



# GLEANNINGS:

*A Journal of First-Year Student Writing*

**2012-2013**

# Preface

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All of the work included in this journal was written by students who were enrolled in Siena's First Year Seminar in 2012-2013. This required course prepares students for the intellectual rigors of life in college and beyond by building critical thinking and communication skills as well as by fostering creativity. Throughout this two-semester seminar, students are encouraged to reflect upon and discuss the vast amounts of reading and writing that they do both inside and outside the classroom, and Siena College is committed to showcasing this intellectual and engaging work being achieved on its campus. Thus, *Gleanings* was created to celebrate some of the finest first-year student writing completed each year.

The submission process for this publication has become increasingly competitive. The editorial committee for *Gleanings* received a significant amount of faculty-nominated writing and had to make difficult decisions about which texts to include in this third volume. A diverse selection of texts is offered so that in addition to recognizing excellence in writing, *Gleanings: A Journal of First-Year Student Writing* is a useful tool for future students and for instructors.

This publication is loosely organized by genre, and there is a short introduction to each piece which simply describes the assignment and draws the reader's attention to some of the rhetorical skills exercised by the writers. Below the title and author, the professor's name and seminar theme is identified. While minor editorial changes have been made to these works-in-progress, they were kept to a minimum in order to preserve the authentic voices of the student authors as well as the integrity of the assignments.

Congratulations to the students whose work is represented here. The faculty and administration of Siena College are very proud of these writers, and they hope that the readers appreciate and enjoy the students' fine work, too.

**Cover:** Illustration by Kaitlyn Krolik '16

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By tracing the trajectory of gender roles in patriarchal societies - from Biblical to modern times - and culling evidence from various seminar readings, the writer of this essay resoundingly argues that accepting and respecting women in the military is vital to the quest for gender equality.

## The Push Toward Equality for Women in the Military

**By Jacob Blackwood**  
(Dr. M. Woolbright – War)

Women are a vital part of the United States military and serve in many prestigious roles. They are now allowed to fight in combative situations, and there is great opposition to this. But from where does this opposition stem? Many believe that opposing women in combat arises from men's need to fight and the belief that women are inferior. Others believe opposing women in combat comes from our desire to protect women. It's clear to me that the only reason opposition exists is because our western social hierarchy is disappearing, and men are resisting this destruction. This hierarchy was created intentionally by God. God planned out this structure and placed man at the top. He gave man "dominion" over women and animals (*NRV* Genesis 1-4). This opposition against women was born out of God's deliberate hierarchical division of men and women, which has set up our country to be a sexist nation. We have followed this opposition for thousands of years, thus programing this thought of a hierarchy into the minds of each generation. This made opposing women in combat the natural thought. We justify opposition by saying we are only protecting women, when in reality, men cannot handle the fact that the social hierarchy that we have always known is disappearing before our very eyes.

Our social hierarchy is burning to pieces in our patriarchal society. As a result, there has been extreme progress in destroying this hierarchical structure over the past few decades. Even in 1988, our hierarchy was strong. Virginia Held writes that "the status of a woman depends upon that of the man with whom she is associated, but remains subordinate to his" (44). Now, a woman's status is based on her personal success. In 1979, 43 percent of working-age women in the United States were in the labor force. In 2009, the percent of women in the labor force was at 59 ("Women at Work"). Men have a lot to gain by the continued establishment of this patriarchy. By keeping women down, the hierarchy remains in place, yet women have defied this structure by redefining themselves. With more women in professional careers, there is great disturbance in the hierarchy.

Our hierarchy still exists, but it is slowly moving towards an oligarchy with both women and men on top. Of course men will oppose this; they do not want to lose their power. Virginia Held also sums up male attitudes by saying that "ever since the ...fifth century... [there has been] a community of males united in opposition to a supposedly threatening female force" (46). Every time a man opposes women in combat, he is fighting the force. This is because males are threatened by the shaking of the hierarchical tree. Men do not want to be on the bottom and do not want women to stop relying on them. The fact that men oppose women in combat is proof that they cannot handle the fact the hierarchy is disappearing. However, it is not man's fault for being threatened by these forces; it is natural. Men were taught by God to be on top, and it's all they have ever known.

To further emphasize that our hierarchy is slowly disappearing, it is necessary to analyze women's educational patterns over time. In 1970, there were about 22 percent of women who had a college degree. Now, there is almost 70 percent who have a college degree ("Women at Work"). To apply this to the military, Ronald Glasser writes that "our military could not function without its female soldiers" (207). This must be a true blow to the masculine identity of this country. The military is one way in which equality of men and women can be achieved. What higher honor is there than for one to serve his or her country? With men and women both in combat and in equal roles, we can blur this hierarchy of gender. This is what we as a country should be striving for. Glasser also writes that "the country, along with the military, has had a long history of ignoring or devaluing servicewomen" (209). Why is that? It is because the hierarchy was strong in the past, and there was a clear line drawn between the role of women and men. Women lacked education and the political strength that they now possess. But now the patriarchal hierarchy is going away, and many cannot handle this because the roles of women and men are now blurred.

I truly wonder if God is happy about the dissolving of His personal hierarchy. When you consider that He taught men to be warlike, it makes me wonder if He ever thought women would be in combat. Back in the beginning of time, women were never seen as warriors. Even in the past century, male pride has allowed the cover-up of female achievements in wartime. But now the fact is that more women are becoming more educated and independent. Traditional roles have changed, making it no longer the woman's duty to stay home and raise the children. With more educated and independent women, there is more equality between the sexes. One of these equalities is the right to fight in combat and be honored for your duty.

To further illustrate this concept of equality, we can look at Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried*, in which the image of women is redesigned and changes from women as nurturers to women as empowered figures. In the novel, Mary Anne is exposed to a wartime situation. At first, she is protected by the other men but soon discovers a thirst for war. The men are quoted: "At least for a moment she seemed to be the same pretty young girl who had arrived a few weeks earlier" (O'Brien 110). This story shows exactly what I mean when I say that we are filled with a culture of men who cannot reconfigure the hard drives in their brains to understand that women can be equal. Why does a woman have to be pretty? Why do we naturally assume that women are not fit in combat? We can fool ourselves with the thought that it is because they are physically weaker, but in fact it is our own stereotypes that prevent women from possessing all of the rights that men have. And these stereotypes are derived from the social hierarchy created in the beginning of time. But the truth is, times are changing, and more women are like Mary Anne in O'Brien's novel. Women today are independent to the point of wanting to fight in war. A woman gaining the right to fight in combat helps to destroy our "hierarchy of the sexes." And by men opposing this, it shows that men cannot handle the destruction of their millennium old power over women.

Our continuously falling hierarchy presents us with the view of women as warriors and also paints a picture of women not following traditional roles. In the non-fiction book *Operation Homecoming*, there are various primary accounts of combat soldiers writing back home, such as when Helen writes to her family about "staying in dustbowls for army camps" (Carroll 58), and Tina writes about the psychological effects even though "physically she remains unharmed" (Carroll 261). These women are fighting wars; they are not at home taking care of their children. Fifty years ago, they would have been home and their husbands would have been fighting. We have to accept this new image of women as much as we may not want to, and by allowing women in combat, we are going against the hierarchy that has plagued us for thousands of years.

Furthermore, we have to look ahead to the day when the hierarchy will be completely dissipated, even if this day may never exist. We have to look forward to getting as close as possible to a nonhierarchical society, just as St. Francis recommended. Resistance from men who crave female dependency will always exist. The simple fact that women are becoming more educated, independent, and determined will end the hierarchy men love so much. Men have a large

status to lose by the advancement of women and the destruction of hierarchy. They simply like power and the patriarchal hierarchy; these were given to man by God. But the truth is we are all human and women should have been given the rights that men possess from the start. There is no debate about whether or not men and women should have the same rights because the answer is, yes, they should. The debate lies in a self-conscious battle with man himself and the death of the hierarchy that places him on top.

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The author of this essay develops a focused and provocative idea regarding the theme of identity and gives fitting examples from three remarkably different texts from the Heritage Unit.

## Changing a Name or Changing a Being?

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**By Lauren Daby**  
(Prof. Barranca – Voice)

According to a Chinese proverb, “The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.” At birth, children are given the right to their names, and for the rest of their lives that one word has the ability to summarize their entire beings. Altering the name of someone completely changes the person at hand. Whether it is an outsider’s ignorance or a personal choice, there is no greater way to separate people from their actions than by transforming their names.

In the essay “Finishing School,” from the memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou said that her name defined who she was. After her boss, Mrs. Cullinan, changed Angelou’s name from Margaret to Mary, Angelou completely changed the way she performed her work. Margaret knew how to work hard and do a good job, but Mary had no ambition. When she finally decided she could no longer handle being called Mary, Angelou wrote: “For a week I looked into Mrs. Cullinan’s face as she called me Mary. She ignored my coming late and leaving early. Miss Glory was a little annoyed because I had begun to leave egg yolk on the dishes and wasn’t putting much heart into polishing the silver. I hoped that she would complain to our boss, but she didn’t” (108). Mary wanted nothing more than to be fired so that she wouldn’t have to quit. Margaret knew she needed this job and understood just how upset her mother would be if she lost it, but Mary didn’t care. Instead of waiting to be fired, she broke every dish her boss cherished. Margaret could never have broken all those dishes, but it was easily justified by Mary.

Because Margaret could put the blame on her alter-ego Mary, she was able to separate her actions from herself. To Angelou, she didn’t do anything wrong. Mary did all the damage, and had it not been for Mrs. Cullinan, there would be no Mary. It is important to note this because Mrs. Cullinan essentially ruined her own China through her accidental creation of Mary. Although she believed that Mary and Margaret were the same, Margaret knew how to distinguish between the two. This ability to detach her actions from herself can be attributed to her changed name, and this mindset allowed her to feel no remorse for her actions because she, Margaret, did not do anything wrong.

The women in the novel *The Help*, by Kathryn Stockett, also found themselves changing their names in order to disconnect their actions from their bodies. While writing the book, they decided to change their names for their safety and well-being, but there was an underlying reason there, too. These women felt that if they changed their names, it would be as if they never confessed the truth about being maids to Skeeter, who was an activist and journalist. While talking to her, they were Aibileen and Minny, but on paper, they were completely different people. It was as if they were wearing masks in the story. These fake names gave them something to hide behind; they also gave the women justification for their actions.

In the back of their minds, the maids knew just how big Skeeter’s book would be and all the potential it had, but because of fear, they chose to hide behind their book aliases and make their efforts seem small. Aibileen tried to convince her friends to join the cause by saying, “We ain’t...we ain’t doing civil rights here. We just telling stories like they really happen” (169). The real Aibileen would not have had the confidence to ask her friends to do such a risky thing,

but within the book, she was not herself but rather “Sarah Ross.” This alias gave Aibileen the ability to forget the importance of her role in Skeeter’s exposé, and it allowed her to simply tell a story. Aibileen believed that when it was over, she could pretend that it never happened to her, but rather that it happened to some random woman in Niceville, Mississippi.

It is evident a person’s name defines his or her personality. All people have nicknames, and all people act differently according to the names they are using. For example, when children are with their parents and called by their formal names, they will act more reserved and careful. On the other hand, when those children are with their best friends, and they’re being called by their nicknames, they are going to act completely different. This doesn’t mean that these people are fake or pretending to be people they are not. Instead, it is human nature for people to have different personalities at different times. This ties in directly with Angelou’s and Stockett’s ideas that changing a person’s name makes the separation of actions much easier.

This same idea is explored in the film *The Dark Knight*, which is another text from our Heritage Unit. For example, Batman chose to hide his real identity and use a facade so that he could help Gotham City. He was able to be a normal man by day, but when he became Batman, he gained the confidence to save the world. Normally, he wouldn’t have had the ability or the strength to do this, but because Bruce Wayne changed his name, and at the same time the way he saw himself, he was able to accomplish amazing things. The Joker changed his name and was able to justify his actions, too, but in a much more negative way. Because he became a completely different person, he found it perfectly acceptable to kill people and terrorize a city. He hid behind his name and took any guilt and responsibility that he should have felt and gave it to his alias, thereby separating his actions from himself.

Many believe that people define their names, but they are wrong. The name people act under defines who they are. This allows people to live a less guilty life; when one commits wrongdoings, he or she can attribute all of that negativity to the other person inside. By blaming others, people can continue on living their lives easier and better. This knowledge surrounding the changing of one’s name can be powerful, as demonstrated by Angelou in “Finishing School,” by the characters Minny and Aibileen in *The Help*, and by Batman and the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. These characters used their aliases as masks and as tools of empowerment and confidence. Sometimes they used this ability to harm others and to keep their minds free of guilt. Whether or not this ability produces positive or negative effects, a person’s name shapes his or her identity and changing that name allows for one to separate from his or her actions.

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This essay demonstrates a student's mastery of course goals and skills, which includes the completion of close readings, the synthesis of information, and the formulation of a focused and informed argument. To prove his thesis regarding honor and war, the writer adeptly moves amongst five different readings and includes carefully selected and documented textual evidence in this well-organized and developed essay.

## The Western Heritage of War

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**By Blake Edwards**  
(Dr. M. Woolbright – War)

Western culture has always been associated with war. Although there are many other societies that do participate in war, Western culture remains at the forefront. From the ancient wars in Assisi to the wars of today, there is one factor in its cause which remains dominant: honour. The concept of honour has been ingrained in Western society since ancient times. It is regarded as one of the dearest things to a person, especially a male. If honour is affronted in any way, one has an obligation to respond to the threat promptly, lest he or she be seen as cowardly and weak. With the concept of honour embedded into the minds of the people by society, war will never cease to exist.

However, in order to understand why honour is still present today, it is important that one know what honour exactly is. The definition of honour includes, according to James Bowman, author of *Honor: A History*, “the good opinion of the people who matter to us” (Bowman 1). For soldiers, this includes their fellow soldiers, family, and commanding officers. However, although what encourages the good opinion changes throughout time, what degrades it has remained static. Through “cowardice or wimpishness, [sic]” the soldier would lose esteem with those whom he holds dear. Of course, this does not just apply to soldiers but rather to everyone, especially men, who are seen to be the warriors in society. Thus, to uphold honour, one must not demonstrate cowardice. He must strive for conflict and challenge even if the cause is unjust, or he would lose esteem with his peers.

How does this concept remain in western society even after hundreds of years? Plato's “The Allegory of the Cave” offers a brilliant explanation. As the title suggests, the dialogue compares people living without knowledge of the truth to people living in caves. The light outside of the cave represents the truth, but the ones living in the cave are chained to the walls and facing their shadows, which represent their misinformed beliefs. In our case, these shadows are the concept of honour. In addition, had they ever broken free from their chains, they “[would] not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities” (Plato 2). This is similar to the habits of human beings, which are hard to break free from since the mind is used to them. Thus, humans feel more comfortable, especially if the habits garner approval from their peers. The same thing applies here with the shadows in the cave. Society has dictated to us that the abstract concept of honour is reality. If we back down from the challenges and conflicts presented by this way of life and head towards the light, we would be seen as despicable, since we reject what society has valued since the beginning of civilisation. Therefore, it is understandable that cave dwellers are forced to respond to conflict with even more violence because they are infatuated with their staunch faith in their beliefs,

St. Francis of Assisi saw first-hand how honour defines a society. Assisi's culture dictated that all sons go to war when called upon by the city, regardless of how unjust the cause may be. If one did not, he and his family would be shamed

and their honour severely tarnished. St. Francis initially embraced this concept, especially since he was “very fond of fashion and chivalry, it is sure that he was arrayed to be the very image of knighthood” (Moses 16). It is also noted how “doing the restrained or ‘peaceful’ thing would have required the renunciation of self-identity” (Moses 18). Of course, when St. Francis abandoned the sacred ideas of war, this theory came into full realisation when his father beat him in revenge for dishonouring him and his family.

The following excerpt from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, entitled the “St. Crispin’s Day Speech,” also demonstrates how valuable honour is in a war-driven society. King Henry, who is attacking France to restore his honour after a “gift” of tennis balls was sent to him, endows morale into his troops by reminding them that “the fewer men, the greater share of honour” (I.iii.22). Why does this work? Those soldiers recognise that honour is everything in their society. If they have “no stomach to this fight,” the others would send them away as cowards. They would refuse to “die in that man’s company that fears his fellowship to die with [them]” (I.iii.38-39). King Henry goes on to mention that the world would remember the splendours of their efforts “from this day to the ending of the world” (I.iii.58). Of course, this appeals to them as the concept of honour rewards those who follow it by reserving their place in society for as long as civilisation lasts. It can be seen in famous works of art and literature that praise the courageous actions of people such as warriors. It is no surprise then, due to this pressure coupled with the desire to be forever seen as honourable in the eyes of the people, that the soldiers did not desert but rather fought till they either died or prevailed.

Like Shakespeare’s work, Homer’s *The Iliad* depicts an ancient war built solely around honour. Why else would King Menelaus of Sparta conduct a long and costly war against the Trojans? The answer is simply that Paris of Troy had taken his wife. If Menelaus had resorted to diplomatic means to negotiate the release of his wife, then his reputation as a king would have suffered. Like the others who were brought up in such a war-loving environment, it was expected that he go to war to settle things with Paris, especially since in Sparta’s warlike society, honour is akin to air. In the actual ground combat, honour was as important as ever. Achilles notes to Patroclus that he must obey his commands to “win great honor, great glory for [him] in the eyes of all the Argive ranks” (Homer 415). One important aspect of honour was the protection of corpses. For example, the “Trojans and Lycians, Myrmidons and Achaeans closed around the corpse to lunge in battle” (Homer 431). It was honourable to fight and die to protect the corpse of one’s leader, especially when the enemy aimed to mutilate it, thus spurring the Achaeans to fight and die with vigour.

It is not just ancient civilisations that revere honour. As shown in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, modern soldiers base their conduct under fire around honour as well. O’Brien’s description of the soldiers includes carrying themselves “with poise, a kind of dignity” (O’Brien 19). These soldiers “were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid to show it” (O’Brien 20) since even in the toughest of fighting they were expected to carry themselves like knights: brave even in the face of death, and certainly not cowardly. The soldier’s greatest fear was the “fear of blushing” (O’Brien 21). The concept of honour forces these men to kill and be killed “because they were embarrassed not to” (O’Brien 21). Just like the soldiers in the other ancient wars, these soldiers from modern culture were still forced to act in an honourable manner or be seen as cowards. It shows how deeply entrenched in their minds honour is, even though many of the soldiers were drafted or were simply just young boys. They would not want to be treated like St. Francis of Assisi, whose family’s reputation was forever tarnished.

I believe that honour will never be removed from western society. These examples from both modern and ancient wars demonstrate that the basic concept of honour has not changed, nor has the value of honour to the community. Especially in today’s times, from what I have seen, one is always driven to conflict or else he or she is seen as the weaker person. Why else would the “draft dodgers” during the Vietnam War be criticised and regarded as cowards, even though the war was unjust? Does this not show how unacceptable it still is to avoid fighting? In my opinion, it is akin to children on a playground. The desire to remain on top of the social food chain drives them to fight when their honour is affronted, especially if those who do not fight are regarded as weak and cowardly.

