away from the sea of fabrications we willingly participate in and subject ourselves to on a daily basis. First and foremost, let's stop these lies that we deem forgivable for they are the grains of sand that muddy the water.

The polite lie, while seemingly the most noble, is perhaps the most treacherous. The idea that we are saving another from emotional pain or suffering gives us the illusion that lying is a necessary social tool. This tactic, while altruistic, is ultimately unhelpful and does not serve to advance our society. We must be willing to tell people what they need to hear and when on the receiving end, separate the message from the messenger. Those around you that provide the most value to you are the ones willing to be honest, direct and genuine. As children we are taught the skills of lying and the 'appropriate' circumstances in which to do so: "Just tell your Aunt Cindy that you liked the sweater." Do we not send mixed messages when we both scold and praise our children for lying? Instead, let's work toward raising confident children who learn to take criticism. They just may grow into adults that can not only handle the truth, but would prefer it.

Children are also great students of the defensive lie: “I didn’t take a cookie.” Kids learn that they can use lies to avoid punishment, embarrassment, or any unfavorable response to their actions. This can often be carried into adulthood where, to their benefit, they are now smart enough not to leave a trail of crumbs. We need to remember that we are “only human” and that means we will make mistakes. We must take blame for and ownership of our mistakes and seek out forgiveness. Perhaps we’d be more thoughtful and careful in our actions if the full weight of its consequence would come upon us. While to the observer this lie would seem morally wrong, to the guilty party a personal justification of moral soundness would be manufactured out of self-preservation. However, the defensive lie is also used to protect others and it is here where people are apt to defend its use. Again, if we were all willing to take the blame for our mistakes, we would neither expect nor ask another to lie for us.

Far worse than lying for what is typically deemed a good reason is the habit of lying for no reason. After years of practice with any skill – like playing an instrument, painting, carpentry, etc. – it becomes second nature. No longer focusing on the how-to, a learned ability is more or less moved to the realm of subconscious. Lying is like a learned foreign-language; we can slip in and out of it without necessarily being aware. For instance, when we could simply greet strangers with the well wishes of a “Good morning” or a simple acknowledgement of “Hello,” it is considered polite to feign a personal interest with an inquiry of “How are you”. Like actors filling their roles, the responders, regardless of their true answers, will often reply with a “fine” or “good.” Here we see that not only are lies accepted but they are expected. There are countless occasions of such insincerity and false statements that fill a day’s encounters. In one study, psychologist Robert S. Feldman found that 60 percent of people lied at least one time in a 10 minute conversation (Feldman). He even goes on to say that the participants in the study

were surprised at their own results. While making others happy is a worthy endeavor, this can be accomplished to a deeper and more fulfilling extent. We must focus on *why* we should care about others instead of how we can create that illusion.

It's not just lying to others that is the problem. Many of us lie to ourselves as well. People tell themselves that they didn't eat too much at a meal or that they can eat the cake because "chocolate is good for you." This behavior is especially true of those who abuse drugs and alcohol. They lie to conceal their behavior from others and also to convince themselves they don't have a problem. We use this same kind of self-deception when we lie for one reason but convince ourselves it's for another. For example, a friend asks you to help them move, and you tell that friend you have other plans when you really don't. There are countless reasons you may not want to help and some of them may be legitimate and could have served as a good reply. Was your lie manufactured out of selfishness? It couldn't hurt to take ourselves off of auto-pilot and begin to question our motives. Otherwise we will just continue to become a society of self-centered, self-absorbed actors who pretend to care for others.

There is going to be the contrary view that there are times that truthfulness can lead to or fail to prevent harm. On these occasions, some may argue, it will be justifiable to lie. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant was a moral absolutist who believed that it was never acceptable to lie, steal or murder. He was posed the question of whether he would tell a murderer which way his friend had gone. Kant stuck to his guns and asserted that it would still be wrong to lie to the murderer (Varden 403). You would be hard pressed to find those that would agree with Kant on that question. I think it's appropriate to look at lying in this way: of the basic human rights, the right to always hear the truth should be among them. If it's appropriate for those who commit crimes to lose certain rights, those that intend to do harm should lose their right to the

truth. It's important to note that, just as with other morally wrong acts, like murder, there will always be rare exceptions to the rule. Lying must be considered an absolute last resort, rather than an easily dispensed lubricant that greases the wheels of social discourse.

Lying may be in our nature but so is violence. Just as we had a humanitarian revolution where we abolished corporal punishment and execution, we need to move away from this secondary form of deliberate assault on another. When we take a more absolutist position on deceit, those that mislead on a grander scale will soon stand out; not only will we see that they don't fit in with us, we'll see that they don't fit into our plans for progress and prosperity. From our economy to the environment there is dishonesty at the heart of every major issue facing us today. Without the truth we lack clarity. Without clarity our future is clouded in uncertainty. Let's clear the air. Do we value and respect the truth or is that just another lie?

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403. Print.

This short essay presents a character description of the writer's mother. Images that usually carry a negative connotation, such as smoking, provide a round a view of the character that ultimately evokes love. The narrator loves his mother for who she is, and he empathizes with her.

The piece is very moving. The writer conveys a feeling of sadness through the use of vivid images and other devices. For example, there is a strong paradox at the end of the essay since the author's mother was laid to rest precisely on Mother's Day.

Bryan Stiner

Professor David R. Johnson

English 1010

9 February 2014

A Fluffy White Lighthouse

My mother had several very distinct features about her that stuck out in my mind even at a very young age. The most prominent of them was the fact that she always smelled like her cigarette of choice -- Winston Light One Hundreds. As much as I loathe cigarette smoke, the smell of a freshly lit Winston reminds me of her and how the house always smelled, which is somehow soothing in a strange way. She was an avid smoker and was hardly ever without her cigarette case. The years of smoking afforded my mother a very distinct voice and a cough that I could pick out of a crowd. Raspy and crackling are the best ways I can describe them, but it was always music to my ears regardless of how she sounded. Another way I could very easily pick Mom out of a crowd was her short, curly white hair. She was never a very tall woman, but when we were in public and I happened to lose sight of her, I would always look for the puff of white hair that stuck out in a crowd, like a patch of snow on a green field, or a sort of weird fluffy white lighthouse.

My mother battled depression for many years, and the signs of it were very obvious on her face. I never remember a time in my life when I would have described my mother as youthful. Her face bore the wrinkles and features of a much older woman. These traits were exacerbated later in life by a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis and eventually terminal lung cancer. The six years of treatment for these diseases took a terrible toll on my mother's visage, but there were two changes that actually frightened me the most. As the multiple sclerosis progressed, she would struggle to find the words she was looking for when she spoke. She would often stutter and become very frustrated because she could not find the words she was looking for. The second change was the loss of her hair due to the chemotherapy. Her fluffy white hair, my "beacon in the crowd," was replaced by crocheted beanies and berets. In the year before her death, she lost the majority of what weight was left on her frame, and she became more of what one would imagine of an end of life cancer patient: Sunken, dark eyes, prominent cheek bones, little to no mobility, and an almost complete loss of her speech, be it from a physical limitation or of simply being defeated by what she called "those fucking tumors."

In 2007, on Mother's Day, we laid my mother to rest in the family cemetery. For the rest of my life, the smell of a Winston and the sight of a white haired little lady in a crowd will always remind me of the twenty-seven years I was able to spend with my mother.

This five-paragraph essay presents a short but effective narrative. The introduction takes a funnel approach that goes from the general description of an office to a specific individual, the narrator's partner. The piece is organized in chronological order, and the work's strongest point is the richness of its images. In a few sentences, the author provides a vivid image of a workplace and the different individuals who share that space.

Deana Simpkins

Professor Halbrooks

English 1010

4 March 2014

A Natural Beauty

I took a tour around the building of my new job, and the smell of coffee and fresh ink on paper filled the room. I could hear the fax machines printing paper and people laughing. I also noticed many faces. I have seen these types of faces before. Some faces looked as if they were on their fiftieth hour. They had long wrinkled cheeks with baggy eyes half opened that said they hated this place. Some faces were energetic and chipper. They would be the ones scrambling to make coffee, eat, and clock in on time every morning. I would see them dashing to the fax machine and flipping through stacks of paper all day. Then, there was one face that was unforgettable.

Her complexion was brown, her eyes were big and brown, and her lashes flourished around them like rays on the sun. Her eyebrows were perfect and crisp, sitting arched at the top of her eyes. She didn't have an expression on her face, which made her more appealing. I wanted to see a smile so I would know what intrigued her. Even a frown would be nice so I would know if she even liked her job. The blank expression she carried made me want to get to know her

better. She would sit with her legs crossed, and the way she moved her hands to pick up things like paper and pens was harmonic. Even the way she fluffed her big natural hair was sexy.

I never spoke, but I always made my presence known. I would make it a point to walk to the door closest to her to go to the bathroom. The long walk to the door seemed like walking into five o'clock traffic. My heart would pound so loudly I would think she could hear it. The closer I got to the door, the faster the beat would get. I was a walking metal detector, and she was the gold. Grabbing the door knob, I felt a shockwave through my body, and it ended once the door was shut. My heartbeat was back to normal, and my lips silently curled upwards as if I achieved victory. I would go to her side of the room to ask questions, hoping she would give me the Answer: "Did anyone receive a fax from Debbie Brown? ... Can we remove this parking ticket for this customer?" Even without an answer, I never felt defeated, but one step closer to whatever it was I was trying to achieve.

Finally, we sat in the same break room at the same lunch hour, across from each other. I felt warmth and coziness in the room. The smell of turkey sandwiches filled the air. She started a conversation easier than cranking up a car. The discussion was prank phone calls and unknown numbers. I told her my number and how everyone thought it was fake because it was so easy. Her eyes looked like flowers blossoming in the spring. We talked every day after that, and we just celebrated our one year anniversary as a couple.

