



2010/2011

Excellence in First-Year Writing

The English Department
Writing Program and
The Gayle Morris Sweetland
Center for Writing

Excellence
in
First-Year Writing

2010/2011

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and
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Published in 2011 by MPublishing
University of Michigan Library

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ISBN 978-1-60785-251-3

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Matt Kelley

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Alan Hogg

Administrative Support:

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Carrie Luke

Perry Janes

Winners list

Matt Kelley Award for Excellence in First-Year Writing

Elizabeth Allison: “American Pride and Prejudice: Yasuhiro Ishimoto in The Family of Man” nominated by Matt Kelley, LHSP 125

Olivia Postelli: “Moon Walk (1969)” nominated by Virginia Murphy, RC-Core 100

Sweetland Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio

Vivian Dregely: “My (Literary and College) Journey” nominated by Matt Kelley, SWC 100

Kathy Pham: “Choreography of Words” nominated by Delia DeCourcy, SWC 100

English Department Writing Program Prize

Jake Atkinson: “Alcohol and the Laws that Govern It in the United States” nominated by Gen Creedon, ENG 125

Katie Long: “Smartphone Stupidity: What the Windows Mobile Phone Advertisements Tell Us” nominated by Shane Slattery-Quintanilla, ENG 125

Emily Van Dusen: “Fear and Self-Loathing in Ohio” nominated by Jennifer McFarlane-Harris, ENG 125

Jessica Levy (Honorable Mention): “Windows and Gardens” nominated by Michael Gorwitz, ENG 125

Nominees list

EDWP nominees

Student Name

Rebecca Angoff
Megan Biner
Jenna Birch
Carisa Bledsoe
Ian Bouyoucus
Cara Brennan
Nelson Burton
Madeline Campbell
Eric Chason
Kristen Choi
Hannah Cohen
Margaret Cox
Chelsea Fournier
Patrick Frazier
Shannon Funsch
Pratik Ghosh
Zachary Hadd
Aldo Hernandez
Sunjana Khubani
Hannah Kowalsky
Nicholas Kozlov
Jared Kwait
Mitchell LaPoff
Patrick Maillet
David Noga

Instructor Name

Gene Laskowski
Genevieve Creedon
Elisabeth Divis
Adam Mazel
Jessica Young
Angela Heetderks
Jessica Young
Tessa Brown
Tim Hedges
Joseph Chapman
Angela Watrous
Tim Hedges
Francine Harris
Gene Laskowski
Francine Harris
Sara Hakeem
Kate Levin
Brad Wetherell
Whitney Stubbs
Patricia Khleif
Genevieve Creedon
Leila Watkins
Sara Hakeem
Angela Watrous
Tessa Brown

Gabriel Pachter	Joseph Chapman
Adam Parada	Patricia Khleif
Neil Patel	Sarah Gothie
Abhishek Puri	Liz Homan
Derek Raymond	Genevieve Creedon
William Rogers	Leila Watkins
Carlee Rosenthal	Adam Mazel
Cassie Rickard	Elisabeth Divis
Adam Rubenfire	Whitney Stubbs
Spencer Rubinstein	Jennifer Tomscha
Jacqueline Shea	Whitney Stubbs
Ryan Strassman	Khaliah Mangrum
Connie Su	Sarah Gothie
Troy Tenbrunsel	Paula Hanna
Edmond Ross Ura	Rebecca Manery
Saul Valle	Francine Harris

Matt Kelley Prize nominees

Student name	Instructor name
Elizabeth Allison	Matt Kelley
Nicholas Anastasia	Laura Thomas
Lauren Beck	Nicole High
John Bohn	Alexander Ralph
Daniel Carlin	Jennifer Metsker
Brittany Doss	Richard Lee Pierre
Sylvia Gindick	Alexander Ralph
Katie Hacala	Mikhail Krutikov
Cindy Lee	Katie Brion
Blake Mackie	Shannon Winston

Melissa Manley	Sebastien Ferrari
Jonathon Odden	Lolita Hernandez
Olivia Postelli	Virginia Murphy
Kendall Russ	Virginia Murphy
Pearl Somboonsong	Lolita Hernandez
Rachel Stokes	Laura Thomas
Alex Veras	Ian Campbell
Justin Wagner	Jennifer Metsker
Sam Walker	Alexander Ralph
Joyce Yoo	Shannon Winston
Yang Yu	Melinda Mattice

Portfolio prize nominees

Student Name	Instructor Name
Aniket Arora	Danielle LaVaque-Manty
Alexandra Chappell	Gina Brandolino
Jenn Chen	Tim Hedges
Karen Coker	Matt Kelley
Lena Cramer	Matt Kelley
Bryan Dadabbo	Matt Kelley
Caili Dalian	Christine Modey
Vivian Dregely	Matt Kelley
Christina Hanchett	Gina Brandolino
Kyle Hinton	Gina Brandolino
Alison Jungquist	Danielle LaVaque-Manty
Nicole Maistrow	Alan Hogg
Conor McGriffin	Christine Modey
Kylie Miller	Tim Hedges
Ziad Mohsen	Christine Modey

Kathy Pham

Rachel Osmer

Annalise Povoio

Yingying Ren

Hilary Stenvig

Tyler Tinsey

Delia DeCourcy

Delia DeCourcy

Delia DeCourcy

Paul Barron

Tim Hedges

Shelley Manis

Introduction

We write to help us figure out what we think, to write our way to answers. We write to share that knowledge with others, to let them build on our words as part of an ongoing scholarly conversation. This conversation undergirds intellectual life in the academy.

The English Department Writing Program and the Sweetland Center for Writing established a first-year writing prize last year in order to celebrate the accomplishments of student writers near the beginning of their careers at the University of Michigan. First-year writing classrooms at this university are designed to be spaces where students can explore questions of genuine interest to them and challenge themselves as writers, peer reviewers, and thinkers. Here in this volume we see the impressive results of these challenging explorations. We want to emphasize that this writing, like all successful writing, was the result of painstaking revision and probably moments of doubt, frustration, pleasure, and triumph (and that can be the triumph sometimes of simply finally finding the right word). As writers, we all continue to hone our skills at capturing complex ideas and arguments in lucid, sophisticated, audience-appropriate, and often compelling ways throughout our careers. We all experience our prose falling apart when we try to write something more challenging than we've ever written before, and then we can see what we have gained as writers as we put the pieces back together again. It does get easier

to put the pieces back together over time, and we do best as writers always to embrace the challenge, knowing that in the end it will make us stronger, savvier writers.

We are honored to announce that the Sweetland first-year writing prize will be named in honor of Matt Kelley, who died suddenly and unexpectedly last winter. Matt had been teaching in the Sweetland Center for Writing for eight years and was a treasured member of the faculty. He was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the first-year writing prize last year and took the lead, with Chris Gerben, on organizing the competition and putting together the first volume of prize-winning essays. That first volume did not just publish excellent first-year writing—it showcased first-year writing, with all the celebration and respect that it deserves.. And that was just what Matt wanted it to do. The hours and hours that he spent working out the details of publication were non-negotiable, as far as we could tell—the idea of a shortcut with this prize inconceivable. Matt knew what he wanted this volume to be, not only for the prize-winning students but also for all the students and instructors who could be inspired by it,. With his energy, and his work ethic, Matt helped inspire all of us to envision what this prize could be. When the inaugural volume came out in September 2010, Matt wrote a blog post about it, and this post captures so much about who Matt was as a teacher, a writer, a colleague, and a person. Matt turns to Langston Hughes in this post, a writer he taught regularly, and he quotes the epigraph of *The Big Sea*, the first volume of Hughes' autobiography: "Life is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pull." Matt then takes us back with him to his first semester in college, to the moment where writing suddenly caught him, when he let down his nets. He writes, "I scarcely recall the specifics of the class, the readings or the assignments, but I can still feel the thrum of energies behind my eyes and in my hands as I wrote out and then pounded out my papers for that class, writing as though I really could belong to something."

One can feel the energy thrumming in these lines—the energy not only of a writer harnessing the power of words but also of a teacher, committed to helping all of us see what writing can do. Matt characteristically ends the post with students at the center, as they always were for him. He thanks the prize-winning students, each by name, and concludes: “Thanks to you first-year writers,” already now second year writers, for helping me remember when I first let down my nets and pulled. Matt, you are missed more than words can capture here.

We want to take this opportunity to thank the many people who have made this year’s prize and publication of prize-winning essays possible. Judges of the electronic portfolios produced in Sweetland’s Writing 100 were Autumn Chapoff, Louis Cicciarelli, Lauren Dreifus, Bradley Estes, T Hetzel, Alexander Liberman, and Raymond McDaniel. Entries for the Matt Kelley Prize for Excellence in First-Year Writing were judged by Lizzie Hutton, Perry Janes, Danielle Lavaque-Manty, Alexandra Park, Naomi Silver, and Carol Tell, with Gina Brandolino serving as chair. After Matt’s death, Perry Janes took responsibility for much of the administrative work of judging and awarding the prizes, so we are especially grateful to him. In the English Department Writing Program, the judges were Julie Babcock, Jeremy Chamberlin, Gen Creedon, Anne Curzan, Carolyn Dekker, Tim Hedges, Kate Levin, Ilana Sichel, Ann Marie Thornburg, and Mike Tondre, with Beth Davila and Stephen Spiess serving as chairs.

And let us conclude by thanking all the students who submitted essays for this prize, who made the judging so wonderfully, wrenchingly difficult. We are inspired by all that we learn from you, in our classrooms and through your prose.

Anne Ruggles Gere, Director, Sweetland Center for Writing
Anne Curzan, Director, English Department Writing Program

English Department Writing Program Prize

We are excited to congratulate this year's first-year writing prize winners. The EDWP award selection committee, made up of ten instructors, labored over the decisions. All of the nominated essays – the winners as well as the more than forty runners up – demonstrated highly successful first-year writing, but these winning essays clearly transcend their counterparts, showing just what our students are capable of achieving.

As these essays show, college students can write, and write well. This is something worth celebrating – especially in contrast to common remarks about the “literacy crisis” made popular over 35 years ago by Newsweek's 1975 cover story, “Why Johnny Can't Write.” As first-year writing instructors know quite well, a sense of panic continues to surround the perceived decline of literacy among students: they “don't read as much as they used to,” and when they do, it's “never the right books.” Texting and email, such rhetoric suggests, are making an already bad situation worse.

This collection of award-winning essays provides an important counterbalance to such pervasive, and destructive, conversations. In fact, written excellence extends far beyond the essays published in this collection: it exists in all first-year writing classrooms and is there to be recognized, acknowledged, and celebrated with more than a letter grade or departmental prize.

This collection offers a powerful tool through which we might counter those discouraging and disparaging conversations circulating in our current social discourses – conversations which position students as incapable, lazy, or lacking. We invite you to join us in celebrating the many successes of these outstanding essays, and to use this occasion to honor the excellence of and in student writing.

Beth Davila and Stephen Spiess, EDWP Writing Prize Co-Chairs
Graduate Student Mentors, English Department Writing Program

Alcohol and the Laws that Govern It in the United States

From English 125: Jake Atkinson (nominated by Gen Creedon)

The course for which Jake Atkinson submitted his paper “Alcohol and the Laws that Govern It in the United States” approached college writing through the framework of developing “critical literacies.” Students were asked to think about their own practices of literacy in relation to the demands of rapidly changing environments that require many different kinds of reading and writing skills. Students wrote a range of different analytical papers that required in-depth and dynamic understandings of language, visual culture, and rhetoric in many different media. The early assignments were stepping stones to the final project, a 10-12 page research paper that asked students to demonstrate their “critical literacy” in a topic of their choosing by engaging with a minimum of six academic sources and formulating their own original intervention in the scholarly conversation. Jake’s paper is a model answer to this assignment. It displays an in-depth look at the different sides and scholarly conversations around his chosen topic, integrating a range of sources very successfully. The paper is logically well-structured to give its readers a balanced and informed view of the debate he is engaging about alcohol laws. Just when it seems as if the debate is at an impasse, the paper then formulates a creative and sophisticated position that draws upon, but also differs from and adds to, the research in the field. This position is not just an original articulation, but one that also demonstrates a critical examination of the shortcomings and blind spots of both sides of the debate to this point. Even if Jake’s proposal does not resolve every problem at hand in the regulation of alcohol purchase and consumption, it does what all of the best critical writing should do: move the conversation in a different direction.

Genevieve Creedon

Alcohol and the Laws that Govern it in the United States

The laws governing alcohol in the United States have shifted countless times over the past few centuries, but regardless of their policy, the country cannot seem to eradicate abusive drinking. For example, the current legal drinking age is 21, nationwide, but millions of people underage still consume alcohol (Wagenaar, 1994, 37). Because so many different drinking ages have been experimented with and none has appeared to extinguish abusive drinking, the government has yet to agree on a solution to this problem, and therefore, no recent changes have been made. This may hint at the notion that the legal drinking age is not the only factor that requires attention, but either way, it is evident that the current laws are not working as originally planned and require a thorough reevaluation. In this paper, I will first address the history of the alcohol laws and their effects in the United States and then discuss the major arguments for and against the current legal drinking age. I will also present a possible solution to the drinking problem based on the information I have gathered through extensive research.

History of Alcohol Laws

It was not until the late 1700s that alcohol regulations even became a subject for debate among government officials in the United States. According to John Yu, a writer at the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse in New York, laws merely governed excessive intoxication due to alcohol before the 1780s, but did not prohibit its consumption or sale, regardless of age. However, in the 1780s, people began to think of alcohol consumption as an immoral act, especially for children. In response, laws were gradually implemented throughout the rest of the 18th and 19th centuries to govern the sale of alcohol to minors. As the harshness of these laws increased, so did the American society's disapproval of uncontrolled alcohol use. Even though alcohol came to be seen as a social taboo among children, it is important to note that until the early 1900s, there were still no formal regulations that

prohibited drinking at a young age (Yu 1-2).

John Yu describes that by the 1910s, government officials had finally started discussing alcohol-related problems more seriously, as abusive alcohol consumption became associated with an irresponsible pastime among the middle-class and the wealthy. With the passing of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 1921, the United States government implemented a nationwide prohibition of alcohol, for people of all ages. Nobody in the country was permitted to produce, sell, possess, or consume alcohol of any kind. However, “Speakeasies” and “Bootleggers” quickly went into business with the illegal sale of alcohol, disregarding the new laws completely. After only 12 years, the United States government realized that this act of prohibition had failed to prevent alcohol consumption on almost every level, and therefore, they repealed the amendment in full (Yu 2).