It can be said then that these soldiers, leaders, and entire societies, both ancient and modern, are all children on a playground. As seen in the texts noted above, the primary motivation for war is to maintain an honourable image, and this basic definition of what an “honourable image” is hasn’t changed throughout the years. This can be seen in recent events with Turkey’s retaliatory shelling of Syria after a Turkish city was bombed as well as the continuation of the U.S. war in Afghanistan against the Taliban. These recent conflicts were started through the desire to maintain a fearsome and honourable image, so until our society can move past these destructive beliefs, war will always remain at the forefront of Western culture.

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In a very clear and direct manner, this writer expresses how he used the ideas from one of his seminar's texts to overcome both personal and professional challenges outside of the classroom. In addition to being focused and organized, this essay demonstrates a genuine understanding and application of material.

## Performing at the Highest Level: Practicing Synergy

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**By Joseph Gonyeau**  
(Prof. Redkey – Leadership)

This past weekend I attended the Mock Trial Opening Round Championships in Easton, Pennsylvania along with my fellow teammates. We had received a bid to the next round after our performance during the regional competition in Boston, Massachusetts. Although it was not as evident to me during our first competition in Boston, this past weekend I realized that my team expressed synergy. In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey describes Habit 6 as the ability to “synergize.” He views synergy as being open to new ideas, working as a team, and solving problems. Covey describes synergy by stating that it is, “to value differences—to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses” (263). This is exactly what my mock trial team did.

My team consisted of three people: Mara, a junior captain; Carlie, a sophomore; and myself, a freshman in my first year of Mock Trial. Our job was to defend a scuba diving company that was being sued for the death of one of its customers. My duty was to direct examine a witness called by our side and to ask him questions that would benefit our case. I also cross-examined a witness whom the plaintiff called, so my goal was to discredit his statements. While the opposing attorney directed his witness, it was my duty to object and ensure that the questions he asked were both fair and legal.

The first synergistic factor we addressed was valuing differences. Each team member brought something different to the table. The major difference that our team was faced with was that of gender. Carlie and Mara were both females, and so spent more time together. They practiced together in their rooms, understood each other more, and had already established a relationship from last year. Being the only male, I spent far less time with my two teammates. They were forming synergy through their daily interactions, and their level of harmony was evident. So, to help bring me into the loop, we made a few decisions. Throughout our weekend in Pennsylvania, we decided that we would spend one hour a day practicing as a team, and we would eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. Although it may not seem like a lot, this really helped put us all on the same page and established a sense of harmony that was evident throughout our performance.

After establishing harmony, we showed synergy another way. As an attorney, one of my duties was to object to opposing counsel if his or her questions did not fit the criteria for court. Although I could formulate a good objection when given time, I was always slow on the draw and would never get it out in time. However, this is one area where my team showed synergy and worked to “compensate for weakness” (Covey 263). We devised a plan where Mara would recognize the objection and tap my shoulder, at which point I would immediately stand up and object. She would write down one or two key words to help me recognize the objection, and I would proceed to make my argument. By doing this, we were able to compensate for my weakness and operated as a whole.

The final synergistic factor we expressed was that of building on strengths. After figuring a way to bypass our differences and compensate for weakness in the team, we focused on what we were best at. My strength was in delivering my direct examination; my direct was so sound that we decided to use my time in front of the court more productively. Not only would I give my direct, but I would insert questions that both Mara and Carlie needed for their arguments. By doing so, I helped our team do very well, gained the respect of my teammates, and proved my worth.

Ultimately, my team was able to express the essence of synergy in three ways that Covey describes. First, we valued our differences and worked around them by doing more things together. Then we set up a system that compensated for personal weakness, and finally we even worked off of one of my strengths. It was through these actions that we showed synergy and were able to perform at the highest level and against some of the toughest teams.

### **Work Cited**

Covey, Stephen. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Free Press, 2004. Print.

After taking a class field trip to Saratoga Battlefield, this writer contemplates the difference in reading about and experiencing the battlefield in person and recognizes how subjectivity influences the interpretation of historical events.

## Response to the Saratoga Battlefield

By **A.J. Lianzo**  
(Dr. Nolan – Local History)

My time at Saratoga Battlefield was an enlightening and unprecedented experience. The trip not only solidified my knowledge of the details and importance of the battles' outcomes, but the trip and our guide revealed that there were a multitude of historical facts that substantially trumped what I had already learned. The most prominent and positive experience that enhanced my understanding of the battles was quite literally being on the fields themselves. There was no better way to conceptualize and empathize with the decisions made during those battles than by understanding the battlefield geography. Additionally, I learned a great deal about the value of militias, which contradicted what I had ascertained through the readings, and most interestingly, I discovered an entirely opposite perspective on General Arnold and his actions as well.

The many discussions in class usually revolved around the battle decisions and movements and the displaying of those movements on maps. In accordance with the class readings, it is easier to conceptualize the troop movements and decisions depicted through the use of maps. However, once I walked through the battlefields, and I had a chance to relate the troop movements to the terrain on which Generals Gates and Burgoyne carried out these decisions, I attained so much more value and comprehension about those decisions. For example, during The Battle of Bemis Heights, Burgoyne had “[t]wo choices [that] lay before him: he could keep his army in a column on the road and try to force his way through the American guns on the bluff and the batteries on the river flats; or he could attack the Americans in their fortified camp on Bemis Heights” (Luzader, *Decision on the Hudson*). Standing from the heights, I could see how perilous Burgoyne's decision was and how strenuous it would have been for his troops to traverse the steep and narrow passage to attack the American position on which I was standing during the trip.

Throughout the multitude of readings on the Battles of Saratoga, there was a great deal mentioned about the various militias deployed. During the conflict of Saratoga, both the British and the Americans made use of their militias; in fact, most of the American forces were militias. Militias are self-organized citizen soldiers, yet from the readings, not much could be determined as to whether they were effective military units or if they were deployed simply for their numbers. During our trip, our guide informed me that the militias the British used were from Canada; these Canadian Militiamen were incredibly indifferent to the war and the cause. Consequently, their effectiveness on the battlefield was abysmal. Our guide also clarified that the numbers of the militias counted for nothing on the battlefield and were essentially “worthless.” This is contrary to what I gathered from Luzader, who stated, “During the first week of October, [Gates] posted militia on the east bank of the Hudson in the enemy's rear and received reinforcements from several areas” (Luzader, *Decision on the Hudson*). This was indicative of not only the number of militiamen at the disposal of General Gates, but that he was utilizing them for strategic military purposes. The tour guide was very helpful in the sense that I now understand that regardless of how frequently armies used these soldiers during the conflict, the

militia did not necessarily translate their numbers into potency in combat. In this regard, the trip to Saratoga Battlefield offered a more descriptive and analytical perspective of the soldiers that our readings did not offer.

The most surprising discovery I made during the trip was the true actions and character of Benedict Arnold. Disregarding the infamous reputation of Arnold's betrayal, his actions at Saratoga Battlefield are highly revered and well-honored. However, I found it very peculiar that the readings from class made Arnold out to be a striking commander who valiantly led troops into historical victories. Conversely, our guide informed us that Arnold was quite dishonorable and never led anyone under his command in a battle at Saratoga, but rather he simply joined the troops under someone else's command. This is contrary to what Luzader wrote about Arnold in his book: "After the Germans routed, Arnold left Learned's troops and seized command of Poor's" (Luzader, *Decisions on the Hudson*). It was extraordinary to see firsthand from our guide that there could be a plethora of interpretations of historical events and documents, for it was completely contradictory to hear from our tour guide that Arnold had actually never commanded troops. It was clear once I had reflected upon my readings that undoubtedly there are opposing views on Arnold.

The field trip revealed to me many infamous areas of the battlefield, such as the American main defensive position, the British redoubts, the fields on which both sides clashed, and Bemis Heights. Additionally, I had the opportunity to see replicas of cannons, the house that served as the main American command post, Benedict Arnold's monument, authentic weaponry and gear, and the topography of the land. In all, I felt that my experience at Saratoga Battlefield was enhanced by all aspects of the trip. The historical value of the topography and additional knowledge about the leaders and troops helped me to define the battles themselves. I gained a great deal of knowledge from our guide and the readings, and through them, whether they coincided or not, my appreciation and understanding of the significance of the Battles of Saratoga was augmented.

In preparation for an academic community engagement project, this student read and reviewed a book about Parkinson's Disease. The writer provides a clear and concise overview of the book's contents while explaining to whom and why it may be relevant.

## A Book Review of *When Parkinson's Strikes Early: Voices, Choices, Resources and Treatment*: An Interesting Read that is both Factual and Inspirational

**By Nakia Marion**  
(Prof. Redkey – Leadership)

Written by Barbara Blake-Krebs and Linda Herman, the book *When Parkinson's Strikes Early* gives real life accounts of individuals who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, along with specific information about all aspects of life with Parkinson's. In addition to focusing on both authors being Parkinson's patients themselves, ones who have worked to develop awareness and support for Parkinson's patients, the book specifically focuses on the accounts of people who have been diagnosed with Young Onset Parkinson's. This resource would be useful, however, for anyone affected by Parkinson's because it has a strong focus on how to face life's challenges with courage and perseverance. These accounts consist of selected email messages to the Parkinson's Information Exchange Network, which is an international discussion group, along with poetry, accounts about well-known individuals who have suffered or who are suffering from Parkinson's, such as Congressman Udall and Michael J. Fox, and also both general and detailed information about various aspects of life with Parkinson's.

The book is divided into eight chapters, with each one being about a generally different aspect of life with Parkinson's. Every chapter also has various accounts of people from around the world who live, or have lived, with Parkinson's, and they are divided into paragraphs with the name and location of each individual. This makes the book easier to read over a prolonged period of time rather than in one sitting. Chapters one and two give some general information about Parkinson's disease, missed diagnoses, early symptoms, the experiences of diagnoses for various patients, and advice to those who are newly diagnosed. These chapters also focus on the symptoms and side effects that occur as Parkinson's disease progresses. Chapters three and four focus on daily life with Parkinson's and how it affects relationships, work, children, marriage, and communication in general. Chapters five and six talk about the perceptions and misperceptions of people who have Parkinson's and focus on the importance of funding research for Parkinson's. They also outline other issues such as support groups, nutrition, public awareness, and coming together as a community to help those who are affected by Parkinson's either directly or indirectly. Chapter seven focuses on the various surgeries that are available for Parkinson's patients, and there is useful information about each procedure and patients' personal accounts of their experiences and the results. Lastly, chapter eight focuses on possible environmental and genetic factors of Parkinson's disease as well as hope for the future.

Overall, this book is engaging to read because of the various accounts of Parkinson's patients and their loved ones or care takers that are included, which break up the factual information that is also included in the book. These accounts



are inspirational and provide a lot of insight into peoples' personal struggles and progress, which are relatable to anyone going through such challenges. The vocabulary is pretty basic, but some of the sections, especially chapter seven, include some technical information and statistics. This book, being that it was written in collaboration with one of the largest online Parkinson's communities and contains much research, has been widely accepted by the Parkinson's community. Personally, I found it very helpful because it provides valuable information that cannot be expressed simply through facts, but is rather aimed at creating understanding through telling real life experiences of people who can relate to what others are going through.

The book is two hundred and five pages long, and the material after that consists of the following: information about the contributors; ideas for advocates; a resource guide to books, newsletters, and videos about Parkinson's disease; a list of websites about Parkinson's; a list of chat rooms, web forums and mailing lists about Parkinson's; and a list of Parkinson's organizations worldwide, including the address and phone number of each organization. I would recommend this book for someone who wants to learn basic factual information about Parkinson's or for someone who has either been diagnosed with Parkinson's or knows someone who has it. Reading this book would definitely be helpful to someone who wants to learn something that relates to his or her personal struggles on a level that is both factual and emotional.

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For this response essay, the students were asked to relate an out-of-class event to an assigned reading. The writer artfully connects a popular science fiction film shown during the First Year Seminar Film Series to a classic text written by an ancient Greek philosopher.

## The Matrix and the Cave: Connecting Two Worlds

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**By Hemraj Persaud  
(Dr. Lederman – Local History)**

*The Matrix*, directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski, is a science fiction action movie about humans who live in a world controlled by artificially intelligent machines. These machines have captured most of the human race and use their body heat and electrical impulses as fuel. The enslaved humans are unknowingly kept in a cell that traps their minds in a massive computer system called the Matrix. Inside the Matrix everyone perceives their lives as reality; they see the world as 1999 and are unaware of the Matrix and the reality outside of it. Beyond the Matrix is a world where the sun is blocked out and machines control the world. The story in this film contains many similar concepts to those expressed in Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave."

In Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave" there exist two realities — one in which there are prisoners trapped in a cave and one outside the cave. The prisoners in the cave do not know what exists outside of the cave; they only know of what is inside the cave. The world outside the cave is the normal world and is the actual reality. The Matrix can be seen as the same as the cave because both are worlds that exist within a greater world, and the people who live in both the Matrix and the cave are unaware of the world outside of the one that they are living in.

*The Matrix* and "The Allegory of the Cave" also have similar concepts embedded within their stories. In the film, one of the characters named Morpheus tells Neo (the main character) that it is against their rules to let an adult above a certain age out of the Matrix because the adult won't accept the reality of the world that exists outside of the Matrix. This concept is similar to what occurs in "The Allegory of the Cave" because when one of the prisoners is allowed to leave the cave, he sees a world that he could never have imagined. When he goes back to the cave to tell his friends what he saw, they are unable to understand what he tells them. The prisoners of the cave cannot comprehend what their friend is describing; they won't accept the reality of the world outside of the cave because all they know is the cave. Similarly, if adults in the science fiction film were let out of their cell, they wouldn't be able to accept the world outside because all they know is their own reality within the Matrix.

Another concept explored in *The Matrix* is the quest to restore reality. In the film, a human named Cypher gives up Morpheus to the machines so that he could return to The Matrix and live a life of luxury. Cypher does this because he hates the reality that exists outside of the Matrix; he wants to go back to the world that he used to know. This is similar to what happens in "The Allegory of the Cave." The prisoners of the cave become angry with their friend who left and returned to the cave to tell them about the outside world. The people of the cave do not want their reality to change, so they become angry and start to yell at their friend. Similar to Cypher, the people of the cave cannot accept the reality that is different from the one they want or know.

*The Matrix* and “The Allegory of the Cave” both tell the story of a world within a world. The texts share similar elements that allow their audiences to become intrigued by an idea that was outside of their own realities thereby helping the readers or viewers to break out of their own matrices or caves.

In this essay, the writer expresses his knowledge and passion about humans using science and technology to preserve natural habitats. He effectively connects a personal experience – a field trip to the Albany Pine Bush Preserve – to course readings and research conducted during the Natural World Unit.

## The Role of Science in the Maintenance of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve

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**By Nelson Rivera**  
(Prof. Fitzgerald – Public Policy)

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is an area of great historical significance. The origins of it can be traced back thousands of years to the last glacial period of the Capital Region. At first, the preserve served as an area of great commercial interest. The Native Americans who inhabited the area conducted trade with European settlers who often brought trading materials, such as tin pots, to exchange for animal pelts and local berries found on the preserve. Today, however, the preserve is home to a wide array of plant and animal life alike. Although some people may argue that land is nothing but a resource for humans to use however they please, I maintain that because of our growing scientific understanding of how different environments are best suited to survive, we must preserve them the best we can.

Our scientific knowledge has allowed us to better understand how to take care of the environment around us. The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is a very unique environment in that it requires fire in order to survive. Deliberately adding fire to a forest ecosystem, such as the Pine Bush, may seem counterintuitive, but scientific research has shown that this type of environment cannot survive otherwise. Science allows us to better preserve our surroundings, for we know exactly what the environment will need in order for it to flourish. The method by which we maintain the health of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve today is through the use of prescribed fires. A prescribed fire is a purposefully set fire in a specific location under pre-determined conditions by highly qualified personnel (Gifford). The use of prescribed fires allows the preserve to maintain its healthy state because the preserve burns in order to conserve its vitality. Also, our scientific knowledge has allowed us to study the conditions under which a prescribed fire may be performed. By studying weather conditions, park conservationists are able to determine when and where it is optimal to perform a prescribed fire.

Technological advances have also contributed in helping to maintain the Albany Pine Bush Preserve. This method of maintenance relies upon the use of heavy machinery in order to keep the preserve in optimal conditions, for we use the machinery to prevent an area from getting too full of debris. At times, it is necessary to cut down certain trees and shrubs in a specific location of the Pine Bush. Cutting down some of the trees allows for the removal of invasive species, such as Black Locust, which can out-compete the native plants found on the preserve. The elimination of trees also helps to clear that area for prescribed fires, and one technique that is commonly used is called girdling. This method requires the use of a bud spark in order to remove part of the bark from a tree, putting a strain on the roots. In turn, the roots will not be able to support the whole tree, eventually causing it to die (Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission). Through the use of the machinery designed by humans, we are able to change the landscape around us. This allows us to severely impact and choose the types of trees we want to preserve and which we want to remove.

Powerful chemical agents, like herbicides, are sometimes used in order to maintain the preserve in a healthy state. Due to the powerful chemicals used in this mode of maintenance, it is only employed when absolutely necessary. In some cases, invasive trees cannot be removed by the application of fire or heavy machinery because of their rapid rate of re-sprouting. In order to remove these invasive species, holes are drilled into their trunks, creating an opening where the chemicals can be applied. The trees draw these chemicals into their roots where the increasing concentration of these chemicals slowly kills them (Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission). Because of our knowledge of the chemicals and their effects on the plant life of the preserve, we are able to keep the preserve healthy and free from invasive species.

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is a very unique ecosystem. Worldwide, there are about twenty Pine Bush Preserves left on this planet. In his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold (1949) maintains that “Our appreciation [of nature] grows with the slow unraveling of earthly history” (Leopold, 102). In making this comment, Leopold is suggesting that the beauty of nature lies in its history. Once we know the history and the amount of work that was done for a certain environment to be created, that is when we can truly appreciate its value. In the case of the Albany Pine Bush Preserve, knowing the origins and circumstances of how it was formed allows one to appreciate the environment and how it came to be. The fact that there is such a low number of Pine Bush Preserves suggests we should maintain these types of environments, for they are rare and not likely to form by natural causes in modern times.

Expansionists, of course, will disagree with my view that land is a precious commodity that should be preserved. Looking at nature from an expansionist’s point of view, undeveloped land serves no real purpose for the general public. Developing the land and transforming it into something which will benefit the public, is a much more efficient use of land. For example, building houses for people to live in is a better way to use the land, rather than just have it remained undeveloped. Arguably, using the land as a source of wood during the winter season may also serve as a better alternative to just having undeveloped land. While it is true that undeveloped land does not serve the general public much good economically, it does not necessarily mean it has no real purpose, for it is very important to the animal and plant life found in the environment. The Karner Blue butterfly, for example, can only live on the preserve because that is where its main source of food, blue lupine, is found. If all the blue lupine from the area was cut down, the Karner Blue butterfly would not be able to survive and would eventually become extinct. The handout, “The Land Ethic,” by Professor Jennifer McErlean of Siena College, proposes the idea of everything in nature is interconnected. To prove this, Dr. Jennifer McErlean uses a food web as an example. In this example, if the amount of foxes in an area were to decrease, the rabbits which it preyed upon will most likely increase in population. This will throw the whole ecosystem out of balance due to the excess amount of rabbits (McErlean). Similarly, trying to develop undeveloped land will throw the whole Pine Bush ecosystem off balance, as altering one aspect of it will adversely affect another.

