

The Scribe



*a collection of outstanding student essays
from English 121 & 122*

*Howard Community College
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Preface

This is our eighth edition of *The Scribe*. Its goal is to recognize and proclaim outstanding student writing that has been completed in *English 121 and 122* (College Composition I and II) at Howard Community College during the past calendar year.

Each year about 1700 students enroll in these courses. Instructors in 2008 nominated excellent essays from their individual classes for consideration. Then a committee of English instructors read all of the nominated essays and selected the ten “best of the best” for publication.

We hope that *The Scribe* will also serve to underscore our belief that good writing is essential to our students and to our world in this Twenty-first Century!

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The Use of Children in Autism: the Musical

“In 1980, autism was a relatively rare disorder, diagnosed in one out of every 10,000 children in the United States. It now impacts one in every 150 children” (*Autism: The Musical*). When one considers how common the disorder is, there are insufficient efforts to create awareness for autism. In 2007, a documentary, called *Autism: the Musical* was aired on HBO. It followed the lives of five children with autism, as they rehearsed and eventually performed in a musical production. This documentary captivated audiences everywhere, and “as it follows their journey, the audience not only better understands the nature of autism, but celebrates the joyful spirit of each child” (*Autism Speaks*). While some question the use of authentic autistic children and their families, the production of *Autism: the Musical* proved to be beneficial as well as ethical.

The mission of the “Miracle Project” was for each individual child to feel loved and accepted for who they are, as well as for them to feel comfortable in the real world (*Autism: the Musical*). Throughout *Autism: the Musical*, the audience is able to see the progression of the autistic children, as well as the level of acceptance the children received from others, including their parents. With the involvement of the “Miracle Project” in the lives of these autistic children and their families, the children were finally able to be better understood by their peers, feel more comfortable in the real world, and feel accepted for who they were.

Many people are unaware of what is meant by a diagnosis of autism, and what families with autistic children face once the diagnosis is made. During the film *Autism: the Musical*, the

mother of an autistic boy, Neal, became engaged. However, when her fiancé asked his parents for their blessing, the elderly father replied, "I feel very good, I would feel better if that boy would be a good boy" (*Autism: the Musical*). This is not an unusual response for parents to hear when others observe their child's autistic behaviors. For the parents of newly diagnosed autistic children, it can be devastating. "For many parents, the diagnosis of autism is a kind of death...dreams wither and die, while the child remains, and 'life' as we know it comes to an end" (Rosenbloom 19). In the film, *Autism: the Musical*, after hearing the diagnosis of autism for her daughter Lexi, her mother immediately thought of a girl wearing diapers simply standing in a corner banging her head against the wall (*Autism: the Musical*). This is not an unusual response from many who continue have this image of autistic individuals.

Autism is a neurological disorder that impacts the normal development of the brain. It impacts the areas that develop social, communicative, and cognitive skills (National Autism Association). Many children, like Neal in the film, are non-verbal; they can't express to the world the way they feel. "For within each of those who bear the label 'autistic' lies a human trapped between our world and theirs, screaming to know and be known, often being taken for little other than their screams" (Souls 37). There are many ways, however, to give a voice to those whose voices cannot be heard. Some of the newer techniques include music therapy and integrative movement classes. The therapeutic approaches used in the "Miracle Project" were able to intertwine the therapeutic art of music, as well as that of integrative movement to create a life changing environment. The resulting documentary has truly changed the way many people view those with autism.

Some may argue that *Autism: the Musical* highlighted only high functioning autistic children. However, this is not completely true. Although the documentary did not focus on any

extremely low functioning autistic children, it did incorporate children at a variety of different levels. The documentary did have a wide range of children not only on the autistic spectrum, but also represented a variety of functioning abilities. “The children on the spectrum were so illustrative of the differences in autism” (HBO). Some of the children, such as Wyatt, seemed to be very high functioning. However, when tested, he was actually quite low cognitively (*Autism: the Musical*). Each of the five main cast members exhibited a unique aspect of autism, which created a very diverse cast. Henry had a form of Asperger syndrome, which is a type of “high functioning” autism. Those affected by Asperger’s tend to have difficulty with social skills, but may be highly gifted intellectually in a particular skill. Lexi had echolalia. This is another form of autism in which the child has difficulty forming her own speech and often repeats what is said to her. Neal was nonverbal. Although intellectually very smart, his type of autism affected the auditory cortex in his brain. This is the area where speech is formulated, and thus Neal struggled with verbal communication. Adam, although not diagnosed with a specific type of autism, had very violent outbursts that were affecting both his academic as well as his family life. Wyatt, like Adam, was not diagnosed with a specific type of autism. Although he appeared to be a very high functioning boy in the movie, his severe difficulties with cognition and learning actually caused Wyatt to be classified as a low functioning autistic child. While none of the five children who were highlighted in *Autism: the Musical*, would be classified as extremely low functioning, they did exhibit a variety of types of autism. Additionally, each child represented different ability levels with areas of both strengths and weaknesses.

