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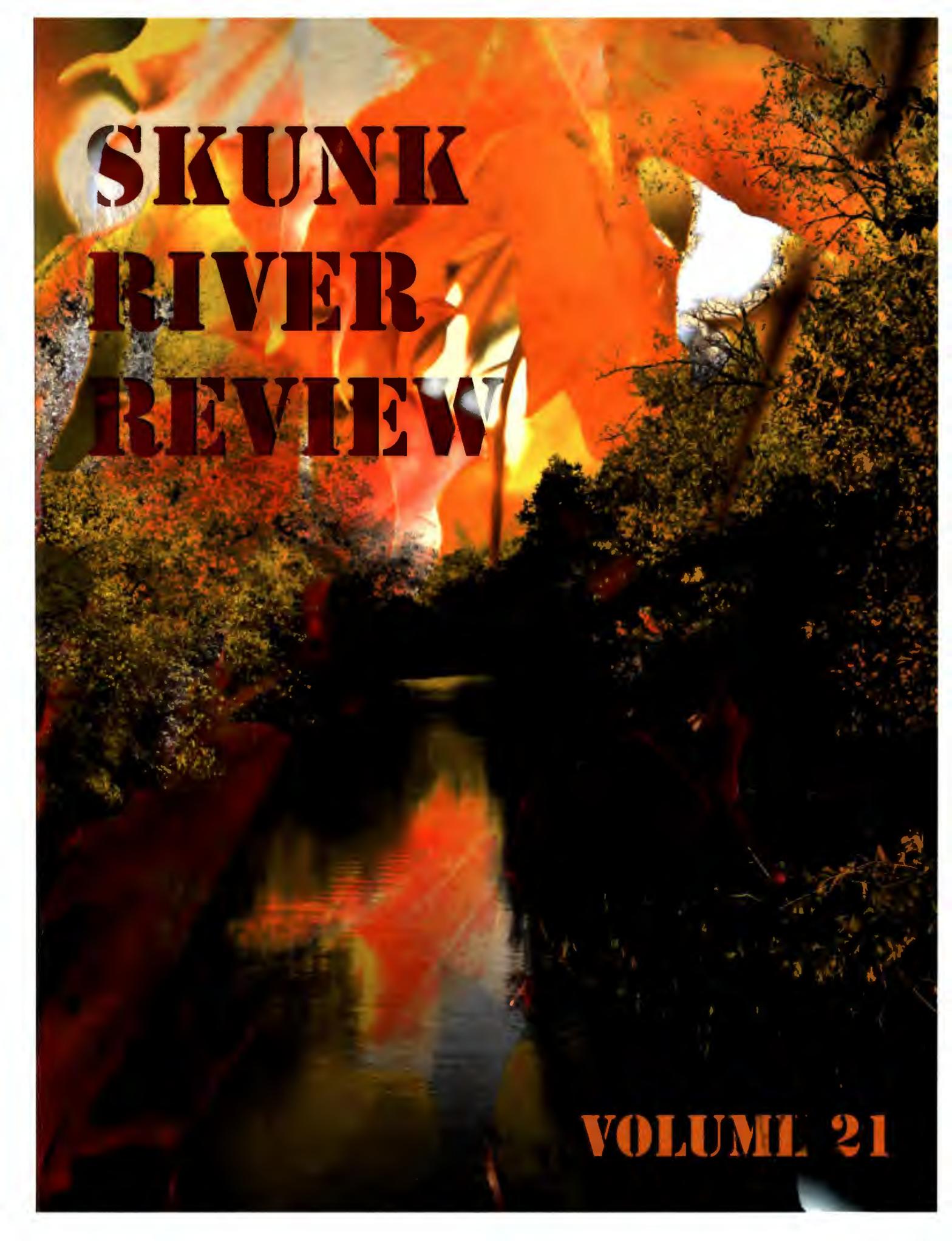
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**SKUNK
RIVER
REVIEW**

VOLUME 21

THE SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

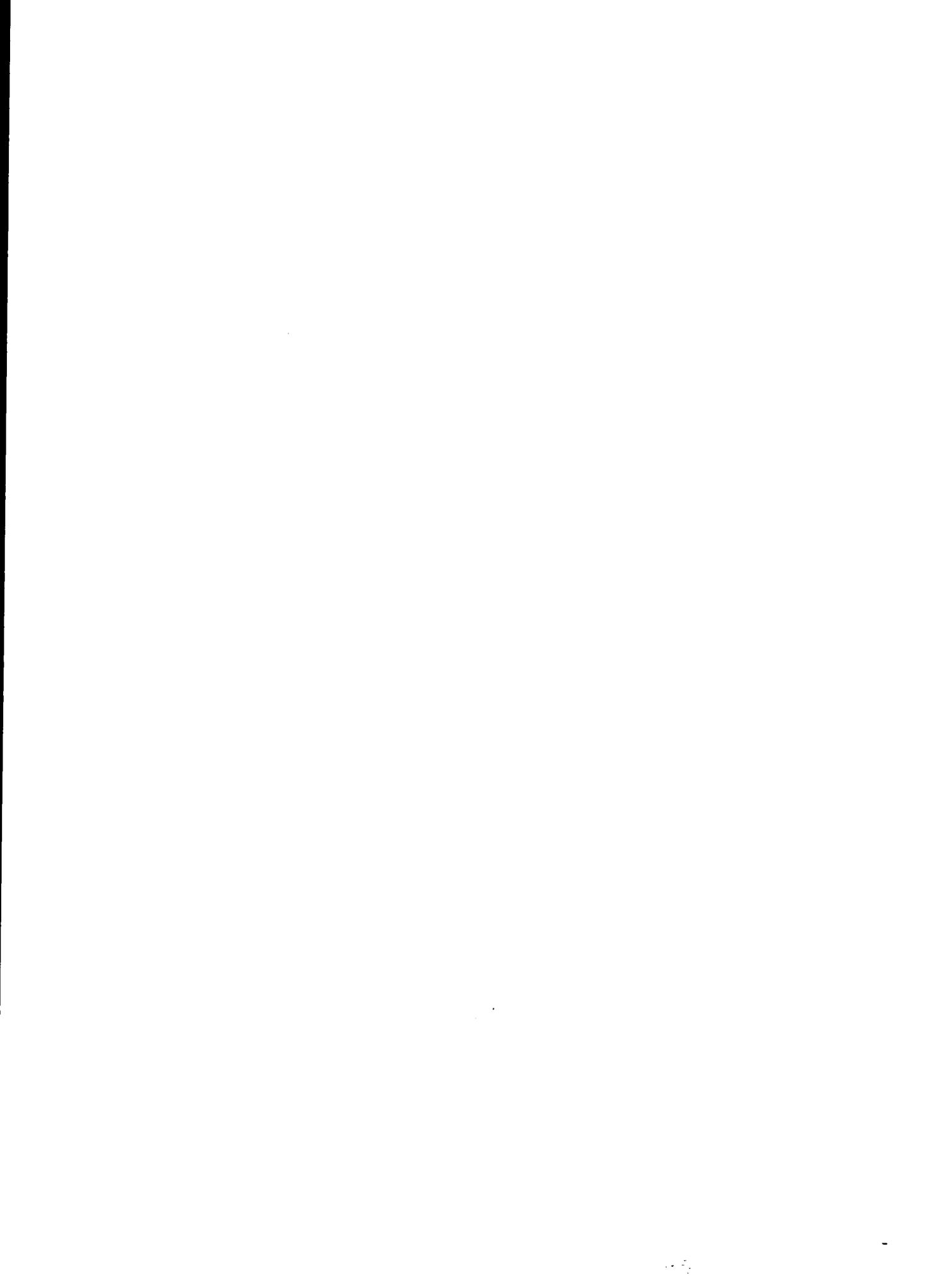
Volume 21

A collection of student writing
spanning 2008-2009

Thank you for purchasing the Skunk River Review. We hope you enjoy these selections, and we hope they may inspire your own thoughts and writing.

We encourage all DMACC writing students to submit to next year's competition, and we look forward to the creativity and diversity of style that makes this publication a proud celebration of student expression.

The cover photograph was taken by Jenna Maarzen, a photography student from the Ankeny campus. This photo was taken during the fall of 2008 along the Skunk River in Iowa.



Welcome to the 2008-2009 edition of *The Skunk River Review*!

Each year we continue to receive many fine examples of student writing. Selection is a challenging process but enjoyable as the submissions range from a variety of topics and styles. Selected entries were only minimally edited for clarity.

The Skunk River Review focuses on students from various DMACC campuses. It includes selections from College Preparatory Writing classes, Composition I and Composition II classes. All entries generally begin as class assignments and are supported by the instructor.

We would like to recognize and appreciate the following people who contributed to this student publication:

- All of the DMACC students from College Preparatory Writing I and II, Composition I and Composition II for their outstanding essay and research submissions
- All of the writing instructors at all DMACC campuses for their support and use of *The Skunk River Review* in their classes throughout the year
- Glena Johnson and Shirley Sandoval for their expert support and administrative assistance
- DMACC's photography department with the leadership Curt Stahr for providing excellent student photographs and creativity
- The scholarship committee of Lisa Ossian, Ben Parker, and Mary Torgoman for their time, judging expertise, and contribution to the selection of this year's scholarship finalists
- Jim Stick, Dean of Sciences and Humanities, for his leadership and contributions to help make this year's publication and overall success
- Department Chair, Alan Hutchison, for his support and direction

We would also like to thank the following instructors who contributed time and effort in submitting their students' essays:

Mary Torgoman Marion Tonhouse Gregory Wolfe Judy Hauser
Sarah Setnes-Dale Randy Jedele Eden Pearson Krystal Hering

Sincerely,

Roselyn Harbart

Shelaine Harbart

Editors

The Skunk River Review reserves the right to edit for minor corrections and clarity. Works cited have not been edited.

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Economic Terrorism

In these critical times of financial crisis, the media has bombarded the American people with dozens of explanations. As fingers are pointed in all directions, politicians and economic experts all seem to disagree about how this crisis has arisen. To understand what has happened to the economy, and who is responsible, a basic understanding of our economy's infrastructure will be needed.

A capitalist economy's success is dependent upon a balance of supply and demand. If this balance is maintained, an economy will be successful even during low periods in growth. The supply of an economy can be measured by the productivity of that economy, while the demand of an economy can be measured by the sum of wages and debt produced within the economy (Batra 142). In an ideal economic situation, wages will rise at the same rate as productivity. If wages do not rise as productivity rises, then it becomes obvious that the economy's supply will soon outweigh its demand and upset the supply/demand ratio's balance.

Such an imbalance was seen in the United States due to industrial and corporate business leaders' unwillingness to share increased profits with their employees whose hard work increased productivity and profit. This refusal to share increased profits would have been the undoing of the economy if it had not been rescued by the great American credit system. This credit system allows banks and other lenders to loan money to consumers and investors, which temporarily helps maintain a balance between supply and demand.

While it may have seemed that a credit system is a solution to the problem, it has, in fact, only created a larger problem. Even though debt can be used to boost an economy's demand, it has some very negative consequences. First, if the gap between wages and productivity becomes too large, then the risk of the available credit being depleted becomes a serious threat. Second, wages will soon be consumed by debt, which then makes it nearly impossible for consumers to afford new loans. Under these conditions, an economy's demand will dive well below its previously low position. The reason for this dive is simple. The wages that were once available to the market are now tied into the payment of existing debt. Finally, the most terrifying consequence of debt is this: Whenever the sum of debt, business investments, and stock market share prices rise more quickly than productivity, a "bubble economy" is created (Batra 150-151).

During a "bubble economy," investors and consumers tend to act irrationally. Mistaking the "bubble economy" for a strong and health economy, these consumers and investors spend, invest, and borrow in astronomical proportions. This excess market activity, of course, inflates the bubble more, and as the bubble continues to grow, the risk of the bubble popping increases. A popped bubble can be translated as a crashed market (Batra 105-151). The popping of a bubble, however, can be avoided if the Federal Reserve responds to the bubble soon enough. The Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve can attempt to deflate a market bubble by the tightening of credit rates. Recently, the stock market saw a market bubble, first with the Dow Jones, and second with NASDAQ. Both of these bubbles were significant in both size and the rate of growth. Normally, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve would be expected to respond quickly to a market bubble of such proportions. Under Alan Greenspan's guidance however, they chose not to respond to the bubble at all.

After the stock market bubble's appearance, the economy also saw a housing market bubble. During the housing market bubble, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were both contracted by Congress to find a way to make housing affordable for low and moderate income families. They attempted to accomplish this task by buying up residential mortgage loans and investing them in securities, which can be traded (Canterbury 132). In other words, they gambled with the home mortgages of low and moderate income families.

They were, at first, successful in their game, and they did, in fact, lower mortgage interest rates. This success allowed them to get affordable housing for some low and moderate income households. Unfortunately, they also demanded that banks give housing loans to families that would not be able to afford the payments. Since Fannie and Freddie were government sponsored enterprises (GSEs), the banks agreed, and where, might the people ask, is this government backing going to come from now that Fannie and Freddie have failed? Their money will, no doubt, come from the taxpayers' pockets of course.

Just why exactly did Fannie and Freddie fail? Well, aside from the obvious reason that it is unwise to lend money to people who cannot afford to pay their debts, there is also the use of derivatives in interest rate exchanges (Canterbury 133). This practice is common among commercial banks, so it should be safe, right? The American people may not feel so secure in this judgment if they were aware of just how many times commercial banks have needed Federal Reserve, IMF, and government bailouts. Still the most obvious reason for failure is this: no matter how good of gamblers Fannie and Freddie may have been, the truth remains that if gamblers continue to gamble, eventually they will lose. It is good for Fannie and Freddie that they were gambling with other people's money, but bad for the American tax payers and the American homeowners. Knowing about the recent history and basic infrastructure of the

economy, it will be easier to see exactly how the globalist, “one world government” propagators known as the Bilderberg Group,¹ with the help of the Trilateral Commission,² the Council on Foreign Relations,³ and the Federal Reserve have intentionally destroyed the American economy.

The first reason that the “Elite Three” (the Bilderberg Group, Trilateral Commission, and Council on Foreign Relations), with the help of the Federal Reserve, destroyed the economy is for profit. Even before the appearance of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, Alan Greenspan (a man with Trilateral Commission connections and former Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve) had begun to do a little gambling of his own. Greenspan, however, was gambling with the stability of the entire economy. He is what Las Vegas would refer to as a “high roller.” Greenspan is responsible for having made decisions with immensely adverse effects on the U.S. and global economies respectively.

According to E. Ray Canterbery, former President of the Eastern Economics Association and the International Trade and Finance Association, Greenspan played the key role in the deregulation of securities trading, the stock market, and commercial banking policies. Greenspan allowed commercial banks to use “hedge funds” and “junk bonds,” which left the American taxpayers in a position to “foot the bill” if one of these bans should collapse (108-110). Given his connection with the banking and industrial. Trilateral Commission elite, it comes as no surprise that Greenspan chose to ignore a market bubble that was generating large

¹ The Bilderberg Group was formed between 1952 and 1954 by Joseph Retinger, a man “who had links to the Jesuit Order [a Catholic secret society that has involved itself with the formation of many secret societies]” (Gardiner 188-189). According to Aldrich, “It [the Bilderberg Group] brought leading European and American personalities together once a year for informal discussions of their differences” (qtd. In Gardiner 188).

² “The Trilateralists or Trilateral Commission is a group of political, economic and industrial leaders, whose aim is . . . One World Government (“Trilateral Commission” 243).

³ The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) is a group of political, economic, and foreign relations experts, with the power of Executive Order. The CFR is not elected by a caucus, yet its members are responsible for making most of American’s foreign policy decisions.

profits for his already wealthy friends (Canterbury 100). Exactly who did profit from Alan Greenspan's lax regulation policies?

The answer to that question is commercial banks and wealthy Wall-Street players. This list of wealthy profiteers includes: David Rockefeller (Chase Manhattan Bank), Timothy F. Geithner (president, Federal Reserve Bank of New York), Karen Elliot House (former senior vice president, Dow Jones & Company), and Jamie Dimon (chairman and chief executive officer, JP Morgan Chase & Co.). [For a larger list of examples, see Appendix A]. Is it a coincidence that every person on this list, excluding one, is a current member of the Trilateral Commission? Interestingly enough, that exclusion happens to be a past Trilateral Commission member (The August Review 1-9).