All the trips to the bathroom the long way and the random work questions didn't get her to notice me. She noticed me for me. Butterflies and nervousness still fill our stomachs when we are around each other, all of this as a result of the types of faces we notice in our surroundings.

SECTION 2:
ENGL 1010
RESEARCHED ESSAYS

PRIZE WINNER

In this tightly focused research essay, Travis Ledoyt educates readers about the potentially devastating impact of the genetically modified food industry on the livelihood of small farmers and argues that the supposed benefits of GMOs are not worth the tradeoff. Much of the strength of this essay lies in the writer's choice to narrow his topic sufficiently so that it is manageable in a short paper. This allows for much more depth and thorough research than if he had cast his net wide and tried to examine the general health and economic effects of GMOs. Using a variety of scholarly articles and respected popular news sources, Ledoyt builds his case that large agribusiness corporations are using aggressive and sometimes unscrupulous tactics to squeeze out farmers who don't use their products. In the end, he argues, this will result in the fall of many small and organic farms and in consumers' having far less choice in the kinds of affordable produce available to them. A confident voice, careful research, and detailed illustration of the cause-and-effect relationship between the rise of GMOs and the plight of small farmers distinguish this powerful argument.

Travis Ledoyt

Professor Deborah Moore

ENGL 1010

4/10/2014

Growing Concerns:

The Negative Impact of Genetically Modified Organisms on Small-Scale Farmers

Just as those experiencing unusually cold weather in one region of the world can be mistaken that climate change isn't a reality, those of us who see the amount of wasted food in America – and the waists from food – may be under the false impression that the supply of food in the world is plentiful. Unfortunately, current estimations are that 842 million people don't have enough to eat – mostly due to distribution problems. But with an exploding human population increasing demand and environmental issues like climate change and the mysterious decline in bee populations hindering supply, global food scarcity is on the horizon. In response to this urgent crisis, the biotechnology industry has made fantastic claims about the ability of

genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to solve the problem by substantially boosting farmers' yields.

GMOs refer to plants or animals that have undergone scientific manipulations to introduce favorable traits from the genes of other organisms. (This differs greatly from traditional crossbreeding which combines genes from related species only). These new bioengineered life forms are designed to withstand adverse environmental conditions, require less farm labor, and tolerate high doses of pesticides and herbicides (Brush 135). With promises like that, farmers should benefit greatly from the introduction of such a godsend. It seems, however, that agricultural behemoths such as Monsanto are the biggest beneficiaries of GMOs. With the control of seeds shifting from farming communities to large corporations, GMOs have left many small-scale farmers counting their losses and missed opportunities.

Regardless of the U.S. Patent Law, which states that living things are not applicable subject matter, the genetic creations of these large agricultural companies – the entirety of which was created by nature over billions of years – have been patented. This means that the relationship between farmer and seed supplier no longer ends at purchase. For example, Monsanto's patent on the Roundup Ready soybean is controlled by a licensing agreement that outlines how farmers should use and manage the purchased seeds (Voo 24). According to the agreement, farmers can use the seeds for only one season, cannot replant the second-generation seeds, cannot share purchased seeds, and cannot breed seeds or give them out for research purposes. These restrictions prevent farmers from engaging in common agricultural practices which have been around for thousands of years. Cross-breeding and replanting are methods farmers have used to cut down on input costs. Not only are these GMO seeds more expensive, but they are now being repurchased year after year.

Agreements are taken seriously by the GM biotech industry, and they have no shortage of funds or attorneys to file lawsuits against farmers they suspect are breaking them. For example, in 2007 Monsanto sued farmer Vernon Hugh Bowman, accusing him of planting second-generation soybean seeds purchased from an authorized vendor. Not only did Mr. Bowman spend \$31k on court fees, he lost the case and was forced to pay Monsanto \$84k (Brush 135). The Center for Food Safety reported that Monsanto has sued 400 farmers and 53 farms for violating their licensing agreements (Wright). Another noteworthy case is that of a Saskatchewan farmer named Perry Schmeiser who was sued by Monsanto for patent infringement on their Roundup Ready canola seed. According to a *New York Times* article, “Mr. Schmeiser has surmised that the genetically modified seed either blew onto his property from neighboring farms or fell off passing trucks. Monsanto acknowledged that Mr. Schmeiser had never placed an order for Roundup Ready canola” (Simon). The Supreme Court ruled in Monsanto’s favor, though the agricultural giant was not awarded money as the farmer did not use the herbicide “Roundup” on the crop, which was the plants’ beneficial engineered trait (Simon). It would seem that this case, for Monsanto, was about sending a message.

The threat of a lawsuit can be a frightening thing when you’re a simple farmer, but it’s even more frightening if the lawsuit can be manufactured out of thin air. Farmers who grow non-GM crops close to agricultural lands that grow GM crops risk their plants being contaminated (Voo 22). Seeds and pollen are naturally spread between farms by the wind and various animals. Surprisingly, this occurrence can make innocent farmers targets for patent infringement lawsuits. In the case of *Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association, et al. v. Monsanto*, over 270,000 represented farmers lost an attempt to prevent wrongful litigation that can occur after unknown

contamination (Wright). According to the Grocery Manufacturers Association, the Monsanto Corporation investigates around 500 farmers every year.

Another concern over unintentional contamination is quality control for organic farmers and non-GMO suppliers. Organic farmers must adhere to strict guidelines to maintain their certifications. In 2013 a farmer in Oregon discovered that a strain of genetically modified wheat was growing in his field. It was soon discovered to be one that Monsanto had last tested in 2005 and had since abandoned. It is still unclear how the contamination happened, but it has other serious ramifications for farmers, according to journalist Bill Donahue, as he states in an article on Bloomberg's *Businessweek* website:

At stake is the \$8 billion wheat export business, and in particular U.S. wheat trade with Asia—and the welfare of more than 160,000 American farms. Soft white wheat is only a fraction of the total market (about 15 percent), but the incident raised questions about the integrity and safety of U.S. agricultural products. In its May 29 press release, the USDA revealed that the top buyer of American wheat, Japan, had suspended import tenders for western white wheat. South Korea planned to test all U.S. wheat and wheat flour upon arrival.

If you can't protect your farm from contamination of a decade-old GM that returned from the dead, how can you hope to protect it from others? Surprisingly, the burden falls on the non-GMO farmer to ensure the integrity of the crop. The costs associated with trying to keep natural seed separated from genetically modified varieties are mounting. For farmers, it includes buffer zones, cleaning equipment, inspections of crops and processing facilities, and frequent testing. To these farmers, it is unfair that they should be punished when they are merely the victims of GMO proliferation.

Should this proliferation of genetically modified seeds continue, the supply of non-GM seeds will decline as a result (*International Business Times* 28). Decline in the supply of non-GM seeds (like organics) implies that the cost of accessing such seeds will increase tenfold. Accordingly, small farmers may not be able to afford such seeds and either be forced out of farming altogether or pushed into growing engineered seeds. Farmers who continue to grow organic produce will not only be purchasing expensive seeds, but they will be now selling expensive products that people are not likely to buy (Brush 135). As it is, there are already countless people who support the idea of organic foods but simply can't afford the current hefty price tag. In contrast, the supply of GM products will increase, thus ensuring they are easily available and inexpensive. Many consumers prefer products that they can find easily and buy at lower prices. In general, the popularity of GM products has adverse effects on the availability and prices of non-GM products, thus ensuring that such farmers can no longer practice their agricultural activities at a profit. In the end, the number of small-scale farmers will decline in the United States and other countries across the world (Voo 25).

Many small farmers have already abandoned robust seeds to start growing GM varieties because of the promise for increased yields only to find that this was not the case (Glover 861). It was further stated by the Union of Concerned Scientists in a briefing that "Genetic engineering has actually done very little to increase the yields of food and feed crops. Given such a track record, it appears unlikely that this technology will play a leading role in helping the world feed itself in the foreseeable future."

In addition, pests that were to be eradicated by particular engineered seeds have developed a tolerance to the poison. This evolutionary countermeasure has also been seen by farmers who have planted Monsanto's Roundup Ready seeds only to find that they suddenly

must increase their use of Roundup Herbicide – which Monsanto conveniently sells – as resistant weeds have developed. Not only is this a slap in the face to our scientific hubris, but this defeats the purpose of the farmers investing in these seeds.

Traditionally, farmers used unused parts of crops to feed their animals. However, with the health concerns and controversies surrounding GM products, farmers find it impossible to use some crop parts such as corn, leaves and stalks to feed their animals (Voo 24). In studies conducted by Dr. Judy Carman of Flinders University in Australia, GM crops were found to cause pigs to have heavy uterus, reproductive complications, and digestive problems. Therefore, small farmers have to purchase expensive, safer feeds for their animals, thus increasing the overall cost of their farming activities (Glover 854). Also, small scale farmers risk the health of their families when they use part of their produce for household consumption. Previous research links GM foods to increased incidences of obesity, cancer, heart diseases, and allergies among others (Brush 135). These health effects on animals and families complicate the lives of small farmers through increased costs of farming, household expenses, and possibly medication expenses.

GMOs continue to spark controversy in the United States and other nations. This is because the consequences of such a solution – a magic seed replacing the lure of the magic pill – have not been properly weighed. We shouldn't underestimate the political and financial muscle of the GM biotechnology industry. Millions of dollars are being spent to sell the world on GMOs because billions of dollars are to be made. Despite the claims of “helping to feed the world,” these corporations do not deserve the benefit of the doubt when the potential for large profits are at stake. The global food crisis needs to be solved, not exploited. We should be working together to help farmers meet the demands of our growing world. We should be trying to put the tools in

their hands, not taking the seeds out of them. For small-scale farmers, making a living is a delicate balance. It's hard enough task without having to look over their shoulder for men in suits to have another hand in their pocket, or for empty promises of protection and security. As it stands, GMO's aren't giving farmers another option: they're giving them an offer they can't refuse.