Some people believe that a specific documentary about autism is not crucial or even relevant to most people in our society. There are many other disorders, crises, and relevant issues in the world that could effectively be addressed in this format. However, because of the lack of

knowledge and understanding that most people have about this disorder, many misconceptions and prejudices have arisen. People who have autism may have opportunities severely restricted and even their basic human rights may be threatened. Adam's future was seen to be limited by many of the educators who had worked with him. One educator who had helped Adam for several years commented, "If he wasn't autistic, imagine the possibilities" (*Autism: the Musical*). There have been many cases where people have demonstrated true disdain for autistic children. In the book, *Souls: Beneath and Beyond Autism*, the author, Sharon Rosenbloom, discusses the public's negative reactions to her son's autistic behaviors. Autism does not cause any physical changes; therefore, autistic people may look like everyone else. This is one reason why it is difficult for many to fully understand and appreciate the struggles these individuals face. "Their faces do not betray the burden they carry, yet their actions invite rash judgment on themselves and those who tend to them" (*Souls* 41). The documentary *Autism: the Musical*, helped many viewers who might hold these prejudices, to get a glimpse into the lives of those with autism. Although they may not fully appreciate what it is like to have an autistic child, gaining a better understanding of the issues might help them to be less harsh and judgmental of children and their families who struggle with this condition. By producing this documentary, the cast was able to shatter many of the myths people hold about what those with autism can really accomplish. The film has been seen throughout the country. One of the producers of the project, who has been touring with the film, "finds that people who have had no association with autism at all come out really with not only an understanding of what it is but a curiosity and acceptance and a desire to know a person with autism" (HBO). By providing this educational tool, people are just beginning to understand the pain, sorrow and joys of being a parent of an autistic child.

Some people may argue that creating a documentary which uses autistic children is unethical and unnecessary. Additionally, the families and their stories were shared on very personal levels. However, everyone in a family is affected when a member has autism. Having an autistic child has the potential to cause tension within families. As shown in the film, it can cause parents to become depressed, discouraged, and even alienated from each other. Many feel their child's future has been erased with the diagnosis. They may feel helpless and hopeless. This was particularly apparent in both Neal and Lexi's families. In both cases, the marriages ended in divorce. This is very common with many families of autistic children. Having an autistic child can be particularly frustrating. There is no cure and little awareness and understanding about what is involved with autism. There are many parents, including many from the documentary itself, who become both discouraged and angry because of all the negativity and even rejection their children receive. Allowing the families to be part of the documentary illustrates the fact that having a child with autism can cause many relational issues. In *Autism: the Musical* the audience was able to watch the pain that Adam's family experienced as he was first diagnosed. They also witness the heartache that Lexi's parents felt throughout the show, which ended with their marital separation. By witnessing these real-life children and their families, the documentary became more personal and more realistic. Actors could not have done justice to the reactions and behaviors of the children and their parents who were willing to publically share their stories.

Many of the children who participated in the production of *Autism: the Musical* are now more socially accepted and have shown great improvement in many areas in which they had previously struggled. "The Miracle Project" was based on a very successful therapy technique created by Dr. Stanley Greenspan. One of the main strategies of Dr. Greenspan's therapy, "Floortime," is for parents, or those working with the child, to follow the child's lead and join

their movements. One of the children in this documentary had been exposed to this treatment strategy at an early age. “[His mother, Elaine] started bringing in theater people to work with Neal, and they would do crazy things with him, and with big affect, and they would join his world until he was finally able to emerge into our world” (*Autism: the Musical*). Throughout the documentary, this transformation was seen in several of the autistic children. At the beginning of the production, Henry would go into his own world to escape the pressures of the real world. However, the more he retreated, the more pressure he felt. Other students began teasing him at school and his mother became increasingly worried. However, as the musical preparations progressed, Henry began to function more and more in the real world and spent less time in his own. This progression continued even after the documentary was complete. Today, Henry is able to perform at kids comedy shows and still loves to act (CBS News). Wyatt had a similar experience. By watching his friend, Henry, retreat into his own world all the time, Wyatt came to his own conclusions about retreating into solitude. “How are you going to make friends in your own world? I love having people around me so I don’t know why I even go in my own world now” (*Autism: the Musical*). These autistic children clearly benefitted from their participation in the “Floortime” program used in “The Miracle Project.”