The second reason that the "Elite Three" have destroyed the American economy is to promote their "one world government" globalist idealism. The best way to gain acceptance for any new idealism is to offer it as a solution to an existing problem. If a problem does not exist, then one can be created. True, some may find this approach a little farfetched, but it would not be the first time in history that something of this nature has occurred. In examination of the events prior to and during the Holocaust, it was evident that the Nazis would have never gained the influence they had if it had not been for careful planning and the occurrence of the great Depression. During times of great economic duress, the people of any nation can be easily led (or misled) by an idealism that offers a solution to the crisis and a scapegoat to be blamed. During the Great Depression, these tactics gave rise to huge socialist, fascist, and totalitarian political movements all across the globe.

A modern example of these tactics being used can be witnessed right here in America on almost any news program or political talk show. According to a poll take by Gallup, only

“twenty-two percent” of Americans consider their political views to be liberal. These are pretty astonishing results when considering that for the first time in American history the polls show that the American people are planning to vote a liberal majority into the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the White House. In fact, Senator Obama is given anywhere between a three point nine to twelve percent lead in the presidential race, depending on which poll results are used. It is important to note that Obama is the number one liberal member of the Senate (McLaughlin 4). Obama’s support is just one example of how easily people can be manipulated to follow an idealism that offers a new solution to an existing problem and a scapegoat to be blamed for the problem. In this case, the scapegoat for the financial crisis is the Republican Party. It is kind of ironic when considering that while Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac are often blamed for the financial crisis, people tend to forget that Fannie and Freddie’s agenda was a liberal one.

The third reason the economic crisis had to be intentionally orchestrated is that the “Elite Three” are filled with members who have very impressive economic backgrounds, and it would be impossible for all of their experts to be oblivious to what they were doing to the economy. In other words, they knew that they were destroying the economy and continued to do it anyway. Some people may disagree with this assessment, but taking a look at the credentials of just a few members, the picture begins to come into focus. Of course, going through both the CFR and Trilateral Commission membership lists would produce over a dozen more names of economic experts who held key positions in the executive and legislative branches of the American government than are listed in this essay.

A few examples of these economic experts are: Martain S. Feldstein; George F. Baker, professor of economics at Harvard University, President Emeritus of the National bureau of

Economic Research, and former chairman U. S. President's Council of Economic Advisors; Roger W. Ferguson Jr., former vice chairman, Federal Reserve, Board of Governors; and Staley Fisher, Governor of the Bank of Israel, former First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (Sklar 574-576; [August Review](#) 1-9)> (A larger list of economic experts, although not a full one, can be found in Appendix B). With these kinds of experts, how is it that they could possibly not have known exactly what they were doing?

The final reason the "Elite Three" have destroyed the economy is to use economic terrorism to aide them in their psychological warfare with everyday citizens. The Bilderberg Group, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Trilateral Commission consist of some of the most influential people in the world, and their main agenda is to form a global governing body. Even though their influence and members exist and operate on a global scale, for the purposes of this essay, the focus will be primarily on American members and influences.

Due to the difficulty of acquiring reliable sources on the Bilderberg Group, this essay will offer only a few brief relevant scraps of information on them. The first of these is that according to Richard J. Aldrich, a lecturer in politics at Nottingham University, "the formation of the American wing of Bilderberg was entrusted to (Gen.) Eisenhower's psychological warfare coordinator, C. D. Jackson, and funding for the first meeting, held at the Hotel de Bilderberg in Holland in 1954, was provided by the Central Intelligence Agency" (qtd. in Gardiner 188). (The second of these scraps is that the formation of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the Trilateral Commission are direct results of decisions made in Bilderberg Group meetings (Gardiner 189).

It is a popular theme among conspiracy buffs that the Trilateral Commission, the CFR, and the Bilderberg Group are plotting a massive takeover of the world. Of course, these theories

are highly susceptible to skepticism. Arguing that they are merely groups of world leaders who meet on an informal basis to discuss global concerns; all three groups maintain their innocence. There still may be some cause for concern, however. If the quotation by Aldrich is examined critically, it appears as though the Bilderbergs are at war with someone. Why a psychological warfare coordinator would be needed to select the American Bilderberg team if the group were not somehow involved in psychological warfare, and why the CIA is somehow involved remains a mystery. So who is the Bilderberg Group at war with? Perhaps those questions can be answered by taking a closer look at the Bilderberg's offspring.

In 1973, David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinski founded the Trilateral Commission (Sutton and Wood¹). According to the *International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders*, the Trilateral Commission is a group of industrial, political, and economic leaders with the goal of achieving a "one world government" led by Japan, Europe, and North America ("Trilateral Commission" 243). In *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite planning for World Management*, Holly Sklar lists several former and current Trilateral Commission members. Some of these members include former presidents of the United States of America, past and present Congressmen, former Secretaries of the Treasury, former members of the Federal Reserve, and former members of the DEA or Council of Economic Advisers (574-576). It is interesting to note that the CEA was established to give economic advice to the President of the United States of America (Wells 86).

According to William Greider's book *Secrets of the Temple: How the Federal Reserve Runs the Country*:

When Paul Volker was confirmed by the Senate Banking Committee in August 1979, a citizen's group from Virginia [the Virginia Taxpayers

Association] had testified against him, noting his connections with the “top secret” Bilderberg Conference, David Rockefeller’s Chase Manhattan Bank, the Council of Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission—all of them staples in the popular theories of “one world” conspiracy. (52)

In January, 1977, former President James Carter and Trilateral Commission co-founder Brzezinski both sent letters apologizing to Japanese and European commission members for being unable to attend the Tokyo meeting. Both of these letters used the phrase “a more just and equitable world order” (Sutton and Wood 3-4). In an interview held in September 1974, Brzezinski defines his concept of a “New World Order” (Sutton and Wood 4-5). In his book Brzezinski considers the American ideal of “independence” to be outdated and calls for constitutional reform. He does, however, admit that this reform is unlikely to happen all at once, and it may be necessary to implement these changes in increments. Of course, another economic depression might speed this implementation along, especially when Brzezinski wanted to accomplish this reform before the 1990’s and seems to be running a little behind schedule (Sutton and Wood 6).

When viewing the evidence, it becomes clear that if the Bilderbergs are at war, they are at war with the people. They have waged war on the citizens of countries with DVR, Trilateral Commission, and Bilderberg Group connections and quite possibly on the citizens of the world. When realizing the scope of political, economic, industrial, and media control (see Appendix C) that these globalist organizations have, it also becomes clear that they are in a perfect position to wage an economic and psychological war on anyone who stands in their way.

The Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, and the Council on Foreign Relations have intentionally destroyed the American economy, and they should be held responsible. These

globalist, “one world government” propagandist organizations consist of media, political, industrial, and economic leaders from across the globe, and they express (almost secretly) a temporary need for socialism and communist transformation to achieve their agenda. As they control news coverage and shape legal and economic policies, should it come as a surprise that they have found a way to destroy the economy and cultural love for American independence? More importantly, how do the American people stand up and take back their independence before it is too late? Perhaps it may be too late already. In an era with such media achieved, cultural manipulation, two questions come to mind. Are there enough patriots left in American who truly understand the independence that the American forefathers fought and died for? What percent of Americans still consider “American Independence” as a blessing and not the black plague of globalism?



Appendix A

(Profiteers of Deregulation)

Alan R. Batkin, vice chairman, Eton Park Capital Management; **Jamie Dimon**, chairman and chief executive officer, JP Morgan & Chase Col; **Michael B. G. Froman**, Former managing director, Head of Infrastructure and Sustainable Development, Citi Alternative Investments, Citi Group Inc.; **Roger W. Ferguson Jr.**, head of Financial Services Products, chairman, Swiss Re American Holding Corporation, former vice chairman, Board of Governors, U.S. Federal Reserve System; **Timothy F. Geithner**, president, Federal Reserve Bank of New York; **Karen Elliot House**, former senior vice president, Dow Jones & Company; **Michael Klein**, chairman and co-chief executive officer, Citi Markets & Banking, vice chairman, Citibank International plc.; **Sir Deryck C. Maughan**, former vice chairman, Citigroup; **Roger S. McNamara**, former president, World Bank; **David Rockefeller**, Chase Manhattan Bank, **Kenneth Rogoff**, former chief economist, International Monetary Fund; **Arthur F. Ryan**, chairman and chief executive officer, Prudential Financial Inc.; and **Robert B. Zoellick**, president, World Bank (the [August Review](#) 1-9).

Appendix B

(Economic Experts in the Trilateral Commission)

Paul McCracken, former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA); **David Packard**, CEA; **George Shultz**, former Secretary of the Treasury; **William Simon**, former Secretary of the Treasury; **W. Michael Blumenthal**, former Secretary of the Treasury; **Arthur Burns**, Board of Governors, Federal Reserve; **Paul A. Volcker**, former chairman, Board of Governors, Federal Reserve; **C. Fred Bergsten**, director of the Peterson Institute for

International Economics and former U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs; **Lael Brainard**, vice president and founding director, Global Economy and Development Center at the Brookings Institution; **Richard N. Cooper**, Maurits C. Boas Professor of economics at Harvard University, former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs; **Martain S. Feldstein**, George F. Baker Professor of economics at Harvard University, President Emeritus of the national Bureau of Economic Research, former chairman U.S. President's Council of Economic Advisors; **Roger W. Ferguson Jr.**, Governor of the Bank of Israel, former First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (Sklar 574-576; the August Review 1-9).

Appendix C

(Trilateral Commission Media Outlets)

David G. Bradley, chairman, Atlantic Media Company; **Lee Cullum**, former regular commentator, *New Hour with Jim Lehrer*, and columnist, Dallas, Texas; **Donald E. Graham**, chairman and chief executive officer, *Washington Post* Company; **Richard Plepler**, co-president, HBO; **Charles Rose**, host, the *Charlie Rose Show* and *Charlie Rose Special Edition*, PBS; **Fareed Zakaria**, editor *Newsweek International*; **Mortimer B. Zuckerman**, chairman and editor-in-chief, *U.S. News & World Report*, and publisher, *New York Daily News*; and **Karen Elliot House**, publisher, *Wall Street Journal* (Usgust Review 1-9).

(Other Media Outlets linked to Trilateralism)

Foreign Affairs

William M. Roth

C. Fred Bergsten

New York Times

Cyrus B. Vance

Los Angeles Times

Harold Brown

CBS

Arthur B. Taylor

Henry B. Schacht

Chicago Sun-Times

Emmett Dedmon

Time Inc.

Hedley Donovan

Foreign Policy Magazine

Samuel P. Huntington, Thomas L. Hughes, Richard N. Cooper, Elliot L. Richardson, Marina Von Neumann Whitman, Richard Holbrooke, and Zbigniew Brzinski (Sutton and Wood 14).

(Council on Foreign Relations on Media Outlets)

Tom Brokaw, *NBC News*; **Fareed Zakaria**, (see list above); **Leslie H. Gelb**, former correspondent, *New York Times*, **James F. Hodge Jr.**, editor, *Foreign Affairs*, former editor, *Chicago Sun-Times*, former publisher, *New York Daily News*; **Edward Alden**, former Washington bureau chief, *Financial Times*; **Caroline Atkinson**, finance reporter, *Washington Post*, director of a roundtable series on global economics; **Peter Beinart**, author, *The Good Fight: Why Liberals-And only Liberals-Cn Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again*, editor-at-large and former editor, *New Republic*, columnist, *Washington Post*, contributor, *Time Magazine*; **Max Boot**, former editorial editor, *Wall street Journal*, **Sebastian Mallaby**, columnist and former editorial board member, *Washington Post* (www.cfr.org).

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Iowa's Smoking Ban

“If people have become this accustomed to being told what to do, then I think we have lost something else that cannot quite be quantified”(Hitchens Par. 12). On April 8, 2008, Iowans took their first step to becoming accustomed to being told what to do by passing a statewide smoking ban. This statewide smoking ban went into effect on July 1, 2008. This ban forced all public areas, state owned property and all restaurants and bars to become smoke-free. This law means that even privately owned restaurants and bars are required to deny any smoking in their establishment. Laws like this one have become popular throughout the United States, but does popularity make it right? The smoking ban is thought to be only a health issue, but the ban involves private property rights, local economics, and monetary exemption. For these reasons, only one conclusion can be made; the smoking ban is wrong.

The United States has been a country that has always been proud of the freedoms and rights that its citizens are given. A problem arises when the government decides to infringe on rights and freedoms that have been permitted in the past. Property rights can easily be defined in three areas: “1) exclusive rights to use, 2) rights to receive all benefits and duty to pay all costs, and 3) rights to transfer these property rights” (Williams 310). The “exclusive rights to use” is the most important part of this definition. The owners of these establishments should be able to weigh the costs and benefits of using their own building or property the way they please. If a bar wishes to allow smoking on its property, then it is the choice for the owner to make. Walter

Williams agrees when he says, “Private property rights are well defined and should resolve the smoking controversy. The owner makes the decision whether smoking is to be permitted on the premises and accepts the economic consequences” (311).

Not only is this law harmful to the owners themselves, but it also infringes on the right of choice to the consumer. The United States is supposed to be a free market economy or a capitalistic economy. The market is based in competition and choices. A capitalistic market should allow for its consumers to make choices in order to regulate it. If customers do not like an establishment, then the consumers do not go to the business and the business cannot stay afloat. Louisiana recently passed a similar law, and club owner Earl Bernhardt speaks about the consumers’ right of choice: “If there is a demand for a non-smoking bar someone’s going to open one up down the street from the smoking bar” (qtd. in Webster 12). In Ames, prior to the statewide law, there were actually smoke-free bars like Es Tas. The market in Ames demanded a smoke-free bar for the consumers who preferred non-smoking and then a couple popped up and were successful. Many supporters of the statewide ban claim it protects the health of the non-smokers who enter and enjoy smoke-filled bars. This argument fails because it is still the non-smoker’s choice to enter that bar. Walter E. Williams writes:

Therefore a person who might suffer injuries from being in the presence of smokers knowingly assumes the risk of harm. There appears to be no actionable remedy for a plaintiff bringing a nuisance or injury case against a home owner, restaurateur, café owner, or manufactory owner defendant claiming injury by the secondary effects of cigarette smoke in the defendant’s establishment. It would appear that the defendant would have several common law doctrines for defense (311-312).

Williams explains here that not only is it the choice of the consumer to use the property as access to a service or good, but also that there is no common law precedent to support the secondary effects of smoking in a private establishment. The smoking ban crosses the line with private property rights and the rights of a capitalistic consumer.

Another reason why the smoking ban is wrong is the negative economic consequences with our local economy. The ban has the potential to significantly hurt a large portion of Iowa's businesses. According to the Center for Disease Control, there are just over 500,000 Iowans who were smokers in 2005 (CDC). The claim should not be made that these Iowans will no longer go to bars or restaurants because assumption that would be ridiculous and false; however, the claim that many of these people will decrease the number of visits to bars and restaurants should almost be a given.

States have come out with smoke-free laws, which allows for statistics to be found in other states that have had similar laws and allows for conclusions to be rendered. There was a county smoking ban in New York prior to the statewide smoking ban and it significantly decreased the county's business. According to *Westchester Country Business Journal*, "the law would reduce receipts by \$2000 per week for the bar section alone, which now makes between \$10000 and \$12000 per week" (Philippidis 2). This amount is a huge reduction in business that many businesses cannot afford to make. The state of the economy has been extremely uncertain and the government should not be reducing business revenue.