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This essay is on a topic that could be a life or death matter for us all: the growing resistance to antibiotics. The writer uses credible sources and effective specific examples, but conveys her message in a clear, natural style. Notice the effective use of sentence fragments to open the paper. Yes, she breaks the “rule,” but she does it purposefully and to great effect.

Anna Buri

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

ENGL 1010-10

18 November 2013

The Battle Between Bacteria and Antibiotics:

How the Misuse of Antibiotics is Hindering Our Fight

Fever of 105°F. Rapid breathing. Bluish tint in lips and nail beds. Sounds like you may have pneumonia. Have no fear, though, for there is an antibiotic for that. Actually it is a rather familiar hero to the medical world: penicillin. Unfortunately, though, penicillin and other antibiotics are becoming less of an enemy to bacteria, including the type that causes bacterial pneumonia, and this poses a big problem.

In spite of this growing dilemma, the threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria does not seem to resonate with many in the populace. If one antibiotic fails to work, we can always use another one, right? Technically, yes. As the years progress, however, more and more antibiotics are being slowly defined as less and less effective against an increasing number of resilient bacteria. In two or three years, a brand new antibiotic that was extremely effective might need a new antibiotic to take its place as the former becomes unsuccessful. Then we have to start the long and extremely costly endeavor of discovering a new antibiotic compound to replace the old one. In the end, merely switching to another antibiotic is not a viable option. Prophetically, the

accidental discoverer of penicillin and Nobel Prize laureate, Alexander Fleming, forewarned the improper use of his newly found antibiotic in his Nobel lecture:

But I would like to sound one note of warning. Penicillin is to all intents and purposes non-poisonous so there is no need to worry about giving an overdose and poisoning the patient. There may be a danger, though, in underdosage. It is not difficult to make microbes resistant to penicillin in the laboratory by exposing them to concentrations not sufficient to kill them, and the same thing has occasionally happened in the body...

...[T]here is the danger that the ignorant man may easily underdose himself and by exposing his microbes to non-lethal quantities of the drug make them resistant.
(92-93)

In that same lecture, Fleming used the hypothetical scenario of a man not using enough penicillin to kill all the pneumonia-causing bacteria in his system. So later, not only does this man's wife become sick with pneumonia, but the bacteria is also now resistant to the penicillin. The treatment with penicillin cannot work, so his wife dies. Whom does Fleming blame for her death? The husband "...whose negligent use of penicillin changed the nature of the microbe" (93). We alone are responsible for the proper or improper use of antibiotics. Doctors warn us to complete our round of prescribed antibiotics so as to not leave any bad bacteria in our system that may then become resistant. A word to the wise should suffice, but for some reason it does not.

A case from the University of Missouri-Columbia's Virtual Health Care Team demonstrates just how ignorant our society is when it comes to appropriate use of antibiotics. A woman seeking relief from her cough and fever entered a physician's office. She persistently

asked for an antibiotic to take care of her cough. Since this was during flu season, the most probable cause of her symptoms was a virus, not bacteria, and antibiotics only kill bacteria. The physician agreed to prescribe her an antibiotic though and told her to come back if she did not get better. She came back the next day with a “drug-induced rash related to the antibiotic.” So she was given another antibiotic. This one did not help either, and by the end she was ultimately given three different antibiotics. After two weeks, the woman was admitted to the hospital and then diagnosed with enterocolitis. The intestinal bacteria that cause this normally do not affect the carrier because there are enough good bacteria in the intestine to keep it balanced.

Unfortunately, since this woman had taken so many antibiotics which also kill good bacteria, the bad bacteria was able to spread unchecked. The patient later died from enterocolitis, and all because she insisted on an antibiotic that would do nothing for her flu symptoms (Hedrick 3).

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), “Antibiotics were prescribed in 68% of acute respiratory tract visits – and of those, 80% were unnecessary according to CDC guidelines” (Scott et al.). Normally, the only reason doctors will prescribe antibiotics unnecessarily is to satisfy patients who do not realize that not only will their viral sickness not be cured by an antibiotic, but that they are also contributing to the rise of resilient bacteria, something that Fleming warned against as soon as antibiotics were first being discovered. Some listened, some did not, but it is not just patients who are contributing to antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Doctors have their hands in it, too.

When antibiotics were first developed and were proving to be extremely effective in killing bacteria, doctors seemed to be in such a euphoric state that they failed to be concerned about a growing trend. Dr. Elinor Levy, an immunologist and associate professor of microbiology at Boston University and the Boston Medical Center, and Mark Fischetti, a

contributing editor to *Scientific America* and a seasoned science writer, remark that it only took three years for bacteria to begin to show resistance against penicillin, which was first established in the commercial market in 1943. Methicillin, another antibiotic, was introduced in 1960, but, Levy and Fischetti note that it just took one year for there to be reports of resistance (177). Many other antibiotics were becoming less effective to bacteria, and all within a matter of a few years. Microbiologists and doctors were not too worried, though. Actually, they often denied any evidence that there was, in fact, a growing amount of resistant bacteria. With so many different antibiotics at their disposal, they figured they could just try a different antibiotic if the first one did not work. As each year ticked away, taking with it the efficacy of antibiotics, doctors finally started to notice that their over-prescribed treatments were starting to fail. According to Levy and Fischetti, it was not until 1997, when Keiichi Hiramatsu, a professor of bacteriology at Juntendo University in Tokyo, published a paper to the *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy* concerning his and one of his colleague's findings that staph infections could indeed become resistant to the antibiotic Vancomycin, that antibiotic-resistant bacteria began to be noticed worldwide (178-182). After over fifty years, during which bacteria were quickly evolving to combat our now dwindling number of effective antibiotics, the medical world slowly started to recognize that we were falling behind in the war on bacteria.

A major place that we are losing the fight is in our hospitals. From cases of physicians who prescribe antibiotics without waiting for positive bacteria test results to countless instances of doctors and nurses failing to wash or sanitize their hands frequently enough thus aiding the spread of resilient bacteria, the ways we are slowly losing the battle against bacteria abound. That is not to say that our campaign against bacteria is not completely hopeless; yet.

In 1945, Alexander Fleming gave us a warning: either use antibiotics properly, or be prepared to face a new string of resistant bacteria. Nearly seventy years later, many are heeding his warning. We failed to use antibiotics correctly in the first place, so now we must prepare. Different classes of antibiotics need to be developed, more precautions need to be taken when dealing with bacterial infections, and new antibiotics need to be seen as a treatment of last resort. Perhaps if we act quickly enough, we can get back into the battle against bacteria before the war is completely lost.

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The best research papers often begin with a personal connection to the subject. Such is the case for this essay. The writer knows the mother of a son with Lyme disease and uses the son's dramatic example throughout the paper. Specific examples are more interesting than statistics alone, but the writer uses statistics and expert opinion to show that his extended example is typical. The writer stresses the importance of knowledge of this condition, especially for people in the southern United States. We have included the outline as an example of how a well-done outline can strengthen the organization of an essay.

Outline

Thesis: Because of Lyme disease, patients have difficulty securing medical treatment, suffer from a poor quality of life, and fight harsh financial hardships.

- I. Lyme disease is a growing cause for concern to the American public.
 - A. Merriam-Webster defines Lyme disease.
 - B. A press release by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides evidence that Lyme disease is a growing problem.
 - C. A report by the U.S. News and World Report magazine defines areas most affected by Lyme disease.
- II. An interview conducted with Cynthia Fry about her and her son's experiences with Lyme disease.
 - A. Robert Nathaniel Fry was bitten by a tick and infected with Lyme disease on May 27, 2006.
 - B. Cynthia had a lot of trouble securing a diagnosis for her son.
- III. People that are infected with Lyme disease have difficulty securing treatment.
 - A. There have been many hearings to have the guidelines, set by the IDSA, on how to deal with Lyme reformed.
 - B. A documentary called *Under Our Skin* followed a hearing between the IDSA and ILADS.

- C. Victims of Lyme disease continue to have difficulty securing treatment and getting diagnosed by their doctors because of the guidelines states by the IDSA.
- IV. Chronic Lyme patients suffer from a low quality of life due to the severe effects that it has on the body
 - A. According to Lyme Policy Wonk, the most common complications of Lyme disease include fatigue, sleep impairment, joint pain, muscle aches, and mental health problems.
 - B. Cynthia Fry explains the debilitating problems that her son faced because of Lyme disease.
- V. People suffering from Lyme disease often find themselves falling into debt.
 - A. The documentary *Under Our Skin* asks people who suffer from Lyme how much they are paying out of pocket in medical procedures.
 - B. Cynthia Fry explains how much she spent cumulatively over the duration of her sons' illness.
 - C. A report by the U.S. Census Bureau explains what the average household income was for the year of 2012.
- VI. Unfortunately, not many people know the horrors of Lyme disease and fantastic failures of the medical community.
 - A. Action must be taken and awareness must be brought to the public's attention.
 - B. The Southern medical community needs to push for more in depth research on prevention and treatment of chronic Lyme disease.
 - C. People's stories need to be heard so that policies for the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of Lyme disease can be improved.

Casey James

Ms. Grossberg

English 1010 008

22 April 2014

Absence of Knowledge: The Devastation Caused by Lyme Disease

Imagine a group of people knowing they are sick and having a pretty good idea of what is causing their illnesses, but not being able to get tested or proper treatment for what is causing their bodies so much physical distress. They visit doctor after doctor asking to be tested or asking to be treated and keep getting told that it is allergies, or it is the flu, or it is all in their head, and could not possibly be what they are suggesting. They get bounced around from specialist to specialist for months, even years before finally getting diagnosed for the illness they have been suggesting all along. The chance to prevent severe medical implications from occurring has passed. The disease has ravaged their bodies, and all the doctors can do now is damage control. They can no longer work because the illness has rendered them disabled while, at the same time, these people are going into enormous debt because of medical costs. This unfortunately is the story for many people infected with Lyme disease. Because of Lyme disease, patients have difficulty securing medical treatment, suffer from a poor quality of life, and fight harsh financial hardships.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, Lyme disease is “an inflammatory disease characterized at first by a rash, headache, fever, and chills, and later by possible arthritis and neurological and cardiac disorders, caused by bacteria that are transmitted by ticks” (“Lyme Disease”). In a press release on August 19, 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that “preliminary estimates indicate that the number of Americans diagnosed with

Lyme disease each year is around 300,000.” This number alone should be great cause for concern. In a 2013 publication of *U.S. News and World Report*, the magazine notes that most reported cases of Lyme come from the Northeastern and Midwest portions of the United States with 96 percent of cases occurring in thirteen states (“U.S. Lyme Disease”). Unfortunately it is not isolated to just these regions. People have been diagnosed with Lyme all over the United States, and for those who become infected in the southern portion of the United States, getting diagnosed and treated can be incredibly difficult.