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve should be maintained. Our expanding scientific knowledge allows us to better understand the complexities behind environments and to better take care of them. Having this understanding is very important, for we can develop alternative methods for maintaining the preserve. In sum, what is at stake is the environment. How well we preserve it will dictate whether it will survive and last long into the future or perish under our attempts.

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Using at least three class readings, students were asked to write a short analytical essay on the theme of nature. This essay connects Original Sin to the death of the natural world, and the writer successfully weaves references to the Book of Genesis with passages written by St. Francis of Assisi, Carolyn Merchant (an ecofeminist philosopher/historian), and Rachel Carson (a biologist/ecologist).

## Why Humans Are Killing Our Mother, Nature

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**By Addison Rodriguez**  
(Dr. Haas – Women)

Sin has had a hold of nature, corrupting it after the Fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The evidence is everywhere today; death rates go up thousands at the hands of earthquakes, storms, and tsunamis. Of course, humans have to add their bit, too, as we dismiss our responsibility of taking care of the Garden (Genesis 2:8). The cause of this mistreatment of nature is explained by Carolyn Merchant in the excerpt from her book *The Death of Nature* (1993). Merchant declares that there are two central views about nature in our society: an organic view, where nature is considered to be alive, and a mechanical view, where nature is lifeless and is something to be manipulated. In today's society, it is almost uniformly believed that we have shifted in our view of the environment from the organic view to the mechanical (Merchant, pp. 227-228). Unfortunately, this shift is not beneficial for either the human species or the environment; it is leading us on a path of destruction, a path to, as Merchant emphasizes, the death of nature. The cause of this destructive shift is the negative aspects of human nature, which are more commonly referred to as the Seven Deadly Sins: Lust, Greed, Pride, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, and Sloth.

Before we tackle these problems or even consider a change, we need to truly understand this environmental situation. This can be achieved by taking a closer look at the two theories described in *The Death of Nature*. The central theme of the organic model, as said by Merchant, is “the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother; A kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe” (p. 270). This model of an ideal world is similar to the Garden of Eden described *The Bible*. The organic model can be compared to how God intended humans to live on our planet, which is to respect it as if it were our mother or brother, which in some way it is (St. Francis, p. 113). Nature gives us food, water, and shelter; in other words, it enables us to live the way a mother does for her child. In return, a child does not rebel against his or her mother, but rather listens to her. Being a part of the environment means that we need to listen to nature and live our lives the way it was originally intended — a way that is the perfect *balance* between cleanliness and efficiency, a way that includes nothing being wasted yet meeting all of our needs. A child does not hit his or her mother, so, in turn, we cannot hurt nature.

While the organic model describes an “ideal” world, the mechanical model describes a tainted one. The mechanical model is, as Merchant describes it, the belief that “Nature . . . [is] composed of interchangeable atomized parts that can be repaired or replaced from the outside” (p. 277). The principle of this model is that man and nature are two separate forces, and because of selfish and arrogant aspects of human nature that cloud our judgment, we believe we are the dominant force. Because of this self-ascribed dominance complex, we believe it is our right to manipulate and bend nature to our will. This newer way of thinking is all about power over nature and evolving to the next stage, and not giving any thought to the damage done to the environment. This stance is one that is raping and abusing our mother, leaving behind a world tainted both with pollution and sin.

The change from the organic model of nature to the mechanical model of nature was inevitable. Human nature was tainted by the forbidden fruit, which unleashed onto the world not only original sin, but also the Seven Deadly Sins. These sins corrupted mankind and because of this it, we no longer followed the organic model of life. Each of these sins either goes against ideals of the organic model or causes man to forsake the organic model for personal gain. As a result, our view transferred to the mechanical model of nature.

Taking a closer look at the Seven Deadly sins, we begin to understand what caused the change from our utopia to the future dystopia we are heading toward. Greed, Gluttony, and Lust, are all sins of excess. They embody the extreme desire to gain more than someone needs or deserves, which leads to over-indulgence or over-consumption to the point of wastefulness. In turn, humans need more resources to sustain themselves, but the organic model places a limit on natural resources and leaves human wants and desires unfulfilled. Thus, humans must find another way to produce more resources, so they turn to the mechanical model. For example, Americans are wasteful of food, water and electricity. This wastefulness causes the need for the production of more resources, which leads to the destruction of the environment, consequently pushing the world towards the mechanical model.

However, the sins mentioned before are not the only ones that affect our relationship with Mother Nature. Surprisingly, the sins Pride, Envy, and Wrath have to do with simple man-to-man interactions because they rely on the need of humans to always have something better than their neighbors. This can be seen in everyday activities like taking care of a lawn. A man with a well-maintained lawn may become prideful and zealous and go to the extremes to be the best. This over-zealousness convinces him that the end justifies the means, which may include using dangerous chemical on his lawn, such as herbicides, insecticides, and fertilizers. These chemicals often contaminate the groundwater and have harmful, if not deadly, effects on the organisms with which it comes into contact (Carson, 2002, p.7).

The final vice that pushes man ever further toward the mechanical view of nature is Sloth, which is defined as the physical and spiritual laziness of man. The ever-growing technology easily enables people to surrender to the temptation of Sloth by creating and using inventions that make their lives easier. Unfortunately, what makes our lives easier almost always makes life harder on the environment and Mother Nature. For example, while the creation of cars for transportation makes our lives much easier, the environment must then suffer through the emission of harmful phosphates, nitrates, and carbonates.

As a society, we have made the change from the organic view to the mechanical view of nature. It must be noted that we cannot remain on the path that we are on, which is one that leads toward a more radical version of the mechanical model of life. As it has been proven by many researchers, this path has a detrimental impact on Mother Nature. Not only does this leave our home without a nurturing mother to take care of us, but it goes against the plan God created for us to live on this earth. And yet, the answer to this problem is not as basic as recycling, reusing, and reducing. In order to have a proper impact, we must change our character. We must turn away from the very sins that brought this havoc upon us; that is the very reason why our all-knowing Father gave us guidelines. If we follow His Word, we will not only save ourselves, but also Mother Nature.

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For this assignment, the students were asked to read two excerpts regarding the Erie Canal and to write a short response paper about how and why they believed the phrase “Paradox of Progress” pertains to it. This student immediately stakes her claim and selects relevant material from the scholarly sources to underscore her opinion in this organized and well-documented essay.

## The Meaning of the “Paradox of Progress”

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**By Emily Roehl**  
(Dr. Lederman – Local History)

In 1825 at the Wedding of the Waters, Governor DeWitt Clinton opened the Erie Canal, a technological achievement that connected Maine to Georgia. The Erie Canal became the backbone for advancements in trade, commerce, expansion, and development in the United States. Peter L. Bernstein, author of the book *Wedding of the Waters* (2005), discussed the history and impact of the Erie Canal and claimed that it was a “revolutionary technological network” that “molded the triumph of the United States as a continental power and as a giant in the world economy” (p. 1). Bernstein believed that the Erie Canal was one of the major factors that shaped the United States into the industrial and world power that it is today. While Bernstein reflected on the grandeur of the Canal, not everyone saw it in such a positive light. Carol Sheriff, author of *The Artificial River* (1996), described the concerns and complaints of the canal, focusing on the middle class’s distaste for the canal workers and lifestyle. Sheriff wrote that “the Canal had become a haven for vice and immorality” (p. 1) and discussed the poor living conditions along its banks. These two differing reflections on the impact of the Erie Canal emphasize the idea that the Canal truly was a “Paradox of Progress,” bringing industrial progress and development to the United States, and at the same time, attracting poor living conditions to life along the Canal. I believe that the Erie Canal brought more positive developments in the United States than negative ones, and, overall, has been a success story in the growth of our country.

In order to grow and progress as a society, we must experience both positive and negative changes along the way. Daily life changed drastically in the United States during the Erie Canal’s years of operation, transportation, industry, and commerce. As discussed in Sheriff’s excerpt “The Perils of Progress,” from *The Artificial River* (1996), people from all levels of society lived and worked on the Erie Canal. According to Sheriff, canal workers “posed a threat to civilized society. Middle class observers portrayed them as profane, lewd, and violent” (p. 4). The canal workers drank, swore, stole, and behaved poorly in society. Boat captains mistreated their workers and many young boys who grew up working on the Canal became outcasts of society and adopted personalities similar to those of the canal workers. Reformers and activists of the Second Great Awakening attempted to reform the corrupted lives of canal workers in the 1820s (Sheriff, 1996, p. 10-11). These reformers tried to bring canal workers to church services and fought for them to be off from work on the Sabbath. While attempts were made at reforming life along the Canal, its poor living and working conditions became a great negative externality related to the Erie Canal’s success.

While poor living conditions and unruly workers sometimes made the Erie Canal an unsafe place, I believe that the Canal’s success outweighed these negative consequences of change. The Erie Canal was a dominant force that helped the United States industrialize and become a major world economic power. According to Bernstein, in 1822 “the canal was serving over twenty million people and [later] had produced revenues of \$121 million since 1825, more than qua-



druple its operating costs” (p. 6). This shows the grand scale of economic growth and development the United States experienced with the Canal. The Canal cut transportation costs of goods and materials and drastically decreased the time it took to move these goods, allowing cargo to be transported throughout the country and the world at a much easier, faster rate (p. 5). As a result of the Erie Canal, New York City became the greatest city in the nation, for it influenced the growth of the United States during the Industrial Revolution (p. 6). Most importantly, I believe that the biggest success of the Erie Canal was that it inspired Americans to hope for and desire growth and expansion. Bernstein explained that “Americans perceived the canal as an expression of faith in the potentials of a free society, a message of hope for a great young nation on the move” (p. 6). The Canal sparked the United States’ expansion in terms of size, power, and presence in the world and turned it into a more civilized and modernized society, which continued to grow thereafter with the creation of railroads and other forms of transportation and technology. I believe that the Erie Canal is significant because it was one of the first technological advancements of the United States that helped to connect the world, and it encouraged future growth and expansion.

The Erie Canal was a success story in terms of expansion, as well as economic and industrial development. It connected people within the United States and united millions of people throughout the world. While there were some undesirable outcomes related to its development, such as the immorality of the canal workers and their poor conditions, I believe that the positive progress that came from the Canal greatly outweighed any negative outcomes. Without the Canal, the United States would not have had the strength and foundation to achieve all of the economic, industrial, communal, and world success that it has experienced since the years of the Erie Canal.

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After viewing a controversial drama at a local theater, this student offers a candid personal response to the complexities surrounding issues of race, gender, and class.

## A Response to David Mamet's *Race*

**By Christopher Roberts**  
(Dr. Liptak – Crossing Borders)

I went with my first year seminar class to see *Race* by David Mamet on February fifth at the Capitol Repertory Theatre in Albany. I do not consider myself the type of person who would enjoy a play; I could hardly stand Drama Club back in high school. Yet the various racial topics addressed by Mamet that night turned what I thought would be a boring mandatory field trip into a rather enjoyable one. As a fairly naive white male, I learned that I am guilty of harboring certain prejudices for groups whether I act on them or not. What surprised me was the idea that even the most well-meaning people are vulnerable to being influenced by the effects of not race itself but rather the mere fear of being labeled a racist.

In the first act of the play, one of my favorite dialogues was between attorney Henry Brown and the defendant, Mr. Strickland. Mr. Strickland is accused of raping a young black woman, and being a rich white man, his case draws the attention of the media. I sympathize with Mr. Strickland as he tries desperately not to get caught up in a racial conversation with the black lawyer he comes to for help. He feels awkward enough being scrutinized by the media, and he struggles not to offend Henry Brown. Under most circumstances, I, too, find myself avoiding racial conversations like the plague. I understand that my opinions on the matter are limited to what I know about the topic, and, quite frankly, I know very little. My status as a white man grants me privileges commonly denied to other groups; therefore I feel as if I am ignorant to the struggles faced by those who do not receive the same privileges that I do. Although some may disagree, I do not find Strickland to be a bad man. He makes serious mistakes, like anyone else, yet because of the racial context of his mistakes, he gives up trying to prove that he is innocent of rape. In the end Mr. Strickland admits to this crime, in spite of him being presumably innocent, simply because he collapses under the pressures of racism.

This play made it painfully clear to me that despite my best intentions, I unconsciously do things that could easily be considered racist. From an early age I have been taught how wrong racism is and how it is good to be culturally sensitive. However, the play *Race* has shown me that simply knowing and believing that racism is bad does not prevent people from engaging in racist behaviors. In the play, white lawyer Jack Lawson works with Henry Brown on the Strickland case. He makes a lot of decisions I considered justified that were later revealed to be racist. A prime example of this is when Jack admits that he had to hire an attorney, Susan, because if he didn't, she could have sued him for looking more deeply into her background because she is black. Although Jack discovers that Susan had lied on her application, which would be a valid reason for not hiring her, the motivation for his investigation (the fact that she was black) was enough to scare him into giving Susan a job. I admit that I probably would have done the exact same thing and hired Susan in spite of her lie. I would argue that most white men will make certain decisions they otherwise would not make for fear of being accused a racist. In the case of Jack Lawson, he fit his own stereotype when he chose to hire Susan strictly out of fear.

I believe that all people, whites especially, can make certain decisions that are directly influenced not by race itself but out of the fear of being thought of as racist. The play *Race* did an excellent job proving this to be true through the actions of both Mr. Strickland and Jack Lawson. Mr. Strickland buckled under the pressure and admits to a crime that he did not commit because he wanted to avoid being viewed as a racist. Jack Lawson buckled under the pressure in a different way. He hired someone he should not have simply to avoid a legal case that would portray him as a racist. Both men pay a price for their actions in the end, yet neither one of them strikes me as a truly bad person. This makes me question the view of racism that was taught to me growing up and helps me realize that racism is not simple.

Referring to a short story about Haitian-Americans, this writer discusses varying notions of identity for natural-born and naturalized Americans. Note how the writer effectively uses imagery, diction, syntax, and tone to maintain the attention of her audience.

## Two Sides of the Same Coin

**By Kelsum Shaikh**  
(Dr. Haas – Women)

America has been regarded as a melting pot for quite some time because of the many cultures and races that make up the population. America may seem like a melting pot; however, in actuality, it is a collection of cultures in disguise. The term “melting” describes more of a rich blend, whereas even though there are a number of cultures in the United States, they do not blend together. Rather, they are isolated, distinctly residing within their own bubbles. This is prevalently noticed when examining the mindsets of two specific groups — the native born Americans and the naturalized Americans. The outlooks of these two groups are poles apart. Being a natural-born American often means forgetting one’s ethnic roots, whereas being a newly- naturalized American often means picking one’s culture over his or her American identity. There is no happy medium. Both of these mindsets work together at creating a divide that leaves scattered cultural bubbles here and there rather than an immersion of a uniform American culture. America cannot vouch for its rich blend of cultures for which it has been known; it cannot be regarded as a melting pot if “Americans” feel the need to pick and choose. In order to be American, it is necessary to accept that one needs to acknowledge both his or her ethnic roots and his or her American nationality, for both are two sides of the same coin and make up each individual’s identity.

When looking at a newly-naturalized American, one can notice his or her strong attachment to culture and roots. There is a hidden fear that by taking on an American identity, these roots will be lost. Adjustment to change is a challenge for all, especially for immigrants who leave their families, traditions, and nationalities behind to join the culture of a new country. The dilemma arises when people feel the need to pick their heritage over their nationality or vice versa. That is a decision that no one should have to make. This problem is apparent when looking at how the American identity appears in the eyes of a newly-naturalized American, devoid of all roots and culture. America stands for freedom of choice, thinking, and actions; however, this same freedom appears to be a trap for the naturalized American. There is a sense of danger that by expressing this freedom, people could choose to forget their roots and reject their ethnicity.

Edwidge Danticat addresses this mindset in her novel, *Krik? Krak!*. The character Ma strongly expresses the fear that resides in her heart in regards to losing her heritage to an American identity. Ma says to her daughter, “You think you are so American, you don’t know what’s good for you... you hear what they say about Haitian women who forget themselves when they come here. Value yourself.”<sup>1</sup> Ma emphasizes the lurking fear that many immigrants have, which drives them to steer away from the American identity, ignore their new nationality, and strictly cling to their culture. Being American is like a curse to naturalized Americans; it means rejecting everything that they stand for. It is pertinent to realize that this tradeoff should not be necessary in the first place. With every perspective, there is also a coun-

<sup>1</sup> Edwidge Danticat. *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press Inc., 1996), 160.

ter perspective, in which the answer may be found. While one perspective looks at the American identity with a fearful eye, the other rejects the heritage and roots of the person's origin.

A natural born American tends to have much pride in being an American, which is not necessarily a negative attribute. The freedom of choice, power of speech, and control over action are all aspects that natural born Americans feel runs through their veins from the second they are born, and these are the same aspects that an immigrant fears. But in the midst of all this pride, a sense of roots and values is lost. The result of this loss is shown by the divide in the population. Americans have become so blinded by being "American" that when they see even a smidge of culture, it appears foreign. Newly-naturalized Americans automatically seem like a different breed, simply because of the culture they carry with them. The problem being emphasized here is that natural born Americans have become so cut off from their own original heritage and roots that they look at new naturalized Americans with a foreign eye, pushing them into their own isolated cultural bubbles.

Danticat brushes upon this natural born American perspective in *Krik? Krak!* as well, through the character of Caroline and the dialogue she shares with her mother and older sister. Ma, standing in her nightgown, tells her daughters: "I just remembered. There is a Mass Sunday at Saint Agnes for a dead refuge woman. Maybe you two will come with me," and, Caroline responds with, "Nobody sleeps in this house." The older sister concludes the discussion with "I would go, but not her."<sup>2</sup> Through this short dialogue between the three characters, Danticat highlights the division due to the mindsets of the natural born and naturalized Americans, while also giving an example of a third character who is struggling to hold onto her American identity while staying true to her heritage. Caroline, a natural born American, rejects her Haitian roots, while the older sister, a newly-naturalized American, is striving to figure out her identity. While one side is rejecting their culture, at the same time, these newly naturalized Americans are harboring fear. They are afraid to step out of their bubble and are afraid to allow their bubble to burst open and submerge together with the rest of the culture. The problem is two-fold; one mindset feeds the other, resulting in the divide that we often see today between natural born and naturalized Americans.

Even though both perspectives stem from one source, they repel like magnets. Two protons are the same at heart; however, when put next to each other, they divide with a great force despite being of the same matter. Whether natural born or naturalized, in essence, all are Americans. In one way or another, both hold a connection to the same roots, for they trace back to the same point of origin. It does not matter where one is born; both the natural born and the naturalized are Americans. Due to social pressure, it has become a necessity to privilege one over the other. The picture keeps being looked at simply in terms of black and white, where grey is not even considered an option. In order to stand tall and proud for the American melting pot—the immersion of cultures—both perspectives need to be considered. Instead of only acknowledging one side of the coin while rejecting the other side, the coin needs to be looked at as a whole, as one entity. It is after this realization when one can alter his or her mindset, begin to accept the idea that one's heritage and nationality meld together in sync, just as a coin, and stay true to his or her identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*, 165.