J. Gary Pretlow, a Westchester lawmaker, discusses the likelihood of economic benefits from a smoking ban, "These days we as a state are trying not to stifle business but to promote it. I can't see restaurants getting any new customers from this. I'm a non-smoker, but I believe that smokers do have some rights" (Philippidis 2). This type of economic despair is not an isolated

incident. In 1986, Beverly Hills had a smoke-free ban and it had negative effects too. By August, Beverly Hills restaurants had lost 30 percent of their customers to restaurants in nearby towns, which allowed smoking (Williams 312). These numbers are staggering and show a substantial loss from a business that is based on smoking crowds. It can really be simplified. Think of how many small-town bars' patrons are smokers? Or how many smokers there are in bowling alleys? These establishments have a customer base that is smokers. These economic pitfalls from the smoking ban could be even worse in small-town Iowa.

The biggest reason that the smoking ban is a bad idea is the legislators' obvious disregard for bar and restaurant owners while providing exemptions for the casinos. The Iowa Congress had the resources and time to see all the negative effects the law had in other areas, yet they still decided to go along with the smoking ban. They were willing to risk the economic dangers in order for healthier environment.

The question then needs to be asked, why the casinos in Iowa are still allowed an exemption and still allow smoking. The *Des Moines Business Record* answers that question: "But under pressure from gambling interests, and unable to stop thinking about all of that money that flows to the state, the lawmakers gave the casinos a break" ("For Sale" 24). It is a money issue. The state legislators are paying attention to the business concerns for the casinos because they are the state's tax "cashcow." This exemption is the exact definition of hypocrisy. If the smoking ban is a health issue, then is the argument that cigarettes don't emit secondhand smoke in casinos? The exemption shows that the legislators know that there is a negative economic impact from the smoking ban, but that they only worry about the businesses that are big and powerful. The law affects almost every property in the state, except for one type of property, and those properties just happen to be some of the largest economic boosters to the state's economy.

Robert N. Proctor is an author of *The Anti-Tobacco Campaign of Nazis*, and he talks about Nazi Germany and their similar laws banning smoking:

One topic that has only recently begun to attract attention is the Nazi anti-tobacco movement. Germany had the world's strongest anti-smoking movement in the 1930s and early 1940s . . . activists pointed out that whereas Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt were all fond of tobacco, the three major fascist leaders of Europe – Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco – were all non-smokers. (114)

Nazis were a Fascist regime that was fond of controlling as much as possible with little individual freedoms. Hitchen's quotation at the beginning of this essay tells people not to get accustomed to being told what to do. The United States is a country based on the ideals of freedoms and rights. The smoking ban is a controlling action of the government. This idea is proven because it violates private property and consumer rights; it hurts hundreds of businesses and is only worried about those who line the wallets.



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My Second Love

I love to spend my time building computers. I am not a technophile, an expert, or a computer brain, but an ordinary, middle-aged grandfather who believes that the two computers I have are my best work yet. Although I love my machines, I am frustrated daily by what I do not know about them. I used to believe that computers were for others who spoke a mysterious language that I would never understand. Now I know that is not true. The main lesson I have learned over the last few years is the challenge of computers. I am now going to college to learn more about them. The more I know about computers, the more I want to know. This year, I am planning to examine, revise, improve, and experiment a lot more to add to my knowledge. I am never too old to learn, and more importantly, to live out my love for something.



Black Holes

Nature is a mysterious entity that will never cease to amaze humanity. We can constantly find something to marvel at no matter if it is on our planet or way out in the cosmos. There are, however, things deep within the universe that we will never be able to see or hear. These things are basically nature's inadequate dumpsters. Their space garbage men have no bounds as they carelessly take anything that is within their reach and quickly stuff it into their massive bottomless hole where it can be compacted, crushed, and mixed with all the other pieces of space junk that has been collected over the millennia. Figurativeness aside, these ominous beings are called black holes, and they are one of the most mysterious objects in the known universe.

Our universe is an immense, endless, expanse of space, filled with galaxies, stars, planets, and comets. It even has life in at least one place that is sentient enough to appreciate it. The human mind has trouble comprehending and understanding the universe in general, but this gets even worse when black holes are thrown in with the mix. The idea of a gigantic invisible space dump compels the human mind to understand exactly what it is, the evidence that supports this complicated theory, and the outcome of an object that falls in.

The life of a black hole begins when the life of a star finally ends. This star has to be somewhat special in order for a black hole to arise because it must be at least 15-20 times larger than our own sun. Once there is no more fuel for this humongous star to consume, it will end its life with quite a bang. This is known as going supernova, which is an extremely bright

explosion. At this point, it could leave behind an extremely heavy and large core. Without the star's outward forces, it will fall in on itself due to the unrelenting power of gravitational forces. The point where it falls into itself becomes the middle of the black hole, which is also known as the singularity. Furthermore, this point, also has the mind-blowing properties of having zero volume and infinite density which allows it to capture, and never let go of light which is why it is called a black hole. (NASA)

Knowing that not even light can escape a black hole can lead a person to believe that black holes are on a bloody warpath sucking up anything that they can find in the universe. Thankfully, they do not work exactly like that. The best way to imagine this would be, to picture an orange traffic cone that is held upside down. The very tip of it which is touching the ground now is the equivalent of a singularity in a black hole. At the bottom of the cone, which is now facing skyward, there is a rim that surrounds the hole that leads to very tip of the cone. This opening that is inside the rim is the counter part to a black hole's event horizon. The event horizon is a more scientific term for the opening of a black hole. If a mouse is placed on the rim, it is perfectly fine and happy. But if the creature is extremely dumb or it has suicidal tendencies, and it crosses the beginning of the hole it will fall through and get stuck inside. So long, Mickey. The same works for the event horizon in a black hole, so try and stay away from it if you value your existence. (McIrvin)

The ability for a black hole to capture light also creates a nasty problem for scientists who just want to prove its existence. Since it captures light and our eyes need light to see the world around us, it quickly becomes relevant that scientists need to find other ways of proving that these things actually exist.

Evidence of black holes can be found when measuring the mass in a region of space. If scientists find a dark object with a large mass and little volume, then they can assume that it is indeed a black hole. This technique has been used to prove the existence of several massive black holes within the center of distant galaxies. It might even be possible that our own galaxy contains one of these so called behemoths within its center (Bunn).

Astronomers scan the heavens in search of x-ray emissions. This could indicate possible black holes because it is theorized that a black hole ionizes the atoms of the matter as it begins to eat it up. This creates the emission of x-rays, and some that avoid the event horizon will drift off into space. Astronomers on earth are then able to pick up the signals of these emissions and pinpoint where these black holes were millennia ago. It is important to note here that black holes are still a theory because scientists have not been able to acquire any direct evidence that they exist. They do, however, have a collection of indirect evidence that points to their existence such as the above mentioned examples (NASA).

Remember how Mickey crossed the event horizon and fell into the cone? What would happen to the little guy if he really did fall into a black hole? What happens to objects once they fall into a black hole is one of the most commonly asked questions about black holes, but it has some of the most confusing answers. Possible theories include traveling to other dimensions, seeing the universe end, wormholes, or any number of the more eccentric ideas proposed over the years. Physicists do, however, have a basic understanding of what happens to objects as it crosses the event horizon. An object would be compressed and stretched until it resembled a piece of tasty spaghetti.

Our current knowledge of physics can only go so far, and we have no unified idea as to what happens when an object finally reaches the singularity. So, the eccentric theories are still

possible, albeit highly unlikely. The most likely outcome for any object reaching the center of a black hole is it getting horribly crushed and compacted beyond recognition. (McIrvin-Bunn)

The chances of an actual living being actually experiencing a black hole are extremely unlikely. Some black holes rotate because their mother stars rotated. In normal-sized black holes, these rotations cause immense tidal forces that would kill off any living thing long before it even reached the hole. The bigger the black hole, the less compacted the tidal forces. Therefore, a person might be able to cross the event horizon unharmed if the hole was large enough. Now all this person has to do is sit back and wait to be turned into spaghetti. This is basically the extent to any attempted travel to the center of a black hole (Bunn).

Black holes are an impressive force within our universe, and there is still much we can discover from them. Our need for knowledge and understanding will continue to drive the human race to discover more and more about the universe that surrounds us. Thankfully, this process will never stop because there will always be something out there that will continue to baffle the human mind.

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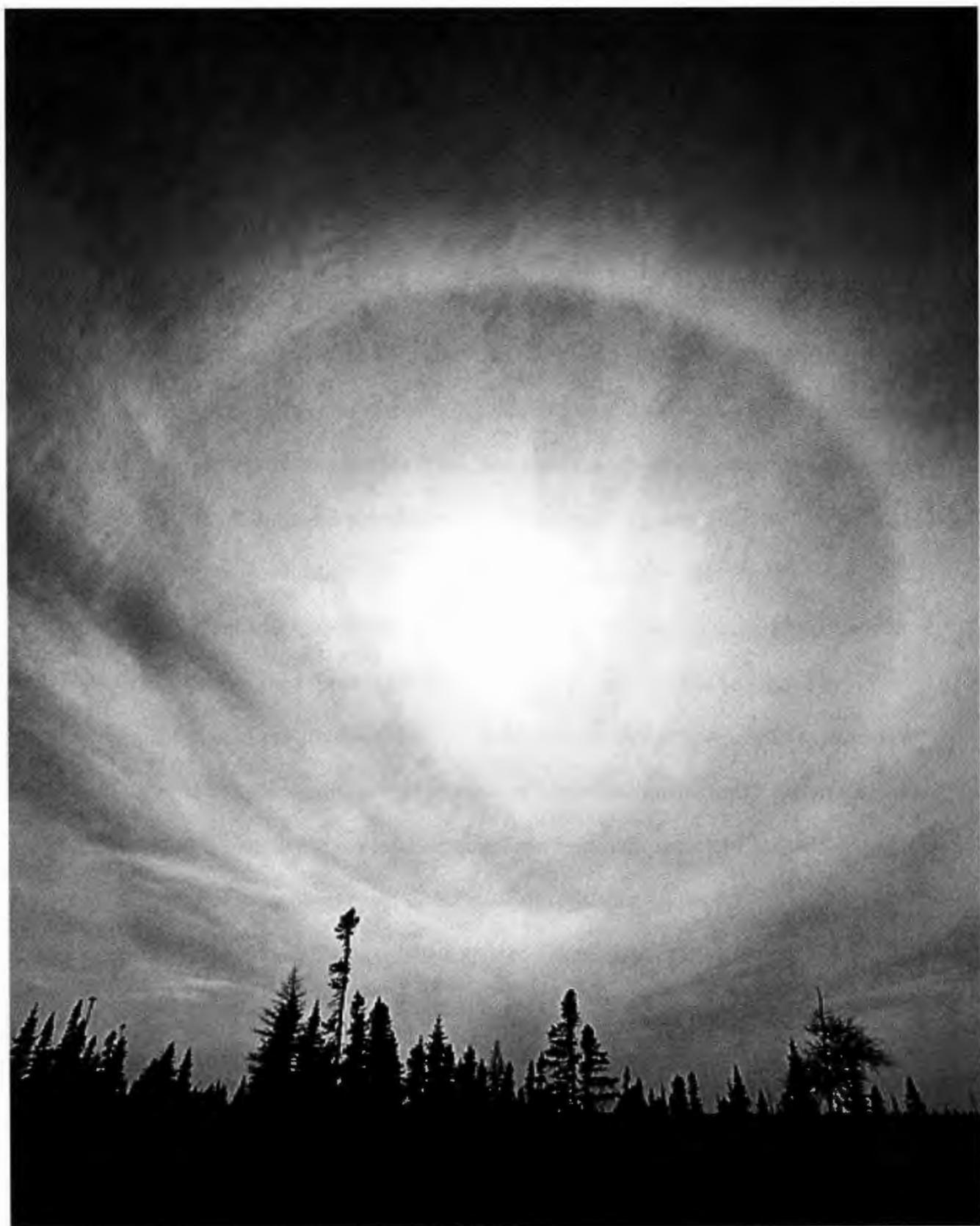
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Legalization of Prostitution

Two adults enter a room, agree on a price, and have sex. Has either committed a crime? Common sense suggests not (“It’s Their Business” 2). Sex is not considered illegal between two consenting adults. It is only illegal if money is exchanged for the sexual acts. This encounter is the basic transaction of a prostitute and her client; however, the situation brings up the question of what is wrong with it? Although prostitution has been illegal in almost all of the United States since the early 1900s, in recent years, many studies have begun to show that legalization of prostitution has more benefits than it does negatives. Prostitution is not a morality issue; it is an issue about safety, privacy, and fiscal responsibility, which means it should be legalized.

The legalization of prostitution provides a safer environment for the people involved in a sexual transaction. First, the legalization of prostitution is medically safer for all parties included and future partners. A majority of the legal brothels have mandated that every person working at the brothel must take blood tests on a regular basis. This regulation allows for a reduction in the number of sexually transmitted diseases. The author of *Taking It off the Streets*, Les Sillars explains, “Required medical check-ups . . . would control sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDS” (13). Transmission of the HIV virus is significantly important since it can be terminal. Sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, continue to plague many people on both sides of an illegal sexual transaction, which continues to be a mixture for disaster because men continue to fail to use condoms and women are not tested.

The regulation of legalized prostitution cleans up this ugly part of prostitution by mandating testing and condom use. Illegal prostitution also claims many young girls' futures by forcing them into prostitution or allowing them to willingly make the bad decision that they are not mentally equipped to do at a young age. Illegal prostitution creates an easy way for teens to be subjected to an unsafe environment. Legalizing prostitution allows for states to make sure that the market of sexual transactions is regulated requiring prostitutes to be either a minimum of 18 or 21 years of age. Sillars agrees that "licensing prostitutes would reduce the number of underage girls working the streets and eliminate pimping" (13). These are all problems that stem from illegal prostitution and are solved by regulating legalized prostitution.

Many people argue that regulating and legalizing prostitution will not get rid of these problems because there will still be girls on the streets no matter what. This argument fails on two levels: first, most people who frequent prostitutes use them to fulfill sexual urges, and not to break the law; therefore, most clients would choose legal sex versus illegal sex, which would significantly diminish the number of clients of illegal prostitution. Second, if prostitutes are working for legal brothels, that employment leads to fewer women on the streets which is good on face value and allows law enforcement to regulate illegal prostitution more easily.

Until prostitution is legalized, prostitutes will not be considered labor or service workers, consequently they will not be afforded safe working conditions. Legalized prostitution would enable prostitutes to form unions that could make sure that the horrendous conditions they have now will not happen in legalized brothels. Legalized prostitution allows women to stand up for fair working conditions, so they would be protected from pimps taking advantage of them. Laurie Shrage, in her article "Prostitution and the Case for Decriminalization," says, "By tolerating the commercial distribution of sexual services within certain limits, we can better

protect the rights and interests of those who seek these services and, importantly, those who choose to earn income by providing them” (243).

As previously stated, no individual part of prostitution is, in fact, illegal. The sex is not illegal. Many people try to argue that prostitution should remain illegal because it is oppressing and degrading to women. The fact that prostitution is illegal is very oppressing to women to begin with because it restricts women from making choices about their own bodies. Shrage concurs when she says, “But we must also ask whether the legal structures that have been set up to control and discourage prostitution . . . also oppress women” (242). In the United States, it is as simple as allowing people, including women, to make their own choices with their bodies.

The United States has already set the precedent in the case *Roe vs. Wade* that women should be allowed to have the right to make their own decisions about their bodies. The case allowed women to terminate parts of their bodies as the choice of the women because they had the right to their own bodies (Center for Reproductive and Policy 65). The United States allows women to have the choice over their bodies. Consenting adults can pay to see women dance nude and they are not breaking the law in the United States, since women have control over their bodies and are allowed to expose them for money, yet it is illegal to actually have the act of sex.

The United States has continuously allowed adults the right to their own bodies unless there are significant health risks and that does not always get stopped such as smoking, drinking, and others. If adults can look at other adults naked and pay for it, and they have the right to do with their bodies as they please, then the question must be asked again, why is prostitution illegal? If women want to use their bodies to provide a service, why should they not be allowed to? Many people would then ask, would you want your child to be a prostitute? The argument is highly flawed and judgmental like the fact that people wouldn't want their children to be janitors,

so let us outlaw that too, right? Shrage continues, “[my daughter’s] choice would be less heartbreaking to me if the work were legal, safe, reasonably well paid, and moderately respectable” (246). People have the right to privacy including their own bodies; therefore, if they wish to use their bodies to perform sexual acts, then they have the right to.