In an interview conducted with Cynthia Fry, a Nashville resident whose son, Robert Nathaniel Fry, had Lyme disease, she was asked how difficult it was to get her son diagnosed properly after he had been bitten. She answers, “He had been bitten on a kayaking trip in May of 2006 in Franklin, Tennessee. Two years and 38 doctors later, including two out of state trips, he was finally diagnosed with Lyme.” She further explains that most of the doctors they saw would tell them that it is not possible that he could have Lyme disease because it does not exist this far south and that his symptoms were probably being caused by something else. Her story runs parallel to many other stories of people struggling to get diagnosis and treatment. It is difficult securing treatment because of guidelines on how to deal with Lyme disease that have been set by the Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA).

There have been many hearings to have these guidelines reexamined and changed by proponents to Lyme disease reform, such as the International Lyme and Associated Diseases Society (ILADS). In the documentary *Under Our Skin*, the film reviews the controversy between these two groups and their positions on Lyme disease:

Over the past decade, two opposing camps have emerged in the battle over this tick-borne illness. One camp is represented by a group of 14 academic researchers

who wrote the 2006 IDSA Lyme guidelines. They maintain that Lyme disease is ‘hard to catch and easy to cure’ because the infection is rare, easily diagnosed and cured with two to four weeks of antibiotics. This group claims that chronic infection by the Lyme spirochetal bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi* is rare or nonexistent. The opposing camp is represented by ILADS, led by a group of community-based physicians. Its members argue that Lyme disease is not rare and tick bites often go unnoticed, especially since commercial laboratory testing of Lyme disease is inaccurate.

The two groups have been fighting against each other for many years on the way that Lyme disease is defined. Over the past few years, as there has been a growing population of individuals affected by Lyme disease, the IDSA has come under greater public scrutiny.

In July of 2009, the IDSA panel listened to the argument by the ILADS group proposing how to reform the way that Lyme disease is defined and treated. The eventual ruling by the IDSA remained largely true to their initial stance. This is a controversial problem because although the IDSA only provides guidelines and not actual rules to be followed, their suggestions are followed by many doctors and insurance companies. Thus, treatments for these people are either not provided by their doctors, or are denied to be paid for by their insurance plans because of these guidelines. The accepted time frame for action in the North, after being bitten and diagnosed, is a two-week window to be treated with high doses of antibiotics to put the disease into remission before it becomes well established in the body. If this window is missed, the disease becomes much more difficult to contain and control, and the effects of it can be devastating on the body.

Chronic Lyme patients suffer from a low quality of life due to the severe effects that it has on the body. Many of these people become unemployed and collect disability (if they are lucky) because the disease has rendered them unable to function at work. According to an article by Loraine Johnson, a writer for *Lymedisease.org*, the most common complications of Lyme disease include fatigue, sleep impairment, joint pain, muscle aches, and mental health problems limiting their clear thinking capacity nineteen days out of any given month on average.

When asked about the effects Lyme disease had on her son, Cynthia Fry replies, “He had to drop out of graduate school shortly after being infected because he could no longer function due to frequent seizures, neurological disorders, and severe pain. Many days he was so weak he could not even get out of bed, and when he did, he had to use a walker or wheel chair and be on oxygen. Sometimes he would get brain fog and we would repeat a conversation within 10 minutes of having it.” Stories just like this one and sometimes even worse can be found on any Lyme discussion board or blog with people sharing their stories of poor motor skills and inability to function because of severe neurological disorders. On top of this terrible living standard, there are enormous financial costs and debts being accumulated by the suffering individual.

With medical procedures being quite expensive, the cost to the consumer can be great. Because of the constant medical attention and treatments needed for victims of Lyme disease to stay alive (as well as being unable to work), those individuals often find themselves falling deep into debt trying to pay for it. Often in the cases of chronic Lyme patients, their insurance companies will deny coverage for specific treatments because of the current ISDA guidelines related to type and duration of treatments. Because the insurance companies refuse to pay for these treatments, the cost is passed on the patient. In the case of Fry, she was paying between \$30,000 and \$60,000 dollars a year in medical procedures, treatments, emergency room visits,

prescriptions, medical equipment, and medicine. She estimates that cumulatively, for the duration of Nathan's sickness, she had spent close to \$250,000 out of pocket trying to get her son well. Again, this is not a rare occurrence for those suffering from chronic Lyme. In the film *Under Our Skin*, the director followed many chronic Lyme sufferers through their daily lives and asked what they had spent. The most common figures were in the tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars out of pocket. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 report, the median household income for citizens in the United States is \$53,046 ("USA Quick Facts"). Because of this statistic, the cost of having Lyme disease can often have a significant and devastating financial effect on the individual and their family.

Unfortunately, many people know the horrors of Lyme disease and fantastic failures of the medical community. Cynthia Fry is one of those people. Her son Robert Nathaniel Fry died six days after his birthday on June 3, 2012, from complications of Lyme after a six-year battle. He was thirty-one. With so many personal stories and so much compelling evidence to support the existence and effects chronic Lyme disease has on its patients, action must be taken, and awareness needs to be brought to the public's attention. The Southern medical community needs to push for more in depth research on prevention and treatment of chronic Lyme disease and encourage education on the physical effects of Lyme and known treatments that can help their patients. People's stories need to be heard so that policies for the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of Lyme disease can be improved. There is a great absence of knowledge about chronic Lyme disease that desperately needs to be addressed.

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Is cursive handwriting a necessary skill for the twenty-first century, or should it go the way of the quill pen and ink well? This debate is being waged across the nation as more and more school systems are deciding to discontinue handwriting instruction. This persuasive essay makes a strong case that the art of writing cursive is worth preserving because of the many gifts students receive from it—some related to the development of concrete skills and others less tangible but equally important. In the end, Scruggs concludes that the art of cursive writing must not be lost because it is a powerful means of self-expression, invaluable in helping us to build a sense of identity as unique and creative individuals. This essay advances a complex thesis in an accessible way through strong organization, clear topic sentences, helpful transitions, and a simple eloquence that engages the reader in thoughtful reflection.

Kenya Scruggs

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

ENGL 1010

6 October 2013

Thrown For a Loop: Why Cursive?

Each year, Ron Nief and Tom McBride of Beloit College compile The Mindset List, a list of the characteristics and the perspectives of each incoming college freshman class. The list for next year's class of 2014 is already out, and the first characteristic reads: "Few in the class know how to write in cursive (McBride). More and more, being able to read and write cursive is becoming a rare talent instead of a widespread skill. With the invention and innovation of keyboard technology – from typewriters to computers to cell phones – students today have been presented with what seems a useful resource: they no longer have to suffer hand cramps or constantly sharpen pencils. They can simply type up their assignments; the power to do so is literally at their fingertips. What they do not realize is the trade-off they are making. Cursive is more than a form of writing we use to dress up our signatures on important documents. Cursive is needed, not just in the classroom, but in our personal lives as well.

Writing in cursive as opposed to typing a manuscript has many benefits. Just like playing with building blocks or throwing and catching a ball, cursive improves hand-eye coordination. But unlike the other activities, cursive ties in language, helping students focus on letters and words and spelling (Klemm). Although cursive can be a wonderful developmental aid, it cannot be denied that practicing forming script letters can be tedious at times, and even once cursive is mastered, the whole writing process may still be a slow one. But at this reduced pace, we have time to think about what we are writing and contemplate the thoughts being inscribed on the paper. In an interview, Wei Jingsheng, a Chinese electrician who was imprisoned for eighteen years for writing democratic essays, told *National Geographic* journalist Joel Swerdlow that writing requires thinking. Wei said, “To write, you must work methodically, forming your thoughts and prompting other people to think as they read ” (Holway 42). Although typing everything is much more efficient in today’s fast-paced society, cursive allows time for careful consideration of our penned words and ideas.

Not only does writing in script allow the writer to process his or her thoughts and feelings, but it also helps the writer learn patience and develop discipline. When learning cursive it can prove to be a painstaking task to master all the loopy-loops and zigzags of the script alphabet. It requires much practice, and a lot of erasing and starting over to reach perfection. Students can watch their progress develop as they write. They can see which letters need to be given extra attention and set goals to fix their mistakes. Working towards that goal until it is achieved is a great lesson in discipline, a lesson that is not often taught nowadays because we, in our quest to make life easier, have inadvertently adopted this attitude that if a machine can do work more efficiently, why should we put forth any effort? An opportunity to demonstrate the rewards of hard work and persistence to the next generation has manifested itself in learning

cursive; are we really willing to toss this incredible opportunity aside for the convenience of technology?

The great cursive debate is more than a matter of being time resourceful and having disciplined students. It is also about something quite personal: handwriting. The way one person might dot I's with hearts and how the next person's R's always resemble N's is what makes each person's penmanship unique. It is part of who we are and is an extension of our personalities. As society becomes increasingly more dependent on technology, teaching handwriting and cursive has gotten the boot. Teachers, struggling to maintain the rigorous standards set by the new Common Core program (which does not require teachers to teach script), no longer have the time to fit this fading art form into their curricula. As a result, we are losing a part of ourselves, a part that cannot be replicated or replaced with keystrokes.