Citing specific biblical passages and including loose references to contemporary texts studied in the Natural World Unit, the writer of this essay builds a compelling argument against modern methods of food production.

## The Consequence of Violating God's Blueprint

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**By Maria Theresa Torina**  
(Dr. L. Woolbright – The Environment)

By violating religious instruction, we degrade the environment that sustains us. As modern corporations successfully develop efficient, yet unsustainable, methods and tools for farming, the environment becomes saturated with harmful chemical toxins. These toxins not only have the potential to become catalysts for the rapid degeneration of the natural world; they also put the exposed human bodies at great risk. Although this trend is dangerous, it will worsen as our population continues to grow at an exponential rate, for with a larger number of people comes a higher demand for food. As this demand increases, corporations will continue to tighten their grip on small farms, forcing farmers to plant more genetically altered seeds and interfering with God's original blueprint for creation. Perhaps the relationship between the violation of religious instruction and environmental degradation can be best explained by exploring the transition from traditional to modern food production and analyzing the environmental effects of mass production.

Although the transition from traditional to modern food production has generally been considered a wonderful improvement, the modern methods of production have had devastating effects on the environment. The invention of innovative farming technology and chemical enhancements have allowed companies to amass huge profits, but at the expense of the environment. As companies undertook large scale production, more and more artificial chemicals were added to the soil, poisoning the land and affecting the ecosystems. In the books *Eat Here: Reclaiming Homegrown Pleasures in a Global Supermarket* by Brian Halweil and *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* by Eric Schlosser, the authors conveyed how the growth of modern day corporations have contributed to the degradation and how humans have deviated from their original role as guardians of the environment as described in the Book of Genesis.

In *Eat Here*, Halweil discussed how the mechanization of farming has led to the development of destructive methods of production. Corporate farmers have created a system that requires the fertilization of the land through artificial means, which disrupt the ecosystems and kill the microorganisms within it. The roles of these microorganisms are essential to the health of the environment. When artificial fertilizers are added to the soil, many bacteria and decomposers die, decreasing the amount of natural nutrients that are produced as a byproduct of their processes. Thus, even though artificial fertilizers may allow the growth of healthy crops for a certain number of years, it may leave the land barren in the long run.

Also in *Eat Here*, Halweil demonstrated how industrialization and the growth of companies have caused the decline of farmers. As civilization moved from traditional to modern food production, many food companies expanded, hurting the farmers who did not possess the resources to compete. Since many local farmers were no longer able to afford planting their own crops, corporations took over, replacing the labor and services that these farmers provided

with machines. This has a negative impact on the environment because farmers, who generally value the interaction of organisms and the health of the soil, were replaced by profit-driven corporations that were willing to tamper with God's original designs by introducing new strains of crops and genetically modified organisms.

Further, Schlosser illustrated how companies such as Monsanto and Altria have violated God's blueprint through the creation of their own patented genes in his book *Fast Food Nation*. Through this success, these international giants have imitated God's actions in the Book of Genesis when He created fruits and vegetables. Monsanto and Altria are essentially stealing God's role as Creator. As companies such as these continue to create patented genes, more and more genetically modified crops may enter not only the markets, but also ecosystems. If these crops, by some anomaly, are able to breed with their wild counterparts, serious repercussions may occur. Not only does this situation have the potential to harm native species, but it also has the potential to harm the humans that created them. As the presence of modified crops in marketplaces continues to become accepted by society, more will be created. If people, whether by ignorance, indifference, or acceptance, continue to tolerate this trend, there may come a time when more than half of the world's crops contain patented genes. There may also come a time when natural products become a rarity in the world, and genetically enhanced organisms come to dominate the planet in large numbers. If this time arrives, a new Genesis may occur, with Man as Creator, and God, forgotten.

Before God created man in Genesis, He created the environment and the animals within it. He then created man and instructed him to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (*NRSV*, Gen. 1.28). Although humans have filled the earth and have subdued it with machines and technologies, they have forgotten how to respect the environment. Even though God did not specifically command humans to guard the environment in Genesis, humans were created after the environment. Therefore, they should learn to respect it. Putting harmful chemicals in the soil, which endangers other organisms and destroys the habitats of other living things, is disrespectful not only toward the organisms that may be severely affected by them, but also toward God.

Saint Francis, who valued creation and refused to harm other living organisms, would not approve of modern day food production. The cruel ways in which corporations treat cattle, pigs, and chickens contradicts Saint Francis's belief that we should love all forms of creation. He would not approve of the filthy, crowded commercial farms that were shown in the movie, *Food Inc.*, and he would not approve of the mistreatment of animals. Personally, I do not support the modern day mass production of food because it uses so much energy and it is not sustainable. I also believe that corporate farming is detrimental to the environment because it does not return organic materials to the soil. Instead, the fertilizers that they use deposit toxic chemicals in it. Like Saint Francis, we should be following God's plan.

God also said in Genesis: "And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food" (Gen. 1.30). This means that the gift of food has been given to all living organisms in order to sustain them. Since all living things on the planet are gifted with the diverse skills and abilities that allow them to sustain life, it might be concluded that they have different roles to play within the environment. It can also be concluded that all of life is connected by each individual organism's inability to live without food. Since each group of organisms are connected to each other, the loss of a particular species (such as, in cases of extinction) will reverberate throughout the whole system. For example, the loss of decomposers may lead to fewer nutrients in the soil as less organic matter will be broken down.

The advancement in agricultural technology has turned farming into more of a destructive process. While the introduction of chemicals, such as pesticides and herbicides, has led to a greater yield of healthy crops, it has also led to the death of populations of insects and other plants. This has contributed to the loss of ecosystems. As more chemicals are added to the soil, more populations of microorganisms are harmed, which leads to less fertile soil. Although artificial

fertilizers may allow the growth of healthy crops for a number of years, eventually, the soil will lose all of the nutrients that it contains, causing it to become barren. While food is important to us, we should not make it our only priority. Every time we harm the environment, we should remember that we also reside in it. Therefore, if it is destroyed, then we will lose our only home. As punishment for violating God's instructions, humans may not be allowed to roam the Earth in the future.

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*New Revised Standard Version of Holy Bible (Anglicized Edition)*. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.



In this response, the writer gives a concise account of the lecture, makes outstanding connections to a specific course reading, and traces a heightened level of self-awareness when dealing with the issues of race and gender.

## The Little “White” Lie

**By Alex Van Den Eynde**  
(Dr. Daly – Popular Culture)

As part of my class on the philosophical perspectives of diversity, I attended a lecture by Dr. Laurie Naranch regarding the role of diversity and social justice. Dr. Naranch talked about how we as students should interact with the diverse student population of Siena and about how weeding out prejudice and inequality starts with one small step at a time. One of the main points that Dr. Naranch brought up was that we cannot be afraid to be “killjoys.” She claimed that far too often people just go along with the degradation of minorities and do not speak up when they feel others are crossing the line out of fear that they will be called out for being killjoys. People look upon advocates of social change as being too straight-laced, taking comments too seriously when they are meant to be taken as a joke. Dr. Naranch, however, argued that by making “jokes” out of the stereotypes or situations in which students encounter diversity, they are actively working to stop its progress. By sitting on the sidelines and not speaking their minds, the privileged are encouraging the spread of hate and stereotypes that have so deeply permeated our culture.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the lecture, however, came when Dr. Naranch opened up the floor for questions at the end of her 45-minute presentation. During this time, Dr. Naranch brought up the racial and gender breakdowns of the faculty and staff at Siena. These facts and figures made it painstakingly obvious that the faculty population is largely white and that more white males hold positions than white females. An African-American girl in the back of the lecture hall raised the issue of affirmative action and asked how it could be possible that there is only one black female faculty member. Dr. Naranch explained that Siena practices equal opportunity, not affirmative action, which means that no one can be considered or dismissed during the interview process because of his or her race or gender. She explained that there is no quota or shopping list that the college uses when determining who to hire. Rather, it looks to hire the most qualified applicants and is blind to their gender and/or race.

The reason that I found this lecture so interesting was due to how strongly it related to what we were discussing in class. Two weeks before this lecture, we had discussed McIntosh’s essay “White Privilege and Male Privilege” in which she discusses the unequal setup of American society and the blind privileges whites and males have. I thought that being a “killjoy” is something McIntosh could relate to. In her essay, she is unafraid to call out the privileges whites take for granted, such as the ability to make choices without “having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race” (McIntosh 75). McIntosh introduces another white privilege on the next page claiming, “If I have low credibility as a leader, I can be sure that my race is not the problem” (McIntosh 76). Rather than being “killjoys,” people like McIntosh are merely pointing out that these stereotypes exist to keep white males in the upper echelons of society while showing people that inequality exists all around them. These inequalities have existed for centuries, evolving as society has evolved but have never received any attention because “whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, just as males are taught not to recognize male privilege” (McIntosh 72). These

privileges exist in the shadows, and many social structures act to hide the inequality. So without the “killjoys” trying to at least hint at the privileges whites and males receive in today’s society, these social structures will never be altered, and true equality will never be experienced.

Overall, I thought this lecture was very well done. Dr. Naranch brought up inequality in several different senses and even discussed how uncomfortable her white students tell her they feel when privilege and inequality are brought up. She claims that her students prefer to talk about ethnicity or heritage rather than race because those talks are much more “fun.” I thought that this was really the most illustrative point of her entire lecture. When white students in particular are faced with talking about diversity, they fall back on the lessons they have been taught, consciously or otherwise, which are to ignore their privileges. I could absolutely relate to these students, for I often feel the same way. People do not like to feel guilty at anytime, but they especially don’t want to experience guilt when they know they weren’t the ones who created these social structures that are so oppressive. However, what I have come to realize through this lecture and our work in class is that through this fear and guilt we experience, we only work to sweep these unjust social structures further and further under the rug, opting to keep oppression alive rather than dealing with the tough questions diversity and privilege ask of us. We need to start asking the tough questions if we ever hope to take equality from the realm of dreams to that of reality.

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The students in this seminar were asked to write a creative piece in response to the work of a female artist. In this poem, inspired by a Frida Kahlo painting, the writer relates to the complexities of gender that Kahlo, too, experienced in a very different time and place.

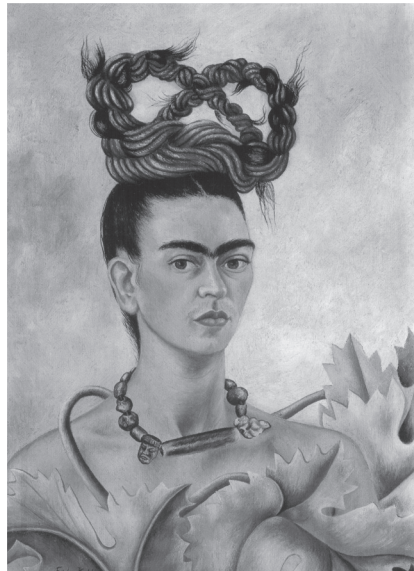
## Double Vision

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**By Amanda Buonagurio**  
(Dr. Haas – Women)

Hideous girl I see  
Does not resemble me  
Concern, tragedy, eyes looking away  
Leaves viewers with great dismay  
Evil look upon her face  
The woman painted, what a disgrace

Beautiful girl I see  
Does resemble me  
Strength, power, chin aligned straight  
With this expression I can relate  
Manly features are unusual to view  
Beauty is hidden, ready to breakthrough



The students in this section were asked to write a narrative about a character living within a specific historical time period. By relying on facts and real-life accounts to create a fictionalized story of suffering and survival, this writer skillfully demonstrates how violence and oppression leave indelible marks on past, present, and future generations.

## Jewish Citizen during German Occupied Europe – 1939 to 1945

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**By Timothy Holmes**  
(Prof. Fitzgerald – Public Policy)

Finally the day had come, my 13th birthday. As the oldest of the Kohein children, I sat down with my grandfather and learned the family secret. It is only shared with us once we are of adult age. Sitting around the warm, crackling fire with my father and grandfather, while my mother watched my younger brother and sister, I was finally a man. My father sat above me in a chair while I was perched at his feet, directly across from my grandfather. My grandfather looked me straight in the eyes and said, “You know about the Holocaust. Tonight I will share with you our family’s survival story.” My grandfather didn’t hesitate as he dove into the story:

“After the Germans invaded Poland on September 1st 1939, they bombarded Warsaw with artillery and air attacks. Finally, they took control of Poland on the 29th of the month (“Holocaust Encyclopedia”). In 1940, the Nazis forced all four hundred thousand Jews in Warsaw into a sectioned off area called the Ghetto. It was no more than two square miles (“Jewish Life”). My baby sister, my parents, and I were all forced into a temporary apartment with three other families. We had an eight foot by ten foot room that provided little privacy for our family. Warsaw was becoming unrecognizable from the extensive bombing and the garbage piling up in the streets. We were sectioned off like animals in our own country because of our Jewish faith.

Food was scarce, and what we were rationed was not sufficient to keep our bodies and immune systems in balance. Inside the Ghetto, starvation became an ever-looming presence. Survival became a fight. With the dirty and tight quarters for everyone, disease spread rapidly throughout the Ghetto. We heard accounts of people dying every day. We prayed that disease would not spread to our family, or the families we lived with. Sadly, we were not spared. My baby sister came down with typhus. We first noticed the rash on her stomach, and then it began to spread. She became deathly ill, and within a week, she was gone. Fortunately, no one else in the apartment was stricken.

I spent many hours walking through the Ghetto trying to make sense of this new reality. My red armband with the embroidered ‘Star of David’ was a constant reminder that I had been cast aside. Staring up at the walls that sectioned off the Jewish part of Warsaw from the rest of Poland, I questioned why we had been forsaken. I stared at the walls that seemed to reach the heavens, and at the guards who patrolled them for hours, remembering not to make eye contact with them. Occasionally, we would hear stories about families who had tried to escape the Ghetto after curfew, only to be publicly murdered as examples to the rest of us. The Nazis were brutal people, without souls, or compassion.

The Nazis became so oppressive that we could not even practice our own faith. Public prayer and teachings were declared illegal. We had to hold private meetings for praying and practicing our rituals in hidden locations. The whereabouts of these places changed daily so that we could not be discovered. It became hard to maintain all rituals of Jewish life from before this segregation, but we never lost our faith. Our faith was what kept us alive, and our faith was what would carry our family through. We studied the Torah whenever we could; we went to schools in private locations when it was possible; we sang songs of the Torah to brighten spirits; and we had a hunger for knowledge like no other. Our teachers would stress to us that our faith could never be taken from us.”

My grandfather raised his eyes from me to my father and asked my father to help him out with this part of the story. My father became a history professor at Harvard after he had received his doctorate from NYU; he had a focus in Jewish history.

Then my father began: “In 1942, Hitler began what he called the ‘Final Solution.’ The goal was to kill every Jew in all of Europe, and to kill anyone who tried to stop him. Hitler created death camps and concentration camps” (“Holocaust Encyclopedia”). My father told me that “Concentration camps were forced labor camps that had conditions worse than your grandfather’s Warsaw. The food rations were smaller and contained less nutrition. The Jews in these camps were treated like dogs, beaten and thrown around. And if they gave the camp guards trouble, they would be shot on sight. Death camps were the worst of the two, if it is possible for you to imagine anything worse. Our people were filed into places like Auschwitz, where they were systematically killed in gas chambers, by firing squads, or burned alive. It is a tough thing to comprehend, but it is a bloody truth.”

My father’s eyes met my grandfather’s as grandfather continued the narration: “Later in 1942, three hundred thousand Warsaw Jews were deported to death and concentration camps, killed in the streets, or killed in their homes. Now only around sixty thousand Jews remained in Warsaw, most of them in hiding (“Holocaust Encyclopedia”). My family had gone into hiding with another family. Every day was spent wondering whether we would be discovered and forced to our death.

Two groups of revolutionaries began to form after the major deportations from Warsaw. They each believed that they could fight off the Nazis and change the future for the Jews remaining in Warsaw. At first, the group’s numbers were roughly two hundred people, weakly armed with scavenged weapons with which they were inadequately trained. The word spread of the resistance, and their numbers rose to around seven hundred and fifty members. My father and my mother were both a part of this group. My father was armed with a pistol containing four rounds, and my mother’s duty was caring for all of the men in need of assistance.

In the middle of 1943 it was time for the resistance to take some type of stand, and the opportunity presented itself. The Nazis were lining up roughly five thousand Warsaw Jews for deportation when the resistance attacked. Fighting against the German troops, they freed almost all of the Jews. Because they were ill-equipped to maintain a strong defensive ground, the major resistance lasted only a few days. For a month, however, there were resistance fighters making attacks on Nazi soldiers, and they fought bravely until the resistance was silenced. In retaliation, the German soldiers destroyed the Warsaw Great Synagogue and killed anyone involved in the revolt” (“Holocaust Encyclopedia”).

I suddenly looked up at my grandfather and asked, “Wait, would that mean your father and mother were killed?”

“Yes son,” replied my grandfather. I could see how hard it was for my grandfather, even though he would not show it or shed a tear. He said, “They had been killed within the last few days of the revolution. As one of the last of the surviving Jews in Warsaw, I was then deported to Lublin concentration camp.

We were treated like animals at the camp, maybe even on a level lower than animals. I will spare the details because I cannot bear to relive the pain that I went through at Lublin. What I can share is that survival in the camp was based on

mental strength. The willpower to survive must be present in your heart and mind. If the perseverance were not present, then the Nazis could tell that they had broken you. The only thing that kept me going was my faith. We sang to keep our spirits high and recited favorite verses from the Torah.”

My father began to speak and asked me if I knew what the term genocide meant. I responded that I did not. He said, “Genocide is a systematic extermination of a certain group or race. The term comes from the Greek word ‘geno’ meaning race or tribe, and from the Latin word “cide” meaning killing. The term was coined in order to have a way to describe what Hitler and the Germans had done to the Jews. In 1948, the United Nations approved the ‘Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,’ which declared that genocide was an international crime. The world then had to figure out how to deal with the leaders of the German government and army, so the Nuremberg Trials took place. During these trials, twenty-four people were sentenced to either death or life in prison (“Holocaust Encyclopedia”).

In 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States created the War Refugee Board, which helped rescue Jews from Europe, and he designated Fort Ontario in upstate New York as a free port for refugees. President Harry Truman established the Truman Doctrine in 1945, which allowed all immigration quotas to be filled with refugees. In 1948, U.S. immigration quotas again increased, and your grandfather arrived in the United States in 1950. Three months after your grandfather’s arrival in 1950, the U.S. immigration law was amended and the quotas were reduced. But one hundred thousand refugees had already migrated into the United States and were headed towards their new lives” (“Holocaust Encyclopedia”).