Autism: the Musical has helped audiences around the nation to better understand autism, and also to have a greater appreciation for both the individual as well as the families who struggle with the disorder. There are many different aspects and classifications of autism, and this production was able to explore some of the more common forms of the disorder. Autism has affected many people, yet there is little public information that raises awareness about the disorder. Therefore, many families are faced with negative judgments and criticism from those who are unaware of the effects of autism. Through the making of this film, many of the

participants and their families have greatly benefited from their experience. The children's lives were changed by this production, as were the hearts of the audiences who viewed it. After "The Miracle Project" was over, Neal wrote, "[the project] has rescued me from a different life. Everything I have today is because of it" (Shute).

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The Importance of the Author's and Detectives' Methods in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Gold Bug"

A mystery story may be defined as a one that engages its reader in solving a crime through steps of logic; clues are often granted, allowing the reader to solve the mystery before the pieces of the puzzle are “officially” put together. However, Edgar Allan Poe appears to have a different approach to engaging his readers and keeping them on the edge of their seats. In Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Gold-Bug,” the methods of the detectives and the large role that detection plays in the stories complement each other by engaging the reader in the seemingly unsolvable mysteries from start to finish.

The two detectives, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin and Mr. William Legrand, live extraordinarily parallel lives, which may in turn be a reason why their methods for detection are quite similar. Dupin and Legrand both went from wealth to want, isolating themselves from society, and finding entertainment in books, and a friend or two. Their private and solitary lifestyles allow them time to immerse themselves in intellectual education and become aquatinted with analytical thought processes. These characteristics, which were possibly acquired after their monetary losses, further help them in solving the mysteries, and therefore may be considered as new and beneficial fortunes in their lives.

These detectives uncover the mysteries, which lie in front of them, through methods of sequential analysis. Dupin, from “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” uses interviews from various people, the information in the newspaper, and the evidence from the crime scene itself to carefully piece together all details without any exclusion. Legrand, from “The Gold Bug,” also analyzes each detail in his possession of the treasure map with careful scrutiny. For both of these detectives, “to observe attentively is to remember distinctly” (“The Murders” 31). With the overlooking of one minute detail, neither mystery would be able to be solved. For Dupin,, unlike the police, is able to discover the spring in the window which allows it to lock automatically. If he had failed to notice this, then there would have been a gap, and his observational logic would not have been successful. In “The Gold-Bug,” if Legrand had not realized that his friend Jupiter did not know the difference between his right and left sides, then he would have missed discovering the hidden treasure by a few small units. For each of these detectives, every detail is as crucial as the next.

Unlike the technology that can be used today to solve mysteries, these two detectives use evidence and brain power alone. They are always confident in their thought processes, which allow them to proceed in their detecting. Not only do their unique and highly intelligent thought processes allow a reader to be intrigued, but also the large role that detection plays in both mysteries. The majority of each story is consumed by either Dupin or Legrand describing how he solved the mystery, with a few interjections from the narrator. Poe uses this technique to keep the suspense in a rather sly manner. Many detective stories provide enough evidence in order to crack the case before the detectives themselves solve it. In contrast, Poe chooses to withhold

clues from the narrator and reader alike. This method allows the reader to engage in the story and feel a part of it, rather than just being an outsider. “The mind struggles to establish a connection—a sequence of cause and effect—and, being able to do so, suffers from temporary paralysis” (“Gold Bug” 96). The frustrations that consume the narrator from not knowing what is to come and trying to create a connection between the already known information and that which is unknown also carry over to the reader. This creates a great deal of suspense and an urgency to read on, just what any author desires for his books.

For Dupin and Legrand, “the difference in the extent of the information obtained, lies not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation” (“The Murders” 31). Through careful scrutiny, much like that in a game of chess or checkers, the detectives were able to be one step ahead in solving the mystery. It was not their correct presumptions that allowed them to come to solve the mysteries, but rather their keen examinations that led them to the solution. Not only are readers able to be engaged through the methods in which Dupin and Legrand use throughout the stories, but also through the amount of detection, which allows the reader only to solve the mystery through reading the story in entirety. Although the methods for solving the two mysteries are similar, Poe’s lack of clues creates two unique and “unsolvable” stories.

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The Cost of Hard Work

Futurist Herman Kahn predicted in 1967 that by the end of the twentieth century, Americans would have thirteen weeks of vacation and engage in a four-day work week (Surowiecki 2005). Other futurists of the time imagined that the biggest problem of the day would be what to do with all that free time. As I watch my soon-to-be mother-in-law go into her eleventh hour of work for the day, I think to myself, “How can this be? They said it would be so different, this age of leisure!” Alas, Americans today are putting in more and more time on the job, and not always to the productive benefit of the company. We burnout, we fill time idly. We may be productive, possibly the most productive in the world, but we suffer. And when we suffer, productivity suffers along with us.