Following the repeal of prohibition in 1933, all alcohol-related laws were left up to the individual states. According to Alexander Wagenaar, a professor at the University of Florida who studied the effects of the legal drinking age in the 1900s, each state quickly developed its own individual laws to govern alcohol. Most implemented Minimum Legal Purchasing Age (MLPA) laws ranging from 18 to 21 years of age. The majority of these new laws took little criticism until the early 1970s, when controversy arose in many of the states whose MLPA was above 18. Many people argued that all legal purchasing ages should be reduced to 18, in response to a few new adult privileges and responsibilities that 18 to 20 year olds were granted in the United States. For example, with the passing of the 26th Amendment in 1971, those individuals between the ages of 18 and 21 were given the right to vote but were still not considered old enough to consume alcohol. Additionally, many argued that if people were expected to carry out the responsibilities of serving their country in the military, they should also be permitted the adult privilege of drinking alcohol. In these early years of the 1970s, a majority of the states changed their MLPA laws to accommodate younger adults. However, after

less than a decade, many of these states began to notice a large increase in youth traffic accidents, especially those related to alcohol. This prompted 28 states to raise their MLPA laws by the year 1984 (Wagenaar, 1994, 3).

Only a few years afterwards, the United States government also stepped in to push for a decrease in the consumption of alcohol among minors. As Toomey, Nelson, and Lank note, by 1986, all states were required to raise their MLPA laws to 21, and if they did not comply, they would lose ten percent of their federal highway funding. This action was justified by the large increase in youth alcohol-related traffic accidents when the MLPA shifted below 21. Since then, all 50 states—along with the District of Columbia—have changed their laws to prohibit the purchase and consumption of alcohol for anyone under the age of 21 (Toomey, et al. 1958).

Until the early 2000s, the 21-year-old drinking age was rarely contested—this is in large part due to the loss of highway funding if states did not comply with the law—but recently, a heated debate has once again surfaced in the United States. Although the entire nation now has a universal drinking age of 21, each state implements its own methods of alcohol prevention and punishment for those who violate the rules, most of which remain ineffective. It is documented that a large percentage of people under the age of 21 drink alcohol in spite of the nationwide laws, and even worse, as Ralph Hingson describes, binge drinking is more prominent than ever among minors and on college campuses (52).¹ Even though the current MLPA law is not the only factor that affects alcohol consumption, this debate has prompted two clear divisions: those in favor of the current drinking age, and those against it.

1 Unless otherwise noted, “binge drinking” will be defined as consuming five or more alcoholic beverages in one sitting for males, and four or more for females.

Arguments in Favor of the Current Legal Drinking Age

Public safety, and its relation to driving while intoxicated, presents the most influential argument that supports the current 21-year-old legal drinking age. For people under the age of 25, car accidents are the leading cause of death in the United States, and 45 percent of these deaths are alcohol-related. This amounts to 4,700 fatalities per year that are the direct result of drinking and driving (Hingson 53). Thus, arguments are made that the drinking age should be as close to 25 as possible. Furthermore, it is estimated that over 26,000 lives have been saved since 1975, when states began to raise their MLPA laws to 21 (Fell 7). Other countries have also found collaborating evidence to support this argument. For example, when New Zealand lowered its minimum drinking age from 20 to 18 in 1999, traffic injuries increased 12 percent for males of ages 18 to 19 and 51 percent for females of the same age (Fell 5). With so much supporting data, it is indisputable that alcohol consumption among youth has a strong correlation with driving-related injuries.

Not only would a lowered drinking age hinder traffic safety, but it would also increase the rate of other non-driving-related problems, death in particular. For example, one study, conducted in New York during the 1970s, found that 23 percent of accidental death victims were legally intoxicated at the time of their fatality (Yu 10). Also, a national study performed between 1979 and 1984 among 18 to 20 year olds discovered that suicide rates in states where people could legally drink were 9.7 percent higher than for people in states where they could not legally drink (Yu 11). These statistics prove that alcohol consumption at a young age leads to increased death and suicide rates, even with driving-related accidents excluded.

In addition to physical injuries, a lowered MLPA has shown an increase in other costly behaviors. To start, for many states, the minimum drinking age of 21 has resulted in up to a 16 percent decrease in vandalism crimes in comparison to when the drinking age was only 18 (Yu 14). Addi-

tionally, it has been proven that youthful alcohol consumption results in an increased frequency of unsafe and unwanted sexual behaviors. According to research on college students in New York who are under the legal drinking age, “[...] 29 percent of students did something that they later regretted after drinking, 16 percent engaged in unplanned sexual activity, two percent had been the victim of sexual assault, and another two percent had taken sexual advantage of someone else” (Yu 14-15). Consequently, it is apparent that a lowered MLPA would likely only increase these numbers and make matters worse.

Moreover, many of the injuries and unwanted behaviors associated with 18 to 20-year-old drinkers have proven to “spill-over” onto even younger teenagers when the MLPA is set at 18. In 1980, the University of Michigan started conducting a nation-wide annual survey called “Monitoring the Future” that has since reported a significant trend between the legal drinking age and the alcohol consumption behaviors of senior high school students. Specifically, researchers concluded that drinking in states with a lower MLPA resulted in a 5.6 percent higher use of alcohol among seniors, on average (Yu 17). This is true because high school students are more easily able to obtain alcohol when their peers can purchase it at a young age. Many high school seniors turn 18 before graduating and are then able to purchase alcohol for anyone else in the school.

This problem is intensified by the fact that these youth drinkers are also at high risk of falling victim to a gateway effect from alcohol to other more serious drugs. Drinking alcohol can encourage kids to start experimenting with other more hard-core drugs, especially because their decision-making skills are substantially hindered when under the influence of alcohol. According to Wagenaar, high school seniors were found to significantly decrease their usage of marijuana and other similar drugs with an increase in the MLPA (1981, 220). This provides strong support for the argument that a higher MLPA can curtail the gateway effect associated with alcohol that

pushes youth drinkers to use other drugs.

Most of the arguments in favor of the current legal drinking age address the irresponsible behaviors that result from excessive alcohol consumption. As described above, these arguments primarily include an increase in injury/death rates on and off the road as well as an increase in instances of crime and sexual abuse. Furthermore, allowing 18 to 20-year-old drinkers to purchase alcohol makes it even easier for younger kids to obtain, and these younger kids are susceptible to a gateway effect into more serious drugs when under the influence of alcohol. Even though these are usually perceived as valid arguments by the majority of people, the question still arises: are the current legal drinking laws actually working to solve these problems?

Arguments in Opposition of the Current Legal Drinking Age

Many would say that the current legal drinking laws are not working effectively because the majority of underage individuals, including those as young as 10 years old, continually fail to abide by the laws; these young Americans relentlessly drink alcohol in spite of the laws that prohibit them from its consumption. Yu argues that people will continue to drink alcohol whether it is legal or not, as its consumption is considered a “rite of passage to adulthood” (19). Studies have shown that about 6 percent of 10 to 11-year-olds had consumed alcohol within the last month. This rate increased rapidly, reaching 25 percent at ages 12 to 14, 55 percent at ages 15 to 17, and 64 percent for seniors in high school (Wagenaar, 1994, 37). In college, underage drinking becomes even more prominent and further enforces the argument that modifications to the drinking laws are necessary. As Radley Balko describes in his magazine article, “Let My Students Drink,” a group of 130 university executives, led by John McCardell from Middlebury College in Vermont, banded together to form a movement called “Choose Responsibility” in an effort to lower the drinking age to 18 on college campuses (11). This well-recognized movement has been a key factor in the effort to reevaluate

the current MLPA in the United States. With so many illegal drinkers, it is evident that the current laws are not doing their job of controlling consumption.

Not only does a high percentage of America's youth drink alcohol illegally, but the fact that alcohol is illegal gives rise to a "forbidden fruit" effect for underage drinkers and can even make them think it is okay to break other laws. Because alcohol is "forbidden," these young adults will often drink merely to look "cool" in front of peers, and this can lead to an increase in illegal alcohol use with the current MLPA of 21. Also, because underage drinkers may have trouble obtaining alcohol on short notice, they often try to stock up with an excessive supply for the upcoming weeks to ensure they do not run out. When the first weekend arrives, and there is a plethora of alcohol available, underage drinkers frequently end up binge drinking, whether they originally planned to or not (Yu 18-19). In a recent national survey of college students, 41 percent reported binge drinking in the last two weeks, and the same was true for 28 percent of high school seniors (Hingson 52). And because so many minors are becoming accustomed to drinking heavily even though it is illegal, some acquire the mindset that it is okay to break other laws as well. This can spark the beginning of an increasingly severe pattern of illegal behavior (Wolfson 432). As a result, the illegal status of alcohol for those under the MLPA of 21 increases its desirability and is directly correlated to other illegal behaviors.

Additionally, the abrupt transition from complete abstinence of alcohol to immense freedom at the age of 21 disenfranchises parents and restrains them from teaching their children to drink responsibly (Balko 11). Parents play a vital role in the upbringing of children, teaching their kids how to be safe and responsible in many situations. However, parents have no legal way to teach their kids the mature and responsible consumption of alcohol under today's laws. By the time people are allowed to drink, at age 21, they are often beyond the reach of parental supervision because they have either already

moved out of their parents' homes or they have already learned to drink irresponsibly on their own. Because people under 21 cannot learn to drink in a controlled manner with their parents, they resort to drinking with their peers, who are also inexperienced and underage (Yu 19). This cycle of immature alcohol use and peer pressure at a young age frequently results in extremely reckless and unsafe alcohol-related behavior.

Moreover, parents often believe the legal drinking age of 21 brings up numerous moral concerns, a few of which were the basis for lowering legal drinking ages in many states during the early 1970s. First, they find it absurd that 18 to 20-year-olds can fight and die for their country in war but are not granted the adult privilege of consuming alcohol. Similarly, if people are allowed to vote and get married at age 18, how can they be denied the right to drink alcohol until the age of 21? Is it that unreasonable to allow a newlywed couple to participate in toasting their own marriage? Finally, some find it unfair to punish all those who drink responsibly and maturely just because others cannot control themselves. Few of these issues are supported by any factual information or hard evidence, but nonetheless, they bolster important moral discussions about the drinking age.

In addition to moral concerns, constitutionality furnishes another criticism of today's nationwide purchasing law. In response to a question about this law, John McCardell, the leader of the "Choose Responsibility" movement, stated, "I would defer to the Constitution, which gives the federal government no authority to set a national federal drinking age at all. It's clearly supposed to be left to the states. So the first thing we need to do is cut out the 10 percent penalty [in federal highway funds to states that refuse to adopt the minimum age of 21], then let the states make their own policies" (Balko 11). McCardell, as well as many others, find the questionable

constitutionality of the 21 MLPA law to hold a credible argument against the current drinking laws.²

As a whole, those who are opposed to the current legal drinking age have a number of valid arguments. First, a large number of people drink alcohol illegally in spite of the MLPA laws, and the fact that it is illegal makes its consumption more desirable. Second, its illegal status is directly correlated to an increase in binge drinking and other illegal behaviors that are harmful to health. Third, under the current laws, parents are unable to teach their children to drink responsibly, and kids often end up learning bad habits from other immature and illegal drinkers. Finally, the drinking age of 21 presents moral and constitutional concerns that diminish its support. With all of this information in mind, it is apparent that there are many problems with the current legal drinking age, and it does not appear to be doing its job of regulating alcohol consumption.

Discussion and Conclusion

With so much controversy over the current legal drinking laws in the United States, it is clear that changes need to be made. The major arguments for debate over the past few decades have primarily revolved around the minimum legal purchasing age and whether it should remain at 21 or be lowered. Unfortunately, both sides present a number of valid arguments, and history has proven that merely adjusting this age requirement will never solve all the problems associated with the consumption of alcohol. Much more innovative solutions need to be developed, starting with the elimination of the social stigma on alcohol consumption for minors.

Alcohol should no longer be considered a social evil for those under the age of 21, but rather, it should be recognized as a drink that requires

2 The MLPA law has caused so much controversy that its constitutionality was even challenged in the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1996 on the basis of age discrimination. The courts eventually ruled that, because the law demonstrates improvements in highway safety, it has a legitimate purpose and does not violate Louisiana's constitution (Yu 18)

a certain level of maturity and responsibility to consume. Since before the 1700s, alcohol has been used in religious ceremonies, weddings, and every imaginable mode of both celebration and mourning. Consequently, drinking it should not be perceived as an immoral act unless done so irresponsibly. In general, the social taboo that is currently associated with alcohol consumption among minors must be shifted away from age and towards the irresponsible consumption of the beverage.

Nevertheless, the specification of a legal drinking age is, in fact, one of the most important decisions to be made when addressing the regulation of alcohol consumption, but there must not be such a rigid age cut-off that decides who can and cannot drink. Imagine the number of traffic injuries that would occur in the United States if nobody was allowed to operate a car until age 18, but on their 18th birthday, teenagers were free to drive as much as they pleased, without attending drivers' education or practicing with their parents through a learner's program. The steps involved in learning to drive a motor vehicle gradually expose young adults to increasing levels of freedom on the road, and they have proven to be an essential component of the licensing process.

First developed in the 1970s by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), graduated licensing has gained much support over the past 15 years. Graduated licensing programs typically involve multiple stages: the first requires parental or adult supervision over the driver at all times while on the road; an optional second stage grants an intermediate license, which can have restrictions associated with nighttime driving, the number of passengers allowed in the vehicle, etc.; the final stage awards drivers a fully unrestricted operator's license. Today, all 50 states have developed some form of a graduated licensing program and each has proven to substantially lower the number of teenage driving accidents. These programs have made such a strong impact on our country that, to most, allowing teenagers to drive without undertaking the steps of a graduated license is practically

unfathomable.

Learning to drink alcohol safely and responsibly should follow a similar procedure. The nation's current methods of controlling alcohol consumption need to incorporate some form of progressive drinking system. One possible idea would be to issue 15-year-olds a "learner's permit" and gradually introduce them to alcohol under the discretion of their parents. Similarly to learning to drive a car, novice drinkers should be subject to stricter drinking regulations. They should be accompanied by their parents at all times when alcohol is in their system, and should not be allowed to binge drink under any circumstances. As soon as they show signs of intoxication, their parents should immediately stop them from drinking. While this may initially appear difficult to enforce, simply holding parents partly accountable for their kids' drinking behaviors during these learning stages would encourage them to do a better job of promoting more responsible consumption habits. For example, if those teenagers who are caught drinking to the point of intoxication receive lesser charges when accompanied by parents, but the parents, however, incur some of the penalties, parents might better align their goals for their kids with more responsible and safer practices. Police authorities could issue tickets to both parents and teenagers at their discretion to ensure that the learner's permits are not abused. On the other hand, if those with learner's permits are caught drinking without parental supervision, they should incur penalties comparable to those currently administered to underage drinkers.