My grandfather took over again and stated how everything was not “as fine and dandy” as you would expect in the States. “The Jews were still a minority and an oppressed one at that. Some Americans were anti-Semitic, and there were many signs on doors that stated, ‘No Jews allowed,’ or ‘Jews not welcome.’ Although being an oppressed minority in the United States was not the easiest, anything was better than being in Warsaw or Lublin. I can remember a news headline with big bold letters, ‘Jewish Synagogue in Atlanta Demolished by Dynamite.’ The thought of more death threats in a place like America made me nervous. Of course, I had my everlasting faith to guide me and keep me strong.

I found a job working at a Jewish-owned grocery store. I rose to middle management and met my wife, your grandmother. She was a cashier at the store. We found a home, settled down and had our only child, your father. Your father went on to accomplish many milestones that had been denied to me by the Nazis. He went to one of the top schools in the country on a scholarship and now teaches at another top school in America.”

My grandfather sat back and took the first sip of his scotch that had been resting on the table next to him throughout the night. I decided that it was time for me to go to bed. I was a little astonished after learning the family secret; I had not known what to expect. I kissed my family goodnight and walked upstairs in our suburban house to my own bedroom. I couldn’t help but rethink in my head the story my grandfather told. I tried to imagine what it must have been like, but I could not do it. I sat thinking about how lucky I was that I did not have to face the oppression my grandfather did. I was free to pray, worship, and practice my religion, all because I was living in America. I stared at my bedroom ceiling thinking about all the privileges I have, ones that even my father did not have, until I felt my eyes slowly shutting and I dosed off.

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The following poem began as a free-writing activity that inspired the poet to address the pertinent topics of freedom and oppression. The narrator of the poem speaks of how minorities not only have to fight for their freedoms, but they also are called upon to fight for the freedom of a country that does not accept them, thus highlighting the complexities surrounding diversity and justice in America.

## The Volunteer

**By Patrick Kelly**  
(Dr. Haas – Women)

Forced to submit  
But I cannot agree  
Freedom's what I long for  
Freedom from the monarchy  
But there be no freedom for our island  
Till we raise Erin's flag of green

To fight the famine and crown  
We rebelled but they cut us down  
They call us rebels and traitors  
But we cannot agree  
All true sons of Erin  
For Fenians are we

We've fought so hard and mean  
For that tattered banner of the green  
But without total unity  
The crown will rule with impunity  
Burned from our homes  
We starved and died alone

So I left my home in Erin  
For the land of liberty  
I've since then found  
Peace would not be for me  
As this Union had enlisted me  
To wear the blue of the sixty-ninth Irish Infantry

We've fought so brave and well  
Tearing down the gates of hell  
For Erin go Bragh was our battle cry  
And many a friend and foe have died  
After four long years of blood and tears

I realize I can give no more  
For the green and blue  
Though not many knew  
That freedom isn't free  
Thus freedom is a commodity  
Purchased in blood by volunteers like me

For this assignment, the students were asked to imagine how they might use their leadership skills in a diverse workplace environment. Referring to several readings, this writer demonstrates how the knowledge she gained in her first year seminar will benefit her as a future pediatrician in a trauma center.

## Diversity in a Trauma Center

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**By Alyssa Wilkinson**  
(Prof. Redkey – Leadership)

The Trauma Center at any major hospital has a reputation of being one of the busiest rooms in the building. There is constant commotion as health professionals examine, diagnose, and treat the most severely injured children all day, every day. There are always patients entering and leaving, as they receive the best care possible by health professionals who are experts in racing against the clock. With the constant flow of patients, your fellow employees whom you spend countless hours working alongside become your teammates. Regardless of what they look like, or where they come from, they are essential in making the trauma centers work. Diversity only makes a team better. In an environment where your knowledge can either limit you or help save a life, it is essential to have other people. Including people on your team who did not have the same upbringing as you, helps fill in possible gaps of information or procedures, especially because each patient who enters the door has a unique set of symptoms. I would welcome, and strongly believe that I would thrive in, your socially diverse work environment.

The benefit of working within a diverse group is that everyone can bring something different to the table. There is more likely to be a group of individuals who all have unique talents and abilities. Being aware of different cultures only makes you a better physician. Being able to respect and interact with patients is a key component of the job. In fact, with children as your main clientele, bedside manner is everything. Pediatricians have to cater to the emotional needs that children have. Being immersed in a diverse environment would help me obtain information about those different from myself. I could then use that information to better care for my patients. Also, as a physician, treating ranges of people gives me more exposure to broaden my skills. A diverse work environment not only challenges me as a physician, but it makes me a more approachable person.

Possible liabilities that come as a result of working in a diverse environment include differences in ethics and morals. In my position, I am faced with life or death decisions that come down to judgment calls. Individuals in vulnerable states often rely on things such as religion. When someone is willing to sway a medical decision because of his or her own personal beliefs, this can create tension, especially if the physician and patient were to have opposing morals. In an environment that is already so stressful, any added tension can be detrimental to the care of the patient. Furthermore, our prejudices and biases are deeply rooted within us. We spend our entire lives learning about who we are, and by extension, how others are different. This is the nature of the situation, and it is inevitable. However, a problem surfaces when we let our prejudices interfere with our perceptions of the abilities of those around us or when they become hurtful. Peggy McIntosh, in her article “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” talks about the idea of “privileges” that are created when there is a polarity among different groups of people. With privileges, come disadvantages, and the denial of the differences keeps those differences from “being fully recognized, acknowledged, lessened or ended” (McIntosh 70).



We cannot help the fact that those biases are there, but we have every power to refrain from relying on them. Nobody is immune from these preconceptions, but being conscious of them is a significant part of the effort to eliminate them.

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey defines the idea of synergy as “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts...The relationship which the parts have to each other is a part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part” (Covey 263). It would be ideal for my colleagues and me to reach synergy. I think a group is most dynamic when every person can contribute to the whole. Also, it creates a competitive advantage because the group is getting more for its efforts. A sole person, acting alone, can accomplish a great amount, but a team all working for one common goal can do wonders. This is so important if one desires success like I do, and this is precisely why I feel like I can handle the diverse employees and clientele. It will only make the team better.

St. Francis of Assisi began an order that is still in existence today, and he is one of the most venerated religious figures in history. My Alma mater, Siena College, provided me with a Franciscan education that was based on Francis’s morals and beliefs. Even eight-hundred years ago, Francis realized that opening your mind to include others, even when they are different, could be beneficial to the order as a whole. If he limited his order to only those who were just like him, he would not be as respected as he is today. It was his ability to look beyond the social barriers that made him honorable. This lesson is something that I connect with personally. Social restrictions hold you back from growing as an individual. Another example of St. Francis’s acceptance is the acts of kindness he showed toward a begging leper one day in the town of Assisi. “He came upon a leper . . . He slipped off his horse and ran to kiss the man. When the leper put out his hand as if to receive some alms, Francis gave him money and a kiss” (Bonaventure 189). He was able to show compassion to someone whom others shunned because he cared enough to look past those social restrictions. Francis did not let this social restriction keep him from accomplishing his goal of spreading the goodness of God. Like Francis, I will not let diversity affect me negatively. I look forward to diversity adding the possibility of a more fulfilling career.

Although Siena College did not have a particularly diverse student body, the faculty made great efforts to show an appreciation for diversity. Even the college’s mission statement exemplifies its importance. It states, “As a Franciscan community, Siena strives to embody the vision and values of St. Francis of Assisi: [including] delight in diversity” (“Mission Statement”). The mission does not say to simply tolerate diversity, but rather it encourages rejoicing in it. The Damietta Cross-Cultural Center at Siena held workshops and presentations that were available multiple times throughout my schooling to promote unity and to create an inclusive community regardless of social identities. These included Diversity and Social Justice Workshops where we learned how to successfully work with people who are different, because together everyone can do better. I believe that it is not necessary to have a diverse background to be able to appreciate and be successful in one. My education encouraged me to work in environments such as these and showed me the advantages. Not only do I believe that I would thrive in a diverse work environment, but I am actively seeking it out because we can do better under those circumstances.

Diversity is about empowering people, and leadership uses this concept as well. Leaders are people who can motivate others to reach a common goal while using their individual strengths. They use diversity to build their team and accentuate their individuality. Leadership is not about convincing everyone around you to be just like you, but instead it is about encouraging one common idea. The more diverse ideas a leader takes into consideration, the better that idea can be. I would be a leader in the hospital, which is a wonderful asset. My training has set me up to excel in the diverse environment as a leader. Most of the great leaders whom we have grown to idolize did not earn their reputation by targeting people who were just like them. It is the leaders who are admired by the most diverse crowd that go down in history.

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The writer of this research essay meticulously selected both primary and secondary sources and skillfully utilizes them to develop her own statements about the tension surrounding religious beliefs and the pursuit of equality.

## Religion or Equality? — The Unanswerable Question

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**By April Alfieri**

(Prof. Olbrys – The American Dream)

Equality, freedom and rights appear to go together. If one has equality, it is assumed that one also has freedom and that there are rights to protect these things. Where this relationship becomes strained is when one group gains equality, while another group feels that its freedom and rights have been ignored. In New York, this became an issue for Catholics as a result of Governor Cuomo's Women's Equality Act. This act is meant to give women long-overdue equality but overlooks religious liberty in doing so. Ignorance in government has forced Catholics, especially Catholic women, to make a choice between equality and rights - a choice that no one should have to make. This essay will show the necessity of women's equality and how it has been denied and suppressed for so long. It will then examine the conflict of the Women's Equality Act with Roman Catholic doctrine, and finally, it will discuss the current climate of ignorance in the relationship between Church and State in government and society.

Governor Cuomo unveiled the Women's Equality Act in his 2013 State of the State Address. The 10-point plan is meant to put New York, which has always been considered a progressive state, back on track and keep it moving forward. Cuomo mentions some of the unfairness the Act is meant to correct:

Today, statistics clearly show that women are not treated equally to men. Study after study shows gender inequality in our communities where women are paid less than men for the same work, women face discrimination in the workplace based on family status and pregnancy, and women face discrimination in housing because of their source of income or domestic violence status. Further, the State still maintains antiquated laws on reproductive health and safety. (114-115)

The Act, therefore, includes measures for equal pay, stronger policies against sexual harassment and a variety of forms of discrimination, and strengthening laws for protecting victims of domestic violence (115-126). The highlight of the Act, however, is the Reproductive Health Act, which makes changes to New York's laws on abortion. The New York State Right to Life Committee summarizes the current laws and the changes the Act will make to them:

Abortions after 24 weeks of pregnancy are only allowed in New York law to save the mother's life (Article 125 Penal Law). [The Act] amends the penal code to allow late-term, third-trimester abortions to protect the mother's health. *Doe v. Bolton* has definitively defined health as 'all factors—physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age.' This enshrines third trimester abortion until the moment of birth in New York State law. ("2013 Statement of Opposition")

Abortion is currently addressed by criminal law regulations. The Reproductive Health Act decriminalizes it, regulating it under public health law. It is not a matter of whether the mother's life is in danger, either. If she feels she is not able to care for a child for almost any reason that could affect her health (emotional, financial, psychological), she

may get an abortion. The Act will “establish abortion as a ‘fundamental right’ in New York which would mean no restrictions on parental consent, taxpayer funding, or informed consent requirements before undergoing the procedure” (Hughes). It is this pro-choice aspect of the Reproductive Health Act that has created an ethical dilemma for some. Fully supporting the Women’s Equality Act means indirectly promoting a pro-choice stance on abortion. The Catholic Church is pro-life, however, which means that Catholics cannot support the Women’s Equality Act in good conscience. This is where the choice comes in – for not only Catholics but for anyone who is pro-life. They must decide whether they will support equality or stand by their moral convictions.

There is not an easy answer to this. However, many praise Cuomo for his Act: “We now have a partner we have needed to pursue the enactment of the Reproductive Health Act...We now have the partner we have needed to better protect women from abuse and to knock down the barriers to fairness and equity that women have endured for far too long” (Hughes). The positive reception that the Act has received is hardly surprising. The reason behind this is clear: women have not been treated fairly in the past – and even today, they still struggle against discrimination and violence. The United States is not as advanced as it could be in this respect. In “The Home Side of Global Feminism: Why Hasn’t the Global Found a Home in the U.S.?” the authors explore the mindset of the US on women’s issues, which directly contributes to our government’s lack of action on their behalf. The article discusses and promotes the notion that “women’s rights are human rights” and should be protected as such (DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and LaWare 100).

However, the US does not share this opinion, at least for its women at home. This has become evident as the US has repeatedly refused to ratify the United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, a treaty which “recognizes that existing human rights documents fail to account for the unique abuses faced by women” (DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and LaWare 101). The reluctance may stem from the fact that, to US politicians, ratification would be viewed as “a largely symbolic move that would help women in countries abroad and have little or no effect at home” (DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and LaWare 101). The last time the issue of ratification was brought up, then-Senator Joe Biden wrote that “[O]ur Constitution and gender discrimination laws already comply with the treaty requirements” (DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and LaWare 101). This exposes flaws on multiple levels. The first, as the authors go on to show, is that the issues addressed in CEDAW are not even perceived to be domestic problems. This mindset has fueled a trend that has shaped women’s lives, that has forced them to be complacent with their meager, often inadequate protection and rights. Furthermore, Biden is no longer a Senator; he is now our Vice-President. We have elected him to this position, placing greater power in his hands. He feels that things are fine just the way they are and that mere compliance is good enough. He will not use the influence we have given to him. Many women still suffer abuse even though our laws comply with the treaty. It is not enough. We must overcome our arrogance to move forward. As stated in the article, “What the Senators do not seem to recognize is that CEDAW will help women in the US, too. To recognize there are humans rights violations against women and children in the US every day would be to reveal flaws in a country that bases its credibility and identity on democracy” (DeFrancisco, Palczewski, and LaWare 109). We need leaders who are not afraid to acknowledge shortcomings – because that is the only way to fix them. We need progressive leaders in our government, leaders who won’t be so easily satisfied; leaders who want change and who are willing to bring it about. Governor Cuomo is one of these leaders. He has recognized that it is time for women to have the equality that they have deserved for so long. It would be difficult to find a reason not to support the Women’s Equality Act.

Yet, some people have, and these objections to seemingly positive changes have raised an unanswerable question: does one choose his or her religion over equality, or equality over faith? One cannot and should not be expected to prioritize – but that is what the Act is asking one to do. Although Catholics and supporters of women’s rights do not have polar opposite perspectives, there is definitely friction between the two, and there does not appear to be a viable

middle ground with respect to the Act. Catholics, while they may support other measures of the Women's Equality Act, such as equal pay or protection for victims of violence, cannot accept the terms of the Reproductive Health Act. The Catholic Church is "against any legalization of abortion for any reason, defining human life as beginning with the fertilization of the ovum" (Ruether). Therefore, even if the mother's life is in danger, Catholics view abortion as murder. It is an unacceptable practice at any stage of the pregnancy and for any reason. While some people may believe that abortion is permissible under certain circumstances and may not agree that life necessarily begins at conception, abortion in the ninth month of pregnancy (as the Act will now allow), no matter what the reason, no matter what one's views are, would surely be considered killing a living human.

Others might feel that the Church is at odds with women's rights, that it is a male-run institution and stubbornly maintains outdated views. Catholics for Choice, a group of progressive-minded Catholics who do not shy away from criticism of their faith, have even referred to the Church's teachings as "crusades against women's reproductive health" (Ruether). While the Church is deeply rooted in tradition, this may be an unfair and harsh characterization of the Church's doctrine. The Church has come a long way from believing women "lacked autonomous humanness and thus had to be always under male authority" (Ruether). This is evidenced in Pope John XXII's *Pacem in Terris*, written in the early 1960s, which stated:

[T]he part that women are now playing in political life is everywhere evident. This is a development that is perhaps of swifter growth among Christian nations ... Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons. (Pope John XXII)

The former Pope, having recognized women as humans and as deserving of rights, adds that "[h]uman beings have also the right to choose for themselves the kind of life which appeals to them: whether it is to found a family—in the founding of which both the man and the woman enjoy equal rights and duties" and that "a human person...is entitled to the legal protection of his rights, and such protection must be effective, unbiased, and strictly just" (Pope John XXII). The Holy Father of the Catholic Church was coming out in favor of an idea that resurfaced in the 1990s with CEDAW (which even the US would not support): that of women's rights as human rights, and that those rights should be protected.

However, Pope John XXII's support came at a price: an appeal to Catholics for morality, judgment, and above all, loyalty to the Catholic faith and God's Will. In *Pacem in Terris*, he goes on to say that "laws and decrees passed in contravention of the moral order, and hence of the divine will, can have no binding force in conscience, since 'it is right to obey God rather than men'" (Pope John XXII). The Pope is not advocating anarchy or rebellion but rather conscientious reflection on what laws mean and whether they are in line with Catholic values. He is merely reminding Catholics that what is just in the eyes of God is more important than what the law declares justice to be – and that we should strive to obey the teachings of our faith even while under the law of a government. Here one can see how many Catholics are conflicted. They want to please God, but equality should be intrinsic for all people.

This dilemma is the result of ignorance in government. Women, as well as other minority groups, have long felt the impact of being overlooked and their concerns discounted. Governor Cuomo has finally made a step toward rectifying that. However, religious ignorance is ingrained in our society. Many people argue for the separation of Church and State, yet for many, it is not that simple. American Catholics do not live under either the Constitution or the teachings of their religion, but both; the two are intertwined in peoples' lives and are intimately related. The influence of the latter is often dismissed, written off as meaningless – worthless – in politics. (It is inconsequential, of course, until an election is at stake.) Paul Horwitz, in his book *The Agnostic Age: Law, Religion, and the Constitution*, addresses the

secondary status of religion in society and proposes an accommodation for peace between religion and law. His suggestion is constitutional agnosticism, which is defined as: “[taking] the truth claims of religion seriously while asserting the impossibility of final conclusions. Although the constitutional agnostic cannot publicly determine the question of truth, he or she can and should treat religious viewpoints with a respect born out of the idea that in the end they could very well prove true” (201). Constitutional agnosticism lays responsibility on legislators to more deeply consider the implications of the laws they are making, and on judges to view religion as a serious factor in their interpretation of the laws. Horwitz notes that courts often “[lean] too hard against free exercise claims and too much in favor of secular purposes” and suggests that “[w]hile seriously considering government ends... a ‘heavy thumb’ [should] be placed on the scale in favor of free exercise. Therefore, whenever possible, religious claims should be accommodated” (201). Horwitz is not saying that lawmakers have to cater to religious interests but that they should take into consideration the concerns of religious groups in an effort to finally begin to balance the longstanding favor of secular interests. If the secular and religious arguments on an issue are equally valid (one is not fundamentally flawed or has obvious weak points), then the religious one should be given more weight, as secular ones have been given historically.