A common philosophy is that the “American work ethic” is what has made us the most prosperous country in the world. With great conviction, our strong capitalist ideals are cited to explain why we hold the economic place we do in this current global market. I cannot disagree with the fact that we are generally, to coin a phrase, “good, hardworking Americans.” It can be said that because we put in the time, we reap great benefits. But here, I say, at what cost? There is a price we put on physical possession, and, in essence, a price we put on things not able to be quantified: our families, our hobbies, our psyches and sanity. We work 50, 60, even 70 hours a week. We have a strong work ethic and are devoted to our companies, but in the end, when subjecting ourselves and our families to such rigorous working behaviors, it is the family and the personal life that suffers.

In her book, *The Overworked American*, Juliet Schor discusses the productivity dividend. Productivity is measured by goods and services rendered per hour. When productivity increases, workers are either producing the same amount in less time or producing more in equal time (Schor 1993). When this occurs, workers theoretically benefit by either more money or more free time. Since 1949, our productivity level has more than doubled. So it stands to reason that we can now produce more in half the time. Schor contends that we could actually have the 4-day work week once dreamed of (Schor 1993).

Why then, are we still working so much? There seems to be an unspoken rule at many companies where *any* time spent is time well spent. With such a high premium placed on being at the desk, often unnoticed is the amount of time actually spent productively. I once heard on a radio program that the average employee arrives at the office between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning, but doesn't actually start "real work" until after 10. What are people doing during this time? They're checking email, scheduling appointments, paying bills, as incidentally, with the amount of overtime we're putting in, there's little opportunity to accomplish these tasks during personal time. While it may be viewed that being in the office means working, it is to the detriment of the company that, on average, 10 of the 40-plus weekly hours are spent not on production, but on the things individuals need but have no time for.

I often think of a favorite movie quote from *Before Sunrise*. While I cannot remember it verbatim, the gist is this: people like having 'time-saving' devices for all the assistance they offer in accomplishing tasks faster and more efficiently. But no one ever says, "With all the time I've saved using my new palm pilot, I think I'll spend a month in a Buddhist monastery." Instead, they fill that newly-found time with more work, presumably by use of another "time-saving" device. That idea has always resonated with me, particularly as I've sat on buses and trains,

watching businessmen and women starting their actual workday during their commute via the Bluetooth and Blackberry. Productivity is meaningless if you don't take the time to enjoy its fruits.

There are many problems associated with this current model of overwork. Issues such as burnout, excessive absenteeism, rising healthcare costs due to stress all can take a serious toll on a worker's output (Reinhart and Danziger 1994). Studies have shown that all these costly side-effects of overwork can cause a company's ultimate drop in productivity. When put simply, overwork causes the employee to suffer mentally, physically, emotionally, a trifecta of a causal dysfunction of sorts. When the employee experiences these types of overwork-related ailments, the work itself suffers. When work suffers, overall productivity falls. When productivity falls, more work needs to be done in order to balance the fall. The cyclical nature of this cause-effect-cause behavior can be avoided. The efficiency-week hypothesis is just one way to counter this downward spiral.

The theory behind the efficiency-week is this: "an optimum number of hours worked per week will increase the immediate productivity of the labor force as well as the productivity of future generations" (LaJeunesse 1999). Working shorter hours has many virtues. One is the obvious impact of minimizing stress of all varieties on employees. Another is unemployment relief. When more people are working less, more people are needed to fill jobs. Productivity can reach a maximum because employees arrive fresh and recuperated. Though more people are technically doing less, they are doing so more efficiently, with fewer accidents and with more creativity, thus everyone shares in a piece of the pie, from the CEO to the janitor. Labor pioneer Samuel Gompers held this belief: "So long as there is one who seeks work and cannot find it, the hours of work are too long" (O'Hara 1996).

The efficiency week also has economic merits, and not just for the company itself, but for the general economy. When an employee spends 60 hours a week at the office, by simple math, the time that staffer spends away from the office is cut dramatically. It is in that time that people go shopping, go to restaurants, see movies, buy groceries. Having that time taken away, people no longer have the opportunity to put money back into the economy. When thinking of it in terms of economic science, while one side of the workforce has built the supply, the other side of the workforce hasn't the time for the demand. Because of an uneven balance in our personal/business lives, we become burdened with an unstable economy.

A visionary of his time, Henry Ford was the father of fair worker treatment. When the norm was \$2.50 for a ten-hour work day, Ford rattled other businessmen with his innovative and highly competitive \$5.00 per 8-hour work day compensation. Ford's theory was that if his workers could not afford to buy the product they themselves were building, no one would. He began his own "economic stimulus" from within the company. The \$5.00 per day covered the affordability factor. But the counterpart to his idea was that once his product was affordable, if everyone was working constantly, when would they have time to actually utilize it? By cutting the length of the work day, he opened the opportunity for his product to reach mass appeal. Within the combination of more money for less clocked hours, he also created a happy workforce. He was unique in his idea that you do not get optimum output by driving your employees into the ground; you get it by allowing your employees to balance work with play.