After turning 19 years old, people with learner's permits could be granted the freedom of adult drinking under the conditions that they have abided by the rules of the learner's permit, taken an alcohol education course, and passed an examination that tests their knowledge of the dangers and responsibilities associated with alcohol consumption. Those who have proven to be knowledgeable and responsible drinkers over the entire four years with a learner's permit will be issued an unrestricted drinking license. While much more planning would be necessary, a progressive process of acquiring a drink-

ing license similar to this one would allow young adults, starting at age 15, to learn the responsibilities and safe practices of alcohol consumption without the abrupt or extreme shift in the legality of drinking at age 21.

However, it is important to point out that there is no perfect solution to all of the alcohol-related problems in the United States and the one proposed here does, indeed, have limitations. For instance, enforcing the steps of a graduated drinking licensing program may not be quite as easy as doing so for a driver's license. Parents have incentives to act responsibly when teaching their kids to drive because they are doing so in a public place where the police are constantly watching. Also, parents have to look out for their own safety when teaching their kids to drive because one wrong move could result in serious danger. Conversely, they might not act quite as responsibly when it comes to alcohol because drinking it is more loosely associated with danger and often takes place in homes and other private places where the police cannot monitor parents as closely.

Furthermore, it is important to recall that most of the laws involved in obtaining a driver's license are currently left up to the states, whereas the laws governing alcohol are in large part influenced on a national level. For any proposal such as the one discussed in this paper to work properly, the concerns surrounding the constitutionality of federal regulation must first be examined, and the clash between state and federal policies must be resolved. Even so, it is crucial that we, as a society, begin to expand our tunnel vision of the laws governing alcohol and start thinking about more creative solutions that do not permit such an abrupt transition from the complete abstinence to the immense freedom of its consumption.

Additionally, for any process of obtaining a drinking license to work effectively, law enforcement must be reexamined and adjusted accordingly. The enforcement of alcohol-related laws in the United States has thus far not been sufficient and must be fortified. Currently, only two out of every 1,000 instances of underage drinking result in an arrest (Wolfson 429). To solve this

problem, it is not the harshness of the penalties that must be increased, but it is the consistency of the enforcement of the laws that is important. The lack of enforcement of alcohol-related laws has led to a decrease in their credibility. People are much more apt to drink unlawfully when there is little chance of being caught. Therefore, police authorities must crack down on illegal drinking, and most importantly, they must be consistent—not to be confused with administering more severe punishment. With an increase in consistency, laws may not even need to be as harsh as they are today.

Finally, a strong focus on drunk driving is a major force that must be continued in order to eliminate the problems associated with alcohol. Although considerable efforts are currently in action to do this, more drastic measures must be implemented. Many Americans have changed their attitudes substantially over the past few decades in response to drunk driving problems, and this trend must continue in the future. On a related note, under any type of graduated drinking program, parents could actually play a role in raising their children as responsible drinkers, and thus, they should have a stronger influence on their kids' decisions to refrain from drinking and driving. For instance, if there wasn't such a taboo on youth alcohol consumption, children would be more inclined to call their parents for a ride home after drinking, instead of fearing punishment and deciding to drive themselves.

Many of the ideas and recommendations presented in this section are purely that: ideas and recommendations. In reality, such a vast restructuring of the laws governing alcohol would require many years of planning and implementation to make them successful, but we have to start somewhere. With the current laws in place, underage drinkers account for the consumption of over 20 percent of the total alcohol sold each year (Richter 58-59). Obviously, something is not working as planned, and substantial changes must be made in order to correct the turmoils of such abusive alcohol-related behavior. Furthermore, the minimum legal purchasing age is not the only factor that affects alcohol consumption, and therefore should not be the only

issue discussed. With the extermination of the social taboo on alcohol, the implementation of a progressive drinking program, more consistent enforcement of alcohol-related laws, and a continued focus on drunk driving, alcohol consumption in the United States might finally start moving in the right direction: towards responsibility.

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Smartphone Stupidity: What the Windows Mobile Phone Advertisements Tell Us

From English 125: Katie Long (nominated by Shane Slattery-Quintanilla)

My English 125 class invited students to think about what it means to be a good writer in an age dominated by so many other non-textual media. One of our course goals was to challenge ourselves to identify what the written word offers that no other media can, and to apply this unique toolkit to relevant contemporary issues. In one assignment, students were required to analyze a video or other new media document. In response, Katie Long produced a rigorous and entertaining close-reading of a recent Microsoft advertising campaign. After a sustained critique of the advertisements themselves, Katie's essay turns toward a surprising and persuasive claim about the wider cultural issues in which these particular marketing strategies operate.

Shane Slattery-Quintanilla,

Smartphone Stupidity: What the Windows Mobile Phone Advertisements Tell Us About Ourselves

Hi, I'm Katie (Hi Katie) and I'm a phone-aholic.

Quite honestly, I'd be willing to bet that you are too. If you walk down any city street, you are guaranteed to witness storms of people with their eyes chained to a tiny screen in their palm. Our cellular devices have become so integrated into our daily lives that it's hard to imagine life without the convenience of mobile communication, GPS, social networking, photo documenting, gaming, and Internet browsing. The capabilities seem endless, and yet we hear in the news almost every day of another fatal accident caused by

an “idiot” on his cell phone. New laws are being passed across the nation to ban the act of texting while driving. Middle school teachers are asking their twelve-year-old students to put their phones away during class. Teenagers are spending more time building relationships through their phones than in person. How did this happen? When did we become so reliant on our phones? In a recent ad campaign by Microsoft, the leading software company brought attention to this epidemic and posed their solution... or lack thereof.

At the start of their ad campaign, Microsoft noticed and addressed a key problem in modern-day America. Their commercials captured the haunting and absurd quality of our technology-dependent lives, but could offer only vague hints at a solution. The first ad opens with a camera slowly panning a scene of people standing as statues in contrast to their chaotic, disaster-ridden environment. Not a single person breaks eye contact with their phone throughout the entire commercial. There are no moving vehicles or people walking faster than a crawl. The audience is singularly focused on the messy scene of a tipped motorcycle and sidecar, then boxes of spilled fruit around a vendor’s stand, a person collapsed next to his similarly prostrate bicycle, and finally, a car with its front bumper wrapped around an uprooted street sign. A slow, simple song (“The Season of the Witch” by Donovan) can be heard in the background of the otherwise silent clip. The lyrics speak of constant paranoia and mystery, and this stirs up an even deeper level of eerie anxiety in the viewer. While the bass line progresses steadily, the camera follows the steps of one individual making his way through the crowd, serving as the focal point of the video.

In the middle of each disaster, individuals remain completely oblivious as they immerse themselves in the features of their smart phones. A bicyclist who has just fallen does not seem the least bit phased; two men bump into each other in slow motion and, unshaken, continue on their way. The final image, and the most haunting in my opinion, is of a man sitting on the crumpled hood of his car while white smoke dances beneath him. A look of

mere apathy rests upon his motionless face, and he completely disregards the damage. While the horror of this situation sinks in, plain white letters appear at the center of the screen that say, “It’s time for a phone... to save us from our phones.” The image of a sleek-looking smart phone then takes the spotlight, implying that the Windows Phone 7 is the phone we’ve been waiting for—the phone that will provide redemption from the horrors of our cellular addictions.

Could one small device really be the end of unnecessary car crashes, bike accidents, and pedestrian mishaps? Following the logic of this commercial, the Windows Phone 7 is promising to somehow prevent us from being so distracted. We, as potential consumers, are left wondering what is different about this mystifying and revolutionary Phone 7. We want to know what sets it apart. A second ad from Microsoft reveals a more complete, but still entirely unclear, explanation.

The theme of this second commercial is the same as the first. However, instead of only showing the final consequences of people being enveloped in their cellular spheres, it portrays every step of the process. The video begins with an all-too-familiar scene. A man walks through a crowd with a cup of coffee in one hand and his eyes glued to the phone in his other hand. This image does not seem unusual, dangerous, or even humorous. It is a sight we encounter daily and have learned to ignore. As the video continues, however, the scenes and images become steadily more unimaginable. A young man on a beach sits surrounded by pretty girls in bikinis, but he pays no attention. A dad sits idly on a teeter-totter while his daughter waits, hanging in the air on the opposite end. Even more bizarre is the next clip of a man in bed who does not even notice his beautiful wife standing next to him in a suggestive, satin black outfit. Is Microsoft really implying that phones have become more appealing and desirable than sex? Shorter clips continue to flash before the viewers’ eyes and many implications are made. Cell phones appear to be more exciting than standing front row at a huge rock concert, more enjoyable than

socializing with people at a formal event, and more worthy of attention than a shark swimming aggressively toward a diver's vulnerable feet.

The orchestral track playing in the background, an arrangement of "In the Hall of the Mountain King" by Edvard Grieg, gains momentum and increases dynamically until the entire violin section is rapidly playing an anxiety-inducing and suspenseful melody. Once the music is at its peak, a man drops his phone into a urinal and the music cuts out completely. The man standing next to him turns with a look of disbelief and says the one word that's on all of our minds—"really?" While this specific moment serves as comic relief, the images that follow are a mix of unbelievable disasters, everyday occurrences, and amusingly absurd examples of karma. The situations that were set up in the first half of the commercial now play out to reveal horrific and hilarious consequences. A bride walks down the aisle looking at her phone instead of her soon-to-be husband. A family sits at the dinner table without saying a word to one another. To the shock of his surgical assistant, a surgeon holds an instrument in one hand and his phone in the other while looming over an open body. The final scene of the ad begins as the music fades and the image of a woman using her phone fills the screen. Her young, innocent daughter is revealed and, as she looks up into the camera, a voice fills the haunting silence by saying, "It's time to look up again. The new Windows Phone: designed to get you in and out, and back to life."

Contrary to what Microsoft aimed to convey through this campaign, the scenes from this ad imply that iPhones and Blackberrys are more enjoyable and exciting than real life. Beyond that, even the most adrenaline-pumping, physically pleasing events appear to be overshadowed by the experience of using a smart phone. By presenting this idea, Microsoft is saying one of two things about their unique Phone 7. Either they have created a truly revolutionary new device that completely reforms the way its users will approach the world, or they have produced a sub-par gadget that is entirely unsatisfying and disengaging. I think Microsoft was hoping that we would succumb to

the first thought, but the second is undoubtedly more believable. We've gone through this same game time and time again. The Zune, Bing.com, the Kin, and The Microsoft Store—all examples of Microsoft's attempts at creating a better version of something that already exists, and each ultimately ends with a wildly unsuccessful, less-developed and less-popular final outcome. Still, despite their larger-than-life claims and strangely ambitious advertising, Microsoft could be withholding their secrets because the Phone 7 really is going to change the entire smart phone market. There is a small chance that this is true, right?

Wrong. A third commercial released by Microsoft stood out from the others because it focused more on the solution than the problem, which was what we had been anticipating. A narrator opens the commercial saying, "The smart-phone—it's come a long way. What started out as a nice thing to have is now the most important device in our lives, but the industry has hit a wall. Each new phone is just a slightly better version than the one before it, adding to what has become a sea of sameness and a focus on apps over the phone experience itself. Don't get us wrong, we love apps, but current smart phones make you use them one at a time. In, and out, and on to the next app, then the next, and the next, rarely working together. So, what do we do now? We start over with a different kind of phone that doesn't make you go in and out of apps but lets you glance and go—a new experience that keeps your life in motion... This isn't the next chapter in the story of the smart phone; this is a new beginning."

This is their brilliant solution to the epidemic of phone overdosing and addiction that's sweeping the nation? Yes, how did phone developers not catch it sooner—the core problem to blame here is that phones today are inefficient! We didn't even realize how much time we were wasting when we had to wait $\frac{3}{4}$ of a second for an application to load on our iPhones and Blackberrys. The woman in the very end of this telling commercial adds an even deeper level of irony to this entire ad campaign. As she walks down an urban street, she

herself is completely immersed in her phone. Microsoft uses this as a chance to show off the incredible features of their new device, but by doing so, they contradict everything they have said up until this point. They want their phone to be appealing and exciting, and as they came to this realization, one point was made indisputably clear: no phone can “save us from our phones.” Microsoft didn’t seem to understand their place in the smart phone market nor did they have a clear concept of how they should portray their product. They were like a girl in a beauty pageant that spoke passionately about curing world hunger, but whose only real motivation was a \$200 check and plastic tiara.

Microsoft executed their first two commercials perfectly, but there was no way that they could create a phone that would both make money and be used less. Their phone was either going to be boring and used infrequently, or it would be great and used just as much as other smart phones. The efficiency of the phone plays such a minimal role in the time we invest into these devices that it is hardly worth mentioning, let alone hinging an entire ad campaign on.

However, this epidemic is not Microsoft’s fault, and I think their ads reveal something far more profound than the unveiling of a mere device. Somehow, in the chaos and discord of this schizophrenic ad campaign, Microsoft spread light on the fact that we as a society are just as confused and unsure about our relationships with our phones as Microsoft is. They unknowingly forced us to analyze the paradoxical thoughts that have become surprisingly common in this modern age. People are on their phones because they’re great, not because they’re inefficient. There is a wealth of information at their fingertips, and it is nothing short of exhilarating to have access to almost anyone and anything right within your palm. No phone can successfully be “designed to get you in and out and back to life,” because we now live in an age where phones are a very real part of our lives. However, despite our fascination and attachment to our phones, there is something innately

dangerous and unnerving about our growing addiction to and dependency on them. These commercials are effective and haunting because they resonate with us; the world in these clips doesn't seem all that implausible. We've already experienced half of the scenarios presented, and the implication that phones might eventually become more alluring than sex, skydiving, or one's own wedding has become alarmingly feasible.

While it is unlikely that Microsoft achieved their marketing objectives with this Windows Phone 7 ad campaign, they achieved something considerably more important and far more influential. These commercials will have a substantial impact on the decisions that individuals make regarding their next phone purchase, but it will not necessarily sway them toward the Phone 7. Instead, I expect and hope that individuals will take a moment to analyze what they truly want—or better yet, need—from their cellular device. Collectively, our response to this question will shape the future of our technology-driven world. We cannot predict where our new devices will lead us, and there will always be uncertainty about the things we're sacrificing in pursuit of such technology. Some will inevitably embrace the future portrayed in these commercials, while others will change their behavior and declare themselves recovering phone-aholics. In either case, a greater awareness of, not only the disadvantages of cell phones, but also our entirely scattered and contradictory perception of them has been developed. This may not be the “new beginning” to which Microsoft was referring, but it most certainly is a different age that may very well demand something “to save us from our phones.” Unfortunately for Microsoft, it is apparent that this salvation will not be coming from their newest product.