Cursive needs to be kept alive in the classroom as well as at home. It is more than a font, more than an art, more than a discipline. Cursive impacts the way we write immensely, down to the very way we even think about writing. It is an expression of personality. Cursive makes us...well, us. And that is certainly something worth preserving.

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SECTION 3:
ENGL 1020 and ABOVE
ADVANCED RESEARCHED ESSAYS

PRIZE WINNER

“The Constitutionality of Same-Sex Marriages” by Savannah Hall presents the history of civil rights in this country along with the history and background of attitudes towards homosexuality, making the point often that laws passed to protect the civil rights of African Americans led to protection for other minority victims of prejudice, including homosexuals. The thesis is clearly stated in the opening paragraph. The strength of this essay is the use of original documents such as the Constitution and rulings handed down from the Supreme Court along with cited paraphrase of critical commentary from contemporary journals and websites. The essay is well-organized and focused, moving from the argument that any breach in the contract of equal rights to all Americans is harmful to society to the assertion that the rights of citizens are decided legally and not in moral or religious contexts. Hall’s counterargument to claims that same-sex marriage will have a negative impact on birth rates and increase the threat of polygamy is dispatched well. The MLA style documentation is consistent and thorough.

Savannah Hall

Professor McMillion

December 13, 2013

ENGL 1020

The Constitutionality of Same-Sex Marriages

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...” (Jefferson). With these words, a nation was born. With these words a revolution began, a revolution that did the impossible; this revolution was led by a group of fledgling colonies, colonies who overthrew the control of the world’s most powerful empire. With these words the United States of America was built. Our country was built on a foundation of equality for all men, men who had basic rights that could not be ignored. This social contract has been breached continuously throughout history, most notably with the institution of slavery and then with the continuing segregation of African Americans. Though their case is the most visible and recognized, there are other breaches in the contract that still persist today. Many

homosexuals struggle with extreme prejudice and denial of the right to pursue their own happiness, largely seen through the denial of a legally recognized marriage. The banning of same-sex marriages or the demotion of their unions to a lesser institution such as civil partnership not only contributes to the limitations on basic human rights imposed on same-sex couples, but is also in violation of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

Marriage is not the only right homosexuals have been denied. Many states have had laws against sodomy, which is largely defined as any sexual act that is considered unnatural. These laws historically included homosexual relations. Many states have revised these laws so that they no longer include homosexual relations as “deviant sexual behavior”; however, there are still a few states-- Texas, Oklahoma, Montana, and Kansas-- whose state criminal codes outlaw homosexual conduct despite the Supreme Court of the United States, or SCOTUS, ruling such laws unconstitutional in the case *Lawrence v. Texas* (Morris). These laws are no longer enforceable; however, the refusal of lawmakers to update the criminal code sends a clear message-- homosexuality is not welcome.

The fight for homosexual rights is not a passing phase the country is going through; it's a revolution years in the making. The modern gay rights movement started in Greenwich Village, New York at a bar called Stonewall Inn during June of 1970. The inn was a place in which many homosexual men and women congregated to socialize in a city otherwise determined to stop their lifestyle. When police conducted an early morning bust at the inn, many onlookers were spurred into starting what would become a two-day riot by the brutality demonstrated by police (“Pride”). This was the first publicly demonstrated dissent against the sodomy laws most states had at this time. It began the long process of eradicating such laws from the constitutions and

criminal codes of most states. This riot was the spark that ignited the revolution, a flame that is still burning today.

Homosexual behavior may no longer be illegal in today's society; however, the lives of gay people are still being unreasonably restricted. In many states, same-sex couples cannot be legally married or can only enter alternative institutions such as civil partnerships. As of November, just sixteen states and the District of Columbia had legalized same-sex marriages ("Pride"). In 1996, President Bill Clinton passed the Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA. This law had two functioning sections; one that defined marriage as a legal union between two people of the opposite gender, and a second that said no state had to legally recognize a homosexual marriage conducted in a different state (Defense of Marriage Act). This restricted same-sex couples not only from the institution of marriage, but from the benefits married couples are entitled to.

It wasn't until 2013 that this act was challenged in the SCOTUS with the case *US v. Windsor*. Edith Windsor was denied the federal tax exemption on the estate of her late, legally wed partner because under the DOMA, the couple was not legally recognized as spouses. While Windsor paid the tax, she challenged the denial. The SCOTUS ruled that the denial of exemption violated the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, using this reasoning:

The federal statute is invalid, for no legitimate purpose overcomes the purpose and effect to disparage and to injure those whom the State, by its marriage laws, sought to protect in personhood and dignity. By seeking to displace this protection and treating those persons as living in marriages less respected than others, the federal statute is in violation of the Fifth Amendment. (United States v Windsor)

The Fifth Amendment establishes due process on a national level, stating that no person can “be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law...” (US Const. amend.). This was a huge strike against the DOMA as barring same-sex couples from legal marriage also denied them the federal benefits. This case invalidated the DOMA’s claim that marriage was reserved for heterosexual couples and established that, on a federal level, marriage could not be denied to same-sex couples.

While this case advanced the fight for gay rights on a federal level, the states could still enact laws banning same-sex marriages because the ruling only applied to federal statutes. Another case, *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, which entered the SCOTUS about the same time as *US v. Windsor* brought the matter to a state level. *Hollingsworth v. Perry* arose from opposition to Proposition 8, an amendment to the California State Constitution that banned same-sex marriages in California (*Hollingsworth v Perry*). The SCOTUS ruled that such a law was unconstitutional under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States:

No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (US Const. XIV)

While the Fourteenth Amendment was conceived to protect newly freed African Americans from the discrimination they faced after the Civil War, it has, with the help of the Fifth Amendment, become the rally point for gay-rights activists. The Fourteenth Amendment ensures that no person is denied basic liberties under the oppression of a state government. The debate over whether same-sex marriages can legally be banned is straightforward: the Fifth and Fourteenth

Amendments to the Constitution of the United States clearly state that no person can be denied rights or privileges based on discrimination and without due process. These protections are clearly violated when a couple is denied an equal opportunity to benefits associated with entering into a legal, binding marriage based on sexual orientation.

Some same-sex marriage opponents, recognizing the equal protection argument, feel that same-sex couples should receive legal benefits but be limited to alternative institutions rather than traditional marriage. While nineteen states offer some legally binding protection for same-sex relationships, five of those states only allow same-sex couples to enter a civil union or domestic partnership (“Winning”). Civil unions and domestic partnerships both allow a same-sex couple to enter into a legally recognized relationship that provides similar benefits to a marriage (Melina). The major difference between civil unions or domestic partnerships and marriage is simply this: the unions are still not considered marriages. By relegating same-sex couples to these unions, the couples are demoted to something akin to second class citizens based on their second class commitments.

Many people argue for this separation by claiming that allowing same-sex couples to engage in marriage would lower the significance of a traditional marriage. According to Peter Sprigg, the Senior Fellow for Policy Studies at the Family Research Council, the legalization of same-sex marriage would have severe consequences, as detailed in his pamphlet entitled “The Top Ten Harms of Same-Sex ‘Marriage.’” Some of his arguments include that the legalization of same-sex marriages would lead to a growing demand for the legalization of polygamy that would result from the supposed deterioration in the meaning of marriage (Sprigg). This is at best a slippery slope fallacy that ignores the fact that marriage is, at its core, a bipartite institution; until the Defense of Marriage Act was passed, it was only implied by tradition that the couple be

of opposite genders. He also claims that the legalization of same-sex marriages would cause birth rates to fall and backs that up with statistics that show states and countries that currently allow some form of union for same sex couples typically have lower birth rates and fertility rates (Sprigg). These statistics reflect an incomplete picture as they only show an after picture. They do not reflect what birth rate and fertility looked like in these states before same-sex unions were legalized. Without statistics reflecting the time before same-sex marriages were legalized—and studies showing a causal link--it cannot be known if the after is direct result of legalization. Two factors that often correlate with low birth rates are high education levels and high concentrations of wealth. NerdWallet compiled a list of the top twenty most educated cities in America based on the percentages of what educational degree was the highest degree people reached in the community. Of those top twenty cities, twelve are located in states that allow same-sex marriages (Divya). According to Madeleine Scinto's infographic "A State-By-State Look at America's Wealth Distribution," all but two of the states that allow for same-sex marriages also have a median household income that sits above the national median income. In fact, only six states beyond this group can claim this fact (Scinto). While neither of these factors show definitively that allowing same-sex marriage isn't a cause of lower fertility and birth rates in those states that allow it, they do show that there are other factors that affect the rates.

Many arguments, both for and against same-sex marriages, rooted in morals or societal influence, are based on inconclusive or shaky data or do not show a full picture of the argument. However, the legal arguments are conclusive: just as denying the benefits of marriage to same-sex couples by barring them from the institution is unconstitutional, so too is limiting them to an alternative institution such as a civil union or domestic partnership. By restricting same-sex couples to a "separate but equal" union, states are entertaining the same doctrine that allowed for

the intense segregation experienced by African Americans. In 1896, the SCOTUS ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that separation of African Americans and whites was constitutional as long as the designated facilities for each group were equal. This ruling held until the 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education*, when newly appointed Chief Justice Earl Warren led the court to a unanimous decision: that separate but equal was not constitutional as it deprived African Americans of their Fourteenth Amendment rights to equal protection and Fifth Amendment rights of due process (National). Though this decision was made in regards to segregation based on race, the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees equal protection to any and all citizens of the United States. A citizen of the United States is defined in the amendment as “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof” (US Const. amend. XIV), meaning that homosexuals cannot be discriminated against based on their sexuality. Limiting same-sex couples to a civil union or domestic partnership constitutes discrimination under the separate but equal doctrine, a doctrine ruled unconstitutional many years ago.