Perhaps one way to correct this problem is to change our vernacular. Tom DeMarco, a project management expert, believes it's time we start refiguring "slack." While initially, this term seems negative, with no home in the workplace, DeMarco asserts that "a certain amount of 'slack' gives people time to think about reinventing the organization instead of preoccupying

them with busywork” (DeMarco 2001). The “slack” of which DeMarco speaks could be perhaps perceived more as “cutting someone slack” rather than “slacking off.” There is value in this concept. “Slack” can advance ideas and rejuvenate staff. When allowing employees to slow down and assess a situation or project, they are allowed to create rather than compile. Having a challenging work environment as well as feeling appreciated can be furthered by “slack.” And this setting is ultimately better for retention.

When people hear the term “Me Generation” (to which I belong), instantly, minds go to the image of the snotty, whiny, self-absorbed stereotype of this new age entering the workforce. While all these negative ideas and preconceptions circle around us like a dust storm, it is from this generation that I believe we will see the most change. Interviews state that it is, in fact, the “Me Generation” that is striving to change the standard. We don’t want the 70-hour work weeks of the past only to be burnt out by 40 and miserable for the rest of our working careers. We want to play. We want to be successful in our careers, but we also want to have our priorities because when you’re too exhausted, what good is all that money if you never get to do anything with it? As playwrights Kaufman and Hart stated abundantly in the play by the same name, *You Can’t Take It With You*.

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It Takes a Lot of Courage to Go through Life

The poetic career of Anne Sexton began with her psychiatrist's suggestion to express her feelings of depression in writing (Kendall). Nevertheless, Sexton's lifelong suicide obsessions overtook her in 1974. In her last collection, *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, "Courage" appears, where Sexton manages to cover a life from its beginning to its end. The poem consists of four stanzas. Each stanza is dedicated to courage and the role it plays during a particular period of life. In the first stanza, Sexton concentrates on childhood. The second and third stanzas embrace young and late adulthood, respectively. The author shifts to the final stage of life and ultimate death in the last stanza. Throughout the poem, Sexton utilizes a series of metaphors referring the audience to vivid, yet at the same time well-known imagery. This allows for a deeper understanding of the idea of courage. With a closer look, the audience can see the author's attempt to convey the idea that many stages in life are inspired and maintained by courage.

At the beginning of her poem, Sexton exemplifies different types of courage that children can have by illustrating characteristic situations. She writes,

The child's first step,
as awesome as an earthquake.
The first time you rode a bike,
wallowing up the sidewalk. (2-5)

Seemingly simple and ordinary events in childhood, such as learning to walk or to ride a bicycle, are manifestations of courage. Although every child virtually goes through these experiences,

children have to overcome their initial fear of being hurt in order to grow and develop. Importantly, people usually fail to recognize these displays of courage since they are very small and commonplace. For this reason, the author metaphorically compares a “child’s first step” with an “earthquake,” expressively stressing the significance of the first event.

In the second and third stanzas, Sexton focuses on courage as the admirable quality of people that enables them to endure difficult moments in their lives. By writing, “Your courage was a small coal,” the author conveys the considerable role of courage in the maintaining of inner feelings (Sexton 20). Courage, like burning coal in a stove, gives up its energy in order for sufferers to tolerate states of emotional or physical distress. Thus, the author manages to create an image of a person gaining inner strength through the igniting of courage. This thought is reinforced by the author “You did not fondle the weakness inside you / though it was there,” implying that courage has strengthened the person’s character in order to face and deal with hardships (Sexton 18-19).

Finally, Sexton makes a shift in the role of courage during the final years of life and eventual death. At the end of life, it takes much more courage to become aware of and accept the coming of death. Therefore, courageous people often devote more time to loved ones since they know that time is short and not much time is left. This is vividly depicted in the line, “those you love will live in a fever of love” (Sexton 42). In addition, courageous people overcome fears associated with death by accepting death as the inevitable end. Thus, they are able to create essential and favorable conditions for facing death in calmness and peace. The author illustrates this idea by writing,

... at the last moment
when death opens the back door

you'll put on your carpet slippers
and stride out. (44-47)

In Anne Sexton's poem "Courage," the author represents the concept of courage in various stages of life. Enabling the audience to envision courage, Sexton uses metaphors and similes to convey the meaning and role of this abstraction in ordinary life. While it is true that the author is able to vividly describe courage in the poem, Sexton appears to be in pursuit of courage herself. The fact of being depressed may suggest that Sexton really knew the hardness of life and the importance of courage in it. On the other hand, a few attempts at committing suicide may put forward the notion of Sexton's lack of courage to overcome life's difficulties and alleviate miseries. Perhaps, by writing the poem about courage, Sexton hoped to develop this quality of character needed vitally for the continuation of life.