From the perspective of constitutional agnosticism, what one may consider agreeable legislation ties into Horwitz’s assertion that a lawmaking body “is forbidden from taking actions or making statements that amount to official conclusions about religious truth” (201). Constitutional agnosticism suggests that it is one thing to pass a law banning something like abortion or capital punishment – it is unlikely any religion will find such a law disagreeable – but it is a very different matter to *allow* such things, especially when they are in conflict with the values of religious groups. Passing a law in favor of – or allowing – something is interpreted as making a moral statement on the issue, which constitutional agnosticism does not permit a government to do. It is, in effect, determining the truth of a faith claim, for example: if a law says that abortion is an acceptable practice, then this would essentially be regarded as saying abortion is not immoral. To not allow – as in not make legal or ban – something should be viewed as not making a statement on the validity of a faith claim, such as “abortion is immoral.” It should be taken as silence on an issue of morality. Banning could also be seen as making a statement, like “abortion is immoral,” essentially siding with a faith claim. However, according to constitutional agnosticism, it should be taken as more of a “no comment” response.

There is definitely ambiguity as to whether banning is really a way to avoid making a moral statement or if it *is* such a statement, but when compared to passing a law, it is certainly closer to refraining from making a moral conclusion. (It is hard to allow something such as abortion without implying that it is seen as ethically acceptable.) To take an active approach toward lawmaking, i.e. to pass laws in favor of something, is to actively assert the values of the lawmaking body. Therefore, if the law is in conflict with a group’s values, the lawmaking body is making a comment on the validity of the values of the group. If a passive approach is taken, i.e. not legalizing or banning something, the legislators are not passing judgment on the morals the group holds. The line between active and passive can be hazy, but to balance the scales between secular and religious interests and correct the ignorance that has created the imbalance, new perspectives on lawmaking will be necessary. As Pope John XXII said in his *Pacem in Terris*: “[T]he right to live involves the duty to preserve one’s life; the right to a decent standard of living, the duty to live in a becoming fashion; the right to be free to seek out the truth, the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it” (Pope John XXII). The government should not be allowed to deny us the right to live and therefore should not deny us the right to seek out the truth or inhibit our search for it.

Governor Cuomo’s Women’s Equality Act has done just that. It has made a determination on whether or not abortion is an acceptable practice and tied that to women’s equality, forcing Catholics to reject both so as to not support something that clashes with their faith. An immediate solution might be to give women equality without the Reproductive Health Act, but this fails to address the larger issue. To abstract this from a matter of religious beliefs, it becomes a question of ethics versus equality, a question without an answer. Our government should not make us choose one over

the other. It should not compel us to violate our ethics by dangling something as basic as equality in front of us, nor should it force us to deny ourselves equality so that we may protect our conscience. The moral convictions one has do not have to stem from religion, nor be related to abortion. The equality does not need to be for women. In any case, it is wrong to have to sacrifice one's beliefs for something as fundamentally deserved as equality.

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All First Year Seminar students are taught to “join in the conversation” of experts and stakeholders when reading, talking, researching, and writing about their seminar topics. In this essay, the writer immediately states her position and includes relevant information from a variety of sources about the history and the process of fracking. She judiciously outlines some of the most important issues surrounding this “hot topic” and meticulously documents the material, thereby gaining the reader’s trust and reinforcing her own argument.

## The Dangers of Drilling

**By Alexa Carlson**

(Professor Olbrys – The American Dream)

Since the industrial revolutions occurred around the world, people have been dependent on energy to fuel innovations. As the number of industrialized societies continues to grow, so does the demand for energy. However, the global need for energy is causing the natural resources that are currently being used to become scarce. Oil is primarily drilled for in the Middle East where OPEC controls the majority of the world’s oil. If the United States has a political entanglement with this region, it may be difficult to get oil at a fair price. The use of coal and other fossil fuels has decreased due to the negative effects they have on the environment. Recently, energy companies have made innovations with solar, wind, and hydro energy. However, there are not enough trained specialists to manufacture and maintain the methods of obtaining energy this way because the processes are fairly new. Recently, there has been controversy over a method used to obtain natural gas. This process is called hydraulic fracturing, and it removes natural gasses from rock, usually shale, that is present below Earth’s surface. There are opposing opinions about using this method to obtain energy. There have been debates that offer valid arguments for all parties who are concerned with hydraulic fracturing. In New York State, Governor Andrew Cuomo has still not made a decision regarding the legality of hydraulic fracturing. Due to serious health and environmental risks associated with hydraulic fracturing, it should not occur in New York State.

Hydraulic Fracturing, also known as fracking, is a mechanical process that is used to retrieve natural gas from the ground. For hydraulic fracking to occur, a mixture of fluid and different sands is used to penetrate the rock. This mixture is pumped at an extremely high pressure inside a horizontal well. This pressure creates fractures and causes them to expand in every direction. The liquid causes the rock to crack, while the sand holds the fractures open and allows the gas to escape. There are different patterns used to change the direction of the flow within the well (Holditch 41-42). This process allows previously inaccessible shale gas resources to become available for use as energy. Designing a fracking treatment can be a complicated process because there are several factors that must be taken into account, such as permeability, thickness, and porosity. The amount of propping agent, or sand, used to fracture the rock is dependent upon these factors. However, data from previous drillings, well tests, and geological records can also be used to determine the fracking treatment (Holditch 42-43). Shale is a desirable rock because it is extremely permeable and has a relatively high percentage of porosity.

During the fracture treatment process, small micro-seismic events occur. These are extremely small and cannot be felt on the surface (Holditch 45). After the process is complete, the water used is considered wastewater and must be disposed of or recycled. There are some regulations on how much wastewater can be put back into the ground as a



disposal method. However, the water can still seep through soil and contaminate other water sources. The most commonly used wastewater disposal methods are: the recycling for reuse in more fracking and filtering, which includes the dispersion into surface waters; injection into the ground; storage in air pits; and the spreading on roads to decrease ice. Some of the chemicals used are considered carcinogens when exposure occurs in high enough doses (Fletcher). Although the contamination of groundwater is a serious concern, the mishandling of wastewater poses a greater threat to citizens. Evidence has proven this true since the invention of hydraulic fracturing.

Fracking is not a new process; it has been around since 1947. Members of the Stanolind Oil and Gas Corporation performed an in-depth study regarding the use of injecting fluid to stimulate a well. They were the first group of people to ever experiment with this technology. In 1949, the first two commercial fracking treatments occurred in Oklahoma and Texas (Montgomery and Smith 27). After this development, hundreds of wells were treated, which led to an increase in production. In the past, fracking treatments involved 750 gallons of fluid and 400 pounds of sand. "Today treatments average 60,000 gal of fluid and 100,000 lbm of propping agent, with the largest treatments exceeding 1 million gal of fluid and 5 million lbm of proppant" (Montgomery and Smith 28). The process itself has been multiplying in size, and the industry has been expanding since its invention. Energy companies have been putting it to use since 1947, and until recently, there was not a lot of controversy over this process.

There has been debate regarding fracking and whether or not it benefits or harms our society. In New York State, Governor Cuomo has not yet reached a decision to date. There has been a serious divide among New York residents regarding fracking. One side argues that allowing drilling to occur would cause an increase in economic activity and make gas cheaper for the middle class. The other side states the possibility of serious health and environmental risks being associated with fracking and does not think having access to more natural gas is worth harming humans or the environment. Governor Cuomo's decision is taking much longer than anticipated. Entrepreneurs are becoming impatient while waiting for the decision that will dictate if investing in fracking in New York State will lead to high profits. However, there are also people, such as Yoko Ono, who have been appreciative of the time put into the decision. She publically showed her gratitude by saying, "Thank you, Governor Cuomo, for taking time to do a more complete health study" (Hakim 2). Legalizing fracking could lead to many potential benefits; however, the costs need to be seriously considered.

The United States has been experiencing a slow recovery from the latest recession. Recently, the unemployment rate has decreased for the nation as a whole. However, the unemployment rate for New York State has increased from 8.2% to 8.4% (New York State). This shows the need for a new industry to help stimulate the economy. There is also a huge energy crisis occurring. If fracking were allowed to occur, there would be more energy available to the public, thus causing prices to decrease. Fracking would also lead to the creation of new companies such as wastewater removal firms and proppant creation firms. These new businesses, along with the actual drilling sites, would create a large number of new jobs and would ultimately help decrease the unemployment rate in New York State. As stated by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, "The development of shale gas plays has become a 'game changer' for the U.S. natural gas market," and this new method of obtaining natural gas has the opportunity to give the New York State economy a serious boost (1). Southern New York has a large area of shale that attracts wealthy people willing to invest in the removal of natural gas through fracking. Fracking would also allow the United States to decrease the amount of natural gas it imports. If the country could produce enough to sustain itself, there might even be a possibility of making a profit by exporting extra gas. New York could potentially make a large contribution to the amount of available energy that is present in the United States. However, this may come at a great cost.

There are concerns about the health risks it may cause, as well as the negative environmental impacts fracking might produce. Although this process has been occurring for a while, it has never occurred on such a large scale as it does today. Due to this fact, no sufficient research has been conducted by health officials regarding the long-term effects of fracking when it is used frequently. Some of the effects of fracking may include contaminated groundwater that leads

to contaminated water supplies and exposing the workers and surrounding towns to harmful chemicals. There is also the issue of being wasteful: “The process uses huge amounts of water, and environmentalists, landowners, and others worry that drinking-water supplies could be contaminated” (Gies 1). As noted above, this process requires massive amounts of water. In 2012, about 4.5 billion gallons were used just for fracking (Gies 3). However, this number does not include water that is used for other types of drilling. This overuse of water can become a serious issue for states that have a tendency to experience droughts. In New York State, water must be used wisely due to the large population in New York City. There have already been towns destroyed to make water reserves for NYC, so misusing a large amount of water would be careless, and possibly dangerous.

In the beginning, fracking occurred in remote areas, far away from civilization. As this method of obtaining natural gas grew in popularity, the areas where drilling could occur began to fill rapidly. Because of this, some drill sites had to be established closer to residential areas. Some wells seriously invade people’s privacy and land: “Some of those wells will be drilled within 150ft of residents’ front doors” (Goldenberg 2). The wells excrete pollution that makes the air surrounding these drilling sites unpleasant. Most of these areas are small towns that lack the authoritative power to keep energy companies away from their townships. Most energy companies are planning to have large numbers of wells in these areas because there is nothing to stop them from doing so. Some major cities such as Tulsa, Oklahoma and Dallas, Texas have banned fracking within city limits. Gardendale, Texas is located near the heart of the west Texas oil industry, and the residents are forced to accept fracking as a part of daily life due to the lack of restrictions on it (Goldenberg 2). This also may occur in New York State. Since the shale in New York is concentrated in areas that are either residential or industrial, there are not many remote areas to drill. In addition, some forests may be cleared in order to drill. If the natural gas is placed at a high value among energy companies and the government, there would be nothing to stop them from invading residential areas in New York, just as they do in Texas.

Fracking is a controversial topic that forces a great divide among people. The energy companies and most wealthy individuals believe fracking would be good for our nation. Yet, they are only thinking of the potential profits from expanding their business or investing. The environmentalists and people who are forced to live near fracking sites do not believe the benefits outweigh the costs in this method of obtaining natural gas. Although fracking offers a new method of obtaining energy, it should not occur in New York State. Admittedly, there are benefits that would make fracking one of the best options for alternative energy. However, the risks and negative costs associated with fracking make the process undesirable compared to other alternative energy sources. Fracking puts workers and citizens in towns or cities near such sites in serious danger. These workers and citizens risk exposure to harmful chemicals that may lead to illness and to the contamination of water supplies and soil. If all of the money spent during the process of fracking, the debates about fracking, and the investing in fracking, was used towards other energy sources, such as solar or wind energy, the other energy sources would offer a superior solution for energy. With these alternative energy sources, the economy would be stimulated and jobs would be created. Rather than risk the health of citizens and the environment, the government and energy companies should pursue other forms of energy before fracking is legalized in New York State.

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Originating from questions raised and discussed in class, this well-researched essay demonstrates how first year seminar underscores Siena's core curriculum and values. The writer bolsters her argument by using a multitude of relevant sources, including an article by and interview with her economics professor.

## The Relationship between GDP and a Nation's Subjective Well-Being

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**By Dina DeCarlo**  
(Prof. Redkey – Leadership)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is defined as the monetary value of all goods and services produced in an economy during any given time period, though usually for one year or one quarter (3 months). Economists study this number, journalists write about it, and average people talk about it on a daily basis. GDP is not a number preserved for the eyes of professional economists; it is in fact, a very widely held number that many people desire to know. In a *New York Times* article “G.D.P. R.I.P.”, Eric Zencey (2009) considers GDP to be our “most commonly cited economic indicator.” GDP is a highly valued indicator because economists collect it the exact same way across all countries, therefore making it possible for a methodical comparison of the GDP of the United States to that of any other country in the world. GDP is a very important number when discussing the state of an economy; it displays the material growth and progress. If GDP reaches a high point (peak) then begins to decrease, by definition the economy is in a recession, and the measurements of GDP tell us how long the recession is lasting and how severe it is. Alternatively, when GDP hits a low point (trough), then begins to increase, the economy is experiencing an expansion. Most people would agree that recessions are undesirable, for they take a toll on the economy — production decreases, unemployment increases, and stress levels skyrocket. Overall, people seem less happy in a recession. Again, we accept the opposite to be true when the economy is expanding due to production increases, unemployment decreases, and people making and spending more money. Because these well-known phenomena are in alignment with fluctuations in GDP, people seem to look at GDP as something other than a monetary number, and more as how-the-economy-is-doing number. Generally, people are happy in expansions and increases in GDP, and they are sad in recessions and decreases in GDP. However, I will argue that “happiness,” or the subjective well-being of the people within an economy, goes far beyond the measure of GDP. Simply increasing GDP will not make people happier and may actually have an adverse effect.

GDP is an important and efficient indicator when used in the right context, which is determining the fiscal health of a nation. The purpose of GDP is not to judge the subjective well-being of people within an economy. Subjective well-being or happiness is a “state of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to extreme joy,” according to Princeton University’s Wordnet. However, it can be a very difficult thing to quantify. For people living in a rapidly advancing nation, where it is easy to get caught up in the importance of incomes, houses, and other tangible goods, it is easy to misinterpret GDP. People succumb to equating happiness with material wealth. Although GDP is somewhat effective for its intended purpose, it has flaws. For example, it ignores production without monetary pay, such as volunteer work, housework and raising children. GDP also excludes the negative effects of production. If an increase in car production increases GDP, it could also increase air pollution and traffic congestion, which are detrimental to quality of life.

Similar to excluding negative effects of production, GDP also makes no distinction between benefits and costs. The “broken windows fallacy” is an economic theory pointing out that going to war will increase GDP due to the defense spending on war materials such as tanks and airplanes, as well as spending to supply soldiers with proper food, water, and shelter. But, this has a complete adverse effect on the subjective well-being of the society - although GDP is going up, people’s happiness is most likely going down. GDP ignores the distribution of economic gains, or in other words, where the money is going. GDP may have increased 5% due to higher incomes, but did people on the bottom 80% of the income distribution receive higher wages, or did the wealthiest 1% just get 5% wealthier? GDP cannot answer that question. If the top 1% enjoyed the 5% income increase, then the bottom 99% received nothing, so although GDP increased, is society happier overall? Lastly, GDP ignores nonmonetary benefits or progress, such as swimming in an ocean, sleeping in, learning how to play guitar, and such things that benefit people but have no effect on GDP. The point that I am making here is that subjective well-being is very complex to measure because it involves many aspects of life. People often mistake subjective well-being (happiness) and fiscal well-being (having money) for being the same thing. If people continue to think this way, they will become progressively unhappier, and if they continue to look at GDP as an indicator of something it is not, it will exacerbate this problem.

In *The New York Times* article “G.D.P. R.I.P.”, Eric Zencey (2009) claims that GDP is “a deeply foolish indicator of how the economy is doing...a miserable failure at representing our economic reality.” Zencey agrees with the limitations I mentioned above and underscores that GDP merely measures activity rather than benefit. Zencey believes GDP is misused, out of date, and should be thrown away all together because it is such a flawed measure of even economic well-being. However, he believes the number still has a useful place in economics but should be renamed to something like “Gross Domestic Transactions” so that people will not mistake it for general welfare. He argues that there is no point in pursuing policies whose purpose is to raise GDP because a higher GDP does not necessarily make people better off.

I agree with Zencey. The United States has a 16 trillion dollar economy, and it is far too complex to be understood or explained by one simple measure. Like other economists, Zencey argues that there should be a different indicator, replacing GDP. This renaming of GDP makes room to create the new measurement that can better capture true economic well-being. Although it sounds like a doable task, creating this new indicator is very difficult because setting a dollar price on things such as extra sleep, kayaking, security, and relationships is so subjective. We may have other options, however, to move beyond price and measure subjective well-being, and a new, different unit is a possibility that we should consider. Even though this task may be difficult, Zencey (2009) states that there is “no reason to set that price at zero, as gross domestic product currently does.” I agree with Zencey and echo the idea that we need a new measurement system.

Economists from all over the world have similar ideas, believing that GDP fails to capture the well-being of our advanced 21st century society and have skewed political objectives across the globe toward the single-minded, pursuit of economic growth, or raising the GDP. Another article in the *New York Times* called “The Rise and Fall of G.D.P.” by Jon Gertner (2010) states that GDP may be an “inaccurate and misleading gauge of prosperity.” Professional economist Jeffery Sachs (2012) states, “GDP by itself does not promote happiness.” Not only is GDP a poor indicator of happiness, but it also does not identify physical well-being. Over the past 10 years there have been dramatic increases in obesity in the United States, and now more than 1/3 of adults (37.5%) and 17% of children and adolescents are obese (Center for Disease Control, 2012). According to Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH, RD, LD and Louise Chang, MD, two significant reasons people gain weight are lack of sleep and increased stress level. I would argue working longer hours and taking more demanding, high paying jobs would be specific scenarios in which people are helping GDP increase but at the same time causing themselves more stress, less sleep, and, in turn, worse health.

On the contrary, some people believe that GDP is only slightly flawed and should maintain its importance in society with minor modifications while others agree that GDP should continue to exist and be used in conjunction with HDI so that together they are a good enough indicator of the economy. HDI stands for the Human Development Index and is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income. Although this measure is slightly more insightful than GDP because it combines two other pieces of demographic information, I maintain that it is not detailed enough to describe a society's well-being. For example, if incomes are high and education is high, the HDI and GDP will be at a high, "healthy" or "desired" level. However, I argue that it is very possible for people in this society to be unhappy. These people may spend most of their daily lives in school, receiving training in the skills to get high paying jobs. Once these well-trained, educated graduates get these jobs, they discover that the jobs are highly demanding and force them to work long hours. Because of this combination, these people are very well-educated, very rich and able to afford the healthcare they need. However, they have no time for relationships, cannot appreciate nature around them because they are stuck in an office all day, are unable to take vacations, and might be happier receiving lower wages to work a job they love instead. This is a very common situation, and it is a perfect illustration of how HDI and GDP, even looked at together, cannot provide an accurate view of well-being. The average household works one extra day per week, or in other words 24 more hours today, than it did in 1970 (Pacitti, 2012). This statistic just shows that these high-paying jobs are detracting from leisure time and significant human relationships.