Fear and Self-Loathing in Ohio

From English 124: Emily Van Dusen

(nominated by Jennifer McFarlane-Harris)

Emily VanDusen's paper responds to a comparison/contrast assignment called "Stories in Dialogue." This assignment asks students to examine the relatively unusual construction of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (1919). Although considered a novel, Winesburg, Ohio is also a collection of interconnected short stories that could potentially be read in isolation from one another. So why is it important to examine them together? Students are asked to answer this question by putting two of the stories from Winesburg in dialogue, investigating how studying two works side by side reveals something about each that might not have been entirely evident otherwise.

From the outset, Emily's essay demonstrates skillful and sophisticated literary analysis. Her voice is her own (see the lovely sentence in the first paragraph likening the chapters of Winesburg, Ohio, to a "haphazard quilt"), and she weaves together narrative and thematic threads that even more experienced critics might miss. Her argument is nuanced and develops effectively across the essay, building to a larger point about society that goes beyond the text ("social isolation is often equated with isolation on an even grander scale..."). What's more, her prose is lucid and compelling; she manages to compare and contrast multiple elements of the stories at hand, often within the same capacious sentence, without over-stimulating her readers. She also takes an overall theme from the course—isolation—and shapes it into a form particular to her own vision. Emily's essay fulfills the true promise of the course subtitle, "Reading and Writing in the Margins: Introspection, Isolation, and Identity."

Jennifer McFarlane-Harris

Fear and Self-Loathing in Ohio: The Consequences of Isolation as Seen in “Strength of God” and “Loneliness”

Although big cities are often associated with crime, poverty, and violence, small town America is often romanticized as being a charming environment, where a tight-knit and loving community keeps danger at bay. However, in Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, a small Midwestern community is exposed, person by person, as a collection of people isolated from each other and themselves in their own individual ways. Their stories come together as a kind of haphazard quilt, in which some squares are sewn tightly together while others seem to be hanging to another by a mere thread, reflecting the disjointed community in which they are set. However loosely or tightly they are bound, the themes of loneliness, alienation, and fear are threaded throughout each of them; while the connections between characters may be weak at best, the connections between their struggles make reading their stories together essential for understanding the true scope of human emotion and action. By studying the spiritual journey of a tormented minister, “Strength of God” examines the use of fantasies to compensate for and overcome isolation, a theme that is carried out to an extreme in the exploration of a tormented soul in “Loneliness.”

The comparison of the two stories starts with Anderson’s descriptions of the protagonists at the beginning of their stories, both of which provide insights about the other. “Strength of God’s” Reverend Curtis Hartman is described as being “rather a favorite in the town,” while Enoch Robinson of “Loneliness” is said to be someone who “couldn’t understand people” and “couldn’t make people understand him” (Anderson 147, 167-168). However, both men seem to possess the same inability to truly connect to other people. Although this could be said for virtually all of the inhabitants of Winesburg, both Curtis and Enoch attempt to overcome this feeling of isolation through modes of expression, and both largely fail. Curtis chooses to try and compensate for his loneliness by seeking out a connection with God, who he figures

will not abandon him as long as he expresses his devotion through weekly sermons. However, as a pastor, Curtis laments on the fact that he cannot seem to arouse passion in his congregation: “In reality he was much in earnest and sometimes suffered prolonged periods of remorse because he could not go crying the word of God in the highways and byways of the town” (148). This inability to share his connection with God with live, flesh-and-bone people makes Curtis doubt the validity of that bond, and so even the relationship he has formed with an invisible being is weakened by its lack of justification from his peers. Therefore, Curtis turns to active fantasies concerning Kate Swift in order to grasp at some kind of connection. He could not find such a bond with the righteous, and so he sinks to sinful thoughts to see if that path can bring him out of his disappointment, anxiety, and loneliness.

Enoch, for his part, “had many odd delicate thoughts hidden away in his brain that might have expressed themselves through the brush of a painter, but he was always a child and that was a handicap to his wordly development” (167). He wants to be able to connect with other people, but struggles with a childlike ignorance of how to express himself in a manner that others would be able to understand. In order to compensate for this fact, he forms a relationship with that which cannot be seen. For him, this means developing a network of imaginary friends, “his own people to whom he could really talk and to whom he explained the things he had been unable to explain to living people” (170). Enoch’s imaginary friends represent a more stereotypical fantasy life, with a collection of characters created in his own mind. Unlike Curtis, whose isolation is perhaps more subtle, Enoch is the kind of figure many people would point to when asked what it means to be “crazy” or delusional.”

Examining these personalities side by side allows for increased understanding about the nature of isolation and how it can come to be. Although one might expect someone like childishly ignorant Enoch Robinson to struggle with relationships, a respected minister would seemingly be able to rely on mean-

ingful connections with both God and his congregation. However, Curtis's lack of a deeper sense of faith makes his deeper nature uncomfortably close to Enoch's, forcing the reader to confront the fact that status and occupation do not lead to companionship or happiness. Comparing the nature of their fantasies is also important in evaluating the ways in which their stories fit together. Curtis's fantasies are constructed around a real figure, Kate Swift, while Enoch Robinson's imaginary figures represent a clear distaste for anyone or anything in the real world; "he began to think that enough people had visited him, that he did not need people any more" (170). And yet, both men use their fantasy lives to keep the reality of their relationship failure at bay. Even though the object of Curtis's fantasies is real, he too is still escaping reality.

Especially important in the discussion of these two stories are their climactic endings, in which the consequences of an active fantasy life come to fruition. For both Enoch and Curtis, there is one pivotal interaction with another that frees them from their worlds of fantasy, although one man is left feeling fulfilled and renewed, while the other is left anguished and truly alone. Curtis's sexual fantasies concerning Kate Swift are eradicated when he notices that "In the lamplight her figure, slim and strong, looked like the figure of the boy in the presence of the Christ on the leaned window" (155). When he has finally resigned himself to a life of sexual desire and sin, he reaches an ironic epiphany, asserting to the town reporter, George Willard, that "I found the light" (155). Robinson, on the other hand, does not welcome the loss of his imaginary world, which comes when he tells a woman in his apartment building about his people and "all the life there had been in the room followed her out" (177). He laments that "she took all my people away," and is left feeling completely alone (177). However, the climax in each man's relation with his fantasy world is its collision with a central female figure. In the case of Curtis, God appears to him in the form of Kate Swift, who is then equated with spiritual vision and guidance. For Enoch,

his female friend represents the incompatibility of his imaginary friends with real people. So while the former instance is much more positive, both men's fantasies are eradicated in the presence of, and even because of, a woman.

Examining each story alone might lead one to attribute vastly different meanings to Anderson's decision to approach the end of their fantasy lives in such a fashion. It seems that there are many possible complicated and specific explanations for God being presented in the form of a naked woman, or for imaginary friends to fear a female acquaintance. When examined together, however, the individual distinctions of what each woman represents to each man are put aside for the benefit of determining what this plot device is saying about the nature of isolation and fantasy in general. For both stories, the central female figure represents most simply what each man was lacking in life: connection and companionship. Although Curtis's desires towards Kate are much more sexual than Enoch's toward his friend, it is still a compensation for the lack of an emotional attachment with God, and so Kate represents more to him than just sexuality: "From wanting to reach the ears of Kate Swift, and through his sermons to delve into her soul, he began to want also look again at the figure lying white and quiet in the bed" (150). Without the tale of Enoch Robinson, the reader is likely to focus too much on the sexual nature of Curtis's desire, and so the example of a woman used in a similar way in another story allows one to embrace the full significance of Kate's role.

Enoch's story also forces readers to confront that the realness of Kate Swift in terms of Curtis's fantasies is somewhat relative. Due to the fact that her window is easily visible from the church, Curtis's fascination with her as opposed to other women is one of convenience. Had that same room been occupied by Helen White, Belle Carpenter, or any other woman in town, Curtis would likely engage in the same behavior. After all, when Kate Swift is first introduced as the object of his desires, she is described as "a woman lying in bed," with "the bare shoulders and white throat of a woman" (148-149).

Her name is not used until the background provided by the narrator comes into play a paragraph or so later, suggesting that it isn't Kate herself that draws Curtis's attentions; just the fact that she is a woman is all that he needs to project his thoughts and desires. As mentioned above, he does seem to be interested in more than just Kate's sexuality, saying that "I wonder if she is listening, if my voice is carrying a message into her soul" (149). However, his interest in her soul is actually portrayed as an interest in his own soul: "he began to hope that on future Sunday mornings he might be able to say words that would touch and awaken the woman apparently so far gone into secret sin" (149). Since there is no evidence of Kate engaging in sinful sexual behavior, it is evident that Curtis is referring to his own "secret sins" of his fantasy life. It is his own soul that needs saving, and so the woman who is at the heart of his fantasy life could be anyone. Therefore, the transitive nature of Curtis's feelings makes the fact that they are focused on one woman rather insignificant, and thus his abstract imaginings are more closely related to Enoch's than they originally seem. Without the reference of Enoch's imaginary companions, the rather indiscriminant nature of Curtis's fantasies is more easily ignored.

In terms of using Curtis's story to increase our understanding of Enoch, the fact that Curtis also has an active fantasy life opens the reader up to the complicated nature of such a life. It can be easy, reading about Enoch in isolation, to write him off as a crazy and his situation as being unique to his own shortcomings. When putting his story next to Curtis's, however, the roots of Enoch's condition are easier to see for what they are: compensation for a lack of companionship that even respected men like Curtis Hartman experience. In the last sentence of "Loneliness," the one voice left to Enoch laments that "I'm all alone...It was warm and friendly in my room but now I'm all alone" (178). While profound on its own, this final sentence is particularly poignant when read in light of Curtis's story. Additionally, the fact that Curtis eventually does reach happiness makes Enoch's failure to reach fulfillment all

the more tragic. This makes it hard to write off Enoch as a deluded individual lost in a despair of his own making; instead, he is simply a man who failed to find the companionship that he, Curtis, and others sought. Both men struggle with the same need for fulfillment, but only Curtis finds it, adding to the empathic and relatable nature of Enoch's anguish.

In a culture which has consistently put a lot of emphasis on social interactions, activities, and expectations, people face a lot of pressure to form a variety of connections that they must maintain at the risk of isolation. Such pressure often makes the pursuit of social relationships all the more awkward, and thus many struggle to make the kind of bonds that they feel are expected from them. In a society which constantly highlights things like marriages, anniversaries, clubs, organizations, and similar bonds, social isolation is often equated with isolation on an even grander scale, like in one's entire community or even culture. Such is the struggle of the inhabitants of Winesburg, Ohio, and so the people's minds are sometimes led to compensate for lack meaning in relationships, leading to complex and often harrowing consequences. Enoch Robinson's imaginary friends and Curtis Hartman's sexual fantasies, then, serve as a lesson to readers about the results of failure to develop relationships. Both men are Winesburg's, and on a grander scale America's, cautionary tales about straying off the beaten path set by religious, romantic, and social expectations.

Matt Kelley Award for Excellence in First-Year Writing

In Margaret Atwood's fantastic poem "Spelling," the speaker describes her young daughter with language that starts out as matter-of-fact but becomes increasingly metaphorical. Playing with brightly colored plastic letters, her daughter, she says, is

learning how to spell,
spelling,
how to make spells

With these lines, the speaker introduces a connection between the important but seemingly ordinary skill of knowing how to spell with the more mysterious power of magic, of casting spells. It is a compelling correlation, and for me, it culminates in two lines of the poem, my favorite lines:

A word after a word
after a word is power.

Language is a formidable force, one so powerful that it is, as this poem suggests, not just like magic but actually is magic, and learning to spell is the first step in learning to harness it. Of course, college freshmen are well beyond the lessons that the daughter in the poem is learning with her plastic letters.

However, their first-year writing courses compel them to explore and discover the ways language works, what words can accomplish, how the words of other writers are powerful, and how students themselves can begin to harness the power of their own words. I remember being a freshman myself, feeling, for what really was the first time for me, the heft of my own words and working on figuring out how to manage them, to deploy them. Doing that writing is what made me want to teach, but reading student work like the essays included here is what makes me proud to teach. The prize winners whose writing you will find in this volume all wield their words with power, and they do so in response to challenging assignments that they pushed themselves to address with their own unique insights, experiences, and turns of phrase. They succeeded. The prize-winning essays you will read here are all impressive examples of the power of students' words—words that reveal their own potent voices, their own magic.

Gina Brandolino

Lecturer, Sweetland Center for Writing and Department of English

American Pride and Prejudice: Yasuhiro Ishimoto in The Family of Man

From LHSP 125: Elizabeth Allison (nominated by Matt Kelley)

As a part of this American Portraiture class, we look at the book adaptation of The Family of Man – which is still to this date, the largest, most expansive photographic exhibition in the world. Staged in 1955 worldwide, Edward Steichen and his colleagues at Life Magazine chose 503 photos from 273 photographers representing 68 countries. The assignment below asks students to contextualize and fully discuss any image from the collection. Loddie's paper, in her second draft, was readable, answered all of my questions and most importantly asked her own. To my knowledge no one else has ever written a word about her chosen photograph and she makes the image all the better by having written about it.

Matt Kelley

American Pride and Prejudice: Yasuhiro Ishimoto in The Family of Man

In 1942, at the Amache Internment Camp in Granada, Colorado, a young college student from the West Coast picked up a camera. Like other Japanese-Americans interned under the infamous Executive Order 9066, Yasuhiro Ishimoto passed his time toying with a newly acquired craft (Kennicott). A discriminatory policy—considered an aberration in the American political tradition—became the footing for his life's work. Ishimoto is no longer known as the son of two Japanese farmers, but as an extraordinary, and prolific, American photographer with an impressive oeuvre ranging from Chicagoan street photography to oriental flower portraiture (Tucker, 345). One of his earliest works, an untitled photograph dating from 1951-52, was selected by Museum of Modern Art curator Edward Steichen for the photographic ex-

hibition *The Family of Man* in 1955 (Steichen, 40, “Marvin”). Steichen chose two of the young photographer’s pieces for the exhibition—they are both untitled photographs of children, placed in the same topical category. The photograph to be discussed in this paper is a striking image of three African-American children standing outside on the street, dressed up as clowns. All of the elements of the photograph—his choice of subject, utilization of environment, and stark theatrical bent—make it distinctly Ishimoto’s; interestingly, those same features cause it to disturb exhibition’s thematic blueprint. In spite of this, Ishimoto’s untitled photograph ultimately and perhaps accidentally satisfies the ambitions of *The Family of Man*. The reasons for this are deeply linked to a sympathy for or sensitivity to the acute injustices and inconsistencies of the American experience. This is the defining element and effect of the photograph that is, unfortunately, almost entirely diminished by its placement in *The Family of Man* exhibition.