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Medical Marijuana

For five thousand years, marijuana has been used for medicinal purposes throughout the world. Originating in Taiwan and China, it spread and was used by the Persians, Greeks, East Indians, Romans, and the Assyrians for the control of muscle spasms, the reduction of pain, and even against indigestion. The medical uses of marijuana, otherwise known as cannabis, continue now in present day, even with the introduction of new medicines. The most common uses for cannabis continue to be as an analgesic for patients with HIV or for those undergoing advanced chemotherapy for cancer treatment, and as a muscle control for spasms in those with multiple sclerosis. While some countries have legalized the use of cannabis for medical use, many have not, including the US, which deems it socially, religiously, medically and politically unfit for use. However, more and more studies seem to be indicating that marijuana has positive benefits. The possibility that cannabis can relieve neurological symptoms in people suffering from various diseases, especially terminal illnesses, should be reason enough to legalize it for medical usage.

Opponents to the legalization of marijuana argue against the drug being smoked for medicinal use. Basic arguments include the assumptions that marijuana is immoral, addictive, or can lead to the use of more dangerous drugs. Other basic claims state that if it is legalized, it would create an easier availability to access the drug and create even more consumers rather than limiting the drug to only those who need it. Furthermore, while there are studies that have proven that cannabis has positive effects on patients, there are also the inherent risks of smoking marijuana, just like tobacco and any other drug. The risk of lung damage when it comes to

smoking marijuana is certainly relevant. Whether or not it is actually more damaging than cigarettes and tobacco is not proven. However, long term and habitual use of smoked marijuana has the ability to cause lung cancer, bronchitis and emphysema. In addition to physical effects, there is also the risk of mental health damage. In 2005, leaders from the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and experts in mental health joined together to warn of the potential risks of habitual cannabis smoking. These risks include links to both depression, following regular usage, and the possibility of schizophrenia later on in life.

While there are the physical implications to marijuana use, proponents to the idea of legalization argue that the benefits of medical marijuana far outweigh the negatives to smoked marijuana. There is also the common argument that the government does not respect the free will and right of choice of those who want to use marijuana, both medically and for recreational use. Their choice to use it for medicinal purposes or to harm themselves should be up to them, or so they believe. Other more-grounded arguments include religion and the immorality of marijuana. If the immorality of marijuana is based on one set of beliefs, then other beliefs should not and cannot be held to that same moral code. Taking a moral stand also seems to benefit politicians who are running for office. The fact, however, is that regardless of laws against its use, marijuana is still being consumed in large quantities and is easily accessible. With this being said, many proponents of legalization suggest that since it is being widely consumed and will continue to be, so far as can be seen as of now, why not legalize it and regulate it? Regulation and legalization would hypothetically lead to an end in the illegal drug trade, and would provide revenue and standards for the drug and its prescription to those who desire to use it medically. Producers would begin to be held liable for their product and health

standards would hypothetically be established. Positive results have been seen in countries that have legalized the drug for medical practice.

When it comes to legalization, cannabis seems to be well-accepted nationally, including Canada. However, The U.S. government is still unmoving in its stand against it. This has not stopped thirteen states from legalizing the drug for prescription and medical use since 1996. These states include Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington. Throughout the world, Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Estonia, India, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Sweden have all legalized the marijuana not only the prescription usage, but the ability to smoke cannabis recreationally as well.

The most commonly prescribed drugs containing delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main ingredient in marijuana, are Marinol and Cesamat. These are also the only two prescriptions legal in the U.S., and this is most likely due to the fact that the THC found in them is synthetic. Both prescriptions are FDA approved for relief from nausea and vomiting for patients undergoing chemotherapy (King). They are used frequently in patients who do not respond well to alternative medications. Marinol has one other application, however. It is also approved for the treatment of anorexia found in patients with HIV (King). Although neither is currently prescribed for pain relief, studies are being done to test their analgesic properties.