Economically the legalization of prostitution provides a great deal of state and federal money. Currently, prostitution only drains on the government’s money in order to arrest and to try to prevent future prostitution. Kathleen Barry talks about a number of prostitutes in a single city, and “In San Francisco in 1977, 2,938 were arrested for prostitution” (226). Each one of those arrests need a police officer for the apprehension and even more labor hours on the paper work and the legal process. This money is all used to prosecute people who are only supplying a service by using their own bodies. In fact, the government would not only save the money on the turnaround by not spending the money on the enforcement of prostitution, but also they would be in line to make a substantial amount of money from taxes and fees. Sillars discusses the fiscal benefits: “Every worker, from hooker to bartender, must pay a \$50 quarterly registration fee. Licensed owners must pass a background check and pay quarterly fees of \$1,500 if they employ less than six girls and \$5,000 for less than 25” (13). These fees are just a small part of the economic impact this regulation could have.

If prostitution were legalized, it would also account for a large amount of income tax dollars that would usually never have been paid due to the fact that it is an illegal form of work. The states and governments would actually be able to make millions of dollars. In Nevada, only a few counties allow legal brothels, yet it is here that the brothels and the state are able to make millions of dollars. Jessica Ramirez, in her article “Feeling the Pinch,” explains, “In a typical year, legal brothels generate about \$50 million in total revenue and have an economic impact of

about \$400 million on the state” (1). This multi-million dollar industry can only provide benefits to the economy with no economic drawbacks.

Carol Leigh, an advocate for prostitutes’ rights claims, “There are safe ways to work. It’s only a risk when it’s illegal” (qtd. in Navarro and Fisher 96). Prostitution has been around for hundreds of years in many different cultures, but it is illegal now because of the way society views it and not because of any legal issue. This profession has been driven underground, which creates an unsafe and unhealthy market for women to work, and it has several economic drawbacks. The legalization of prostitution is the practical solution and the right solution in a country that is based on the ideal of freedom.



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An Unusual Recipe

On occasion while I am getting ready to cook dinner, I run into recipes that are a little unusual. One of those recipes that I use quite frequently is my dad's recipe for John's World Famous Stuffed Green Things. It begins by telling me to go to the produce department at the store and buy six or eight short, fat, round green things. Then, I need to stop at the meat department and buy two pounds of 90% ground cow; also I will need one pound of Graziano's spicy dead pig mixture. While at the store, I will also need a box of crackers, a jug of dirty sock cheese, three white oval things that come out of a chicken's butt, and a brown one that comes from the same place. Additionally, I will need to make some spaghetti sauce or buy some of the sauce that they have at the store. At home, I start out by cutting the tops off of the green things I bought, and then I need to remove all the seeds and white ugly stuff out of them. A spoon usually works the best. The next thing I need to do is throw my dead cow and pig into a bowl, crush two of the long plastic things that came in my box of crackers, and throw them on top of my meat mixture. I add the oval things that I got from the chicken's butt, about half of my dirty sock cheese, a good amount of garlic powder, salt, and pepper on top of the mess that I should have in my bowl by now. The last thing I need to add is a dried herb called Sweet Basil that looks like something Cheech and Chong would like to smoke. I do not smoke it though, I just throw it on top of all the other stuff I have in my bowl. Now that I have everything added into the bowl, I will need to mix everything I have by squeezing, stroking, and massaging all the

meat. I pack what I now have missed together into the short, fat, green things that I cut the tops off and put them into a baking dish. I pour my spaghetti sauce that I made or bought over them, and I bake them in the oven at 375 degrees for about two hours or until they are done. I also will boil up some mini penne noodles to serve them. Finally, when all my hard work is done, my family and I will sit at our dinning room table to enjoy what I have created. I just hope somebody likes it.



Video Games: Giving Life a 1 Up

They are responsible for the third fastest growing industry in the nation, a multi-billion dollar industry centered around something 60% - 80% of the United States takes part in - playing video games (Irvine). We are all used to hearing that video games are a waste of time and they just rot our brains. To everyone's surprise, video games have been studied, tested, and proven to show that they can actually be quite beneficial in several ways. Video games have been given a negative image for many years, such as: they make kids dumb, they are a waste of time, and they cause violence. We are now learning that they have been found to have positive results physically and mentally.

How could video games show positive results physically? One may jump to the thought of the Wii, which can be great for physical exercise because it is an interactive video game system that will get a player up and moving. What some people do not realize is that video games actually improve vision. Games with lots of action are an example of the type of video games that will help with vision. "Players became up to 58 percent better at perceiving fine contrast differences in the tests" (Britt). This means they have the ability to notice very minor changes in colors of gray. "The ability to decipher slight differences in shades of gray, or contrast sensitivity, is the primary limiting factor on how well one sees" (Schipper). They also had higher skills in "attentional blink." In other words, how easy it is for something to catch their attention (Video Games 'Good').

There were a few different tests given to participants to prove that video games really do help improve sight. One test was done where researchers gathered up some people who played computer games often and some people who never played. The first test had them match shapes that were inside circles with the ones on the side of the screen. “Keen players were vastly better at this task and completed it much faster, especially when the test was made more difficult by the circles being filled with distracting shapes” (Video Games ‘Good’).

Another test had people get trained on certain games to test the changes. One group played a WWII shooter called “Medal of Honor.” This game takes place during World War II, and the goal is to complete objectives, like destroying enemy positions and killing the German forces in the process since they are the foe. The other group got to play the well-known game of “Tetris.” This is a puzzle game where the player stacks blocks to complete up to four rows at a time which then disappear. They continued this training for 10 days, an hour a day. Those who played “Medal of Honor” showed very high improvement in their vision and attention. The people who played “Tetris” showed no improvements or changes because that game does not challenge the eyes.

A very similar test had 11 people play “Unreal Tournament 2004,” which is a futuristic first person shooter, and “Call of Duty 2,” which is another first person shooter set in World War II. The other 11 people played “The Sims 2,” which is a simulation of life where the player controls his/her own person plus that person’s family and the whole neighborhood to make them thrive or to destroy them. These volunteers were to play 50 hours in 9 weeks. “Those who played the action games showed an average of 43 percent improvement in their ability to discern close shades of gray... whereas the Sims players showed no improvement” (Britt). This is because The Sims doesn’t challenge the visual motor coordination.

These vision improvements will work for anybody. The action games are training the player's brain to use its visual cortex more precisely. These changes remain long-term after not playing video games. A significant example of the advantages of these visual changes is driving. When a person is out driving in the weather with the visual field decreased, he/she will be able to recognize much faster if there is a need to brake. So, people who play video games and challenge their eyes are more efficient and safe drivers because their brain has been taught to notice any slight changes in the environment (Britt).

A second thing video games do for us is they can help improve our thinking and logic skills. Games like "SimCity" or "Age of Mythology" contains aspects where the gamer has to build a city and develop war strategies for when they are invaded. Doing this is helping them "to develop their logical skills and also help in decision making" (Vinci). There are many other puzzle, adventure and word games that improve these skills as well such as "Syberia," "Lemmings," and "The Logical Journey of the Zoombinis." All these games will help one to think logically and solve problems by figuring out questions like "What do I have to do in order for this to happen, or what clues have I been given?"

The way these games work is while people are playing, they "must figure out the rules of the game and the goals they need to achieve to win. For hours they work at solving a series of puzzles that are nested inside one another like a collapsed telescope" (Van Kampen). Players have to keep in mind the long term goal while at the same time solving several smaller problems. Video games force one's brain to think; they also teach the brain to make decisions. "It's not *what* you're thinking about when you play a video game, it's the *way* you're thinking that challenges your brain" (Van Kampen).

Video games are even teaching money management. Role Playing Games (RPGs) are an excellent example of this. In order to get stronger armor or better weapons, there has to be money. If gamers do not save their money, then they will probably not succeed since their character does not have tough armor and high-quality weapons. Thus, the character will die over and over again. This is especially bad if playing a game that gives penalties for dying, such as losing money or experience. Another game that teaches money management is “The Sims,” which is a simulation of life. As long as the player does not use the money or cheat that gives them an extra \$50,000 instantly at anytime. Then, they are forced to save money in order to pay the bills and buy new appliances, furniture, or anything else their sim desires. If there is not enough money for the sim, they will get items in their house repossessed each month because they are not paying their bills. “The Sims” also could help people realize that life is not easy.

Video games are making people think more strategically, whether or not they are violent. Managing several different scenarios and objects at the same time while constantly making decisions is teaching people to think strategically. “Intelligence test scores in the United States are rising faster than ever... One possible reason: Studies show video games make people more perceptive, training their brains to analyze things faster” (Berman).

Video games are teaching people things that they can remember more easily by playing and having fun rather than sitting in a classroom and losing interest after 15 minutes. The game “Medal of Honor” is an example of a video game that teaches history. “Many veterans’ and historical organizations have bestowed awards on games such as the “Medal of Honor” series for their educational value” (Cowlshaw 394). There is another game that was developed by the Health Media Lab. It is called “D.M. Dinwiddie, Physician-In-Training.” This game teaches children first aid. It shows them how to identify 12 common medical conditions: burns, choking,

insect bites and stings, bumps and bruises, cuts and bleeding, sun burn, sprains and broken bones, food poisoning, common cold, influenza, tonsillitis, and appendicitis. This would be a very good game to even include in a school curriculum for health classes. Most people do not know what to do in several of those situations.

Another thing video games contribute to is hand-eye coordination. They help surgeons to not make mistakes nearly as often. Researchers have found that “doctors who spent at least three hours a week playing video games made about 37 percent fewer mistakes in laparoscopic surgery and performed the task 27 percent faster than their counterparts who did not play video games” (Dobnik). Laparoscopic surgery is used by sticking a very little camera into a small incision, as well as tools which are controlled by a joystick on the outside of the body. This surgery can be done on just about anywhere in the body. The surgeon makes very small incisions, large enough to stick a pencil into, and the tiny camera is put inside the incision while the other instruments get a little hole the same size to go through. The surgeon controls these tools while looking at a screen. There are now simulations based on video games that surgeons can perform with in order to perfect themselves before actually entering surgery. “With a video game, one can definitely develop timing and a sense of touch, as well as a very intuitive feel for manipulating devices” (Dobnik).

Video games also contribute to military training. There are games created called “training games.” “The target outcome is to modify people’s attitudes (e.g., desensitize to killing) and behaviors (e.g., create reflexes for fighting)” (Fogg). This is a very strong weapon for the advantage of our military. These video games have been used for recruits as well. There is one game that shows a soldier how to survive ambushes in an area that looks like Baghdad.

“In short, video games make better soldiers and sailors faster, more safely and more cheaply” (Holguin).

Furthermore, what makes video games such a positive thing in the lives of people is they are fun! There are always improved graphics, neat storylines, and amusing adventures.

“Research conducted in 2002 showed that 60% of U.S. residence age 6 and older play computer games, and that over 221 million computer and video games were sold in the U.S” (Jones 374).

In 2007, “U.S. video game industry sales rocketed to a record high 17.9 billion dollars” (Kioskea). The video game industry makes double the amount that movie theaters make.

“Consumers spent \$18.85 billion on video game hardware, software, and accessories in 2007 – triple what they spent in 2000” (Fernandez). The word spreads about video games, and people go out and get them because they are going to be fun. In a phone survey, researchers found “ninety-seven percent of young respondents play video games. That is 99 percent of boys and 94 percent of girls, with little difference in the percentages among various racial and ethnic groups and incomes” (Irvine). It is obviously a very significant form of entertainment in the world today.

Video games contain a lot of music in the backgrounds, and almost everybody will recognize the Mario tune. Video game music has actually inspired people to play its music on instruments. Some people started playing instruments just so they could play their favorite video game songs. For me, playing video game music on the piano makes it twice as fun because the song is familiar to me and brings back memories of playing the game with my family. It has motivated me to learn how to play the piano more seriously and to practice harder in order to play the really difficult and awesome songs.

There are, of course, many people that are against video games because they believe video games are having a negative impact on people physically and mentally.

There are reports of physical problems that arise in people from playing video games. These are general complaints made by people who play games frequently. The complaints are: eye strains, back pains, sore wrists, an achy neck and headaches. Even obesity is being put on the list. There was a “case of an 11-year-old boy who suffered from tendonitis following long periods on his Nintendo Game Boy, a condition that has come to be known as ‘Nintendonitis’” (Vinci).

There is also an additional problem becoming known as “PlayStation Palm.” There was a girl that had sore marks on both of her hands. “A physical exam revealed ‘highly tender’ red nodules from the girl’s palm to her fingertips” (Mitchell). This girl was playing her video games for many hours a day. When she first noticed the irritations on her hands, she ignored them and kept playing her video games. “After she abstained from video games for 10 days, her rash cleared up” (Mitchell).

Both of these arguments are pretty useless against video games. When people exercise vigorously they will develop tendonitis; exercise is the most common cause of tendonitis. So basically, by saying people should not play their Game Boy because they could develop the problem of tendonitis is like saying people should not start an exercise program for themselves because they could obtain tendonitis as well.

On the subject of PlayStation palm, the girl received that from holding the controller for several hours a day for weeks. People can get sores on their hands from just riding their bikes for long distances. Even when mowing the lawn, people can get sore hands or blisters. Obesity

is not an argument either. Yes, sitting there and playing video games is a sedentary activity, but doing homework and going to school to sit in class is just as inactive if not more.

Eye strains, neck aches, and back pains, can all happen from working on the computer just as easily as gaming. Another experience I have recently had is my eyes are getting strained from typing this paper... I also get a backache if I play the piano for too long. These are some examples from my most recent experiences. People who do serious art get neck aches and hand cramps all the time.

Also, according to those who do not favor video games, they promote and desensitize people to violence. “Cho Seung-Hui, who murdered 32 people on the Virginia Tech campus in 2007, was initially reported to have played video games obsessively, and many commentators have instinctively linked game violence with campus killings” (Fernandez). Also, violent video games and movies have been linked to the Columbine shooting in 1999. There have been several studies that show a sturdy relation between playing violent video games and hostile feelings. “And in 2004, a team of researchers studied 607 eighth and ninth grade students... and discovered that there was indeed a correlation between playing violent video games and getting into fist fights” (Fernandez).

On this topic of aggressive behavior from playing video games, do violent video games make kids more aggressive, or do aggressive kids play violent video games? There are many other things that can cause aggressiveness in kids as well. For example, sports. “A game that instills aggressive thoughts in the mind of its players, some of whom have gone on to commit real-world acts of violence and sexual assault after playing... high school football” (Johnson).

There is a big problem with this school shootings argument as well. There are millions of people who will play video games every day and never start or get involved in any aggressive or

violent activities. This is just like the case against Marilyn Manson's music: "Why haven't Marilyn Manson's thousands or millions of other fans shot up the local High School?" (Burns 286). The Department of Education analyzed several cases of violence in school to figure out what was common in all the kids responsible for school shootings. They found that the most frequent characteristic with shooters were that "they were male and had histories of depression and attempted suicide... this 2002 study did not find a relationship between game play and school shootings" (Fernandez). In other words, video games are being used as a scapegoat to violence.

If parents are concerned, they need to take notice what games their child is playing. On every game case there is a rating:



Titles rated **EC (Early Childhood)** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



Titles rated **E (Everyone)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



Titles rated **E10+ (Everyone 10 and older)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.



Titles rated **T (Teen)** have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



Titles rated **M (Mature)** have content that may be suitable for persons 17 years and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language.



Titles rated **AO (Adults Only)** have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.



Title listed as **RP (Rating Pending)** has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)

“Games may list content descriptors that describe violence, language, sex, tobacco, drug, and alcohol use” (List of ESRB Ratings from the National Institute on Media and the Family).

A third thing people who oppose video games say is that they negatively affect the people who play them because they will cause social problems. Because of this, gamers are shy and passive people. They play video games by themselves which takes away from their social life, and it turns into an every day thing where they stay home by themselves. They become anti-social people. “Unlike the math exercises, the computer game does not stimulate the brain's frontal lobe, an area which plays an important role in the repression of anti-social impulses and is associated with memory, learning and emotion” (Matthews).