Ishimoto’s earliest professional photographs date back to 1951-52—his last years studying under the influence of the New Bauhaus ethic at Chicago’s Institute of Design. The untitled photograph featured in *The Family of Man* was produced at the beginning of his career (Warren, 807). Nonetheless, it is a real indication of Ishimoto and his style. At this point in his career, Ishimoto was taking to the streets. Steven Longmire of the *Chicago Reader* writes, “If the street can be regarded as theater, Ishimoto may be the ideal photographer” (Longmire). The untitled photograph featured in *The Family of Man* illustrates the ways in which the theatrics of the streets can be translated into, and even come alive in, black-and-white photography. The main focus of Untitled is a young, African-American girl. Her lips are pursed; her eyes look on with traces of vague curiosity. The line of her body is distorted by an unusual, and disproportionate, jutting out of her left hip, an anatomical incongruity that lends the image an almost unsettling, and yet mesmerizing, effect. In the background, two boy figures are positioned on her either side. Their faces are covered in roughly applied paint: bold white strokes en-

circle their eyes and lips, contrasting against the dark tones of their skin. They are all dressed as clowns. It is likely Halloween, however, this is not a typical or necessarily playful Halloween photograph. Here, the trick-or-treaters are on the street, standing outside of a dark, wooden fence. The fence frames the photo, but it also hints to a plot. This unnamed photo is a classic example of Ishimoto street photography, where the elements of the theatric emerge in an everyday photograph, and the interactions of the ‘actors’ upon their ‘stage,’ i.e. the subjects in their setting, both inform and complicate the narrative.

What makes the photograph distinctly Ishimoto’s is also what makes it unsuited for its placement in *The Family of Man*. Ishimoto took to photography after reading *Visions in Motion* by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, New Bauhaus educator and Institute of Design founder (Warren, 807). Moholy-Nagy once wrote, “Man’s interest in getting to know the whole world has been enlarged by [through photography and film] the feeling of being—at every moment—in every situation—involved in it” (“Moholy”). The enigmatic quality of the photograph demands this level of engagement from the viewer. However, this type of reading is not exactly what *The Family of Man*, on a whole, inspires. In *The Family of Man*, the photographic exhibition turned best-selling book, a wide range of black-and-white photographs are categorized thematically in order to collectively express the universality of the human condition. The photographs, like their human subjects, are thus meant to function collectively—and not independently. The photographs selected for *The Family of Man* are not favored for their artistic quality so much than their ability to speak to a curated theme. As they are branded (and subdued) under thematic headings, and are, in the book, also supplemented with sweeping, famous quotes, the photographs are cast into a predictable, and readable, mold. Ishimoto’s untitled photograph is among those that break this mold. The photograph was placed in a section highlighting the wonders of childhood and accompanied by a quote by William Blake (“The little ones leaped, and shouted, and laugh’d / And all the hills echoed”) (Steichen, 35). The photographs

surrounding it depict light-hearted fun: schoolgirls in England laughing and dancing, three small children playing cards on a doorstep, a little boy hiding his face in another, older boy's jacket. Each of these photographs are colored by a feeling of comfort and freedom—exactly what Ishimoto's *Untitled* is utterly void of. The figures in Ishimoto's photograph relay unintelligible, and conflicting, emotions: the girl, with her awkward, stifled hip and indifferent gaze, the younger, frighteningly morose boy to her left, and the curious, and perhaps more amiable boy on her right, interact to generate an altogether troubling photograph. It is a photograph that in no way conforms to the theme in which it was placed.

Interestingly, the photograph, standing alone, fulfills the main objective of *The Family of Man*, which was praised for “symbolizing the universality of human emotions” by The New York Times (Steichen, back cover). In the book, just as in the exhibition, the photograph is surrounded by photographs taken of white American or British subjects by, respectively, white American or British photographers. *Untitled*, on the other hand, portrays African-American subjects through the lens of a Japanese-American photographer (Steichen, 40). On first look, and in the most superficial way, Ishimoto's untitled photograph's placement within the context of *The Family of Man* presents America in a positive light, representing its diverse culture. But the photo was taken in 1951-52, post-World War II and pre-Civil Rights movement—two significant historical markers in American history that had a measurable impact on both the photographer and the subjects' lives. Ishimoto once said, “I have sympathy for all people” (Longmire). Ishimoto's two-year internment no doubt helped him cultivate a sensitivity to social injustice. In the forward to *Visions in Motion*, Moholy-Nagy writes, “Emotional prejudice—or inertia—is the great hindrance to necessary adjustments and social reforms. The remedy is to add to our intellectual literacy an emotional literacy, an education of the senses, the ability to articulate feeling through the means of expression” (“Moholy”). On the barest level, Ishimoto's photo

pays a neat testament to America's racial diversity (he is the only non-white photographer in the section). But on further inspection, the photograph is actually a disconcerting portrait representing an emotional exchange between the photographer and his subjects—an uneven, but substantial communication of empathy. In this way, the photograph is, on a very deep level, overtly demonstrative of the “universality of human emotions,” with America, however, being the perpetrator.

It is interesting to consider that a majority of the subjects of Ishimoto's street photography are children, and that of these children an even larger percentage dawn costumes or masks, or both (Longmire). The comforts and freedoms that, as mentioned above, typically characterize childhood are deeply indebted to the fact that the future lies open, and that the possibilities of the world are all around you; going along with that notion, the costumes and masks hint to a notion of the possible—the freedom to fashion identity. In Ishimoto's untitled photograph, however, the costumes of the subjects only highlight the uncertainty of their futures. Ironically, Ishimoto's presence in *The Family of Man* does in fact send a certain message of hope. It was this exhibition, put together by an American, that brought Ishimoto's photography to a global audience and provided Ishimoto the opportunity to publish a collection of his work in Japan a mere three years later (Warren, 807). Despite the fact that in the context of the exhibition itself, Ishimoto's untitled photograph was not framed in a favorable way, the fact that Ishimoto himself was included in *The Family of Man* nodded to the idea that America was progressing, with art becoming a place where traditional boundaries did not exist, and that through it one could shape not only his or her own identity, but could help transform society.

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Moon Walk (1969)

From RCCore 100: Olivia Postelli (nominated by Virginia Murphy)

Olivia's essay showcases both her rhetorical skill and her creative writing acumen. She responded to an assignment that asked students to respond to the following prompt:

You may choose the following assignment or design your own. All alternative assignments must be approved in advance and meet the same page and deadline requirements.

November 30, 1969

You are a freshman at the University of Michigan.

Tonight, on the Ed Sullivan Show, Neil Diamond performs "Sweet Caroline."

Today, the Oakland Raiders beat the New York Jets (27-14) at Shea Stadium.

Ten days ago, The Cleveland Plain Dealer published photographs of dead Vietnamese villagers massacred by US soldiers at My Lai.

Tomorrow, December 1, the first draft lottery since World War II will be held.

In three days, Black Panther Party members Fred Hampton and Mark Cole will be shot dead in their sleep during a raid by Chicago Police officers.

Discuss the following questions:

What is life like for you?

What is your position on the Vietnam War?

With what student groups are you involved?

What music, literature and films have influenced your thinking?

—Virginia Murphy

Moon Walk (1969)

This summer, Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon. We watched it on TV – the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite.¹ My mom said that now that had happened, anything was possible.

“Someday,” she told me while we were setting the table for dinner, “your children will be living on Mars with aliens as neighbors. You might even have a green son-in-law.” She laughed as she wiped one of the spoons on her apron to get rid of a water spot. It was a joke. Still, there was something in her laugh, in the way she scrubbed the spoon against her thigh a little too hard, that made me think she believed it was true.

It’s the Monday after Thanksgiving break, and it’s cold when I leave my room to go to the library. My bag is full of French books, worksheets, and flashcards. I have a composition due tomorrow, and there’s a test on Wednesday. My grasp on the material is shaky at best – all the pronouns and tenses jumble together in my head. Sometimes, on cold, library-bound nights like these, *je déteste le français*. Then, I look at pictures of Paris in spring, and I imagine myself reading Baudelaire on the banks of the Seine. Camus at a café near the Champs-Élysées. Flaubert under the Arc de Triomphe and in line at the Louvre. When I’m there, living under a Parisian sky, all the studying will be worth it.

I tighten the ends of my scarf and shove my hands in my pockets as I walk under the Dennison Archway. At orientation, they told us if you kiss your true love under the archway at midnight, you’ll get married. I’ve never seen anyone kiss here, so I don’t know if it’s true. My mom tells me that a nice story is just as good as a true one, but I don’t know if I believe her.

There is a “make love not war” poster taped to the kiosk on the other side of the archway. It’s advertising an SDS meeting – this Friday at nine o’clock. My roommate is a member, and she goes all the time. When I

1 Kirkpatrick, Robert. 1969: *The Year Everything Changed*. New York City, New York: Skyhorse Publishing. 2009. Print.

asked my dad about it, he said they were just “leftist radicals who probably fly Communist flags in their backyards.” I didn’t tell him my roommate is dating the chapter president.² It isn’t something he needs to know.

The draft starts tomorrow, and there are signs all over campus reminding men to register. I don’t have anyone to worry over. My dad is too old. I don’t have any brothers, and my only male cousin has a congenital heart defect. Still, I walk to class, my hands in my pockets and my French books on my back, and I see all these people, young men (my age) who could be picked up and sent away tomorrow because they were born on the wrong day. It doesn’t seem fair.³

I don’t know much about Vietnam. I read *The Quiet American* once, so I know it used to be a French colony, and that they still speak French there. It’s on the news a lot, and all the rice paddies and winding Saigon streets remind me of the book. Greene doesn’t talk about the bombs – not like my roommate does. Liz is always telling me about children without legs and Vietnamese villagers without faces – blown up by landmines or burnt off by napalm. Her boyfriend gave her a pamphlet with pictures from the war, and she pinned to the cork board above her bed.

“Won’t that give you nightmares?” I asked her when I looked up from my homework to find haunted Vietnamese faces staring out of the glossy brochure at me.

“No,” she shook her head like it was an odd question and pinned them next to her ticket stub from a Rolling Stones concert.

We didn’t talk about it again.

It’s strange to think about Vietnam. It’s not really another planet,

2 Skimmed for context and information.

Russell, Jim. “SDS’s Other Wars.” *Nation* 272.9 (2001): 30-32. The National Archive. EBSCO. Web. 5 Dec. 2010.

Read for context.

3 Sun, Michael Hill. “Vietnam Draft Still Divides Nation.” *The Orlando Sentinel*. 22 Feb 2004: A.21. *Sentinel Star Co.*

Web. 5 Dec. 2010. Read for context.

but, sometimes, it seems just as far away as the moon. Greene says that “moonlight reminds [him] of a mortuary,” and that’s what Vietnam is, isn’t it? A place for the dead.⁴ Dead babies and villagers and soldiers. It certainly seems just as exotically dangerous as the moon, and I think everyone is afraid of what we’ll find there. It won’t be a kind old man or cheese hiding in the jungles Vietnam. It will be the bombs Greene doesn’t really mention, and the civilian casualties Liz always does. It will be a giant leap, but no one is sure for whom.

If Vietnam is the moon, then I’m like the astronaut in that David Bowie song. My mom bought me the record for my birthday – *Man of Words/Man of Music*. The first song on it is “Space Oddity,” and it’s about a moon walk. “Here am I sitting in my tin can far above the moon/Planet Earth is blue, and there’s nothing I can do.”⁵ I feel exactly like that. No matter how many times Liz and my friends say every little bit helps. No matter how many posters I see that say “give peace a chance.” I feel like there’s nothing I can do but watch the world turn below me and stare. My dorm room is my tin can, and I am staring at Vietnam with no clue about why it keeps spinning when everyone just wants it to stop.

I get to Hatcher in time for the snow to pick up. I tuck myself in the back corner, and I pull out my French book. I’m halfway through the vocabulary list when I see it: *la guerre*, the French word for war. Then, further down

4 Greene, Graham. *The Quiet American*. New York City, New York: Bantam Books. 1956. Print.

“Moonlight reminds me of a mortuary and the cold wash of an unshaded globe over a marble slab, but starlight is alive and never still: it is almost as though someone in those vast spaces is trying to communicate a message of good will, for even the names of the stars are friendly. Venus is any woman we love, the Bears are the bears of childhood, and I suppose the Southern Cross, to those, like my wife, who believe, may be a favorite hymn or a prayer beside the bed” (Greene 90).

5 Bowie, David, singer. “Space Oddity.” *Space Oddity*. RCA Records. 1972. CD.

Space Oddity was originally released in 1969 as *Man of Words/Man of Music* by Philips Records. At the time the essay takes place, the narrator would have owned a copy of the original record, not the more popular rerelease from 1972.

the page, *la lune*. Moon. I laugh, and the girl two tables away glares at me. I briefly consider that my book is trying to tell me something, but my dad is the conspiracy theorist, not me. My mom would say it's a sign, but I believe in those about as much as I believe in my dad's conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination. I think about it, and I decide it's only a space oddity. I turn the page.

Sweetland Prize for Outstanding Writing Portfolio

My (Literary and College) Journey

From SWC 100: Vivian Dregely (nominated by Matt Kelley)

Vivien's writing was always from the heart. She was a quiet, reserved student who identified herself as someone who didn't seem to always fit in with most of the students here at UM. She writes in her introduction about having a sudden awareness over a three-day weekend in Chicago – an awakening to her own feelings of independence. To us, old as we are, these kinds of things can seem quaint, but for a minute, in reading her portfolio, I recalled something similar in my own life, like what Raymond Carver calls "A Small Good Thing" in his famous short story. These little moments found and Vivien's receptive way of taking them all in happened often in Sweetland 100. Her papers found their voice and power in the revisions, as she learned to listen to what she wanted to say and how she wanted to say it. She improved with each draft of each paper, never faltering and always emerging with more and more to say. Her portfolio represents this powerful set of realizations.

Matt Kelley


Vivien Dregely's Writing pages

My (Literary and College) Journey >

Alec Soth's: Last Days of W: Josh, Joelton, Tennessee- My First Paper.

Interpreting Literature through Text of Simple by Langston Hughes Steinbeck and Capote's A Russian Journal Research Paper Sitemap

At the beginning of the term I had little confidence in my writing abilities and wasn't very sure of clear ideas to place in papers. We began the term with analyzing different photo collections, which is something I never did in high school. Surprisingly, I found it interesting to look into the picture and see not only what is physically presented but to take that and find the symbolism the photographer was trying to symbolize to the viewers. After discovering that I would have to write a four-page paper on the interpretations I found on my own, I was unsure of how to approach the paper. As I was writing the paper I realized I actually had a perspective on the photo that was worth presenting and I thought I had a stable, consistent argument that analyzed the photo as well as I could. After writing the paper and getting it peer-edited my low confidence subsided and I was certain my paper was definitely worthy of at least a B. Contrary to my beliefs I got my paper back with a C, a grade lower than my expectations. Not only that, but after receiving the paper back I realized I spelt the name of the photographer wrong throughout. Scorned by embarrassment, I decided to try my best to listen to Professor Kelley's criticisms and I started making slight changes. I honestly didn't expect would make that large of a change in a letter grade. Once again, against my expectations, my letter grade went up to a B. This whole experience taught me not only how to interpret symbolism in a photo but also taught me that some concentration and slight corrections can completely transform a paper from one of the many to a piece of literature worth reading.