Numerous medical applications have been and are still being researched regarding marijuana and the THC and cannabinoids found within. One such use continues to be in patients with HIV and Multiple Sclerosis. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV or AIDS), is defined as a virus that invades cells in and complicates the immune system. This causes the individual infected to become incredibly vulnerable to infectious diseases. Oftentimes, with

HIV, comes a great deal of neuropathic pain due to the body trying to ward off the infections. This pain in patients seems to be what causes them to use such drugs as natural marijuana for therapeutic benefit. According to NORML, one survey shows that in North America, up to one third of patients with HIV used cannabis. Another recent study reported that over 60 percent of HIV patients consider themselves “medical cannabis users” (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). According to investigators at San Francisco General Hospital and the University of California’s Pain Clinical Research Center who reported in the medical journal, *Neurology*, that smoking cannabis three times a day reduces neuropathic pain in HIV patients by up to 34 percent, much greater than that of placebo. In another study reported in 2007 by the *Washington Post*, out of 50 patients with HIV related pain, over half of those who smoked marijuana achieved just as much and more relief, with fewer side effects, than with the usual prescribed pain relievers (“Findings Support Medicinal Marijuana”). In addition to basic pain relief, there are also benefits regarding the lack of appetite and weight loss found in those with AIDS. Another study in 2007 by Columbia University published clinical data that indicated smoking marijuana four times a day caused, “substantial... increases in food intake...and no impairment of cognitive performance.” The conclusion was that “smoked marijuana... has a clear medical benefit in HIV positive [subjects]” (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).

Multiple sclerosis is classified as a degenerative disease in the central nervous system. It usually causes inflammation, muscular weakness and spasms, and a lack of motor coordination. The disease inevitably disables most patients and can even be fatal. Scientific literature concerning cannabis and its numerous chemicals, or cannabinoids, shows an ability to reduce the symptoms of multiple sclerosis. Along with the reduction of pain, the cannabinoids

are also able to relieve spasticity and depression found in patients. The Multiple Sclerosis Societies of Britain and Canada favor the prescription use of cannabis extracts.

In addition to the known benefits of cannabis and cannabinoids, there are also the benefits still to be proven. Recently, research printed in the 2003 issue of *Brain*, a medical journal, the University College of London's Institute of Neurology reported that in their administration of a synthetic cannabinoid in an MS animal model, it actually provided "significant neuroprotection" (Multiple Sclerosis). This indicates that not only can marijuana extracts manage symptoms, but they may even be able to slow the neurodegenerative processes various diseases including MS, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and Lou Gehrig's Disease. At the University of Saskatchewan, researchers who administered synthetic cannabinoids to rats actually reported the proliferation of newborn neurons. This indicated reduced anxiety and depression related behavior. In addition to neurogenesis, there is also more evidence pointing towards neuroprotection in the brain. In the May 2005 issue of the *Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics*, a study by the US National Institutes of Mental health showed a reduction in ethanol induced cell death by 60 percent. Unlike alcohol poisoning, cannabis cannot cause death by overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control (*Cannabis and the Brain: A User's Guide*). More support has verified these findings in a Japanese study in 2005. The administration of THC in patients with glioma, a deadly form of cancer, showed a decrease in malignant cells as well as programmed cell death, according to a 2005 issue of the *Journal of Neurooncology* (*Cannabis and the Brain: A User's Guide*). In several studies, including one published recently in the *American Journal of Addictions*, long term use of cannabis has, "at most a negligible impact on cognition and memory" (Armentano). This indicates that there are a

great deal of possible applications to both the cannabinoid extracts as well as the THC found in marijuana had no real founded or proven negative effects as long as it is not smoked.

But what are the benefits of smoking marijuana versus taking oral synthetic prescriptions such as Marinol? As mentioned before, Marinol is used to treat nausea related to chemotherapy, and it is also used to treat weight loss in HIV patients. While it is FDA approved, there are downsides to Marinol. For one, it provides only partial relief to some patients. Some patients are somewhat physically unresponsive to synthetic cannabis, in which case natural cannabis could be an alternative if it were legal, which it is not in the US. The reason for Marinol's limited ability in some patients may be because it lacks many of the cannabinoids found in natural cannabis. One such cannabinoid is cannabidiol, or CBD. CBD has been clinically shown to reduce pain, spasms, anxiety, nausea and even arthritis. It is also neuroprotective against a variety of cerebral ailments such as stroke and cell death. Some clinical trials have even demonstrated CBD to be anti-tumoral (Marinol vs. Natural Cannabis). There are also some psychoactive effects of Marinol such as drowsiness, confusion, and even feeling "high." The price of Marinol is one very important factor as well. Monthly, the prescription for Marinol can be as much as \$800. In a survey, one third of doctors claimed that the reason they did not prescribe Marinol was because of its cost (Marinol vs. Natural Cannabis). In comparison to Marinol, natural marijuana is much cheaper to purchase. According to a British survey in 2005 of 500 HIV patients, about one third use natural cannabis. An earlier study in the US indicated that about one fourth had used marijuana for medical purposes in the last month. These findings could explain why some patients prefer natural cannabis to synthetic prescriptions such as Marinol.