This is not true. “Nearly two-thirds play video games to socialize face-to-face with friends and family, while just over a quarter said they play with Internet friends” (Irvine). People who play video games are not anti-social, they play with other people more than not. From my own personal experience, video games are not nearly as much fun if I play by myself. I love to play video games with my family and boyfriend. We always laugh and have a great time. Video games have become a social subject to talk about. People who play video games all have something in common, and they can chat about parts of a game that was particularly hard or neat. Playing video games with friends is a way of bonding with them. When talking about the shy

people who *do* play video games, it is another cause and effect question. Do video games cause shyness and anti-social behavior, or do shy and anti-social people play video games?

There are so many new things for people to realize when it comes to playing video games. Not only are they fun, they are also educational and can improve visual problems. Video games sharpen rather than rot our brains. So, for the people who are against play, the game is not over yet!

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I Believe That Dreams Are Possible

I pride myself every day in knowing how amazing my father truly is. He has always been a strong and independent man ever since I can remember. Like many other children I have always carried my father on a pedestal, and I enjoy looking up to him. My father sets the example for many of my people in the United States. He is a full-blooded Mexican who later after years of working as an “Illegal Alien,” is now proud to have become a United States citizen. To become the man he is today my father had to break many barriers. Even though some of these barriers were illegal and necessary to break, I understand him for doing so. From the moment he stepped onto U.S. soil, his dreams became his passions in life. And I admire him for making his dreams come true through me.

My father was a strict and a very present father figure in my life. As a child he made sure to teach me my native language before I learned to speak what he called “My Privileged Language.” He somehow forced my family and me to strictly watch English channels on TV by forbidding anyone from watching Spanish channels on TV in his presence. He basically self taught himself and my family by watching movies, history, and the Discovery channel in English. I cannot even count how many times my father literally sat down with me to help me do my homework while at the same time he was also the student.

His favorite subject was history. He loved reading my history books from school. Little by little he began to buy and read his own history books. Before I knew it, he became a huge

history buff. He loved telling me everything he knew about American history. I especially remember the days I helped him study for his citizenship test. He loved knowing that he was getting every answer right. Watching him answer my questions with a grin on his face made me proud and lucky to be his daughter. Finally one day after six years of trying to become a citizen, he passed his citizenship test. He was now permanently a United States citizen.

The day he became a citizen was the day he sat me down and told me about his own history. He told me that as a little boy he only went to school up to the second grade, and dropped out of school at the age of eight. He began to work as a farm boy at the tender age of ten making five dollars a week. By the time he was twelve he was able to buy his own new pair of shoes that cost him a full months pay of work. His old pair of sandals was handed down to his younger brother, as his parents were too poor to buy new clothes and shoes for his siblings.

He told me that he came from a humble and big, loving family of nine siblings. My father insists that even though he had to grow up fast as a child, he will never forget the sad and poor feelings of poverty he had to live through at a young age. Because of what he went through, he remembers the day he bought his first pair of shoes very well. After his childhood story, I was finally able to understand why he always tells me to appreciate what I have. I was taught to be polite and respectful of others, but that day I learned why I should be thankful for what I have.

When my father turned fifteen, he told his parents that before he turned eighteen he wanted to migrate to the north (United States) to find a better life for himself and his family. His long time dream was to find a place to settle down and earn decent money. He knew that he would be able to accomplish that in the United States. He also believed that when he was ready to bring his family to the United States, he would. He knew that the United States was the only

place on earth where there was equal opportunity for his family. He also wanted the best for his future children as well. Most of all he wanted his future children to have the opportunities that his beloved country could not offer him.

It took a year and a half later for my father to migrate to the north in search of his dream. He migrated to the United States where he met my mother. Once my father settled down with my mother he began to bring my uncles and aunts to America. In less than five years my father's entire family migrated north to be with him and share his dream. By the time my father was twenty-one, he began to work on becoming a citizen. He also started his own business as a landscaping artist. He earned 60K a year and was able to finally buy his first house. Once his business took off successfully, he began to work on improving his education. His self drive and passion for a new and better life slowly molded his confidence into pursuing more goals. He soon realized that he could learn how to read and write through me by reading my homework.

I remember when he told me how lucky I was to go to school. He wished he could have at least finished elementary school. Since he could not, he knew that through me he could pick up where he left off. He always told me that no one in this world is stupid unless they believe they are. He once shared with me his belief in the human brain by teaching me a lesson I will never forget. He asked me, "What do you think the brain is? An organ or a muscle." I, of course, was too young to understand the differences between the two, so I guessed it was an organ. Right away he said, "Oh no honey, an organ is something people can live without or donate when they pass away. A brain is like a muscle because if a person never uses it enough then their intelligence never grows. It will just remain the same. You have to use it, otherwise your brain will not function as fast as you wish it could."



That day all I could think about was that question. I began to realize how Intelligent and honest my father was. I understand how privileged I was to be where I was, and how lucky I was to have him as my father. I knew many other fathers that were just like him, only my father was different from all of them. My father was always a self starter that somehow let his self drive, and dreams lead him to where he is today. Today, thanks to my father, I am living in one of the most well developed countries that is full of equal opportunities. I have many options for myself and my future family, such as education, health care, and most importantly, the freedom to exercise my rights as an American citizen.



The Compensated College Athlete

According to the official website of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), in the 2008 fiscal year, the NCAA is predicting annual revenues of \$614 million. What kind of an organization can make this amount of money yet pay those responsible for earning it nothing? The NCAA governs thousands of college athletes at several different levels. Built on the concept of what makes an amateur player, the NCAA doesn't lose much ground when it comes to fairly compensating its athletes.

The strict definition of amateur athlete is an athlete who is not getting paid to play the sport. The NCAA feels the education it's providing for *free*, in the form of scholarships, is sufficient enough for the players. Started in 1906 as a way to ensure the safety of the student-athletes, the NCAA has become a multi-million dollar business fully entwined in the business world just as much as the sports world. When there is an organization as large as the NCAA, there has to be some consideration to the true moneymakers at the forefront. Point blank, student-athletes must be fairly compensated for doing their part in bringing in millions of dollars annually.

College student-athletes should be fairly compensated for their performance due to the large amounts of money they generate for the NCAA. Given the staggering monetary figures the NCAA makes in a given year, it's not too farfetched to pay the athletes. As Stan Dorsey states in *The Sporting News*, "It is downright ridiculous that athletic departments can generate

tremendous revenue from filled stadiums and arenas, while the athletes directly responsible for those packed venues are forbidden from earning so much as a penny” (47).

The nation’s colleges have numerous means to generate revenue. Take, for instance, the University of North Carolina, which is one of many universities that have shoe deals with major sports apparel companies. The university is one of only a handful of schools to announce the monetary numbers involved with shoe companies. North Carolina had a contract with Nike, which was for five years and equaled to 7.1 million dollars (Greenlee 90). Then there are the TV rights paid by the major networks to air such collegiate sporting events as the BCS College Football Championship, the NCAA Basketball Tournament, and the College World Series. The NCAA currently has a deal with CBS for the exclusive rights to broadcast the NCAA Basketball Tournament for 6.2 billion until the year 2013 (Greenlee 91). Many people argue the point of who will get paid. Clearly, the college football and men’s basketball programs bring in the most money. Nevertheless, with all the money generated from shoe deals, naming rights to stadiums and television rights, there is plenty of money being brought in by the NCAA to pay all of the college athletes some kind of dollar amount to help cover the additional cost of living expenses for student-athletes.

There are people who claim that paying college athletes to compete in sporting events would essentially ruin the standards of education. However, if college athletes were able to receive payment for their talents, it would almost certainly increase graduation rates. In today’s college sports, more and more athletes are skipping the remainder of their schooling to enter the professional market. The primary reason for leaving school early is to be able to make money. Just take a look at the graduation rates for the Final Four teams of 2002. As stated by David Davis, a writer for *Los Angeles Magazine*, “The graduation figures for last year’s ‘Final Four’

participants: Kansas, 64 percent; Indiana, 43 percent; Maryland, 19 percent; Oklahoma, 0 percent” (3). If players start getting paid in college, the need to leave school is virtually eradicated.

The graduation numbers from the above schools could have been drastically changed if athletes didn't find the need to hurry and make money. By completing a four-year program at a university, athletes have the chance to earn a degree, which will help them in a post-sports career. As Steve Robinson points out in his article in *Sports Illustrated*, “about 1% of them, the outstanding athletes, will play their sport professionally; the other 99% are job hunting, and more than half of those who played at the Division 1 level are brandishing only their varsity letters, not diplomas” (1).

By compensating student-athletes, universities will make the true goals of education possible for them to obtain. The schools doing the recruiting should give their athletes a fair opportunity to get their degrees. When considering the realities of the sports world today, there has to be some realization to the effect there is no real *off-season* for these athletes. By playing college sports, especially in the large universities, players have to use the majority of their *free* time involved in weight training, *voluntary* workouts, and film studying, which allows very little time for the educational side of college.

The current education system the NCAA uses in regards to athletic scholarships, in which schools only offer four or five years of education, is severely flawed. There must be some consideration given to the heavy work load a student-athlete has. If student-athletes practice and perform at a regular pace throughout their college years, the colleges should give them the chance to at least obtain a Bachelor's degree, which is essential to getting jobs in today's job market (Robinson 1). Many people would argue college athletes should take full advantage of

the free education while they are in school. The fact of the matter is when student athletes combine a full college work load and they are playing sports, there is so little time to balance.

In many cases, just because athletes are given a full scholarship, there is no guarantee they will earn a degree. When practice demands of up to 40 hours a week are added with the season length, sometimes six months long, there is no extra time to spend on academics (Murphy and Pace 3). There is no way of knowing for sure how many athletes would be willing to take advantage of a program like this, but there is no way a program like this could be bad for a university. A sports program could utilize this type of guaranteed degree plan to even lure in more recruits.

If student-athletes were being fairly compensated by the NCAA, athletes wouldn't be as prone to enter into the darker side of society. Gambling and cash payments have become a major crisis for college athletes who are looking to make money fast. However, if the NCAA would at least offer some form of compensation, the athletes wouldn't have to resort to such activities. Take the case of former Michigan basketball standout Chris Webber who accepted *loans* from a college booster named Ed Martin. Webber admitted to accepting the loans from Martin since high school and throughout his college career.

The University of Michigan felt the brunt of the action from the NCAA with the forfeiture of games in which Webber played in and Michigan also received numerous fines as a result (Marzilli 64). If the NCAA fairly compensated players like Webber, then scandalous behavior wouldn't take place. A 1999 University of Michigan study concluded "more than 5 percent of college football and men's basketball have either given inside information to gamblers (usually their classmates), bet on games in which they have played, or shaved points in return for

money” (Porto 45). Until the athletes are given a chance to earn money, the realities of gambling or cheating will remain a mainstay.

Even if athletes were given a chance to have a job, many people feel student-athletes wouldn't be actually working to earn the money. Skeptics, rather, believe a job would be only a “front” for getting money “under the table.” It is hard to argue against athletes getting special treatment at the workplace, but consider the harsh reality these actions play in players gambling, accepting money from shady agents, or the dealing of money from athletic boosters. According to David Davis of the *Los Angeles Magazine*, the Division 1 scholarships only cover room, board, and tuition (2). Covering these expenses is a huge help and burden relief to the athlete, but it still leaves a large amount of items left out like clothing, bathing supplies, and transportation.

When entering the heated debate over how to fairly compensate the student-athletes, the simplest method is to let them earn money. There are many restrictions placed on the amount and ways student-athletes can make money. Many issues arise when the NCAA doesn't allow athletes to make much money. The argument against allowing student-athletes to earn money is a legitimate point. Traditional students can just go out and get part-time jobs to help, but the same can't be said for athletes. According to a 1998 rule change, athletes can earn up to \$2,000 a year from a job (Looney 2). When the math is figured, \$2,000 a year works out to be around \$165 a month. To a college student, \$165 lasts about two weeks if it is spread as far as it can go. According to Alan Marzilli, author of *Amateur Athletics*, “the NCAA currently bans payments to athletes and endorsement deals with advertisers, plus a dizzying list of extra benefits” (66). When athletes are unable to earn enough money to live on, the athletes often look for the money in other places as stated above.

Always at the heart of this debate is how to fairly deal with the college athletes. While money would make all of the student-athletes extremely happy, there are many options to be utilized. The point of the matter is college athletes need to get some form of compensation for the *jobs* they perform. It is extremely unfair to have athletes bringing in enormous amounts of money for an organization and have to live in poverty to complete an education, or fallback on gambling or taking money *under the table*. There is no way the NCAA could get a black eye for compensating their athletes fairly. If nothing else, graduation rates would surely increase. Players would be staying in school longer and, as a result, the NCAA would make more money off of the players. In one form or another, college athletes are being exploited and the only way to “right the wrong” is to fairly compensate.



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Balance

In the balance of life there is always something tipping the scales. I do not believe people are born straight or gay. I think it is the circumstances in childhood that tip the scale one way or another.

I had a very unhappy childhood; my parents divorced when I was six. I stayed with my dad while my mom left for college. Having an unstable home life affects more than one might think. School “sucked,” and I hated it. Who hates elementary school? I had anxiety, and up until I left to live with my mom at age eleven, I was an unhappy child. From the ages of six to eleven a lot develops; in my case, it was my distaste for men in general (not all men but most). In addition I saw the ZZ Top video “She’s Got Legs” at age eight and knew then, in the back of my mind, that I preferred women. I could not wait to be an adult for so many reasons, but mostly so I could control the situations around me.

When I went to live with my mom, she was finishing her last year of college at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri. She had been dating a guy named Nate for a couple years. I moved into their one bedroom apartment and the dining room became my bedroom. We were very happy, but very poor. I could have cared less. My mom and Nate nurtured me back to life. For the first time, I was happy and not so worried or anxious. Nate, my stepdad now, was the kind of man I needed in my life. He was sensitive, attentive and did

not treat me as child but always as a friend. His complete faith in me always gave me the feeling that no matter what, he would accept me for who and what I was to become.

At the age of eight, when I realized the truth about myself, I never really understood that it was an option. No one grooms you for a gay lifestyle. It is not something that they encourage in Home Economics. I repressed those feelings for my own convenience. In high school I had crushes on boys because I really did like them. I had convinced myself that this was what was expected of me. However, always in the back of my mind, I knew that I would never really be happy with a guy; but what choice did I have? No one wants to be pegged as something negative in high school. It was hard enough being overweight, but overweight and gay? Can you imagine?

The summer before my sophomore year of high school, we moved to Albert City because of my mom's job. I had made a lot of friends, and I was really upset. I did not want to live anymore. It is funny how everything seems so much worse when you are a fifteen year old with raging hormones. It was funny also how all my life I seemed to be looking for some sort of balance, and here was the beginning of my destiny as an adult, but I just could not see it yet.

I went from a class of over one-hundred to a class of less than thirty. It was hard to make friends. I had met this girl Heidi in the fall of my sophomore year. I invited her over for a movie and to make chocolate chip cookies. She had long dark brown hair, and she was very athletic. My attraction at first was my envy; envy of her body, friends, athleticism. That soon turned into something much more. She had a very cute gap in her two front teeth and dimples when she smiled. We had a great deal in common; movies, music, things that we thought were funny, sports that we enjoyed playing and watching. She hated her dad; I hated my real dad. She also had great legs. WOW, great legs! She also had a boyfriend, so I never really thought anything

would come of my feelings. I thought it would be one of those dirty little secrets that you only keep to yourself. That is the way society sometimes makes gay people feel, as if you are pervert or should be ashamed.

Time passed and we were sixteen, the summer before our junior year. We had become close friends; we spent all of our time together and learned everything we could about one another. We were on the softball team together. Riding the bus home at night after a game, we always sat together, and I always made sure my hand would brush against her leg at least once. When that would happen, she never moved or said anything; it always made my heart jump a little hoping that maybe she felt the same way.

When softball ended for the season, Heidi and I went on a road trip to Chariton where I had lived before Albert City. We were going to stay at my friend Desi's. After arriving, I confided in Desi about how I felt about Heidi, and Desi asked me if it was just admiration. I assured her it was not. I knew this was different. I hadn't felt like this before with any of my guy crushes.