While the battle for the legalization of same-sex marriages has been thrust into national attention recently with the two SCOTUS cases *US v Windsor* and *Hollingsworth v Perry*, this is a war that has been publicly raging since 1970—and privately long before that. Homosexuals have faced a history rich in many types of discrimination. Their situation is one just as serious and painful as the slow fight for civil rights undertaken by African Americans. Though they have not been enslaved, they have faced persecution and torture, often to a lethal degree. They are discriminated against not because of the color of their skin or any other physical attribute. They endure prejudice because of whom they love, something that can be helped no more than ancestry can.

It is time for the Civil Rights movement started all those years ago to reach its conclusion. America has often been called the melting pot due to the great diversity of its residents. Let us not be a haven to people of ethnic diversity alone. As our own Statue of Liberty, a monument representative of the ideology our country was born from, says, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door" (Lyden). This is typically considered to be a promise to those coming to "the new world," in search of a better life . However, this applies just as well to those already here who are lost in a storm of discrimination in our own land, those who need a lamp to light the way to a better future.

As a country, the United States has constitutionally abolished the denial of basic civil rights to its citizens. The denial of same-sex couples to pursue their own lives, liberty, and happiness violates this decision. This refusal breaks the social contract instilled in the mind and heart of every American: the agreement that each man, woman, and child has "certain unalienable Rights" that have been "endowed by the Creator" (Jefferson). This practice is against the very foundations of the Constitution, a documentation of governance that was constructed to stop the refusal of basic human rights the colonists experienced under King George. Let this be recognized for what it is: a gross negligence of our fellow man's basic rights that must be rectified.

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“Residential Sprinklers: Are they Worth the Investment?” by Daniel Moore makes an intelligent, well-organized example of the “assembled” long research essay written as three 700 word essays with three sources each and then combined. Moore provides good sources, many of which are from the National Fire Protection Association website. The thesis is clearly stated in the opening paragraph, and the argument is clearly made that sprinkler systems are costly, can be ineffective and damaging, and statistically have not made the difference that inexpensive smoke alarms and fire extinguishers have made in preventing major damage and fatality in house fires. The counterargument, that fire sprinklers save lives, is attributed to manufacturers of sprinkler systems whose lobby has groomed cooperation from firefighters but is motivated by self-interest. MLA style documentation is consistent and thorough. Direct quotes which are well integrated, but in some instances the writer relies on signal phrases to introduce quotes and does not provide parenthetical citations as well. The strength of the essay is the abundant research skillfully woven into this timely and useful essay.

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5 May 2014

Residential Sprinklers: Are They Worth the Investment?

Model building codes can be meddlesome. While they have significantly lowered construction costs and have aided in making homes safer over time, they have also fallen victim to politics. In 2008 the International Code Council (ICC), the model building code agency governing one and two-family residential construction, passed an ardently debated requirement mandating sprinkler protection in all new construction. Homebuilders throughout the United States were eager to defeat the measure, for they were concerned about the added costs of sprinkler protection, and they argued that annual statistical data did not warrant the change. On the other hand, fire officials pointed to sprinkler systems as the greatest investment homeowners can make in the area of fire safety, regardless of cost; regrettably, the ICC voting body agreed. While it is true building codes and technologies have drastically changed over the last forty

years, some of these changes have been more effective than others. For instance, smoke detectors were introduced into the first model codes in 1976, and they have produced positive outcomes on fire death rates since. According to the United States Department of Commerce, about 6,000 fire related deaths occurred in inhabited structures in 1973 while there were only about 2,600 fire fatalities in 2008 (United States Fire Admin.). Fire related deaths have waned since the 1970's, and the chief reason for their decline has been mandatory smoke detectors. As a result, smoke detectors—not sprinkler systems—are the greatest single investment fire conscious homeowners can make (Smith). Sprinkler system mandates should be repealed from model residential building codes because residential sprinkler systems are not cost effective, they do not significantly reduce mortality rates, and because sprinkler system manufacturers—not homeowners or insurance agents—are their chief proponents.

Residential sprinkler systems are expensive to install. While the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) claims the average cost of installing home fire sprinklers in new construction is \$1.35 per square foot, homebuilders are not so sure. In a 2007 article for the National Association of Home Builders, Lanlan Xu states the actual costs are closer to \$2.45 per square foot of protected space, adding roughly \$5,000 to a 2,000 square foot home. If a sprinkler protected dwelling is in a rural area, where water pressure is limited or else where water is derived from a well, the costs can range from \$10,000 to \$16,000, regardless of the size of the house¹. While it is true residential sprinkler systems are an investment and that they are effective when they activate properly, their expenses outweigh their benefits. In fact, sprinklers are not the only fire protection technology available to homeowners. Smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are extremely effective fire safety devices, and they are relatively cheap by comparison. Rather

¹ See articles from both Johnson and Smith for further discussions on disproportionate residential sprinkler system costs.

than spending thousands of dollars on sprinkler systems, homebuilders can furnish houses with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for under \$200 apiece. This is important because the current stagnant economy has affected the housing market and homebuilders are feeling the pinch. In a 2009 article for The Center for Public Integrity, Dusty Smith quotes Michael L. Toalson when he writes, “Price matters. [. . .] We need the housing industry to recover for this economy to recover. This is not the time to add this expense, especially when the statistics do not justify the costs.” The added expense of mandated sprinkler protection in one and two-family residential applications are not warranted, and requiring them limits both homeowners’ choices of household amenities and their choices of neighborhoods.

Sprinkler systems are highly effective at saving property. While it is true that an active sprinkler head continues to discharge water until it is shut off—usually by the fire department—water damage is far easier and less costly to repair than fire damage is. According to the American Fire Sprinkler Association, some U.S. cities report significant diminishes in property damage after implementing mandatory residential sprinkler protection policies. For example, Fresno California reports property losses of only \$42,000 during the ten year period after mandating residential sprinkler systems (“Automatic”). This fits with the NFPA’s assertion that homes protected by sprinkler systems experience a 70% reduction in property damage when fires occur. Indeed, both Fresno’s data and the NFPA’s statistics clearly demonstrate significant savings in property losses; however, as nearly all mortgaged residential properties in the U.S. are required by lending institutions to carry insurance, the savings is primarily realized by insurance companies rather than by homeowners. By NFPA estimates, the national average discount insurance companies offer homeowners with sprinkler systems is 7%. Although any insurance discount sounds appealing, according to Emrath, it takes the average homeowner thirty years to

recoup the initial installation costs. This is significant because the current life expectancy for residential sprinklers is thirty to fifty years, meaning they may need replacing soon after they have paid for themselves (Emrath). Sprinkler systems do save money, but only when fires break out; inasmuch, most homeowners will never realize the potential for property loss savings.

The NFPA would have people believe that residential sprinkler systems significantly reduce mortality rates in fire related emergencies. Although mortality rates decrease by 80% when sprinklers are present, the data is often intentionally misrepresented. In other words, the survivability rate in structures without any form of fire protection is 98.87%. On the other hand, the survivability rate reaches 99.45% when working smoke detectors are present—and remember, smoke detectors are credited with decreasing the annual fire fatality rates by 50% since the 1970s. As a result, the survivability rate increases to 99.89% when fires break out in sprinkler protected structures (“Making”). The harsh reality is this: \$10 smoke detectors installed in occupied dwellings have done more to reduce fire fatalities than any \$5,000 sprinkler system currently on the market. When comparing one to the other, it is easy to validate spending a little extra for smoke detectors; however, it is far more difficult to justify the financial burden sprinkler systems place on homeowners, and this reality should be reflected in model building codes.

Sprinkler systems are often billed as necessary lifesaving devices. Dr. Paul Emrath alludes to this fact in his 2011 piece for HousingEconomics.com entitled “Using NIST’s New Web Tool to Compare Sprinkler Costs and Benefits.” In the article, Dr. Emrath offers data obtained from the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST) which theorizes a 0% chance of occupant mortality in fire events where structures are protected by operational sprinkler systems (2011). Emrath also points to NIST’s data concerning fire deaths between 2007

and 2011, noting that an average of 2,159 fire related deaths occurred in one or two-family dwellings in the United States, meaning that 10,795 people could potentially have been saved from dying during this time period if each of the homes involved had been protected by working sprinkler systems (Ahrens). Although no one can argue that working sprinkler systems do save lives, Emrath does not take into account malfunctioning or improperly maintained sprinkler systems nor does he evaluate data from communities where local building codes already mandate sprinkler protection in residential dwellings. As a result, Emrath's treatment of the NIST data is speculative and not based in solid fact.

Leading the charge for mandatory residential sprinkler protection in the United States are our nations' sprinkler system manufacturers. Although fire officials have a stake in the greater argument, sprinkler manufacturers have the most to gain. The Home Builders Association of Virginia ("Fire Officials Hijack") reports that fire sprinkler manufacturers will realize an additional \$5.8 billion in yearly revenues once residential sprinklers become commonplace. While it is true that no one can place a monetary value on life, money is a finite resource, and life is fraught with risks. The issue comes down to cost versus benefits. Toalson points out that codes councils have the option to require structures to safely withstand any disaster, natural or man-made, "but, unfortunately, nobody could afford that home" (as quoted in Smith). On the other hand, fire sprinkler manufacturers have been able to use skewed statistical data concerning sprinklers and fire related fatalities to promote their agendas, and they have done so through fallaciously appealing to fear. As a result, the ICC caved in to mounting political pressure from lobbying groups and passed the sprinkler system mandate for all residential structures.