Attachments (2)

Paper #1 Final Draft.docx - on Dec 8, 2010 1:28 PM by akahibo@yahoo.com (version 1)
100% [View](#) [Download](#)

Paper #1 First Draft.docx - on Dec 8, 2010 1:29 PM by akahibo@yahoo.com (version 1)
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The Obscurity of War Alec Soth's *Last Days of W* by Vivien Dregely

Throughout Alec Soth's collection titled *The Last Days of W* he shows his perspective on the after-effects of the former President George W. Bush's presidency. These representations of the Bush administration show not only, Soth's opinion on Bush's turbulent presidency, but also show the perspective of the average American. Soth points out the flaws in Bush's presidency in his photography, depicting the typical American opinion of Bush's absence during Hurricane Katrina, war and the general national recession. Within the collection, Soth strategically keeps the people and places mysterious by not placing a large emphasis on details of the people or places involved. This approach

keeps the album somewhat disconnected emotionally from the audience but still intriguing as to the story behind each face and place. Throughout Soth's collection he remains mysterious, however, in contrast to many of the photos within the series, Soth chooses to hit an emotional chord by adding more details about the innocent soldier in "Josh, Joelton, Tennessee".

In many of Soth's photographic endeavors he uses humor to point out political flaws. Throughout *Last Days of W*, he makes a mockery of George W. Bush's presidency by mocking his lack of initiative in quick decisions like hurricane Katrina. His choices of mass importance have often been portrayed as not considering the American people's opinion and keeping them in the dark. Soth demonstrates this by taking photos of many abandoned homes, cities and attractions throughout the United States. The irony of these deserted places is that they are all supposed to depict the American dream, showing success. But in actuality the Soth shows through his pictures the increasing obscurity the government keeps society in. When viewed, the collection gives the impression that if government doesn't seek the people's appraisal showing they don't value their views.

"Josh, Joelton, Tennessee" shows a young soldier preparing himself two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches at an army base camp. Many of the other photos although a serious subject matter make light of the situations Americans have been placed into after Bush's term but this photo stops the laughter creating a somber, alarming view of a young boy pushed into a war that took away his youth and identity. The war against terrorism has caused over 30,000 injured and 4,000 casualties in the past seven years. Although the number of fatalities may not seem vast when compared to previous wars, imagining young men, such as the one shown in the photo, fighting for our country instills a sense of terror in itself. The idea that someone so young faces responsibilities that are unimaginable to the average American is frightening in and of itself. This is without consideration that many of these young soldiers do not even understand what it is they are fighting for. So the obscu-

ality Soth presents throughout his collection is felt in the obscurity the soldiers feel about the war they have been placed into. Encompassing these ideas as a whole, this photograph creates controversy between those for and opposing the war. Soth's point is evident that Bush's war on terror took away this young man's and many other young men's innocence and childhood, leaving the young soldier in limbo between what a soldier should be and what it truly is, thus leaving behind a trail of fear and confusion for the American faith in war.

Other details within the photo show that the young soldier seems to have a disfigurement in his right hand presumably caused in combat. He also has a scar around his forehead, perhaps an indent on his skin caused by his helmet or a wound from fighting. The obscurity of the background also shows that Soth wanted the viewer to focus all of their attention on the details of the young man and his sandwich. However, if looked at closely the background shows details of scattered snacks, bins and other soldiers making the boy look like he is lost in time and space, unsure of his surroundings. Although little detail is known about the actual man, viewers can infer that he is from the state of Tennessee based on the National guard patch on his left arm of his uniform. He also appears inexperienced based on his age and lack of military paraphernalia on his uniform. A startling aspect of the photo is the boy's cold expression evoking a vacant look of despair, as his eyes seem to stare right through the viewer. This gaze leaves the audience with an uneasiness that could not be felt if Soth had not taken the picture at any other moment. This ominous photo arouses the curiosity about the boy, Josh's background and how he got to this point in his life. Another unusual, interesting aspect to the photo is that the meager, unsure soldier does not match the imagery of the tough and mature military man most Americans are used to seeing. This photo is very thought provoking giving the feeling of disdain toward Bush and the way he handled the war. Soth shows early on in his collection, by putting this photography as the fifth photo, that in spite of

the fact that many of his photos poke fun of Bush's eight years in office there were repercussions to his presidential actions. These actions affected all walks of life in America, including the lifestyles of the youth.

The most striking element of the photograph is the two deconstructed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches sitting in Josh's lap. At first glance, the thought of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich evokes memories of childhood and times of simplicity, which is striking, based on the context of the photograph. The statement Soth makes using the peanut butter jelly sandwich is that the trouble-free, childlike thoughts associated with preparing a pb and j sandwich completely opposes the experience that the young, inexperienced military man is going through. Soth published his collection in a newspaper with the military man Josh of Joelton, Tennessee as the cover page. He did this in order to reach the general public and to immediately show audiences the severity of Bush's presidency. Even the representation of two sandwiches shows viewers the sentiment of a teenage boy rather than a young man going off to a battle that many deemed unnecessary. The sandwich captured a hard-hitting moment that leaves an emotional scar to the viewer. Without this element this photograph would be an average, inessential addition to the collection.

This photo is the first within the collection directly mentioning the war. By placing the photo in the middle of the collection, as the fifth photograph, he is showing that his series as a whole is not to be taken lightly and makes an impact on those viewing it. At the first mention of the war, Soth doesn't even show someone in the navy or army but someone in the National Guard. This is done to show that because of Bush's turbulent actions our country now seeks protection within its borders. Striking enough, Soth is also showing that the youth displayed in the photo shows fear and confusion while he isn't even directly participating in the war effort. The young soldier isn't even in Iraq, which begs the question of if the soldier ever went or is planning to go. Soth constantly with this photograph brings the issue of war

and the boy's story to the forefront but leaves these questions unanswered. Even though this photo is not first in the collection, it creates a more striking perspective because it is such a strong controversial view that is left open and vulnerable to viewers.

Throughout the collection, Soth first presents all aspects of controversy within the eight years of tragedy and economic turmoil. The national unemployment rate rose almost 5% since 2001, pre-Bush administration. This statistic shows that the images in Soth's collection were not conjured up by Soth, but rather depicted the reality of many turbulent American situations. Without all of the issues shown in the collection, the audience would not be able to truly see Soth's thoughts toward Bush's presidency. By placing the photo in the middle of the collection, as the fifth photograph, he is showing that his series as a whole is not to be taken lightly and to make an impact on those viewing it. Everyone is aware that adolescent soldiers are being shipped to Iraq to fight the war for our country everyday, but the placement of the photo brings the issue to the forefront and can only bring on controversial opinions. Alec Soth captured the American feelings of deep sorrow and insecurity as the American dream was tearing at the seams. Thus viewers can only look towards the future for hope and reflect back at a desolate memory of the past through viewing the *Last Days of W.* When reflecting back at this collection, viewers can see the obscurity and doubt American citizens felt towards their government, which Soth bravely exposes to the world.

The Paradox of Art in African American Culture

by Vivien Dregley

In the African American arts, especially during the Harlem renaissance, black artists created literature, music and visual art that represented elements of their culture and their struggle. Unfortunately, later this portrayal of culture

categorized blacks into one genre not allowing them to grow as artists. Langston Hughes balanced this struggle with maintaining his cultural roots yet expanding his artistic horizons interracially. In 1943, in the *Chicago Defender*, Hughes created the character Semple for his columns that was later arranged in the novel *The Best of Simple*. He expressed his views on Jim Crow and racism through the character Jesse B. Simple. The point of this was to ensure his beliefs would not be chastised for being politically incorrect among the white populace. In the column, “Banquet in Honor,” Hughes expresses the struggle many African Americans face when trying to balance art about their culture and art that is universally accepted. He expresses this struggle by showing the dynamics of the intellectual African American community trying to fit into white norms versus the uneducated, street-smart black man trying to keep his true Harlem culture intact.

“Banquet in Honor” begins with Jesse B. Semple telling the narrator of his recent trip to a banquet. This formal dinner was in honor of an old, unsuccessful African American artist. The main reason for this sudden praise of an unnoted artist was due to the New York Times stating that he was a creative genius. The author is aware of this sudden fake admiration and expresses it by saying

“The way you could have honored me if you had wanted to, ladies and gentlemen, all these years, would have been to buy a piece of my music and play it, or a book of mine and read it, but you didn’t... and not one of you from Sugar Hill to Central Park ever offered me a pig’s foot.” (Hughes, “Banquet in Honor”, 46)

Semple also makes it a point to say that the artist never used his race or background as a crutch. The artist never suggested his race in his literature or paintings, as to make sure his art was perceived equally among all races. Unfortunately, the artist’s work was never perceived by anyone. The general white public did not view his art because of his background and race and the African American minority did not view his work because he was not already

famous with the general public. This obvious paradox is only noticeable to Semple who is scolded for laughing after the artist's awkward confrontation towards those at the banquet. This trap between trying to please both the general public and the African American minority shows the struggle Hughes was presenting that many black artists had to go through.

This column leaves readers subjected to Hughes opinions on different racial communities support, or lack thereof, in the African American communities creative endeavors. In the story, Semple explains that the reason the author had no fans from the white community was purely based on the color of his skin. In "Banquet in Honor", Semple says that "It seems like this old man has always played the race game straight" (44) meaning the old artist never only illustrated things specifically for one race audience, in other words, he did not do anything to satisfy white culture specifically. Based on W.E.B. Dubois' "The Talented Tenth", only ten percent of the black community was considered worthy of living an educated life with a renowned job after WW2. This made it very unlikely, at the time, for many African Americans to be successful in what was considered white jobs, the creative arts also falling under this category. The few African Americans that were successful in this arena, often had to work their way up and make a name for themselves. Frequently involving African Americans being subservient to what the white public seeks out of them. This can often be demeaning towards their own background making it nearly impossible to be creatively accomplished without leaving behind ones past life. Although this obscure route can be taken to achieve fame in white culture, the artist described in "Banquet of Honor" never followed what was expected of him, only following his artistic beliefs, which explains the authors' failure in the arts. The message Hughes is telling readers is that in order to be successful in the white community you must completely abandon your views and follow what is popular in the white mainstream.

One would assume that although the white community did not support black artists, surely his own racial community would commend his hard

work. As stated by Simple, “the negroes didn’t pay him no mind because he wasn’t already famous” (“Banquet in Honor”, 44). The quote shows that unfortunately, the artist’s work was never commended or purchased by the black public nor did they pay him any attention because he was not yet famous. As mentioned before, the only way to become famous is to become widely accepted by the white community. So many black artists were left in the predicament of leaving behind their background to become famous, which in turn would be recognized but not supported by their community. The other option they had was that they could stick to their artistic gut but would have a high chance of never reaching success or appreciation from anyone. This was the situation the artist was left in until he received recognition just before his death. Hughes also shows that the lower class African Americans do to take a stand or support black, working class artists because they believe it is best to keep to themselves, especially since they get chastised for their opinions and views. The upper class African Americans, on the other hand, act as if they understand art and culture when they see it, no matter whom it is from. Although, they are still African Americans “They themselves draw a colored line” (“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”), meaning they only appreciate popular, white art and culture even if its original roots are from a black background.

The statement Hughes makes in “Banquet in Honor” is that even the most culturally ignorant people, such as Simple, can see that it is nearly impossible to become successful without using race as a crutch or following prevalent views rather than your own. Hughes indulges in a flight of fancy when he says:

They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardization. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. (“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain”) He means that like the artist in “Banquet in Honor”

he waits for the day that artists can express themselves and still be valued in all societies as a great artist. He dreams that an African American artist should be willing to step over artistic and racial boundaries without being scared of what any race thinks of them

Citations

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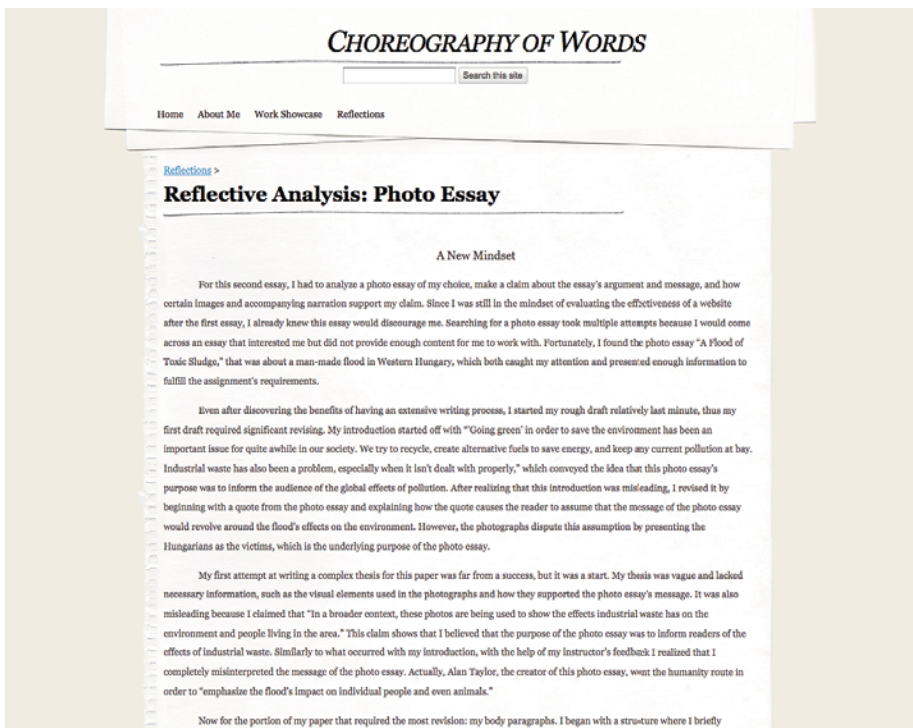
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Choreography of Words

From SWC 100: Kathy Pham (nominated by Delia Decourcy)

Kathy Pham worked extremely hard all semester to revise each essay. She revised more than any other student I've had to make sure her arguments were cohesive and well-structured. This is evident in the four final essays she produced. The quality of her reflective pieces is also very high. She's thoughtful about how she has changed as a writer and why and what she still struggles with. Her portfolio is the best I've seen as far as visual consistency, argument, and appeal are concerned. Her navigation is also great. She has paid tremendous attention to detail—from the captions for all her images to thoroughly citing all images. The portfolio gives the viewer/reader a very clear sense of who Kathy is (the About Me page), what she's capable of now as a writer, and how her writing self evolved during SWC 100.