Since many professionals agree that GDP (or even GDP with HDI) is not the best or most useful measure of well-being, many economists have been working to create new indicators within the United States and across the globe. In the United States since 2003, a government official named Chris Hoenig has been running a group working with the US Government Accountability Office, researching ways to evaluate national progress. In 2007, this research became independent, and Hoenig is now the president and chief executive officer of his project called the "State of the USA." The purpose of the State of the USA is to create "key national indicators," something similar to a report card, as described by Jon Gertner. The State of the USA intends to post 300 indicators describing things such as health, education, environment, infrastructure, crime, and housing, for citizens to view by geographic regions (Gertner, 2010). Vartan Gregorian (2013), speaking on behalf of the State of the USA, claims: "With the State of the USA, Americans will now have a source of reliable, objective information about our increasingly complex society, which they can assimilate, find meaning in and act on to improve the country." People such as Gregorian and Hoenig believe that through these measures we can replace GDP with a better index describing a society's well-being. I believe that by using these new evaluation methods we can better improve our economies and increase national progress in a beneficial and desirable way. By discarding GDP as an indicator of national progress, we can create the new, far less-flawed indicator. The new measure may be much more complex than GDP and harder to create, but it will be well worth it when we can focus on increasing subjective well-being rather than fiscal expansions. If we do not begin to focus on increasing subjective well-being, policies will continue to be created with the hopes of increasing GDP, but they will be making us miserable. Therefore, the policies will be counterproductive and a waste of society's money and time.

As I have explained, defining subjective well-being or happiness is a very complicated task. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is a group that describes itself as an "organization helping governments tackle the economic, social and governance challenges of a globalized economy" (BBC News, 2003). The OECD agrees with Hoenig, Zencey, and Gertner that GDP is a misinterpreted number, which cannot properly describe the subjective well-being of people living within any given economy. Similar to the State of the USA, this group created an interactive index, the OECD Better Life Index, in which you can compare 36 developed countries, such as Japan, France, Germany, and Spain on an adjustable scale of things that are important to you or that make you happy. There are 11 adjustable categories that the OECD created for a person to have optimal happiness in his or her society. These categories include work-life balance, safety, life satisfaction, health, civic engagement, environment, education, com-

munity, jobs, income, and housing. They are all on an adjustable scale so you can choose which categories are the most important to you. To reiterate, GDP completely ignores most of these categories.

The idea of creating a “Happiness Index” or a measure that reflects other things in life rather than money is becoming more and more mainstream. People are becoming familiar with the idea that having money seems great, but how great is it if you are unhappy? In our fast-paced society, the phrase “money can’t buy happiness” is a truth we have to accept, especially in the United States. Out of 156 countries surveyed, the United States ranked 11th happiest (Koch, 2012). That puts the United States in the top 10% of happiest countries, which is a good place to be, but there is one problem. According to CNN Money, the United States has the number one largest economy in the world at an estimated \$16.2 trillion, and it has been the largest since 2001. Not only is the United States the largest economy in the world, in the past 10 years, it has experienced mostly increases in GDP. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, from 2001 to 2007 real per capita GDP (the average GDP per person in an economy) increased from about \$45,000 to \$49,500, but from 2007 to 2009, the United States experienced a recession in which real per capita GDP decreased to about \$47,000. Despite the recession, GDP has steadily increased since 2009. Although our GDP is increasing, and the US is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, it is not the happiest nation. *USA Today* interviewed random people asking them what they thought the happiest nation was. One person responded, “Definitely not the United States!” Another person responded with “Hmm Norwegians are happy.” Other people laughed or responded with various countries such as Finland (*USA Today*, 2012). Being such an advanced, stable, growing and wealthy nation, these answers are surprising. This random sample is just an example of Americans not being particularly happy. On the adjustable OECD Better Life Index, if you increase the importance on income, the United States ranks the highest, but as you increase importance on any other given category, such as work life balance or health, the United States slightly falls. Using this index, and adding to this index, can be very helpful in illustrating what really makes people happy and allows the society as a whole to improve on those specific things.

The first step to fixing this problem is to make more people aware that GDP does not measure subjective well-being. The interviews done by *USA Today* show this idea is becoming more accepted and mainstream. Interviewee, Gillian Biggers (2012) said, “Money can’t make you happy. You make your own happiness.” Along with the OECD Better Life Index and the State of the USA indicators, today several other cities and states are looking into “citizen well-being or floating happiness initiatives” (*USA Today*, 2012). According to Wendy Koch of *USA Today*, places such as Nevada City, California; Somerville, Massachusetts; and Seattle, Washington have all launched happiness initiatives. Aaron Pacitti (2012), Professor of Economics at Siena College, says “Increases in GDP lead to increases in things such as stress, anxiety, health problems and hours worked, all coupled with decreases in leisure time, community, and overall happiness.” Pacitti makes another important point by saying people need to discover what makes them happy, what increases their well-being, and let those things shape their lives rather than having the close-minded goal of making more money (increasing GDP). For Pacitti, leisure time equals wealth; he admits that he would rather receive an extra week of vacation time than a raise. Things such as vacation time, leisure time, and sleeping in, as I mentioned before, are all disregarded in GDP. However, many people consider these things as a form of wealth or happiness. Using the ideas, activities, and characteristics previously mentioned, society must collectively redefine happiness and move beyond the simple materialistic concept of wealth.

In conclusion, I maintain that increases in GDP do not lead to increases in happiness or the subjective well-being of a society. This measure should be used to discuss fiscal well-being alone, and I agree with Zencey that it should be given a different name and considered only by economists. The media should shift its focus to displaying a new, positive, more helpful measurement, which will remind people to recognize that money and tangible things cannot provide happiness in a single person, or in a society overall. Our goal must shift from increasing GDP to increasing our subjective well-being.

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The students in this seminar were asked to find, describe, and evaluate sources for their research projects. The writer concisely explains her process and her rationale for using or dismissing the sources listed on her bibliography, thus demonstrating genuine engagement and reflection when collecting research material.

## Evaluation of Sources for Research Project on Marilyn Monroe's Influence on Popular Culture

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**By Melissa Fuhrman**  
(Dr. Daly – Popular Culture)

*Forever-Marilyn*. Fan-Sites.org. 18 Oct. 2012. Web. 26 Oct. 2012.

This source is a website. I found it by entering “Marilyn Monroe Fansite” into the *Google* search bar. It has a page that contains Marilyn Monroe’s biographical information as well as news articles, pictures, and other multimedia items. The website was started because of her pop culture influence; she influenced the creators so much that they wanted to honor her. This source is inappropriate for college-level use. This is because it is biased. It is a fan site, so the writers are biased and favor Monroe. It also is not credible; the writers have no qualifications to write the things they do and acquired their information from another source without citing that source. Therefore, this is not a credible source.

“History.” *Official Marilyn Monroe Website*. The Estate of Marilyn Monroe, 2011. Web. 27 Oct. 2012.

This source is a website. I found it by searching “Marilyn Monroe” in *Google*. This page of the website has a short biography of Monroe and a list of people who claim to have been influenced by her, proving Monroe’s influence on pop culture in the 1960’s. This source is inappropriate for college-level use because the information is not clear and is biased. The site’s creators only speak about her positive influences and career highlights, rather than presenting a balanced picture, which would include her downfall.

“Marilyn Monroe Dead, Pills Near.” *The New York Times*. 5 Aug. 1962: 1. *Proquest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*. Web. 27 Oct. 2012.

This source is an article from a newspaper. I found it through the Proquest database by searching “Marilyn Monroe.” It has information about Monroe’s death in 1962 and the aftermath, showing the media storm and heartbroken fans in mourning, which illustrate her impact on society. It is a credible source because it was published in an accredited newspaper and is seemingly unbiased. It is assumed to be written by a qualified journalist because the article was published in the respected *New York Times*.

Martin, Pete. "The New Marilyn Monroe: Here She Talks About Herself." *Saturday Evening Post* 228:46 (1956): 28-29, 108-113. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 26 Oct. 2012.

This source is a magazine article that I found by searching "Marilyn Monroe" in the EBSCOhost when using Siena College's research databases. It has an interview with Marilyn Monroe, and in it, Monroe talks about her life and her career, as well as her impact on pop culture. This source is appropriate for college-level research because it is a primary source and was written during Marilyn's lifetime and contains actual quotes from her. Also, the *Saturday Evening Post* is long-standing and reputable, making this source even more credible.

McCann, Graham. *Marilyn Monroe*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1987. Print.

This source is a book. I found it by using the CYRIL search engine through the library and entering "Marilyn Monroe 1960s." It is a book about her life, with the last two sections outlining her death in 1962 and how it impacted the world. This source is appropriate for college-level research because it contains many references in its "Works Cited" section and comes from Rutgers, a credible university press.

Mellen, Joan. "Marilyn Monroe." *Film Quarterly*. 27.3. (1974): 55-56. JSTOR. Web. 27 Oct. 2012.

This source is an article from an academic journal. I found it in the library's list of journals and then looked for more specific information in JSTOR by entering "Marilyn Monroe" in the search bar. The article has information about Monroe as a sex symbol and her impact on the film industry's view of women, which shows her influence on popular culture. This source is credible. There is no bias, and it comes from a credible journal and author. The information is not outdated because Monroe has passed, and therefore information about her life does not change. Though information about her impact could change, it is a relatively recent article.

For this assignment, the students were asked to write a personal essay about one of the Mirabel sisters in Julia Alvarez's novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*. The writer articulates a strong, genuine connection to Dedé Mirabel and adeptly juxtaposes textual evidence with poignant personal examples from the writer's own life.

## My Sister's Keeper

**By Courtney Houston**  
(Dr. Liptak - Crossing Borders)

In the novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez, Dedé is the only one of the four sisters whose internal conflicts prevent her from joining the revolution. Even though Dedé wants to fight alongside her sisters, who are very active in the revolt against Trujillo's dictatorship, her family is her first priority. Some people may argue that Dedé is meek, but even though she does not take a more active role in the revolution, she still fights for her own beliefs. Dedé's role during the revolution changes, and bravely, she takes on the challenge of not only raising her own family but also of becoming the caregiver to all of sisters' families as well. I connect with Dedé the most because of the high standards she set for herself and her family.

When it comes to her sisters, Dedé is the protector. Not only does she take care of all three of them, but once the sisters are taken to jail, she also begins to take care of their children. In the moment that the sisters are taken, they are forced to leave all the children behind, and Dedé is left to help keep the children together. After Minerva is taken away, her daughter, Minou, is afraid and unaware of what is happening. When Dedé hears the news that her sister Minerva is in jail, she immediately calls Minou on the phone and tries to keep her calm. Minerva's daughter Minou asks Dedé if she is with her mother, to which Dedé replies, "Yes, Mama is here" (Alvarez 194). Dedé initially refers to herself as the child's mother because she already feels the responsibility of being the new caregiver to Minou. All three sisters ask Dedé to care for the children in their absence. After they are released, Dedé tries to convince them to not visit their husbands who were still in jail, and she continually refuses to join her sisters on their trip to the prison. Dedé knows something bad will happen to her sisters if they go, and she is shocked when they decide to leave anyway. While the sisters are away, Dedé becomes the mother figure to all of the children. Her relationship with them becomes very strong, and she cannot imagine her life without them.

Dedé feels the obligation of raising the new members of her family; in my family I do the same. When I turned seven, a new member of my family arrived. My sister was born with many complications and needed much care and supervision. Because of my younger sister, the passion that I had already developed for children increased. With a struggling mother, and a partially absent father, I became the second caregiver to my sister. She has needed special attention because she is unable to do anything for herself. I am not ashamed to have a sister with a disability. I have learned how to become more responsible and independent with her arrival. At first, taking on such a strong role in the family did not feel like an actual duty. To me, it was something I enjoyed. I knew that I could be counted on and felt that I would be noticed for being "grown up." After a while, my mother realized that unlike my older sister, I had no problem attending to my younger sister's needs. I enjoyed it and easily took on this responsible role. My mother began to count on me, and it was then that I gained a new perspective on what part I had to play in the household. Even though the

responsibilities that Dedé and I undertook were not expected, we both felt that they were important to keeping the family together.

In the novel, Dedé's first priority is to her husband and children. Since she lived in a time where it was traditional for women to obey their husbands and always care for the children, this is how Dedé lives her life. Instead of joining her sisters, Dedé chooses to keep her family together, and she believes that children should not be without a mother. Her husband Jaimito threatens to leave her and take the children away if she joins her sisters in the dangerous fight against the dictatorship. Patria continues to ask if Dedé will join in the revolution, and Dedé does not know how to explain that she does not want to go. Dedé tells Patria, "Jaimito's taken the boys to San Francisco. He threatened to leave me if I got involved with your group" (Alvarez 186). Some may use Dedé's obedience to her husband as a prime example of Dedé's meekness, but it takes a courageous woman to stand up for her beliefs and to stay with her kids in a two-parent home. Dedé only wants the best for her children, which amplifies her internal conflicts. As her sisters continue to try and convince her join in the revolution, she weighs her options. For Dedé, she has the chance to fight in a battle she believes in, or she could stay with her husband and fight for her family so that they do not have to live without her. Later, after her sisters have been killed, Dedé thinks about what her fate would have been if she had decided to join the revolution: "She would have died with them on that lonely mountain road" (Alvarez 177). Dedé shows that she is a strong person by risking her relationship with her sisters. Instead of joining the revolution to make them happy, she admits that she is afraid and does what she wants for herself, which is to put her family first.

Like Dedé, I feel an obligation to help my family with my sister. I did not have the ability to have a normal adolescence, and I was, in a way, forced to grow up before my time. Instead of being able to hang out on the weekends with my friends, I was obligated to watch my sister while my mother went to work. Even though my older sister would be at home with us, it was my job to wake up early in the morning, feed my sister, and make sure she got her required medicine. I was the only one who knew how to give her all the things she needed when my mother was not around. In my household, I am closer to my sister than to anyone else, and I feel that she is more important to me than anything else in the world. Dedé considers her sisters' children to be hers, and she would do anything for them. This is exactly how I feel about my sister; my family even refers to her as my child as Dedé refers to Minou as her child. Also, just as Dedé feared expressing herself to her sisters and hurting their feelings, I feared expressing to my mother how I felt. I did not think that I should be forced to be a permanent babysitter to my sister. I was not sure that I could be open and honest if it meant hurting other people's feelings and possibly changing their futures. I did not want to give my mother a sense of hopelessness or for her to think that she could not count on me to be there for her. Dedé chose to keep her family together and make her husband happy, as I chose to be there for my sister and make my mother happy. This is our ultimate sacrifice.

Dedé and I have many things in common, particularly our ability to put our family first, whether it is the whole family or a certain person. Though many readers respect the other Mirabel sisters for their brave work during the revolution, I admire Dedé because she thinks about how her family would be affected if she were no longer around. Like Dedé, I do not live my life to please others. Though I am away at college, my sister and I have an unbreakable bond, and as long as I graduate, I will be able to provide for her when my mother is no longer able to. Both my mother and my sister know that I will always be there for them, just as Dedé was always there for her family.

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In this research essay, the author takes a firm stance on the American food industry's marketing practices. Note how the writer anticipates what the naysayers might argue and methodically offers strong counterpoints, relevant statistics, and plausible actions.

## Fat Cats, Obese Children, and Food Advertising

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**By Veery Huleatt**

(Prof. Murray - Democracy)

Obesity, diabetes, and other nutrition-related diseases are rife in our country today. These problems have many causes, from the marketing power of food companies and the poor and confusing nutritional advice, to the habit-forming potential of high caloric, low nutritional-value foods. In this paper I will focus on how this national problem plays out in the life of children and explore what could be done, in the form of changes to national policy and initiatives, to improve the situation. My reason for focusing on children is that people develop lifelong habits in childhood. Also, children are more at risk to marketing than adults, simply because they lack the reasoning powers to process what is being fed to them in advertisements. The problem is huge, and so is the amount of money that food companies pour into advertising. Although they would take work and determination, the solutions consisting of education, advocacy, and regulations, are simple and inexpensive.

As a backdrop to the nutritional problems affecting children, and to understand the problem in context, I will explore the situation on a national level. As Marion Nestle explains in her book *Food Politics*, more than a century ago, our country's main nutritional problems, such as scurvy and anemia, resulted from a lack of nutrients. Many children did not receive sufficient vitamins and nutrients, making them vulnerable to infectious diseases that could leave them crippled or underdeveloped for their entire lives. The message of nutritionists and the government to the public at that time was to "eat more," especially protein and vegetables. Obviously, this message jived well with food producers, for it was beneficial to both consumers and producers — an ideal situation.

As farming methods advanced, however, food availability shifted from paucity to excess. To compensate for lower demand, food producers launched aggressive marketing campaigns (Nestle 32-33). These advertising campaigns would not be harmful if it were not for the fact that companies make little profit on fresh or raw produce. In order to make a profit, they are forced to add value to food products. "Value enhancing" includes processing, added ingredients, and packaging. From this emerges the situation we have in our country today, which is that food producers aggressively market their products. These are mainly "added value" products with the "added value" being fats, sugars, and preservatives — values that we would be healthier without (Nestle 17).

How does this affect children? According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2010 one third of children and adolescents in the United States were overweight and eighteen percent were obese. This number has "more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years" ("Childhood Obesity Facts"). In 2010, 11.3 percent of all individuals under the age of twenty had diabetes, and this number is also growing. As well as being expensive to treat, diabetes can cause hypertension, heart disease, eye problems, kidney disease, and nervous system disease ("National Diabetes Fact Sheet"). While obesity and diabetes may stem from genetic or lifestyle factors, the role of unhealthy food and the role of advertising in promoting unhealthy food cannot be ignored (Novosat and Linn 133).

Children present a captive audience, respond readily to advertising, and possess more spending power than ever before. These factors, combined with busy parents needing convenience foods, make children the ideal audience for food producers.

In their article “Calories for Sale: Food Marketing to Children in the Twenty-First Century,” authors Susan Linn and Courtney L. Novosat explore the health problems related to advertising that targets children. Like Nestle, Linn and Novosat argue that the success of food advertising to children contributes to nutrition-related problems in children’s lives. Marketers rely on the research of child psychologists and social scientists to make their advertising campaigns effective (Novosat and Linn 136). The success of these campaigns promoting “high calorie, low nutrient foods” comes at the cost of children’s health (Novosat and Linn 137). They demonstrate clear links between childhood obesity and the amount of food advertising that children are exposed to, which are verified by studies conducted in the last decade by groups such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the British Food Commission. Such studies demonstrate that populations of children exposed to more advertising have higher rates of obesity (Novosat and Linn 134). Although food companies have argued that these correlations are not significant, Nestle points out that the amount of money spent on advertising to children proves that it must pay off.

One of the most common kinds of advertising directed at children uses licensed entertainment characters to promote food. Because they do not have the reasoning to know the difference between shows and commercials, small children are especially vulnerable to licensed advertising, responding readily to the marketing messages promoted by their favorite characters. This type of advertising has other disadvantages. For example, some entertainment characters appear on both healthy and unhealthy food (Novosat and Linn 138). This confuses children; they relate the character to healthy food and therefore assume that any product associated with that character must be healthy.