Fire officials across the nation have a vested interest in seeing mandatory residential sprinkler systems come to pass in their jurisdictions. While they are not guided by profits, fire

officials are prone to let their emotions—rather than logic—inform their positions on the matter. Of all the voices clamoring to be heard regarding fire sprinklers, firefighting professionals have the strongest, for they are the ones who are on the frontlines of fire emergencies. As such, their claims are generally well received; however, firefighters are prone to use anecdotes rather than statistics when arguing for sprinkler protection. In other words, firefighters see firsthand the destruction and the loss of life associated with fire events. They are the ones placing themselves in harm's way, and it is difficult for them to become detached from the larger debate. Fire officials know that sprinklers will save both lives and property, but few are objective enough to set their emotions aside and to, instead, perform a cost/benefit analysis to determine the legitimacy of their positions. If they could do this, then many would be swayed by logic, for tragic events are facts of life that cannot be fully mitigated by anyone or by passing any model code. Although no one will fault firefighters for having strong opinions about residential sprinkler systems, their emotional attachment to the issue is being exploited by fire sprinkler manufacturers. According to the HBAV, many of the “fire officials that were eligible to vote at the International Code Council's final action hearings [. . .] had their travel expenses paid by sprinkler manufacturers.” This is significant for two reasons. First, the vote in question was responsible for passing the residential sprinkler mandate for the 2009 ICC International Residential Code, and second, 900 of the ICC's 1,753 delegates were fire officials who swayed the vote in their favor (“Fire Officials Hijack”).

Fire extinguishers are less costly alternatives to mandatory residential sprinklers. Each year, about 45% of all reported structure fires are related to cooking (United States Fire Admin 1). Accordingly, some municipalities, such as Denver, Colorado, now require at least one fire extinguisher to be present in all dwellings; likewise, the state of New Jersey requires fire

extinguishers to be mounted in all kitchen areas (City and County of Denver; The State of New Jersey). Fire extinguishers are effective, which is why they are required equipment in many structures, but they do require familiarity and training. Frank Lafferty, in *Fire Engineering* magazine, has this to say about the strengths and limitations of fire extinguishers:

Civilians should be taught how to recognize and react to an emergency to ensure the safety of the people taking the actions and those they are attempting to protect. [. . .] Portable fire extinguishers are appliances to be used principally by the occupants of a fire-endangered building or area who are familiar with the location and operation of the extinguisher through education or training. Portable fire extinguishers are primarily of value for immediate use on small fires. They have a limited quantity of extinguishing material and, therefore, need to be used properly so that this material is not wasted.

While it is important to understand the capabilities of portable fire extinguishers and how to operate them correctly, they are used by civilians throughout the United States on a daily basis and to great effect. In fact, the Fire Equipment Manufacturers' Association's webpage has a section entitled "Success Stories" chronicling the value of early fire extinguisher interventions by civilians; likewise, the safety monitoring solutions company en-Gauge reports that 80% of all fire events are able to be controlled through the proper use of fire extinguishers. The average home-based fire extinguisher costs about \$40, and it is well worth the investment when performing a cost/benefit analysis. As such, homebuilders would embrace a national model building code mandating fire extinguishers in all residential dwellings, for unlike sprinkler systems—which are effective but expensive—fire extinguishers are both effective and inexpensive.

Though fire extinguishers are effective pieces of fire safety equipment, another device exists which many homebuilders swear by: the smoke detector. Newer generations of smoke detectors feature both improved fire sensing and alternative power source capabilities; however, sprinkler system advocates say that smoke detectors do not offer enough protection for occupants and that they should not be stand-alone fire safety solutions. Consider the following quotation, taken from the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition's (HFSC) website, which discusses why smoke detectors are not adequate by themselves:

Research conducted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) has shown that home fires become deadly in as few as three minutes. "Fires today seem to burn faster and kill quicker, because the contents of modern homes (such as furnishings) can burn faster and more intensely," says NIST senior engineer Richard Bukowski, P.E. New and old homes alike are filled with these newer contents and furnishings, which provide less margin [sic] for success for smoke alarms and add to the need for fire sprinklers. ("Making the Case")

According to the HFSC's Richard Bukowski, smoke detectors are less likely than ever before to signal occupants of fire situations in time to ensure safe egresses. He gives newer synthetic contents and furnishings as the major reasons, but few people understand the importance of Bukowski's claim: modern synthetics are often composed of hydrocarbons. In other words, modern furnishings—such as couches, carpeting, and plastics—can be likened to solid forms of gasoline. Although Bukowski's words may appear convincing, statistical data does not support his claim. For instance, the United States Fire Administration (USFA) reports that residential fires, death rates, and property losses have declined from 2007 to 2011. Likewise, the NFPA reports that structure fire deaths have steadily fallen since the early 1980s, about the same time

synthetics were becoming commonplace in households across America (Brown). As such, Bukowski's assertion that smoke detectors cannot keep pace with changing fire environments does not hold water, for if it were true, both the USFA and the NFPA would have higher fire fatalities to report.

Model building codes exist in order to develop consensus standards across the United States. Many state and local municipalities adopt model building codes, demonstrating their dedication to minimum acceptable standards and to occupant safety; however, most states conform to a doctrine known as "home-rule" ("Home Rule"). Under the doctrine, states or municipalities have the right to exclude certain aspects of model codes they feel conflict with best practices in their regions. As a result, the ICC's mandated residential sprinkler standard has been excluded by most governing bodies to date. This resistance to change will not last, for all governments are susceptible to the political will of the people, and both fire officials and fire sprinkler manufacturers are making strides in turning public support for the measure. In order to prevent their appeals to fear, it is time for homebuilders and fire extinguisher manufacturers to unite, presenting accurate scientific data to civilians which clearly demonstrate why residential sprinklers are not worth the added expense, for if the people remain ignorant, the lobbyists will get their way.

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“Racial Intolerance and Ecological Ruin Thrive in the New Frontier,” by Amanda Steele, was written for an Honors History and English class co-taught by history professor McKinney and English professor Black. The essay examines a poem by Native-American poet Louise Erdrich, “Dear John Wayne,” which describes the experience of a child watching a Western at a drive-in movie and internalizing the portrayal of her people as the villains and the white settlers and soldiers as heroes. Steele compares the situation in the poem with contemporary historians’ documentation of the greed for wealth and lack of concern for the land of early settlers and gold-seekers. Erdrich’s images of “mosquitoes” and John Wayne’s ultimate death by cancer symbolize the ruthlessness and determination which forced Native Americans from their homes and way of life in the 19th Century. The poem is cited by line number in accordance with MLA style. The historical sources are credible and correctly documented.

Amanda Steele

Dr. McKinney and Professor Black

Honors HIST 2020 and ENGL 2120

13 February 2014

Racial Intolerance and Ecological Ruin Thrive in the New Frontier

Hidden in the depths of “Dear John Wayne,” a poem by Louise Erdrich, lies a story of the author’s perspective as a Native American struggling with the devastating westward expansion of settlers. The poem’s surface describes people attending a drive-in movie theater, featuring a typical western film with the iconic American actor John Wayne. The author juxtaposes the reality of the destructive western push and the film’s battles between John Wayne (portrayed as a hero), and Native Americans. Erdrich uses “Dear John Wayne” to illustrate the true essence of despair and calamitous depravity brought by settlers to the Native Americans residing in the new frontier.

Native Americans living in the western frontier were subject to the ongoing racial and ethnic discrimination and violence that came with the expansion of settlers. In her article, “The Frontier as a Place of Ethnic and Religious Conflict,” Patricia Limerick examines the race

relations in the western realm. California and Oregon were declared free states and opposed slavery, but state laws prevented free blacks from entering the state. After the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment was passed, granting voting rights to blacks. Americans questioned if the Constitutional amendment extended to Native Americans and other minorities (54-55). Erdrich addresses how the Americans halted advancements for Native Americans with the lines, “Always the lookout spots the Indians first / spread north to south, barring progress” (lines 6-7). Native Americans were viciously mistreated and were not viewed as actual American citizens with full rights.

With the settlers’ arrival in the western frontier came tumultuous times for Native Americans. Erdrich describes the settlers’ invasion in the following lines, “surrounded by the slow-burning spirals they sell / at the window, to vanquish the hordes of mosquitoes. / Nothing works. They break through the smoke screen for blood” (3-5). Despite the Native Americans best efforts to thwart the intrusion, the invaders came to make this new land their own. Settlers had heard about the discovery of gold in the West and made the journey to find their own fortune. The travelers stopped at nothing to divulge the land of its riches. Ted Steinberg reports in his article, “The Unforgiving West,” “Massive amounts of debris ... settled in riverbeds downstream from mines, leaving less room for water and forcing the river to spill out across the floodplain, killing people and destroying property” (119). Driven by the desire of wealth, these gold-seekers built mines with little to no thought of the long-term ecological effects on the land. Steinberg also mentions the necessity to construct levees to control the rising riverbeds full of mining sediment to protect towns from floods (120). The land that Native Americans once used for their homes was now overrun with strangers who harmed the land and ravaged it for their own personal gain. Erdrich uses the line from the John Wayne film in her poem, “Everything we see

belongs to us” (23), to convey the settlers’ ruinous effects on the land and Native American lives alike.

Louise Erdrich’s poem depicts the westward expansion as catastrophic to the West’s first inhabitants, the Native Americans. The Native Americans were maliciously attacked and robbed of their land and its resources. In the last two lines of the poem, “Even his disease was the idea of taking everything. / Those cells, burning, doubling, splitting out of their skins” (41-42), Erdrich compares the phenomenon of the settlers’ advancement to the west to a deadly disease. Those last lines wrap up the author’s point of view by linking together the commonalities of death, of cancer, of the invasion of settlers, and the destruction in which they are all accountable.

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“HPV Vaccine: Preventing Cancer, Not Promoting Sex,” by Andrew Webb, is a well-organized research essay on a compelling topic, the vaccine which prevents the Human Papillomavirus, which despite its health benefits for young adults remains controversial. The thesis statement is clearly stated in opening paragraph, and the background of the contagious and potentially fatal disease is clearly explained and documented. Direct quotes in the essay are well-integrated, effective, and correctly cited, including as “qtd. in” citation indicating an indirect source. Counterarguments, that the HPV vaccine violates privacy and promotes sexual promiscuity, is refuted by pointing to the misinformation which has troubled parents and discouraged doctors from recommending the vaccine. The essay closes with a claim of policy that the vaccine should be mandated, not optional, and a public education campaign should be launched.