Delia Decourcy



Reflective Analysis: Photo Essay

A New Mindset

For this second essay, I had to analyze a photo essay of my choice, make a claim about the essay's argument and message, and how certain images and accompanying narration support my claim. Since I was still in the mindset of evaluating the effectiveness of a website after the first essay, I already knew this essay would discourage me. Searching for a photo essay took multiple attempts because I would come across an essay that interested me but did not provide enough content for me to work with. Fortunately, I found the photo essay "A Flood of Toxic Sludge," that was about a man-made flood in Western Hungary, which both caught my attention and presented enough information to fulfill the assignment's requirements.

Even after discovering the benefits of having an extensive writing process, I started my rough draft relatively last minute, thus my first draft required significant revising. My introduction started off with going ‘green’ in order to save the environment has been an important issue for quite awhile in our society. We try to recycle, create alternative fuels to save energy, and keep any current pollution at bay. Industrial waste has also been a problem, especially when it isn’t dealt with properly,” which conveyed the idea that this photo essay’s purpose was to inform the audience of the global effects of pollution. After realizing that this introduction was misleading, I revised it by beginning with a quote from the photo essay and explaining how the quote causes the reader to assume that the message of the photo essay would revolve around the flood’s effects on the environment. However, the photographs dispute this assumption by presenting the Hungarians as the victims, which is the underlying purpose of the photo essay.

My first attempt at writing a complex thesis for this paper was far from a success, but it was a start. My thesis was vague and lacked necessary information, such as the visual elements used in the photographs and how they supported the photo essay’s message. It was also misleading because I claimed that “In a broader context, these photos are being used to show the effects industrial waste has on the environment and people living in the area.” This claim shows that I believed that the purpose of the photo essay was to inform readers of the effects of industrial waste. Similarly to what occurred with my introduction, with the help of my instructor’s feedback I realized that I completely misinterpreted the message of the photo essay. Actually, Alan Taylor, the creator of this photo essay, went the humanity route in order to “emphasize the flood’s impact on individual people and even animals.”

Now for the portion of my paper that required the most revision: my body paragraphs. I began with a structure where I briefly discussed the format of the photo essay, analyzed the photographs I selected arranged by the type of photo they were (aerial, individual, and nature), the necessity of

using color images, and then evaluating the effectiveness of the photo essay's organization. First, I had plenty of rearranging to do. For the general structure of the paper, I combined my paragraphs where I talked vaguely about the photo essay's format and evaluated its effectiveness so that it followed my thesis paragraph. As for body paragraphs, I needed to rearrange the paragraphs where I explained the purpose of the aerial and individual photographs. In my first draft, I presented the three aerial images, provided a brief description, and followed with my analysis. In the next paragraph, I organized the images of the different points of view based on numerical order rather than significance. I did not even notice that I made no mention of the visual element that was used in either paragraphs. By my final draft, I explicitly stated the visual element that was shown in the topic sentence of each paragraph and separated my one paragraph about the aerial photos into three so that I could focus on each image individually. I also reorganized the pictures to show a woman's perspective first, a resident's view, and lastly, a shopkeeper's view. This way, readers would immediately get a sense of what the woman saw because only her back profile was being shown which allowed the audience to step in her shoes. This new organization strengthened my overall argument.

The most frustrating part of this essay was the conclusion, hands down. In my rough draft, I had no idea how to wrap up my argument and present several new ideas simultaneously. Since it was just a first draft, I decided to contrast my current photo essay to the photo essay I had previously chosen and evaluate how much more effective it was. During a conference with my instructor, she confirmed my notion that I had returned to the evaluating mode that I was in for the previous essay. After several suggestions for a new conclusion, I decided to discuss whether or not Taylor decided to document this disaster solely to inform his audience. I also presented a new claim that Taylor did not just want to only inform his readers, but to remind them that there's a connection that link us together.

As a whole, I'm confident about the outcome of my paper even though it took me five drafts to get to where my essay is now. However, I believe all of my effort paid off. My drafts is evidence of how my argument has evolved from my rough draft to my final, and I gained insight on why I took the steps I decided to take to revise what I needed to change. Now that I've recognized what I had trouble with, I can focus on those parts of my essay next time. What I learned from this essay was that constantly changing your content and evolving your argument does not necessarily mean I am a bad writer, it just means that I am able to catch my mistakes and improving in expressing what I want to say.

Analysis of a Photo Essay

In the Shoes of Another

On Monday, October 4th, a large reservoir filled with toxic red sludge in western Hungary ruptured, releasing approximately 700,000 cubic meters (185 million gallons) of stinking caustic mud, which killed many animals, at least four people, and injured over 120 - many with chemical burns" (Taylor 1). This quote, taken from the photo essay "A Flood of Toxic Sludge," provides general information, such as the date of the incident, where it happened, how it was caused, and of course, the injuries and death. But with the lack of details, it is difficult to determine what the purpose of the photo essay is. Nevertheless, the essay's purpose may be hinted at by how the media commonly portray these types of disaster. Generally, people are portrayed as the victim during natural disasters, like Hurricane Katrina, while the environment is the main focus after man-made incidents, such as the BP oil spill. With this expectation and the vague introduction provided, we may assume that since the flood was man-made, the essay will only discuss how the environment was affected. However, this photo essay deviates from that expectation to show that the environment was not the flood's only victim.

In “A Flood of Toxic Sludge,” Alan Taylor, a developer for the *Boston Globe’s* website, compiles thirty photographs from different companies in order to inform its readers of the aftermath of a flood of toxic red sludge that has swept through several towns in Western Hungary. Although it may seem like these photos are being used to show the effects that industrial waste has on only Hungary’s environment, the underlying purpose of this essay is to emphasize the flood’s impact on individual people and even animals. Through his choice to use color photos, Taylor accentuates the dominance of the red color of the sludge. The captions that accompany each photo briefly summarize the moment depicted in the images. However, by presenting different points of view of the disaster, readers gain insight about the aftermath of the flood from an aerial, individual, and natural perspective. In addition, focusing on proportion within the aerial photos allows the audience to get a grasp of the vast scale of the flood. Through his use of these visual elements, Taylor strives to illustrate the consequences that this toxic sludge has caused and acknowledge the helplessness that those affected are currently experiencing.

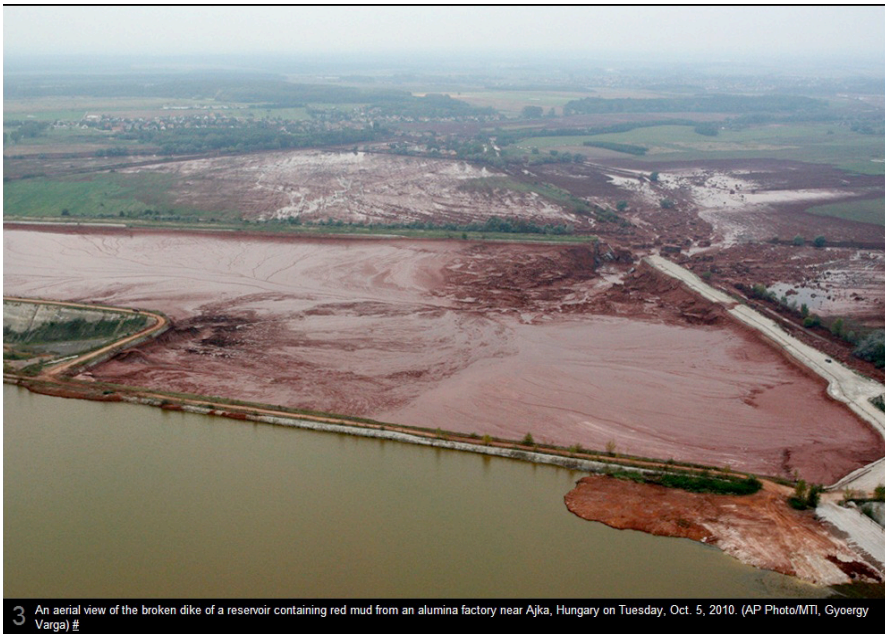
As many photo essays do, “A Flood of Toxic Sludge” begins with a brief summary of its subject, which in this case are the flood and its consequences. However, the difference between this particular photo essay and others similar in subject is that it is presented in a blog format rather than a standard slide show. The way that Taylor arranged the photographs and the specific photos he decided to include contribute to the essay’s capability of telling its own story without any text because each photograph has a specific focus. First, the photographs can always be viewed first so the audience can immediately absorb and interpret what they’re looking at. As the readers scroll down, a short caption clarifies some of the questions that may have emerged. Each of the 30 photographs is accompanied with a caption and is shown in color. Now, the photos that Taylor chose to present within this essay progress fluidly which prevents abrupt cuts between each photo and the audience to having to “fill in the gaps.” He begins with photos of the reservoir and its

damaged wall to show the source of the flood. Then he proceeds with photos of how the sludge has completely flooded the streets of surrounding neighborhoods, destroyed the businesses and homes of residents, and contaminated the environment. If Taylor had not included these photos, the audience would have to further search for information on the flood, thus demonstrating that the photo essay did not achieve its purpose of informing.

Almost right away, several photographs focus on the disaster from a geographic point of view in order to emphasize the size of the reservoir, the extent of the flood, and the damage that is already done. Without these visuals, comprehending the magnitude of the disaster would be unfathomable. The first photograph shows what appears to be a close up of the ruptured wall of the reservoir that was originally holding the toxic sludge (Taylor Photo 2). However, the proportional difference between the ruptured wall and the construction vehicles that can be seen on the bottom of the photo leaves the audience with a better “sense of scale.” Contrary to what the audience may believe at first glance, the photo is not a close up. This understanding leaves readers with a sense of disbelief at how enormous the wall is.



The second photograph is an actual representation of how the audience may have been visualizing the reservoir. It shows a different perspective of the reservoir where its vast size, and the amount of sludge that has leaked out from it, can be observed (Taylor Photo 3). In the distance, stretches of land can also be seen where most of the surrounding land, once a deep green, is now covered in red. The realization that the small portion of the sludge that escaped from the reservoir was capable of spreading as far as it did is staggering with the remaining sludge in consideration.



3 An aerial view of the broken dike of a reservoir containing red mud from an alumina factory near Ajka, Hungary on Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2010. (AP Photo/MTI, Gyoergy Varga) #

From the second photo, the third photograph diverts from the immenseness of the flood to a smaller scale by focusing on a certain portion of the sludge-covered land to show that actual towns are located there. Here, the streets of Kolontar, one of the towns that were caught in the midst of the flood, have been claimed by the toxic sludge (Taylor, Photo 4). Since this is just a small view of what Western Hungary currently looks like, a sense of

helplessness is created knowing that there are more towns that have been affected just like this. Although a geographic perspective is useful for revealing the “bigger picture,” it makes the readers wonder just what the smaller picture looks like and how the towns’ residents are dealing with the effects of the flood.



4 As the essay proceeds, the subject of the photographs focuses on how certain people’s lives have been affected through three different points of view. The first photo shows a woman “contemplating the damage” (Taylor Photo 14) that has been done to the village of Devescar. Although only her back profile is shown, that gives the audience an opportunity to step in her shoes. As she notices the flood’s waterline that had almost rose above the doorway, the fallen gate, or just how the red color of the sludge has clung to everything it touched, what is she thinking? Perhaps, she has realized how much work needs to be done to restore the town and just how little she can actually do to help.



14 A woman contemplates the damage in Devcsér, Hungary on October 5, 2010 after the village was flooded by toxic red sludge. (ATTILA KISBENEDEK/AFP/Getty Images) #

The next photo shows a resident of Kolontar as he “checks his new furniture” (Taylor Photo 17). This is ironic and somewhat humorous because the furniture is not “new” in the sense that they were just purchased, but new as in they are different because they are now ruined. All of the cabinets are toppled over with their content scattered on the floor; the stained walls and red-drenched curtains emit an aura of foreboding. Although the man’s face cannot really be seen, just imagining what emotions he may be experiencing after seeing his home wrecked is not impossible. He no longer has a place to come home to, a good shelter for his family, or a clean bed to sleep in at night. Anyone in his position would be burdened with the pain of losing a home and the helplessness of not being able to salvage it.



17 A 34-year old resident checks his new furniture in Kolontar, Hungary on October 6, 2010 after a wave of toxic red mud swept through the small village. (ATTILA KISBENEDEK/AFP/Getty Images) #

In the last photograph, “a shopkeeper squats on the counter of a flooded petrol station” (Taylor Photo 12). From the counter to the ceiling, everything appears to be in normal state. From the counter down, a red stain can be seen lingering on almost everything while the ground is still covered in the sludge. As the shopkeeper clasps his hands and inspects the condition of his store, his expression appears to be downcast due to the store’s present state and his inability to clean it himself in risk of becoming injured. Furthermore, he’s unable to run his business until the sludge has been dealt with. For the time being, all he can do is to figure out a way to financially support himself and his family as he continues looking on at the damage.



12 A shopkeeper squats on the counter of a flooded petrol station in the village of Devecser, Hungary on October 4, 2010. (REUTERS/Stringer) #

While most of the photographs target the extensive consequences of the flood, several photos focusing on animals are distributed throughout the essay to remind the audience that not only the environment and the people were affected. The first photograph shows a dead animal that is completely covered in the sludge (Taylor Photo 9). Although it is almost impossible to discern the animal as either a cat or a rabbit, it doesn't take away from the fact that this animal had to suffer a horrible death. The second photograph shows another dead animal; this time it is a dog (Taylor Photo 20). Although the audience is incapable of comprehending what animals may feel, they can imagine the struggle this dog had to put up at an attempt to save its own life during the flood. Yet in the end, it is obvious that that struggle was futile. This photograph is especially emotionally provoking because imagining one's own pet dying ending in such a tragic way is just as heartbreaking.



Besides his use of several perspectives of the incident, Taylor also uses color photographs that he presents in a unified way that does not require any accompanying narration. Black and white photography can often be seen as the preferred medium for photo essays however, the use of color is much more effective for this particular subject. While a black and white scheme may be used in other photo essays to focus on a certain subject in the photographs, color is used for that very purpose here. Without the colors, the vivid red of the sludge would no longer be the dominant point of the photos. In the second aerial view of the reservoir, it would be difficult to differentiate the unaffected land from the damaged parts which would not fulfill the purpose of this photograph. If there was no color in the photo of the man and his bedroom, the audience would only notice the fallen cabinets instead of the deep red stains that were left behind and the remaining sludge on the floor, thus the photo would not be as emotionally provoking as it is.