This evidence, especially about the vulnerability of children to food advertising, seems to make a compelling argument for stricter regulation on both the products advertised to children and the content of those advertisements. Why has nothing been done? Does no one care about our children’s health? A closer look into the history of food marketing shows that while many people care and have tried to make a difference, the forces they are up against are both well-funded and firmly ensconced in the government. At present, advertising is “regulated” by the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU), “the advertising industry’s self-appointed watchdog” (Novosat and Linn 148). Nestle points out that while CARU has plenty of guidelines, regulations, and suggestions for positive food advertising to children, its claims of impartiality is questionable because CARU is funded solely by the industry it regulates (391). Advocacy groups have called for stricter government regulation, but they are contending with the strength of the food industry lobby. Unless the government institutes some meaningful regulations about both the products that can be advertised to children and the content of the advertisements, activists will continue spending both funds and energy fighting small battles.

Some argue, however, that the food children eat, at least at home, is essentially their parents’ choice; the seemingly obvious solution is parents making firmer rules about what their children eat. While this may be partially true, a closer look reveals a more complicated situation. Advertisements exploit family stress, undermining parental authority by, for example, encouraging children to play with their food, which opposes most parents’ instructions to their children not to play with food. This is obviously unfair to parents, but also to children, who will be confused by these different authorities and who are forced to decide who to listen to, the media or their parents . . . and hey, the media is a lot more fun, so it’s not a hard choice (Novosat and Linn 136).

However, parents’ control of the advertising their children are exposed to is limited because companies target children while they are at school. Children in the classroom, a captive audience, cannot avoid the message they receive through commercials and other forms of marketing (141). Channel One, a corporate sponsored news program, is run in almost

12,000 schools throughout the country. Schools subscribe to it because in return for showing it every day, they receive free video equipment. This means that at school children are exposed to two minutes of commercials and ten of news or educational programs. Novosat and Linn point out that the main advertisers on Channel One promote high fat and sugar products, including Pepsi, Snickers, Pop Tarts, and Mountain Dew. It is confusing for children to see unhealthy products promoted at school as this implies that the school endorses the product. While the funding and equipment schools receive through such contracts is arguably beneficial to students, giving corporations that amount of power and voice in education is not beneficial in the long run. While they should be allowed to advertise and promote their products, learning to eat unhealthy food should not be a part of the elementary class room experience alongside reading, math, and science.

Nestle also describes “corporate takeovers” in schools, when schools allow food companies to establish themselves and sell their products inside the school. Fast food is popular with children, due both to advertising and to the notoriously unpalatable meals offered by schools. “Corporate takeovers” are popular with school administration because they are a source of profit and are convenient, removing the burden of food preparation. Companies such as Taco Bell and Pizza Hut benefit from this arrangement because it offers them a commercial outlet for establishing a fan base among children who will hopefully continue to buy their food outside of school and as they grow up. Nestle mentions that commercial meals are more expensive than the school meals, which contributes to fast food’s “cool”, status symbol image in children’s minds (194-495). This “cool” status is reinforced by advertising, making fast food even more desirable.

“Pouring rights,” another example of school-corporation partnerships, consists of an agreement when soft drink companies such as PepsiCo pay school districts to sell only that company’s product in all the district schools (Nestle 197). Nestle points to one incident in a school in Georgia where a high school student was suspended because he “wore a shirt sporting a Pepsi logo to a ‘Coke Day’ rally” (206). While this is not a widespread phenomenon, it is a stark metaphor for the power that corporations have within our public schools.

In the depressing picture presented by Nestle, the problems loom insurmountably, and she offers few solutions. Linn and Novosat, on the other hand, identify several solutions that have been implemented in other countries. While more regulations are never popular, Europe demonstrates several examples of strong regulations to protect children’s health. For example, in France vending machines are banned in all middle and elementary schools, and Britain has prohibited junk food advertising on children’s shows. Sweden and Norway do not allow any television marketing to children who are less than twelve years old. There also have been improvements in this country. Novosat and Linn highlight Kellogg’s agreement to limit its marketing to children and to stop using entertainment characters to advertise food, which is the result of a lawsuit filed by parents and an advocacy group (148). This shows that lawsuits do gain results, as well as publicity, for advocacy causes. They are, however, expensive, time consuming, and mostly deal with only one company at a time, draining the energy and funds of advocacy groups. It is time to end the “self-regulation” laws that (do not) govern food companies’ marketing to children, and it is time for the government to follow the example of the countries that have taken these steps and have found them to be successful.

Another solution is the formation of advocacy groups that promote “food education” in schools. One famous example, the British chef Jamie Oliver, has led a successful movement in England promoting healthy eating and “food education” in schools. His foundation is also gaining momentum in this country with “Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution” that offers information about school meals as well as tool kits to help parents educate themselves and advocate for healthy school meals (“Jamie Oliver”). Rather than commercials for unhealthy food, children should receive real nutritional education in school. Nestle points out that food advertisers discovered years ago that children respond to product messages that promise “play, fun, friends, and nurturance (in that order)” (181). Advocacy groups could just

as well use this information to promote healthy eating, teaching children that fun and friend-focused activities such as cooking, gardening, and eating come with healthy food.

Finally, the government should provide more funding for schools so that schools are not pressured into joining corporate agreements to gain educational funds. Although neither Nestle nor Novosat and Linn dwell on this solution, this step is an obvious way to help schools break their dependence on food corporations. Empowering schools to offer higher quality education to students would benefit our country in many ways far beyond nutrition.

In conclusion, although the problem is complex, there are many solutions to work towards a healthy, nutritionally-educated society, starting with our children. To begin with, we all need to be informed of the dangers of poor nutrition, especially for children, and the impact of corporations on children's food choices. I think that when we are faced with the evidence, it will be too compelling to ignore. Groups need to be formed in order to prod the government into providing more regulation and to encourage schools to educate our children about how to make healthy and discerning food choices. No one loses in a healthier future — no one except fat-cat food corporations. And they can afford it.

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This student writer uses satire to draw attention to humans' disregard for and abuse of the natural world. Her passion is made visible through the careful and clever use of repetition, word choice, sentence variety, and research, too.

## The Environment: How Can We Fight Back?

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**By Molly Murphy**

(Dr. L. Woolbright – The Environment)

We are in the middle of war on the largest scale that we have ever seen. The human race is under attack by our own environment. If we wish to continue to survive as a species, we must find a way to fight back. The Earth, weather, and animals are all attacking. We must retaliate!

The environment is out to get the human race; therefore, it is our duty to make a preemptive strike before we become extinct. Renowned scholar, Bill McKibben, once said that “nature, the independent force that has surrounded us since our earliest days, cannot coexist with our numbers and our habits” (McKibben, 1989). Clearly this is a call to action, to rise up and defeat this “force” that simply refuses to cooperate with humanity. Nature has been militaristically attacking since the very dawn of mankind. Mount Vesuvius, Mount Saint Helens, Hurricane Katrina - these are all so-called “natural disasters.” In reality, though, these are nothing more than attacks on the human race. Nature has been upping its number and the severity of its attacks since the mid-1980s (Hansen, 1988). The number of deaths per year from these attacks has risen from below 50,000 in the early 1990s, to just below 250,000 in 2004 (Mission, 2010). These attacks are virtually unprovoked. Nature’s bombardments of vicious attacks on mankind are downright inhumane and are, to put it simply, simply war crimes.

It is not only the weather and the tectonic plates that are attacking humanity; it is also the indigenous species. Yes, the animals are out to get us. This is potentially the most startling and horrifying aspect of the multi-front attack on humanity. Animals are naturally meant to live in the wilderness, fending for themselves. However, since the very early days of human society, animals have slowly infiltrated our very homes. In early Egyptian times, people even worshipped the feline enemies. These beasts have taken advantage of our kindness and generosity toward them and have begun to attack. The number of shark attacks has drastically risen worldwide (Torrent, 2011). This is only one of many species that has already begun its assault on humanity. Keeping this in mind, it is increasingly frightening to think of what else these beasts are planning. The deer and wolf populations have grown incredibly high (Montgomery, 2012; Montana, 2012), which can mean that these animals are preparing themselves for a large scale attack on the human race. They, with the help of their anti-human animal sympathizers, have even begun to disarm our only counterattack. Organizations like PETA urge humans to cease eating meat. These people have turned their backs on their own kind. Killing and eating animals is one of the few ways that humans have been able to survive through the ages. If we were to stop eating them, then the animals would surely start to savagely devour us. They have merely fooled people into believing that they are innocent creatures, capable of the same emotional spectrum as humans. This is one of their propaganda techniques; they use big shiny eyes and “cute” fluffy fur to trick us into sympathizing with them. We must resist their lies and kick them out of our homes. It is only a matter of time until they have gathered enough intelligence on us to make a final strike. They have, after all, infiltrated the White House!

There is only one option to save humanity at this point; we must counterattack against nature and animals, and, in the aftermath, we must flee Earth in search of a planet that is inhabited by fewer enemies. We also can continue with our testing on animals, increase the number of animals tested, and of course, make the tests lethal. We must begin to use pollutants in much heavier doses, speeding up the biggest weapon in our arsenal — global warming. We have to get rid of the ozone layer, for it is Earth's major weakness. If we take it out, then we can surely win this war. Once we have beaten Earth into submission, we must move humanity aboard space stations. Bill McKibben agreed with this plan of action as early as 1989, saying that “we may well be able to create a world that can support our numbers and our habits, but it will be an artificial world, a space station” (McKibben, 1989). Clearly, this means that since the Earth is refusing to cooperate with us, we have no choice but to leave in order for the entire race and our culture to survive.

The human race is in the middle of the most devastating war it has ever seen. The attacks on civilians are growing and multiplying in intensity. We cannot simply stand by and let our species be wiped out by such a monstrous threat. We have no choice but to fight back with every aerosol can, Freon-run refrigerator, SUV, and steak that we can get a hold of. It is our duty to fight back, so that future generations may not have to deal with the tortures of this world but may instead enjoy a carefree childhood light-years away from this mess.

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This research project required the students to explore a topic in their communities — with the caveat that they were stakeholders in the selected problems or issues. Successfully showing the relationship between public and private spaces, the writer outlines and substantiates specific financial problems that her county and her family have been facing during these turbulent economic times.

## High Property Tax in Rockland County

**By Kristen Tenore**  
(Dr. Liptak - Crossing Borders)

Property tax is a major component that potential residents account for when looking for a new home. In Rockland County, New York, this tax has become a problem for county residents and business owners due to its steep increase over the past few years. Many people are choosing to leave, and it is difficult to sell real estate in the area. The high property taxes in Rockland are caused by an influx of residents and business owners as well as the mismanagement of funds. Unless this problem is rectified by the creation of a new budget and more outspoken homeowners, Rockland will lose current residents, such as my family, and the town economy will continue to decline.

The nation ranks counties in terms of their property tax medians. Rockland is ranked third in the United States in terms of this tax, only to be surpassed by two others in New York - Nassau County and Westchester County. The median tax rose from \$8,430 in 2008 to \$9,376 in 2011. Notably, the median household income decreased by almost \$3,000 during those three years, which means that there is an inverse relationship between the money earned and the money being spent (Henderson). As a result, homeowners are having a harder time paying such high property taxes because they are not earning as much money as they did in previous years.

Figure 1 below illustrates the recent increase in property tax rate over the past decade. Residents are now paying \$2.51 per thousand dollars, which is significantly higher than the \$1.03 per thousand dollars in 2007. Even though they have not released the projected rate for 2014, one can only assume that it will follow the current trend and continue to rise. There is a two percent cap on taxes in New York State. However, Rockland County Legislature is voting to override this tax cap because of the outstanding debts the County needs to pay off (Taylor). My hope is that it will not pass; however, members of the community and the media believe otherwise. This can only be a bad omen for Rockland residents and business owners.

Unfortunately, not all of the five towns in Rockland pay property taxes that are close to the median. A resident of Stony Point, Rob Riccardelli states: “The more we pay, the less we get.” Riccardelli says that he pays twice the median for Rockland County, but due to budget cuts, the students are receiving less of an

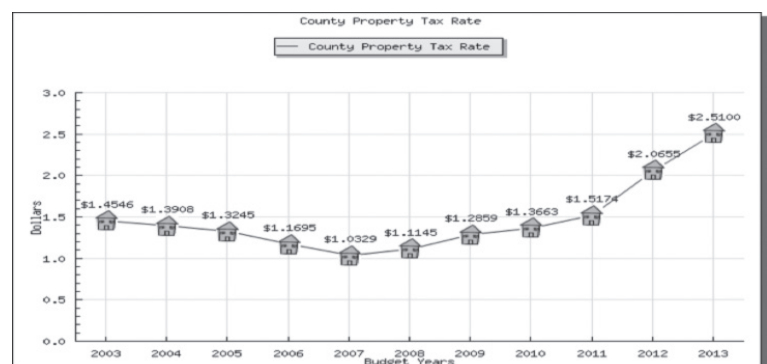


Figure 1. Scatterplot of Rockland County property tax rates from 2003 to 2013. Taken from the Budget and Management Department of the County of Rockland, 15 April 2013 <http://budget.rocklandgov.com/propertytax/index.php>

education (Henderson). One specific example is the schooling of the mentally disabled. Programs are being cut and they are receiving less aid. My family lives in Suffern, a village with very high property taxes that are well above the median. Although my younger brother is in high school, my parents will continue to pay for teacher salaries and such after he graduates. This is illogical because they will essentially be paying for teachers who are no longer educating their children. Although this is how it works in every state, it less of a burden on the homeowners when the taxes are lower. Many elderly residents cannot keep up with the constant increase. No matter where they live, they will have to pay for things that may not concern them, like school budgets. However, since the taxes are so high in Rockland, they are moving to areas that have lower taxes, like New Jersey, because it is less of a financial burden for them (Foord). The average property tax in New Jersey is \$7,529 (PropertyPilot). This is a more ideal number for taxpayers.



Figure 2. Map of Counties in the lower New York area. From the New York Travel Notary, 15 April 2013 [http://nytravelnotary.com/?page\\_id=9](http://nytravelnotary.com/?page_id=9)

While the elderly are moving out, the younger, wealthier generations are moving their families in. The three top-ranked counties for taxes are located right next to each other (see Fig. 2). Due to their close proximity to New York City, many people move into these areas because they are closer to their workplaces. While it may seem that there are houses to live in since the senior citizens are leaving, these families do not want to occupy older homes. Instead, they want to have new houses built in the areas of their choice. However, there is not enough room to continue expanding, and taxes are increasing to compensate for the necessary costs to accommodate the families. Also, the numbers coming in are still less than the number of residents moving out. This leaves fewer taxpayers to pay their share (Foord).

Fund mismanagement is another contributing factor to the increase in taxation. During my interview with Susan Foord, a real estate salesperson for Weichert Realtors and my mother’s work associate, I discovered that taxpayer dollars are going to the wrong places. After asking her what the possible causes of the high taxation are, she admits that the Town finances are being mishandled: “I believe there is fraud and corruption within the Town with taxpayer’s money. Special interest groups get preferential treatment at the expense of all taxpayers” (Foord).

A prime example of this corruption is the construction of the ballpark that was built in Pomona, a small town in Rockland, back in 2011. Boulder Stadium, shown above in Figure 3, was built to bring people together from the surrounding region and to fuel a love for the Great American Pastime. The Rockland Boulders are a part of the Canadian American Association of Professional Baseball. According to Town Supervisor, and initiator of the project, Christopher St. Lawrence, this ballpark put the Town behind \$38 million. This figure does not include the \$14 million used to meet State toxic soil regulations, or the \$175,000 yearly lease. However, Preserve Ramapo, a political group that sued, but obviously lost, to prevent the ballpark’s construction, estimated its cost to be closer to \$70 million. St. Lawrence believes that the revenue from the stadium will allow the Town to pay off its required annual debt payment, \$1.12 million, by the end of the year. The team is only averaging about 2,500 fans per game though, which is only half capacity, and the stadium is not making as much as it was supposed to. This means that the property owners are picking up the slack when paying their taxes (Lieberman).



Figure 3. View of Boulder Stadium from behind home plate. From Ballpark Reviews, 2011, 13 April 2013. [www.ballparkreviews.com](http://www.ballparkreviews.com).

Foord also talks about fraud with the New York State School Tax Relief Program, known as Basic STAR. The purpose of this program is to provide relief for homeowners who make less than \$500,000 and live in their own homes. The benefit is that the first \$30,000 of the full value of the home is exempt from school taxes. Senior citizens have the first \$63,000 of the value is exempt (“The New York State Department of Taxation and Finance”). This is very beneficial for many homeowners; however, there are people who are abusing this benefit and costing the state more and more money. It is only given to homeowners who own their property and consider it to be their first home. Families with vacation houses in New York are taking advantage of the program when it is not meant for them. They are exempt even though they only stay in the house a few months out of the year. There are also families who live in New York State who are collecting the benefit when they do not qualify. Rockland County’s district attorney discovered that the state was paying \$679,000 more than it should be because 516 unqualified homeowners were receiving the deduction. Shockingly, 75 of them do not even live in the United States (Henley). While there is an investigation going on, all forms of government, from the Town to the Federal government, need to fix the problem or else there will be no relief for taxpayers.

Both examples of corruption and fraud have had a negative effect on my family and me. The ballpark seemed to be a nice idea at first. It would bring people together and give us something to do on our summer nights. My parents and their neighbors did not think about the potential costs though. Now they are paying hundreds of dollars for a stadium that we rarely have visited. Also, we live forty-five minutes from Yankee Stadium and City Field. It does not make sense to have another ballpark in the area when we have two perfectly good Major League Baseball stadiums at our fingertips.

My parents do benefit from the STAR Program. Our family fits the criteria, and the exemption gets taken out of our tax bills. It is unfair that people are abusing a benefit that some people deserve. Thankfully, the State is making property owners renew their registration in 2014. This will set up a database for property owners in New York, and prevent part-time residents from receiving the benefit. If someone who is not qualified is found receiving the exemption, they will have to pay a twenty-percent fine (Henley).

I asked Mrs. Foord, the real estate salesperson from Weichert Realtors, about the effects the tax has on salespeople like her. She says that people are still purchasing homes, but there are not as many sales as there used to be. Many parents believe that paying the high property taxes is worth it because their children are in good school districts, which is a main reason why there is still an influx of people. However, the numbers are still low enough that salespeople are not making as much money as they used to (Foord). This is pertinent to my family because my mother is a real estate salesperson. She has been in the business for six years and has suffered the effects of the high tax because it is difficult to sell property. While my father is the main breadwinner for the family, my mother’s earnings are necessary, especially since my brother and I are both in college. They are also paying the high taxes themselves and need to worry about bringing enough money in to provide for the family. It is difficult for her to earn a steady income when fewer and fewer people are willing to buy, or even rent, houses in the area. Since there is no sign that these taxes will decrease any time soon, my mom does not predict a turnaround for real estate salespeople in the foreseeable future.

Those living in Rockland County have faced serious difficulties in the last few years. I have grown up there my entire life, and it is sad to see that my family will be forced to leave there soon. Unless the county legislature decides to reorganize the budget, maintain the tax cap, and remove fraudulent workers, taxpayers are going to continue paying too much money to live in that area. Taxpayers will not be experiencing any relief until change makes its way throughout Rockland County.

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