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HPV Vaccine: Preventing Cancer, Not Promoting Sex

According to the Center for Disease Control, or the CDC, the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States is Human Papillomavirus, referred to as HPV (“Genital”). The CDC states, “HPV is so common that nearly all of sexually active men and women get it at some point in their lives. There are many different types of HPV. Some types can cause health problems including genital warts and cancer” (“Genital”). The good news is that there is now a vaccine, called Gardasil, which protects against the four most dangerous strains of HPV. There is a debate over whether or not the vaccine should be mandatory to attend middle school. Some believe that HPV is not dangerous enough and does not meet the requirements of a mandated vaccine. Others say that mandating the vaccine violates their sexual privacy rights. Parents are concerned that their children will be more sexually active because of the protection

they receive from the vaccine. Despite what those opposed think, the HPV vaccine should be mandatory. The HPV vaccine is too important and those who are opposed to it must understand why.

The strains that are covered in the vaccine are types 6, 11, 16 and 18 (Yeganeh, Curtis, and Kuo). Types 6 and 11 cause 90% of all genital warts while types 16 and 18 cause 70-80% of all cervical cancer (Yeganeh, Curtis, and Kuo). Admittedly, the vaccine is expensive. The vaccine is a three-shot series that can cost over \$500 in total (Walden). However, \$500 is a reasonable price to pay considering the money that could be saved on potential chemotherapy from cancer contracted because of HPV. The side effects associated with the vaccine are the same as any other approved vaccine. The side effects include pain and soreness at the injection site and mild inflammation that lasts a few days at most (“Should”). However, there are still many who oppose the HPV vaccine.

HPV is an extremely dangerous and life-threatening infection. While not every strain causes cancer, HPV causes a large percentage of the cancer cases in America. John Dreyzehner, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Health, states, “Vaccine-preventable strains are estimated to cause 70% of cervical cancers, 90% of anal cancers, 65% of vaginal cancers, 50% of vulvar cancers, 35% of penile cancers and 60% of oropharyngeal cancers.” The sad part of this statement is that these cancer cases could have been prevented if the vaccine was mandated. However, there are those that say HPV is not dangerous enough and does not meet the requirements of a mandated vaccine. Martha Presley points to the Supreme Court case of *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*. The case states that for a vaccine to be mandated, the disease must be, “highly contagious, casually communicated and potentially fatal” (qtd. in Presley). Given the definition of a mandated disease stated above, it is clear that HPV is both highly contagious and

potentially fatal. Presley also states that there are alternative methods to help prevent HPV including abstinence, condoms, and cervical screenings. However, the CDC states that HPV “can infect areas that are not covered by a condom – so condoms may not give full protection against getting HPV” (“Genital”). Additionally, Kyla Webb, Mid-Cumberland Regional Coordinator for the Tennessee Breast and Cervical Screening Program, notes that for every year we delay getting to an 80% vaccination rate for HPV, “another 4,400 women will develop cervical cancer in their life times – even with good screening programs.” It is clear that HPV affects too many people for the vaccine to be ignored.

Some people who oppose an HPV vaccine mandate say that the vaccine violates their right to sexual privacy. It is true that HPV is a sexually transmitted infection, making its vaccine a sexual health decision. However, this does not mean that the HPV vaccine is an invasion of sexual privacy. A common misconception among those who oppose the vaccine is that their doctors will tell them to stop having sex or ask about their sexual behavior. However, this is not true. A mandate of the HPV vaccine would allow people to opt out for certain circumstances. However, the family doctor would try to convince the family to get the vaccine. While doing this, the doctor would not invade their sexual privacy. Doctors merely suggest getting a possibly lifesaving vaccine. Doctors recommend the use of condoms and birth control for those who do not want to have children, but this is not considered an invasion of privacy. Doctors would not tell anyone when they can or cannot have sex or how anyone should live their lives when dealing with HPV and the HPV vaccine. In fact, the HPV vaccine is the opposite of an invasion of sexual privacy. People who receive the vaccine can go about their lives and not have to worry about contracting the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. They will not

have to worry about contracting a form of cancer that can be caused by HPV. This vaccine does not invade anyone's sexual privacy; it allows people to live their life the way they want to.

Many parents are concerned that because of the protection that the vaccine provides, their children will feel that they have a license to have sex. *The Journal of School Health* notes, "Therefore, adolescents may not fully comprehend the utility of the HPV vaccine and many overgeneralize the vaccine to include protection against other sexually transmitted infections...with less lethal potential" (Vamos, McDermott, and Daley). However, just because the vaccine provides protection from HPV, does not necessarily mean that teenagers will engage in more sexual activity. Kyla Webb responds to a question about teenagers engaging in more sexual activity because of the HPV vaccine:

When I am approached with that line of thinking, it is important not to focus on how HPV is contracted, but on the benefits of the vaccine. If the HPV vaccine would promote increased sexual activity, then the Hepatitis B vaccine should have done the same thing. The Hepatitis B vaccine is now considered an anti-liver cancer drug. The Hepatitis B vaccine is designed to protect against a family of viruses that leads to reproductive organs, head, and neck cancers. Far more people are exposed to HPV per year than Hepatitis B.

Webb compares HPV to Hepatitis B because Hepatitis B can also be contracted through sexual activity. No one made an argument against the Hepatitis B vaccine increasing sexual activity. This vaccine certainly does have the potential to be a license for sex. However, it does not have to be. This vaccine can provide a door for parents to talk to their children about sex and its implications. Parents can tell their children what their opinions on premarital sex are before the world can tell their children what it believes. However, if parents do not communicate with their

children about the importance of protected sex or abstinence, teenagers will continue to contract other STDs and STIs besides HPV. Whether or not there is a mandate for the HPV vaccine, everyone must remember one thing: teenagers will be teenagers. Teenagers are at a point in their lives when hormones are raging, and many do not think about the consequences of what having unprotected sex may be. Many teenagers will continue to have unprotected and premarital sex possibly because their parents do not play an active enough part in their child's life. Teenagers do not need a vaccination to think they have a license for sex. Regardless of whether or not there is an HPV vaccine mandate, teenagers will continue to have sex. The number of pregnancies, STDs and STIs among teenagers proves this. Tom Frieden, the director of the Center for Disease Control, sums it up well:

...multiple studies have found that preteens and teens who receive this vaccine do not have sex any sooner than their peers who have not received the vaccine. HPV vaccine does not open the door to sex. HPV vaccine closes the door to cancer. (*CDC*)

Despite the fact that the need for nation-wide vaccination is great and that all the tools for administering the vaccine are available, vaccine rates in the United States are very low. Only 32% of young women have received all three shots (Webb). Even though HPV presents a considerable threat to the health of millions, many people have not heard of it. In a survey of the general public, 33% of women and 50% of men surveyed had never heard of HPV (Gonik). Even though the majority of sexually active individuals will be exposed to a form of HPV at one point in their lives, knowledge about HPV and the diseases it can cause is limited. In order to raise the vaccine rate, there must be sufficient education on HPV and the effect it can have on a person's health.

There are many reasons that vaccine rates for the HPV vaccine are so low. However, arguably the biggest reason for low vaccine rates is doctors not actively recommending the vaccine (Webb). Yeganeh et al. performed a study on the HPV vaccine. Part of the study asked parents to indicate why they had not gotten their children the HPV vaccine. Parents could mark all the situations that applied to them. This is why the following statistics will be greater than 100%. It was discovered in the study that 15% had not had time to go to the doctors, 8% said the vaccine was too expensive or was not covered by insurance, 8% said that they did not know where to get the vaccine, 18% said that they had concerns about safety, 8% said they were worried that the vaccine will encourage their daughter to have sex, 8% said that the clinic did not have the vaccine available, 21% said that the doctor did not offer the vaccine, 55% said that they needed more information, and 8% marked other (Yeganeh, Curtis, and Kuo). These statistics reveal important facts about why the vaccine rates for the HPV vaccine are so low. The most common response for why parents had not had their child vaccinated is that the parents needed more information. They had not heard enough about it to know what the vaccine would protect their children from. The second most common response is that doctors had not offered it to the parents. The fact that doctors had not offered or recommended the vaccine contributes to why parents know so little about HPV and its vaccine. Clearly, education and support from doctors are crucial to raising vaccination rates.

Webb also agrees that increasing referrals from doctors is the most important step to take to increase vaccination rates. The state of Tennessee is enacting a pilot project that will increase education on HPV and its vaccine. This project is a great model to follow. It could possibly be the solution to raising vaccination rates. The basic idea of the project is to give pediatricians tools to help provide appropriate and accurate education about the HPV vaccine. Here is how the

project works. Before the doctor enters the room, the nurse will give the parents a card with three to four questions regarding HPV. The nurse will then play a three to five minute age-appropriate video for the parents and child to watch. There are different videos that the nurse can choose from. The video selected is based on the answers that the parents marked on the card. After the family has watched the video, the doctor will enter the room. The doctor will discuss the answers on the card and make sure the parents and children understand what the videos said. The doctor will then recommend getting the HPV vaccine. There is also a website that the parents can view at the doctor's office called get3shots.org. This website provides similar information about HPV as well as other vaccinations that require a three-shot series and encourages parents to ask their doctors. This project could be a crucial turning point in raised vaccination rates.

In conclusion, HPV presents a substantial threat to the health of millions in the United States. The HPV vaccine should be mandated. It is too important to be left alone. While there are those who say that it is not important enough to be mandated, that it violates their sexual privacy rights, and that it gives teenagers a license to have sex, the HPV vaccine should still be mandated. These arguments have some good points that raise questions, like any argument can have. However, these arguments are ultimately inaccurate. In order to raise awareness and acceptance of the HPV vaccine, the public needs more education. Projects like the one currently being enacted in Tennessee must be started. The HPV vaccine must be mandated because it can save hundreds of thousands of lives as well as spare millions in medical expenses that are associated with chemotherapy.

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