Teenage girls always play the scenario game, "what guy would you sleep with?" "If so and so asked you to ...?" Heidi and I were playing this game to pass time one night, and Heidi asked the question, "What girl in our class would you be with?" I was honest and said her. Heidi beat around the bush and seemed shy to answer. However, of course, she said me after much persuading. There it was- out in the open. The answer seemed to take up the whole room. From then on our relationship became complicated, especially for two sixteen-year-old girls. The one thing that was clear from that moment on, was that I loved her, and I knew she was it for me. It took a lot longer for her to realize that I was going to be it for her, but she got there.

When we arrived home from that trip, I was very emotional. I could not seem to grasp the enormity of my decision. I knew that there was no other way for me to live my life. If I tried to live a straight life, it would be a lie. At the age of sixteen, I believe that I happened to be lucky enough to have found the one person I think destiny truly intended for me.

Life after that trip was different. The time Heidi and I spent together seemed frantic, always trying to drain each hour for everything it was worth. Heidi spent a lot of time at my house escaping her father. My mom and Heidi would do puzzles together, or we would watch movies. One in particular was "Jesus Christ Superstar." We all three loved it and knew every word and song.

All this quality time together gave Heidi a sense of acceptance and stability that she longed for. Heidi and I had no idea where all these feelings were leading us or what was going to happen, but we both wanted to confide in someone. For Heidi, that someone was my mom. Heidi was very close to her own mom, but Heidi comes from a Catholic family and the town we lived in was very small. Her mom was raised there and knows everyone. Can you imagine the close-minded mentality that comes from living in a town of 800 people for forty-eight years? Finding out that your daughter is gay might be hard to grasp. Heidi rationalized my mom's big town know-how as an invitation to be open about our relationship.

It was a spring night; school was coming to an end. My mom was working on a craft project, and Heidi and I were watching "Will and Grace." Perhaps Heidi saw the irony in this as a segue to what she wanted to reveal. The night was so painful to remember that I do not even remember how Heidi brought it up. However, I do remember the stabbing hurt I felt when my mom dismissed Heidi's feelings and told her to go home. When you deeply love someone, their pain is fully yours. I was left alone with a woman who could not see past her own confusion to

understand mine. It is always very scary to reveal something about yourself that shows your vulnerability - to make your self so paper thin that people can see in and often, through.

My mom immediately called my sister, Jenny to yell at her for knowing and not telling. My mother commands respect. In her job, she must have complete control; she is a special education teacher. If the kids with behavior disabilities do not respect her then she loses control over what they learn. I respected my mom, but I could see the respect she had for me was being replaced with disappointment.

I tried to drive the point home that I was not just fooling around, I was not exploring my sexuality. She was not hearing it. My mind went into survival mode. What could I say that would relieve this situation? Nothing could resolve this but time, and when you are sixteen, you cannot afford time. I begged my mom to not tell Nate. I dreaded his disappointment more than hers. She agreed, and I started for the stairs to escape to my room. I remember turning around and asking "Are you disappointed in me?" She said "No, not in you, but I am in your decisions" I knew she was lying. I went to turn and climb the stairs again and stopped; I thought what if she stops loving me? I turned again and asked "You still love me, don't you?" She, of course, said yes, but at that moment I did not believe her. I wanted to be angry at her. I wanted to hold onto that anger and own it. How could she question my feelings? How could she be so mean to Heidi for loving me?

The next day was not any easier, and all the days that followed were harder than the one before. I was the middle man trying to ease Heidi's feelings of betrayal, and smoothing things over with my mom when she would find out that I had gone over to Heidi's house. My mom made it clear that she did not want Heidi and me to spend time together. I let it go like that for a month or so, and then I told a lie that I thought would solve our situation. I told her that Heidi

and I were not involved. I even dated a guy to drive my point home. That was wrong on so many levels, but most of all because I used someone else to ease my problem.

That summer of after our junior year I took a job in Storm Lake about thirty minutes away so I could see Heidi before and after work without enduring the Spanish Inquisition. That fall my mom had figured out the truth somehow, maybe because moms know everything about their child no matter how hard the children try to hide it. The fight that followed was one of the worst fights I have ever had. It was all of my resentment and anger at her coming to a head, and I exploded on her. I had abandoned my fear of my mother and completely let go. I laid into her, and she was seeing red, I could tell. She called Nate's work and told him it was an emergency. I suppose she did this so she would have some support. When he got home, he came up to my room where my mom was standing over me looking angrier than I have ever seen her. At some point in the argument, she blurted out that I was gay. The air stopped in my lungs.

All that time as a young child, I had yearned for some control over myself and my feelings. Unfortunately, though, both times I was outed without any control over what was said or how it was said. I had never been so angry and have not been since. This was a moment frozen in time for me. On one hand I was seething with anger, and on the other hand, my Nate (as I call him) showed me his unconditional love in a way I have never felt from any man before or since. He never skipped a beat. He told me that it didn't matter and that he loved me no matter what. He said that he had always known.

I could not grasp that he had accepted me before I had accepted myself. All along, this is what I needed and wanted from my mom, and here he was giving me the acceptance that I thought I would never get. I sat there in that frozen moment and thought he had kept my secret from me and from my mom. Had he never discussed his thoughts with my mom? Why hadn't

he ever asked me if I was confused about my sexuality? He had let me discover myself. He had kept the balance of self-discovery for me to tip it one way or the other.

Heidi and I spent our entire senior year sneaking around. After we graduated, I told my mom that Heidi and I were moving in together and going to college in Ankeny. She wasn't happy about it. I had decided that my life was not about pleasing her anymore but about pleasing me. I could not wait to show my mom how wrong she had been about the woman I love.

Heidi and I began our life together in August of 1998. We moved into the DMACC dorms. This is where all the real life lessons started. I knew that after what I had been through to find my own honesty in life, all the things that followed could never be as hard. And thank God, so far, there has not ever been anything Heidi and I thought we could not handle together.

College did not work out for us so we began working together at Millpond in Ankeny. Heidi was a certified nurse's aide in high school and she trained me at Millpond. We worked together there for eight years. We really worked as a team. It is nice to know that when you are at work you have someone to rely on no-matter what. We loved working together, but it did not make it very easy to live an openly gay life. Public displays of affection were impossible. What if you ran into one of the resident's family members at the farmers market? (This did happen frequently.) Plus, we would always get asked the question "Are you married dear?" I always felt so awful when I had to discredit my relationship with Heidi and lie. However, above all, our relationship was not really the residents' business anyway; we were there to get to know them and understand them.

As it often happens in life, change happened, and Heidi went to work at the Ankeny Veterinary Clinic. She really loves working there, and I think overall the change was a positive step for us both. Now that I am going to school full- time and not working, I find it necessary to

let people know the truth. I refuse to make a new relationship and not say anything. Whoever the person is, he or she deserves to really get to know me and the important people in my life.

Our families have accepted us both with unconditional love. It took about a year after our graduating from high school for my mom to warm up to the idea that Heidi and I were not going to change our minds. She has said to me on many occasions that she could not see me any other way or with anyone else. Heidi and I have been together for twelve years this July. We own a house here in Ankeny and have two dogs and two cats. We would love to have children someday. I cannot wait to really complete our family.

Looking back now on my mom and her reaction, I understand it more. Her outburst was not about my choice; it was about the dangers I might face and about the ugliness in the world. She was scared by my choice because she did not want me to take a path that might be impossible to walk.

Now, as an adult woman, I feel like I have found the control I always wanted as a child. I feel like I can control my happiness, the love I share with others, and the truth about myself. This is the road I feel I should be taking. Everyone believes something different when it comes to God or a higher being. I do not exactly know what I believe, but whatever it is, it wanted me to find love, not just “Oh, I love you, let’s have sex” kind of love, but the kind that takes your entire soul to love. I know I have found it. It is impossible to describe the depth, the truth, the passion, and the fullness one can feel from this kind of love; all I can say is that it gives a person balance.

Cyberspace Socials

In 2009, a person's social circle is wider than ever before. Thanks to social networking no one should complain about loneliness. Making a new friend or connecting with an old one is just a click away. By the end of October 2007 there were 350 plus social networking sites (Sharma). The most popular sites are MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Some of the benefits of social networking are: it extends a person's social circle; it enhances social skills; it increases one's knowledge; and it can provide a means of support for those who need reassurance. The jury is still out, however, on whether social networking is a good thing or a bad thing.

When it comes to enforcing curfew and fewer nights out, the Internet has done its part in relieving some of the tension between parents and teens. Young people do not need to leave the house to connect with friends. This is a positive aspect of social networks for parents. In fact, a study done at the University of California revealed that just by hanging out with friends on line and sending instant messages qualified teens for skills used in the business world and gave them social confidence for the digital age (Ritter). In a competitive market place, networking is essential to landing employment. Young people who network are already one step ahead in the job search game.

Social networking is not just for the younger crowd. Many baby boomers are finding ways to reconnect with old friends and even relatives through Facebook. Those who live a fair

distance from each other, or in another state, find it is much cheaper than driving or calling long distance to talk to them. Social Networking has made it much easier to keep in touch with friends, families and colleagues. “People between 35 and 54 are the fastest-growing group on Facebook” (Grossman).

Social networking has proven to be a useful tool for the political realm as well. A population of like-minded people found their way to Barack Obama’s page on Facebook. These people can say they were the first to ever take part in a social network campaign event on Facebook. Nicole Ellison, an assistant professor at Michigan State University had this to say, “I believe the benefits provided by social network sites such as Facebook have made us better off as a society and as individuals, and that, as they continue to be adopted by more diverse populations, we will see an increase in their utility. Anecdotal evidence of positive outcomes from these technologies—such as political activities organized via Facebook—is well-known, but now a growing corpus of academic research on social networks sites supports this view as well” (qtd. in Dubner).

The University of Michigan ran a survey designed to assess students’ “social capital” and the results found that those who passionately used Facebook had higher social capital scores than those who did not. Social capital, defined by author Francis Fukuyama, is an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. The norms that constitute social capital can range from a norm of reciprocity between two friends, all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. Barry Wellman, a professor who studies networks, suggests that social capital has simply moved online. Social Networks, such as Facebook, have played an important role in maintaining and strengthening reciprocal relationships (qtd. in Dubner).

Social networking can be a useful venue for learning and increasing a person's knowledge. People love to share what they know with others and are often free in giving advice. Through social networking, a person can check out friends of friends and read what they have to say about a website, movie, book, etc. Through social networking, people are giving free promotions of their favorite products. Passing this information on from person to person is called "viral marketing". Professor Nicole Ellison suggests that people reap the benefits of their "weak ties"—people not known as well because they can share useful information and ideas (qtd. in Dubner).

Social networking can be a "shoulder" for moral support—a cheering section. Proof of this is found in "Social Networking Sites Help Shed Weight," an article printed from *The Times of India*. People who need moral support and nutritional information have found a common thread on networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. "These social networking sites are a perfect place for people to record their progress, find others in the same boat or join weight loss groups" and "It can be motivating to see your friends on one of these sites losing weight. It can push you to work harder and stay focused" (Barthmare). In *Cyberhood vs. Neighborhood*, author John Perry Barlow, who was grieving over a death of a loved one, found "openheartedness that would have caused grave uneasiness in physical America" through an online social network (349).

Not everyone agrees on the benefits of social networking. There are downsides as well. There have been some studies that suggest the more time a person spends on technology, the less they know how to use social skills. One psychiatrist, Dr. Gary Small, testifies that the more digital technology that is used, the more the circuitry of the brain is changed. The ability to have a conversation face to face becomes awkward and non-verbal messages are misinterpreted.

Also, today's wired world is all about speed; therefore, a child gathering information on the Intranet does not develop analysis and comprehension skills that come from thorough reading (Ritter).

Another downside of social networking is that it has become a hunting ground for ignorant teens and young adults, who does not realize the consequences of posting pictures that could be defames. With more and more people getting connected through MySpace and Facebook, there is nothing stopping an employer from looking up an employee. Once there, an off-color picture or some derogatory dialogue may give that employer a reason to question an employee's character. Recruiters and employers have been known to make hiring decisions based on photos seen of applicants that are drunk or inappropriately dressed (qtd. in Dubner).

Another argument is that people only join networks that their friends are on, or only make friends with people that have the same interest as them. "Is this a bad thing? It might be if, by choosing potential friends via their Facebook profiles, it means that folk cut themselves off from serendipitous encounters with those who are superficially different from the, ethnically, socio-economically, and even in terms of musical taste" (qtd. in Dubner).

Why are there non-conformists to social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, in the first place? The fear of becoming self absorbed, socially isolated, and not using the most of one's time are rumored as some of the reasons for resisting. Then, the ones who do join find themselves taking a much needed break from all the socializing. According to Martha Irvine, author of article "Are You a Twit if You're Not on Twitter?" social networking fatigue begins to set in for some users. The reality is however, "friendships represent a considerable burden on our time and our physical and emotional resources" and "friends are a big investment"

(qtd. in Dubner). Being social can be exhausting. Once we re-energize, we're back to making sacrifices to maintain friendships because we fear isolation.

Although powerful new technologies provide great benefits, Martin Baily, an elderly adviser to McKinsey Global Institute said they can change the way we live. He remembers when air-conditioning was invented and how comfortable it made him and his family; however, it put an end to visiting with the neighbors on the front porch (qtd in Dubner).

The reality is most people need people contact whether it is face to face or on-line. Social networking is much more than a fad. There is no rule that says a person has to join one, and there is no rule that says a person cannot quit. As Malcom Ritter mentions, more than 2,000 years ago, Socrates warned about a different information revolution—the rise of the written word, which he considered a more superficial way of learning than the oral tradition (Ritter). Was Socrates right in his prediction or was he wrong? Is Social Networking good for society or is it bad?

Like many other concepts, social networking is neither black nor white. Barlow's opinion is that it is not gray either. "It is, along with the rest of life, black/white. Both/neither. We have to get over our Manichean sense that everything is either good or bad, and the border of cyberspace seems to me a good place to leave that old set of filters.

" Whether we have an opinion or not, accept it or not, proof of its benefits or proof of its harm, the impact of cyberspace is not going away. The only place cyberspace is going is everywhere.

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My Grandpa

I've never met anyone as kind and generous as my grandfather, John Blackford, Jr. He was always there in times of crisis, no matter what. If someone in the family ever needed money he would loan it to them every time. He would even give us his shirt off his back if he had to. He was a very giving, and caring person. I remember his beautiful smile, and silly laugh. He had silver hair that he combed to the side, he was tall, and had a big belly like Santa Claus that hung over his blue jeans. He always wore blue jeans and t-shirts, nothing too special, just a normal guy. Occasionally, when we went out for dinner as a big family, he would wear a nice button up shirt. He really enjoyed being with all of the family. He was always happy and smiley at all of our big family get-togethers, and weddings in the family. He even walked one of my uncle's wives down the aisle, because her dad wouldn't.

As a child I remember my mom and dad dropping my brother and me off at Grandpa's so he could babysit us while they ran errands. Grandpa would usually take us to the lake. We would drive through Saylorville Lake and take in the beautiful sights. The grass was so green; the sunlight glistened on the water as it swayed along the shore. We would take short walks around enjoying the wonderful summer days, the nice fresh air, and summer breeze; afterwards grandpa would always take us to KFC because he knew my brother and I both loved chicken. After eating lunch together we would venture out to Big Creek, and he would let us play on the playground as long as we wanted. I loved playing on the tire swing while my grandpa pushed it

around and around. My brother and I would climb across the monkey bars just to show grandpa we could do it. We would yell at him and say “Grandpa, watch me, watch me,” we were always excited to show him what we could do. We ran around like crazy, played in the sand and made sand castles. We would even make tunnels to put water around our castles, and say there were sharks in the water. I always had lots of fun spending days with Grandpa especially when he took us somewhere like the playground.

Sometimes we would just stay at Grandpa’s apartment and watch TV or a movie. His apartment was very small, he had two recliners in the living room, and he usually sat in the big, comfy, blue one. He always offered his chair when company came. There was also a small dining room table where my brother and I use to sit and play board games. He had many pictures of his kids and grandkids, some hanging on the walls, and others on his TV stand. He always had pop, candy, and cookies for us.