Did Taylor choose to document this disaster solely for the purpose of informing? It is true that Taylor compiled this photo essay to present the destruction of the flood and mention those who were affected but not acknowledged. Perhaps one of the things he wanted readers to take away from this essay is the notion of becoming more pro-environmental. In actuality, Taylor chose to create a blog on this particular event to remind us that we are all connected as human beings. With just a brief look over of this photo essay, readers may believe that they cannot relate to the Hungarians because

they are strangers. However, even though this flood happened to occur in Hungary, it does not mean that it could not have happened somewhere else or affect the inhabitants in a similar way. If this flood happened elsewhere, the people there would also suffer just as the Hungarians did whether their pets were killed, their loved ones were injured, or their home was completely destroyed. If it were documented as this one was, it would also convey the helplessness the Hungarians felt and elicit just as much empathy from the audience because people cannot help but to respond to others' suffering. By the end of this photo essay, the audience will leave with the realization that many people may be strangers, but we are all essentially the same as humans in the emotions that we feel.

Work Cited

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Reflective Analysis: Argument with Visuals

Credibility is Key

Although Wikipedia was always off limits when it came to citing it as a credible secondary source, the sources that I did use throughout the essays I wrote in high school might as well had been from Wikipedia. Each time I had a paper that required outside sources, I simply searched for any articles or websites that discussed the topic I was currently writing about, found a quote I could use as supporting evidence, ensure that an author's name was available, and then incorporate it into my essay. I admit that I was unconcerned with the credibility of my secondary sources as long as they provided any information I could use. However, after writing my first college argument essay, I realized that finding and citing secondary sources was never supposed to be that simple.

For my argument essay, I wanted to persuade others that one of the current problems occurring on the U of M campus is that with the abundance of food always available, students believe that they can take as much as they would like without it being a problem. Instead of taking enough food just to satisfy their hunger, students tend to get enough food to fill their trays just because it is convenient. Fortunately, a simple solution would be to implement a trayless dining policy, which would greatly reduce food waste. However, as passionate as I may be about this topic, my essay could not be based on just my experience and opinions alone. For that reason, I had to turn to secondary sources that not only supported my argument, but were credible themselves.

Being required to include secondary sources into my essay definitely affected my writing process. Other times, I would just write a rough draft and have a complete beginning, middle, and end. This time, I could not even write most of my body paragraphs since several of my paragraphs required information from interviews that I was still in the process of attempting to set up. After several obstacles and feelings of frustration and animosity towards this part of the writing process, I decided to interview a couple of my friends and luckily found a friend that worked in one of the dining halls who was willing to help me out. Only after I acquired the information I needed was I able to complete most of my first draft.

Although proposing a solution to the problem I identified on campus was easy, I had to find a source that explained the benefits of trayless dining and provided statistics on how much food waste, and water and energy consumption were reduced because of it. After an in class workshop on determining the credibility of websites, finding a website that did not end in “.com” was difficult enough. Eventually, I came across an online power point that was created by a group of Michigan students who actually conducted a trial test using the trayless dining in Markley. From there, I was able to find one of the sources those students used to also include in my essay.

Despite the time and patience that was required during my search for secondary sources, the sources really helped to make my argument credible. By interviewing a couple people about their attitude towards dining and what were the causes of their food waste, I was able to prove that my argument was not solely supported by just my experience but the experiences of others as well. After talking to someone who actually works in the dish room in one of the dining halls, I learned how much food waste workers actually see at the end of their shift and just how much work it takes to clean all the dishes and silverware. Also, because I presented valid statistics on the benefits of trayless dining and included information from a study that was done on trayless dining in one of our own dining halls, the solution I proposed was proven to be reasonable possibility.

I discovered that the more valid my secondary sources are, the more valid my argument becomes. This may seem like common sense, but since I was never attentive towards the criteria that made a source credible from the first time I used them, I never realized how important secondary sources are. Without the sources that I used within the essay, my argument would have merely been considered as only one's opinion instead of the recognition of an actual problem. In the future, I will try to figure out what type of secondary sources I will need, such as interviews or articles, and provide myself enough time to gather the necessary information so that I can at least produce a complete rough draft. Never again do I want to experience being "done" with a draft and only having half of it actually written.

Argument Essay with Visual Evidence

Waste Not, Want Not

For many students, the start of their freshman year at college also means the beginning of discovering their new found freedom. Students are presented with the opportunities of choosing classes they are actually interested in, going out to party whenever they want and deciding whether or not they would rather sleep in or get up to attend class. However, the possibilities are even more extensive when it comes to eating in the dining halls. Meals that were once dictated by Mom are now only limited by the students' preference and the various food items being offered. Food options range from the basic pizza, burger, and fries, to the more extravagant sushi and dishes from around the world. With the availability of a tray, students' taste buds and hunger are satisfied by the opportunity to sample several entrees during one meal.

Yet, despite how appealing that sounds, students are taking advantage of the dining opportunities without any regard for the consequences their actions have on the environment. Students have developed a lack of concern for the environment through their belief that getting a lot of food is not a detrimental issue because so much food is already provided. Instead of using trays simply to make carrying several things less of a hassle, students are misusing the trays offered in the dining halls by taking advantage of the space it provides and getting more food than they will actually consume. What students do not realize is that this leads to greater food waste, which then results in a greater usage of plates and silverware, more water being required for washing, and ultimately, money being wasted. Although these problems cannot be completely abated, implementing a trayless dining policy will reduce the amount of wasted food, thus reducing water and energy consumption and increasing students' awareness about their choices in the dining hall.

When I enter the dining hall, the first item I grab is a tray. Even

when I see food that I want to eat right away, it has become second nature to grab a tray since they have been available since the start of the school year. Although I am now more aware of the food choices I make, at the beginning of the school year I fully took advantage of the food variety and the spaciousness of a tray. By the time I made my way around the dining and chose a place to sit, I usually had one to two large dishes of several entrees, a plate of salad, and a bowl of fruit regardless of how hungry I was. By the end of the meal, I may have eaten half or $\frac{3}{4}$ of my entrees, most of my salad, some fruit, and threw away all that was leftover. This means that for every meal I ate, which was about ten times per week, I used one tray, four plates, and threw approximately a quarter of my meal away. By the end of the week, I would have thrown away enough food to constitute 2.5 meals and used ten trays and 40 plates that would need to be washed. According to “Trayless Dining,” a presentation on a trayless dining test study ran by a group of University of Michigan students, there were approximately 9,700 students (in 2009) and seven dining halls that served a total 2.5 million meals per year at U of M (4). Based off this information and the numbers I gathered, the 2.5 million meals served per year would result in approximately 6.25 million meals thrown away and the use of 2.5 million trays and 10 million plates. Imagine how much water and energy would have to be used to deal with that.



Before I realized how much food I took, I usually took an amount equivalent to the amount shown in the first photo. The second photo shows how much food I would waste after taking too much.

Source: Photo taken by Kathy Pham

In order to determine the attitude of other students toward the food

and trays in the dining halls, I interviewed several people in Marketplace, the dining hall located in the Mosher-Jordan residence hall. Kevin Konenoko, a freshman at U of M, finished his meal with one-third of his plate covered in rice, one third of his sandwich in another plate, and left over milk in his bowl. When asked why he was not going to finish the rest, he replied, “I’m kind of full and I just don’t feel like eating the rest” (Konenoko). After I proposed the possibility of asking for or getting less than he did, Kevin admitted that “Having a tray is just more convenient for me. I figured that I could finish the rice and that, you know, a sandwich is just a sandwich.” I also interviewed Abby Adair, a U of M freshman and a friend of mine, who declared, “If I had a bigger tray, I’d get even more food.” When I asked her if she would finish all that food, she explained, “Sometimes if I waste any food, it’s because the food isn’t that good... But I do always think I’m hungrier than I am” (Adair). Kevin’s explanation suggests that he believes getting a lot of food is not a big deal which shows that he trivializes the value of food and the problem of food waste that comes from getting too much. While Kevin was focused on the amount of food provided, Abby was more focused on the size of the tray. Her interview implies that the size of the tray does in fact affect the amount of food a student may get.



U of M freshman, Kevin Konenoko's, personal food waste.

Source: Taken by Kathy Pham

After gaining insight on the experiences of students in the dining hall, I decided to hear the other side of the story of someone who actually sees the amount of food being wasted at the end of dining hours. Truc Nguyen, a sophomore who works in the dish room at the Mo-Jo dining hall, has the jobs of taking trays down and pitching dishes into the machine and taking them out. When asked how much food she sees being wasted when she is working, she responded, “I see tons of food being wasted. Sometimes, there are plates of food that looks untouched.” Truc believes the reason behind this is that students usually take more than they can eat while servers also tend to serve more food than will be consumed. She also revealed that the cleaning process for dishes and trays consists of “putting them through once and if they are still dirty, we put them in until they come out clean. For utensils, we put them in twice. First, a pile and then we sort them and run them back through” (Nguyen). On average, enough water is required to wash utensils for two cycles while plates and tray may require even three or four cycles, which is already a large amount of water. As long as students are increasing their use of trays, plates, and silverware, the amount of water necessary for cleaning will continue to increase even more. Also, according to Truc, students have a tendency to overestimate their hunger, thus the convenience of a tray causes students to feel inclined to get enough food to fill the tray which results in them being less aware of what they are actually getting and just how much. On the other hand, students are not entirely at fault since it is revealed that servers also serve too much food.

Although the availability of trays contributes to students getting more food than they will eat, there may be an underlying reason behind their actions. According to University of Michigan’s Housing, a standard meal plan of 150 meals and ten guest meals, not including the \$200 that is set aside for Blue Bucks and Dining Dollars, costs \$1605. If you do the math, one meal costs approximately \$10, which many people would consider a hefty amount

for one meal when a budget is crucial in college. Also, “unused meals expire at the end of the academic year and are not refundable” (U Housing) so even if students want to ration their meals throughout the semester, it would be a pointless attempt since the meals would just expire and go to waste. In order to get their money’s worth, students attempt to get as much food as possible so that they feel like their money is being put to use. I admit that this is one of the main reasons why I take so much food, and I’m sure many others would admit to the same.

Meals Plans for Non-Residents

Close ^

Plan	# of Meals	Dining Dollars	Blue Bucks	Guest Meals	Cost per Term
ALLOWANCES PER TERM					
50 Block	50	-	500	5	\$1075
75 Block	75	-	400	5	\$1210
125 Block	125	300	75	10	\$1805
150 Block	150	100	100	10	\$1805
200 Block	200	75	75	10	\$1935
Unlimited	Unlimited	25	25	10	\$2190
Unlimited+	Unlimited	150	150	15	\$2320

- Block Meals and Dining Dollars roll over from fall to winter term. Unused meals and Dining Dollars expire at the end of the academic year and are not refundable.

The cost of several different meal plans offered by the University of Michigan.

Source: Meal plan from Housing.umich.edu by U Housing

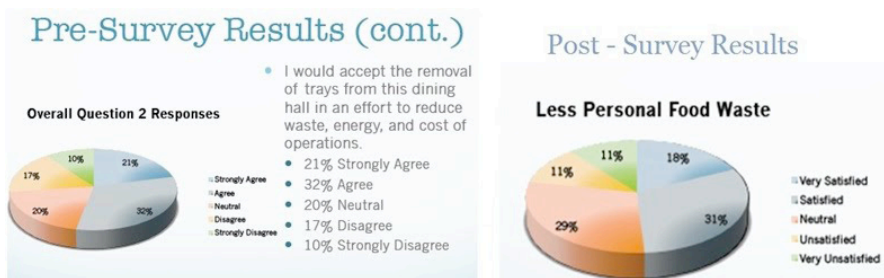
A possible solution to the problem of having a meal plan where it costs \$10 per meal is having the University implement a new policy where any unused meals can be refunded so students will be less inclined to take

enough food in order to make the most of their money. If dining halls began allowing students to take food from the dining halls to later eat, students would also create less waste during their meals. However, creating a new policy to refund unused meals may take time to get approval and may not even be financially possible while giving students the opportunity to take food from the dining hall may lead to abuse of this privilege and cause additional problems.

However, the food waste in dining could be dealt with through another method. By targeting the trays in the dining halls, a more feasible solution would be to enforce trayless dining. According to ARAMARK, a professional services organization, “trayless dining decreases waste, conserves natural resources (namely, energy and water)... Economically, it reduces the cost of these same inputs (energy, water, cleaning agents), as well as the fees associated with waste removal. Socially, trayless dining can provide education and awareness about environmental issues...” (3). After conducting a study with more than 186,000 meals served at 25 institutions, the institutions collectively generated 11,505 fewer pounds of waste on days when trays had been removed. On average, food waste quantity was reduced by 1.2 ounces to 1.8 ounces per person per meal which represents a 25 percent to 30 percent reduction in per-person waste (3). ARAMARK also determined that on average, a tray requires one-third to one-half gallon of water to wash (4). With the complete removal of trays, this water consumption used for trays could be significantly decreased.

Although it may be predicted that many students would object the removal of trays, however, a test study was already conducted right on the University of Michigan’s campus. In 2009, a group of students believed that trayless dining would decrease the amount of food waste and water consumption, so they tried it out at the dining hall in Markley. Before the actual study, a pre-survey was provided in order to gauge the opinions of residents. From the results, a little over half of the students agreed that they would ac-

cept a trayless dining policy (Trayless Dining, 11). At the end of the study, a post-survey was also given in order to determine the satisfaction of students based on the amount of food they wasted. According to the results, almost half of the students were satisfied with how much less food they threw away (Trayless, 14). At the end of the entire test study, the students determined that a total 50.355 lbs of food waste was reduced which was calculated to be approximately 0.105 lbs of food waste reduced per person. Dish washing at the end of each meal shift was also determined to be 30-45 minutes less than usual (Trayless 18). After additional calculations, they predicted that a total of 262,500 lbs of food waste per year could be reduced (Trayless 19), which will ultimately save a lot of money.



From the pre-survey results, more than 50% of the students agreed to accept the removal of trays from dining halls. From the post-survey results, approximately 50% of students were satisfied with the reduced amount of personal food waste.

Source: Trayless dining survey results from Graham.umich.edu by Trayless Dining

If students continue to waste food as they do now, the University of Michigan will continue to spend money on buying more food to replace it and even more on the energy required to wash the dishes and trays and remove the waste. Fortunately, a costless solution of creating a trayless dining policy and having servers serve a smaller portion of food can be the start to becoming more “green”. Until then, students should take the time to become more aware of their choices in the dining hall. Whether it is adopting the trayless method or making the effort to sample food before getting more, students can make their own difference and decrease the overall amount of food being wasted and energy being used on their terms.

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