Every time I left Grandpa’s house I never left empty handed. The last time I visited him he sent me home with a whole box of fudge bars. Even when Grandpa came to visit at our house, he would bring us chubby cola and chocolate chip cookies. He knew they were our favorite. Every time we said goodbye to Grandpa he would pick us up and we’d give him a great big hug.

My grandpa was very conservative. He saved a great deal of his money, “if it aint broke, don’t fix it,” he’d say. He grocery shopped at Save-A-Lot, and didn’t buy more than he needed, besides the sweets he always gave my brother and me. He didn’t really have a lot of stuff. He wasn’t a materialistic person. When my dad would take my grandpa, my brother, and I out to a restaurant for dinner, he wouldn’t order anything expensive on the menu, like a steak meal. He would get something cheap.

When I got older I didn't spend as much time with him, because we moved an hour away. We would stop by his place while we were in Des Moines to visit him every once in awhile when we went there. A few years ago he started to change, he wasn't the same; he wasn't as healthy. His belly wasn't so big anymore, and he began to shrivel and shrink. He didn't talk as much and I didn't hear that occasional chuckle. He was very quiet. I would try to talk to him, but he didn't seem to want to say much. He didn't come around as much; he would sit in his apartment alone, sometimes in silence. This made me really sad inside because I knew my grandpa wasn't as strong and healthy as before. My grandpa is a very important person to me. He taught me to be kind, generous, and to respect others. Most importantly, he taught me to save my money, to be conservative. He passed away last August of a heart attack, and I miss him more than ever. I would give anything to have just one more day with him.



The Ultimate Driving Experience

It was the semi finals of the Western Conference Finals in Denver, Colorado. As I drove my 14 foot long Jr. Dragster through the water box to do my burnout, I could see the ESPN 2 cameras shoved in my face. It was hard to focus on this important run. I slammed the gas pedal to the foot boards of my car and the engine roared to life as I did my burn out to build up heat in my motor and to clean off my tires for the semi final elimination round. Going home now was not an option. I had made it past five single elimination rounds, and I was not about to give up now.

My dad had set the idle of my car to a steady 4,200 rpm before I coasted to the starting line. My next opponent would be the former National Western Conference Finals Champion, Kristie Thompson. I knew this task would not be easy. As both cars were staged, I took one last deep breath and watched the three yellow amber lights go down. The lights steadily came down one after another. As the third light came on, I mashed the gas pedal and went for a ride.

Growing up, racing was my sport, hobby, and life. I had tried other sports like basketball, football, and baseball, but I was never interested in them enough to commit to them. Drag racing was more of my style. The way I saw it, drag racing was the only sport that needed two balls instead of one.

The Western Conference Finals was not a normal race. This race involved each participant to be on a track team. Back in the 1990's, to earn the right to be on the team, each

racer had to be within the top ten in the track points system. As the participant count grew over the years, the rule changed from being in the top ten in points to just having to sign up to run for points at a track. Considering I was signed up at a track to be in the points running, I was qualified to go race, but just because I was qualified to race, did not mean that I was going to go. The decision had to go through my parents first. In years past, many of the families that my parents and I got to know had always gone to this race. The report from them was always the same.

My friends would say to me, "Carter, you should've gone to the race. It was so much fun! You need to go next year."

My parents got the same report from my friends' parents as well. So in the summer of 2005, my parents and I made the trip out to Denver, Colorado, for the Western Conference Finals.

On Friday July 22, 2005, my family and I, along with other racing friends, left for Denver, Colorado. Having a long, ten-hour drive, there was nothing for me to do but listen to my rock and rap music and watch the world go by. I also found that falling asleep helped the trip go by even faster. During the trip, I could not help myself but imagine standing in the spot light holding my hard-earned trophy and a \$5000.00 savings bond. All I wanted to do was to show up at the track and win.

We pulled over for a rest from driving and would continue driving the rest of the way in the morning. Saturday morning, ten long and boring hours later, we arrived at the famous Bandimere Speedway in Denver, Colorado. I will never forget the amazing view from the grandstands as I looked off into the distance at the jagged mountain tops of the Rocky

Mountains, which surrounded the racetrack. As we went to the hotel, which we would call home for the next week, I could not wait for the fun and excitement to start.

Sunday came around, and the only reason my family and I went to the track was so we could wait in line to buy tech cards and get information for the upcoming week. We later found out there were 501 car entries. This was a waste of a day in my eyes because we had just traveled ten hours and then the next day my family and I would sit around and do nothing. At this point that was the least of my worries. I was going to spend a week with my favorite people and participate in my favorite sport in the world. Little did I know this week would be the nirvana of my racing career.

I was very successful throughout my racing career. Being the 2004 Eddyville Raceway Park Champion and 2005 Eddyville Raceway Park Champion Runner-up, and having 16 event wins and 14 event runner-ups, this Western Conference Finals race would be the most memorable.

Monday just so happened to be a test day, which gave me a chance to work on my reaction times and to see how the car would run. Considering the air at a mile high above sea level is much less dense, the cars ran slower. There were 501 cars that had entered for the week, so getting more than one test run was near impossible. Every run was precious to each race team. As the week went on, I had four other passes down the track. My car was running very consistent E.T.'s (elapsed time) and I, the driver, was driving like I had been doing it all my life. Considering my driving was right on, my car was running well, and my confidence was up, everything was looking good.

Thursday night came sooner than anticipated. I was having so much fun with my friends driving our pit vehicles up and down the pit spots, listening to music, and talking about anything

and everything. It was Thursday night when I finally realized that the next day was Friday, which meant it was time for first round eliminations. As I was realizing that, the nerves settled in my stomach like something terrible. Friday was only first round eliminations and if I lost first round, I was on a long trip back home to Pella, Iowa.

As Friday morning came, I do not think I have ever been so nervous in my life. It was go time. Everything was business from here on out with a little fun here and there; of course, half the reason I got into racing was to have a good time. Arriving at the track, I could tell everyone was nervous about the big race. I unloaded my car from the trailer and started cleaning it from “head to toe.” Somehow this always calmed me. After a few hours, the blue, white, orange, red, and yellow colors began to sparkle like a bright star in the dark night sky, and the chrome engine parts were almost blinding when the sun was at the right angle.

“The 15-year-old class, please make your way to the staging lanes at this time,” said the announcer.

“Hey, Dad, we have been called,” I announced to my dad.

We hooked up my car to the golf cart and made our way to the staging lanes to get paired up with my next opponent. Once again my nerves seemed to be right at home in my stomach. Now was go, or go home, and I for sure was not going home. I suited up in my blue, hot, and heavy fire suit, put my helmet on, and started buckling my five point harness to keep me from falling out in case of a wreck.

My dad started me up, and my motor roared to life. I did my burn out, and my dad set the idle at 4,200 rpm as I coasted to the starting line. Both my opponent and I staged our cars and watched the three yellow amber lights come down. At once both my opponent and I took off at the same time. At the finish line, I looked up and I saw the win light on my side of the 1/8th mile

long racetrack. I had won the first round and was able to stay one more day to finish the event. I slowed my car to a stop after the run and shook my opponent's hand and showed great sportsmanship. This same routine continued for five more exciting rounds of racing sending five other kids packing their bags. The semi finals finally came. I was one round past the trophy round, so I knew I was leaving this place with some hardware.

After I staged my car that semi final round, I did not care if I won or not. Of course, I wanted to win, but at this point I had accomplished more than what I came to do. I wanted to win first round and race with the best of the best in the western half of the United States. I wanted to make my name known. I did just that.

I watched the three yellow amber lights come down one by one, and I mashed the gas just as the light turned green. My opponent and I left the starting line with nearly identical reaction times and we raced down the track. Constantly looking back, I kept my eye on the other car. As the finish line approached, she slowly moved beside me. The race was too close to tell by the naked eye. Anticipating seeing the win light, I looked over to the scoreboard. I was disappointed to find out that the win light was on my opponent's side. I lost to the former Western Conference Finals National Champion.

I left this race with something special. Besides the \$1000.00 savings bond and a trophy that stood up past my waist, I learned that winning is not everything. It is the experience and what I learned from the event that matters. Going into the race, all I could think about was winning, but as I left the track that Saturday evening watching the mountains disappearing out of sight, I thought back of all the fun and excitement I had and came to the conclusion that I had had the time of my life. This event helped me make who I am today because it taught me to do activities for the experience and to learn from those experiences. Even though I lost in the semi

final of the race of my life, I still often wonder where I would be standing now if I had won the
race.



The Great Marijuana Debate

“According to the United Nations, 141 million people around the world use marijuana and marijuana is the most commonly used illegal drug in the United States. Approximately, 80 million Americans admit to having tried marijuana at least once, and about 11 million admit to smoking it regularly” (Appendix 169). With these statistics in mind, it should be noted that there are very few debatable subjects, which spawns such great clashes as that on the legalization of marijuana.

The current status of the use of marijuana is very reminiscent of the prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s. By 1933 national Prohibition came to an end, due to the fact that alcohol consumption did not decrease and prison populations increased (Boaz 58). Marijuana is currently the center of the same statistics, with usage and prison populations rising. In addition, by making marijuana illegal, the federal government is feeding a very dangerous “black market” for marijuana. This “black market” leads directly to gang violence, assaults, and organized crime, which is the same result that the prohibition of alcohol had on the United States back in the 1920s. Without doubt, marijuana needs to be legalized.

One of the main reasons why marijuana should be legalized is the shear financial benefits legalization would create. According to Ronald Fraser of the *Long Island Business News*, “nationally, with an actual market value of \$35.8 billion, marijuana ranks ahead of corn and wheat crops – combined” (14A). Just think of the financial gain if the “marijuana barriers” were

removed and marijuana were taxed. Fraser also notes “taxpayers could save up to \$1.1 billion a year by no longer enforcing anti-marijuana laws. Tax revenues on marijuana sales could bring in up to \$65 million per year” (14A). Other than tax revenues, legalizing marijuana could bring in other forms of money to the country.

There is no real way to know just how much money can be made with legalizing marijuana, but the money saved by doing away with marijuana laws is tremendous in itself. It has been stated that “California saves almost \$100 million a year by treating marijuana possession as a civil rather than a criminal offense” (Ruschmann 80). When dealing with the financial aspect of marijuana there also has to be consideration given to the farming possibilities. When people think about marijuana, they only consider the drug and the effects it can have on a person. However, there are multiple uses from a marijuana plant. The resources farmers can draw from a marijuana plant are almost limitless.

The stalk of a marijuana plant contains very strong fibers, which can be made into items like rope, fabric, and even paper. To be able to create such a wide variety of uses out of one plant would be highly desired by any farmer. Opening up the cash crop market would only help the financially strapped farmers of America. Growing around the world, from China and Germany to Canada and Peru, marijuana could be a viable option for many farmers due to the fact that it can grow in almost any climate. It not only grows all across the world, but also across time. For example, it was used in ancient Greece for medicine, helped in the building of the pyramids in the form of ropes, and was utilized in the early American settlements as a home building material (Robinson 19). Re-introducing marijuana to farmers would almost certainly bring in the much needed revenue increases and It would open up new products for a stagnate market.

Yet another reason to legalize marijuana is the medicinal benefits it has. Marijuana has been used as medicine since recorded history. Ancient Hebrew archeological sites have unearthed the use of marijuana in childbirths, which long preceded the birth of Christ (Martinez 2). Marijuana has been linked in aiding the treatments of such conditions as glaucoma, anorexia, arthritis, and cancer. Most recently, marijuana has also been used as a treatment for HIV/AIDS patients, who have stated marijuana has helped them with the side effects of their treatments like lack of appetite and queasiness (Schlosser 46).

There are many uses for marijuana and there are currently many debates as to whether or not marijuana is a viable medical tool. Many people argue that marijuana is not a useful substitute for legal drugs. While modern medicine is the best that it has ever been, the U.S. population must recognize the effects marijuana has as a whole. There are many active ingredients involved in marijuana that all interact together. Therefore, it is hard to pin point the exact chemicals which help certain medical conditions (Schlosser 47). In many cases, it is just easier, and cheaper, to smoke a marijuana cigarette than to go out and buy a synthetic version, which is not as effective.

People are able to monitor the amount of the drug they are using by smoking a little bit and then deciding if they need more or less. Whereas, most drugs come in a pill that can't just be taken a little bit at a time; people must take the whole pill. It is also interesting to note that "it is possible to die by eating too much salt. Salt is not illegal. Aspirin kills by overdose" (Marshall 82), and yet marijuana – medicinally – remains helpful but illegal. Oddly enough, there have been no cases on record of people overdosing on marijuana. According to Eric Schlosser author of *Reefer Madness* "marijuana is one of the few therapeutically active substances known to man for which there is no well-defined fatal dose. It has been estimated that a person would have to

smoke a hundred pounds of marijuana a minute for fifteen minutes in order to induce a lethal response” (48).

There are many skeptics who claim marijuana is a gateway drug, which opens people up to the possibilities of trying harsher more addictive drugs. It is also widely believed that marijuana makes people dependant on the drug. However, marijuana being a gateway drug couldn't be farther from the truth. Marijuana is one of the least addictive drugs available and carries almost no dependency level. There are no scientific facts showing marijuana as a gateway drug. Nor are there any long-term negative effects associated with prolonged marijuana use (Allentuck and Bowman 76).

According to modern statistics, “for every 104 Americans who have tried marijuana, there is only one regular user of cocaine, and less than one user of heroin. Marijuana is clearly a ‘terminus’ rather than a gateway for the overwhelming majority of marijuana smokers” (Cussen and Black 101). Taking these facts into consideration, there are thirty-two states which allow the use of medicinal marijuana. Based on the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, states are not required to arrest people for federal offenses; state’s rights allows individual states to permit the use of marijuana even though the federal government declares it illegal (Earleywine 141).

The main reason for the legalization of marijuana is prison overcrowding. The prison population today is overwhelming. The current laws on file for marijuana use have inappropriately contributed to the overcrowding of the nation’s prisons. According to the US Department of Justice, there are about 1.4 million people arrested and charged with a drug crime in the US a year. Now, of those people, there are roughly 45,000 people just sitting in jails or prisons for marijuana offenses (“Persons” 1; Schlosser 46). There are just too many low-level

marijuana arrests for our prison systems to handle. According to the book Marijuana, “in the United States there are more drug arrests for crimes involving marijuana than any other drug.

Since 1993, there have been nearly 6.5 million marijuana related arrests, 88 percent of which were for possession of the drug” (Appendix 168). Added people in jail for marijuana offenses simply equals up to many extra mouths to feed every year (Schlosser 46). It’s hard to believe the staggering numbers associated with a drug, which isn’t classified as a toxin (unlike tobacco and alcohol) and has no lethal dosage. According to the *Sunday Independent*, “the average time spent in jail for a marijuana offense is 10 years, whereas the average time spent in jail for murder is six years” (Leslie 1). The jail time for a marijuana offense is a hard statistic to digest, but it is the harsh reality in the world of drug enforcement. The real problem here is the effect of jailing a person who is the head of a household.

When people are imprisoned and they are the money makers of a family, there is a ripple effect created and there is no clear end to its effects (Silverberg 33). After being jailed, individuals then have a “black cloud” above their heads. This cloud prevents them from applying for numerous government programs like student loans, small business loans, and even farm subsidies (Schlosser 54). Why should a person be punished so harshly for doing something, which has no harm on anyone else? When people use marijuana, they are engaging in activities that only directly affect themselves; they are causing no injuries to anyone else. In reality, marijuana users are doing nothing different to themselves than that of a tobacco user or that of an individual using alcohol.

It is hard to believe with the evidence available that marijuana has not been legalized yet. With all of the financial gains to be earned and the savings in valuable tax dollars, legalizing marijuana is a decision that just makes sense. Why should people who have committed serious

crimes be able to walk out in public, while someone who gets caught smoking marijuana is forced to spend months in jail? If marijuana were legalized, the “black market” would disappear literally overnight. Legalization would take money off of the streets and put it in the American economy.

There has never been any concrete evidence for or against the use of marijuana. Therefore, the government should not label marijuana as being bad without the evidence to support its claims. The prohibition of alcohol had no success in the 1920s and in the same light, the prohibition of marijuana is a complete flop. In the grand scheme of life, there are simply more important items that must be focused on. Instead of trying to run ineffective programs on marijuana, the US government should divert its focus on the economy, and then it would realize the possibilities legal marijuana could have. The entire debate boils down to money, money saved by the public and money gained by the government.



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The Only Way to Go

“Penis, Penis, Penis, Vagina, Vagina, Vagina” (Perensky). Sadly enough with the simple addition of three words—condom and birth control—this quotation from the popular 1999 teen film *Varsity Blues*, in which a sex education teacher is teaching a class of high school students, perfectly describes the only information that today’s high school students are required to know by the federal government. Those three subjects or words, and that is all.

Then when studies are released with statistics stating that one in four teenage girls in the United States have an STD, our nation, states, cities, and communities wonder how something like this could have happened (“1 in 4 Teen” 1). The reason this statistic is present in the first place is because our schools teach abstinence-only sexual education and get paid to do so by the government. Basically, in an abstinence-only class, teenagers are told what sex is, how sex works, what happens as a result of sex, and then they’re told not to have sex until they are married.

As most parents know, children don’t always do what they are told. For instance, what do most young children do when they are told specifically not to get a cookie out of the cookie jar? The second the adult leaves the room, and the child is alone, he or she is gunning straight for the cookies. The same applies to sex, and in almost the same context. Parents know that teenagers are more likely to do just the opposite of what they are told. It is for this reason that abstinence-only classes should not even be an option. There is only one option for sex education

courses taught in schools, a comprehensive sexual education class in schools would help students lead healthier lives, initiate important discussions between parents and their children, and also promote responsibility within the children's lives.

A comprehensive sex education class would help parents with their number one job as a parent, keeping their children safe and healthy. If parents wanted to ensure a safe and healthy future for their children, they would support a comprehensive sexual education class because without such a class, an adolescent could receive a complete education and come out lacking the life skills that would be needed to fulfill healthy sexual relationships (Bourton 20). Also, in the article "Should We Be Teaching Sex Education or Sexual Abstinence?" Del Stover, Senior Editor for American School Board Journal, says this about abstinence-only classes:

Such success—by an educational philosophy that has come under attack for being ideologically driven, its effectiveness unsupported by research, and guilty of providing inaccurate public health information to children—is both demoralizing and infuriation to many education and public health organizations that stand in opposition. Nearly half of students engage in sexual activity before the age of 19, they argue. How can schools be asked to leave students ill prepared to protect themselves once they're sexually active? (43)

Still on the subject of teens and their health, in the same article, Stover quotes Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards saying, "Abstinence-only programs keep teens in the dark and do nothing to help parents protect their children's health" (qtd. in Stover 43). U.S. Representative Henry A. Waxman says, "This data supports what a growing body of public health evidence has indicated: Abstinence-only programs don't protect teen health. In short,

American taxpayers appear to have paid over 1 billion in federal dollars for programs that have no impact” (qtd. in Samuels 8).

People who are in favor of abstinence-only classes and oppose a comprehensive sex class would say that abstinence is 100 percent health because there is no sex until marriage. However, as was stated earlier, one in four teens now has an STD. Among these one in four teens with an STD, a virus that is known to cause cervical cancer is the most common STD of girls ranging in age from 14 to 19 (1 in 4 Teen” 1). These statistics come during and after a time when abstinence-only classes were implemented and supported, which justifies that abstinence-only classes are ineffective and do not provide enough information to protect students and help them lead healthy lives.

Another plus to having comprehensive sex education courses taught in high school is the time that students can spend with their parents talking about views and issues related to sex. A comprehensive sex class would provide students with information that parents might not want them to hear because in the eyes of the parents they are protecting their children. Sex is not a topic that most parents would find ideal for a family discussion, but during this discussion, parents can relay to their children what their own personal views, understandings, and most importantly, their expectations for their children when it comes to sex. Sex education should provide more than biological facts. Children need to be able to discuss issues (Singleton 28). Issues such as what is acceptable in public, what the students’ parents’ wishes are when it comes to purity, and what questions are asked by the children.

Most parents are probably not comfortable with talking to their children about sex. This anxiety about sex can be translated to their children and achieve the opposite effect of what the parents are ultimately wanting to do, protect them. Parents will be better protecting their

children by talking to them and relaying information about their expectations, and therefore, providing them with vital information that will protect them in the future. This way their children know the information that their parents want them to know, as well as their parents' expectations. While at school, children are being exposed to information they will one day need to know to carry on a healthy sex life.

Another great effect of having a comprehensive sex education class in schools is that it will promote responsibility among the students. As children grow up, there are certain characteristics that their parents want them to learn, such as compassion, fairness, trustworthiness, citizenship, and most importantly, responsibility. This is most important because they will eventually have to pay bills every month, take care of a family, be on time to work, and make the right decisions on their own when it comes to their sex lives. Such *responsibility can be hard to learn when politicians, in partnership with religious parties, lobby for programs that "Promote chastity and limit discussion about contraceptives to their failure rates"* (Stover 42).

This idea in itself not only provides biased information to manipulate minds, but also infringes some of the mentioned characteristics above that are ideal to instill in children. According to Joneen Karuth-Mackenzie, the executive director of WAIT (why am I tempted?) training organization, a nonprofit group in Denver, who is quoted in Stover's article "Should We Be Teaching Sex Education or Sexual Abstinence?" "students need to understand what a healthy relationship is like, how to deal with social pressures that influence sexual behavior, . . . and that there is nothing wrong with deciding they're not ready for sex" (43). When students are armed with the information that a fully comprehensive sex education course will provide them, the ball is in their court when it comes to the responsibility involved in making the right decision about

sex. When students have all of this information, they are also more accountable for their actions when it comes to their sex lives.

For adolescents deciding when they are reading for sex can be the most important of all. However, with only the information about what it is and how it works that is provided in abstinence-only classes, this decision can be the hardest and, depending on the situation, the most important choice young adults have to make in their lives. And from looking at the statistics and analyses, the only way to get children the necessary education to make the right choice and to make that choice on their terms is by making a comprehensive sex education class mandatory for all students. J. Kitzinger put it best when he said, "The twin concepts of innocence and ignorance are vehicles for adult double standard. A child is ignorant if she [sic] doesn't know what adults want her [sic] to know, but innocent if she [sic] doesn't know what adults don't want her [sic] to know" (qtd. in Giami et al. 485).

The main point that everyone in this debate, on either side, is trying to defend is what is best for the children who will be affected by these decisions. Parents all try to keep their children safe and healthy, but the point is the way the statistics and analyses are going, abstinence-only is not the way to go. From the time children were getting caught with their hands in the cookie jar, to the time of their first sexual experience, the point was not to protect them from the world. The point is to get them ready for the world they will someday live in. The only way to fully do this is to make a comprehensive sexual education class mandatory for all students.

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Finding Love

When my birth mother Sue abandoned me at age three, I felt unloved and unwanted. During my early childhood, from age three to age eight, I was in five different foster homes. The last one was the first most positive and loving environment I had ever been in. This was the first time I was shown how a family lives, also, it was the first time to have siblings, parents, and other relatives. They gave me hugs, healthy food, a safe house to live in, and a feeling that I am an important person. At age eight I was so happy with my foster family, yet I felt nervous to know that I might get adopted soon. At last, the people that would become my future parents found me through an adoption agency. Although they were wondering if I would fit into their family as I did in the last foster home. It was also hard because I did not want to get attached to them and be turned away. Again, I had the fear of being sent away when my adopted parents had a baby of their own. Even then, I had to learn to trust them to love me as their own child as much as their other child. I also had to learn that just because my parents had a child of their own did not mean they were going to abandon me like my first mom did. My adoption has worked out because I have been with my family for twenty-five years.

Ethanol: Miracle in the Heartland?

Ethanol is often thought to be the “patriotic fuel” and it is even deemed just as *American* as apple pie (Bryce, “A Promise” 16). There are also many people who think of ethanol use as a way of keeping American dollars in the hands of Americans. By not sending money overseas for oil, Americans think we will win the war on terror. Most people would even say ethanol is America’s way of going *green*. Ethanol is considered highly patriotic, because the entire process takes place on American soil: corn for ethanol is grown on American farms, Ethanol plants are scattered across American cities, and the fuel is kept in American gas stations.

All of the good praise ethanol receives paints a very stunning picture; it might even give people a warm fuzzy feeling inside just thinking about how ethanol is going to change lives. However, the wording used to describe ethanol is nothing more than propaganda. If ethanol is so wonderful, why does the ethanol industry rely so heavily on government subsidies, government grants, to survive? If ethanol is such a good product investors should be lining up to try to *line their pockets* too (Stossel 26)? Furthermore, the U.S. government is recklessly painting nothing more than wonderful scenery on a long dark road. Behind all of the beautiful clouds, majestic mountains, and colorful landscapes lies a dark murky lake full of rising food prices, rising fuel costs, and an enormous amount of pollution. When everything is added up, ethanol is not the answer to America’s foreign oil dependence.

One reason why ethanol is not the answer to America's foreign oil demands is the fact that ethanol is very inefficient as a fuel. According to Pipeline and Gas Journal, "the scientific problem with corn ethanol is that it contains one-third less energy than gasoline. So a motorist has to purchase one-third more fuel to go the same distance" (Perry 70). It is hard to believe people would be willing to stop to purchase more fuel just to get to work. Doing the math at the pumps, a gallon of E85 (85 percent ethanol, 15 percent gasoline) would have to be around \$1.35 in order for added fuel stops to equal the average cost per gallon of regular gasoline, which is averaging around \$4.02 per gallon.

However, according to the E85 website, a gallon of E85 is currently averaging \$3.34 a gallon ("Reported" 1). So with yet another quick figuring on the calculator, if there are two people buying gas and one is using E85 and the other is filling up with regular gasoline, the person buying the E85 would have to spend about \$0.64 more per gallon in order to get to the same place as the person who filled up with regular gasoline. In a money saving economy, it is hard to imagine a "pay less at the pump, but fill up more often" system could gain a favorable audience.

There are skeptics around the U.S. who believe, even if ethanol contains less energy than that of gasoline, ethanol is considerably more profitable, and thus, cheaper to produce. However, it has been determined that when producing ethanol "for every 1 Btu [sic] invested, an investor gets .71 Btus [sic] in return" (Bryce, Gusher 164). To respond, critics would claim the amount of return on gasoline is probably about the same. Robert Bryce, author of Gusher of Lies has numbers to refute such a claim as well. Bryce claims that "for 1 Btu [sic] invested in crude oil and gasoline production, an investor gets 6 or 7 Btus [sic] back" (164). How can ethanol stand on its own if there is no real way of investors making a solid profit compared to oil? Also, if

there is not a profit being made, how can the ethanol process be considered cheaper than gasoline? The whole ethanol process is very inefficient, from the production clear to the gas pump.

Another key aspect as to why ethanol is not the answer to America's foreign oil situation has to do with pollution concerns. People seem to think ethanol is a *green* fuel alternative. What people fail to realize is ethanol actually releases, in the form of nitrous oxide, higher volumes of more dangerous greenhouse gases. Gasoline is no better at greenhouse gas discharges, but gasoline primarily emits carbon dioxide (Bryce, Gusher 165). Nitrous oxide is a gas, which cannot be broken down by other gases in the atmosphere; consequently, nitrous oxide floats endlessly in the stratosphere. Therefore, nitrous oxide is a heavy contributor to both the greenhouse effect and global warming.

There are many other environmental concerns with ethanol people don't realize. When considering ethanol, people need to consider all of the diesel-fueled farm equipment used to plant, harvest, and transport the corn, all of which release harmful carbon emissions (Rotman 56). What about issues ethanol poses in the form of transporting the fuel around the country? Ethanol tends to absorb moisture easily when traveling through piping, so ethanol has to be transported by trucks or railcars (Geiselman 2). So even after the corn is converted to ethanol, gasoline is still needed to move the product around the United States.

With ethanol now becoming far more popular, other environmental concerns have sprouted up. Farm subsidies from the U.S. government have now allowed ethanol to become a very profitable business for farmers, which has led to the creation of more and more farmlands for additional corn. It is startling to imagine, but "farmers are on track to plant 88 million acres of corn this year – up 10 million over 2006 and more than has been planted in the United States

at any time since the 1940s” (Lavelle and Schulte 50). When farmers clear land for fields they are clearing away valuable trees from the environment. When trees are removed from the environment, the farmers are taking natural *eaters* of carbon dioxide off of our planet. As a result of smaller numbers of trees, carbon dioxide is building up hazardous levels in the atmosphere. Trees are also a main factor in the oxygen levels present on earth; removal of trees will essentially equal poorer air quality for generations to come.

The additional corn also requires additional water for it to grow. According to The Conference Board Review, “a gallon of ethanol produced from irrigated corn requires as much water as the amount contained in twenty-five ordinary bathtubs” (Bryce 21). With water conservation at record levels, it is hard to believe the amount of waste being committed during the ethanol process. Every progression in the production of ethanol entails some form of pollution, from the use of nitrogen-based fertilizer all the way to coal-powered ethanol plants (Lavelle and Shulte 47).

Ethanol is not the answer to America’s foreign oil condition due to the impact it is having on the food supplies, nationwide and worldwide. The effects of ethanol production have already put a huge strain on the food market; just consider that “ethanol gobbled up 20 percent of the U.S. corn crop. That surpasses all of the corn Americans consumed last year” (Lavelle and Shulte 50). As a result of the increase in corn consumption for non-food use, the nation’s corn prices have doubled in the same one year span. The rising costs of food can be directly related to that of the use of the nation’s farmlands for corn derived ethanol.

Due to the higher costs for corn, farmers have had to pay more for the feed they use for animals, which has indirectly contributed to rising prices for milk, bread, and meat products (Rotman 56). The largest economic group to feel the most pain, as a result of rising food prices,

will be the poorest of the poor. Given the fact that one large drought could create massive issues down the road, Americans could possibly be looking at some of the darkest days ahead. Using the nation's food supply for a fuel is really a terrible idea not only in relation to the Americans who go hungry every day, but also in the form of added costs to American citizens. According to Gusher of Lies, "the food bill for every American increased by about \$47 due to surging prices for corn and the associated price increases for other grains like soybeans and wheat" (Bryce 161).

It is absolutely unacceptable to expect poor, working class Americans to have to spend more money to feed their families just so people can *think* they are saving at the pump. It can be argued that \$47 extra a year doesn't really seem like a great deal of money, but it is when people are barely making ends meet and living paycheck to paycheck. The rising food costs are not just an American problem either. The entire world food supply could be in jeopardy with 20 percent of the nation's corn being sent overseas, so now the foreign market is becoming depleted as well. By the foreign market becoming depleted, the corn prices have now begun to rise around the world as well (Bryce, Gusher 162).

As a world leader, the U.S. is sending the wrong messages to smaller/poorer countries. Those countries see the U.S. as putting aside the human issues in the world in support of making money and putting money ahead of human interests is exactly what the U.S. is trying to do. The U.S. is taking food out of the hands of the needy and trying to put it in the gas tank.

In a world of "act first, think later," the United States government is definitely taking American taxpayers down a very shady path, full of blind spots and pot holes. Anytime a government downplays major factors and manipulates key statistics, the general population is going to suffer. Without government subsidies, the ethanol industry could not even stay afloat.

Instead of trying to force ethanol to be a miracle answer to oil dependency, the U.S. government should admit the current errors with the ethanol system and put an end to the wasting of tax dollars.

The author of “Ethanol Energy Issue Confront the U.S.,” Mark Perry says it best when he says, “Increasing ethanol production will only lead to higher taxes, higher prices for both food and fuel, and damage to the environment, making us all worse off in the process” (70). It has to be a top priority to make changes in the ethanol system before the problems become too large to handle; it is always easier to clean up a little puddle of water as opposed to a complete flood. If the government lets the water run for too long, then the whole country will drown.

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