While smoking natural marijuana may be favored over Marinol in some cases, these two methods are not the only ways to administer THC and gain therapeutic relief. Vaporization is also an option and has been shown to hold advantages over both other methods. The vapors are heated below the point of combustion so as not to cause smoke and the inherent risks associated with smoking. The inhalation would also provide faster acting relief because it is absorbed into the bloodstream almost instantaneously, rather than passing through the digestive tract. This also allows for easier mediation of dosage so as not to allow the same psychoactive effects as some patients have with Marinol. While there is no medical vaporization yet, there is an oral spray, Sativex, that has been legalized in Canada. It consists of natural cannabinoid extracts and is somewhat faster acting than Marinol.

The results are unarguable. Marijuana does have its risks, but as time goes on, more and more benefits seem to open up for the field of medicine. Legalized prescriptions containing synthetic THC do work; however, they have their downsides and many patients still prefer natural cannabis and its chemical compounds that are not found in Marinol and other synthetic medications. While natural marijuana may create lung problems with noxious smoke, this seems to be a small cost to those suffering from neurological pain because of HIV and MS. These people deserve an alternative, a choice to spend less money and still receive therapeutic relief. In those with a limited life expectancy, what is the downside of smoking marijuana to ease the pain? Legalizing marijuana would provide people suffering with neurological pain with an option without placing their loved ones in jail for acquiring their only means of relief. More research into the medical properties of THC and cannabinoids as well as vapor sprays should be conducted. In the meantime, the benefits far outweigh the risks when it comes to medical marijuana.

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Opportunities and Objectives Mexicans Face in America

In Jimmy Santiago Baca's poem, "So Mexicans are Taking Jobs from Americans," (1977) he defends and sympathizes with the Mexican worker. His verses describe the class distinctions laborers face in America, which portrays Marxist criticism. The resentment and outcry over the Mexican presence in the work force has risen with the increase in the immigrant numbers. Though Americans may feel threatened about job loss, Mexican workers fill positions which others have chosen to disregard. Unfortunately, divisions have been set, which the poetry emotionally sets forth. Baca does not consider in his poem the attitude many Americans share is influenced by their objection to the large migration of Mexicans to the United States, while they fail to realize there is a need for this labor.

The welcome or rejection of Mexican laborers has been an issue, especially since President George Bush in March, 2006 referred to the migrants in search of opportunity in the United States as "guest workers" whose employment could be justified "to fill jobs Americans will not take" (Saunders 1). As Debra Saunders in her RealClearPolitics Commentary also states, "The very notion that Americans won't take some jobs is absurd. After all, Americans will take any job, if it pays enough" (2). This is the center of the controversy and Baca's objection to the unfair treatment of Mexican workers. American employers are more likely to hire someone who will work for lower wages and the immigrant job seeker answers this call. Baca voices this when he

describes small farmers “selling out/ to clean-suited farmers living in New York,” who are out of touch with the people working the fields and pay them little (25-26).

Baca confirms the beliefs of Marx with his portrayal of the disadvantaged worker. He repeats his message of divisions in society in references throughout his poem, such as, “only a few people/ got all the money in this world, the rest/ count their pennies to buy bread and butter” (30-32). The Mexican laborer who faces ill feeling in the work force must instead struggle to survive. This is not the picture of someone replacing others and taking over all the jobs in America.

Job preferences also contribute to the labor market debate. The average American college graduate leans toward jobs which guarantee a higher salary. Professional positions are sought after because of a desired higher standard of living, and often former students have large educational loans to repay. Daniel Gross, in an editorial titled, “What are the jobs Americans won’t do?” for Slate Magazine also draws attention to the unwillingness of the average worker to seek out jobs which require extra training or long hours, and unpleasant or uncomfortable job settings (Gross 2). It appears the American employee has certain requirements.

This does not mean that Americans have become so absorbed with themselves that they feel they are above certain positions which the Mexican laborer fills. Beginning level construction jobs are filled by the migrant worker, but Americans still fill most of the positions overall in the construction field. This implies that it is not the attitude of the American to shun work that is more demanding physically, but the fact that there are other opportunities where they can choose employment which provides more benefits financially and emotionally (Gross 3).

Employment opportunities are plentiful in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in November 2005, among the occupations with the largest growth projections are food preparation and service, janitors and cleaners (Occupations 1). These positions do not exclude people who may not have English as a second language, or who have grown up in another culture. In comparison, some of the greatest percentages in employment need are for registered nurses, college level teachers, and home health and medical providers (Occupations 1). These require higher standards of education, which the Mexican worker may not have achieved, due to poorer life circumstances. This leaves the door open for both Americans and Mexicans in the work force with such job possibilities.

The unskilled labor positions are ones which are sought by the Mexican worker because the lower wages typically paid are nevertheless higher than ones in their native towns. Often, the employment options are limited there, and across the border the labor market is prized for the better standards of living it can bring for the worker. According to the Director of the World Bank for Mexico and Columbia, Axel Van Trotsenburg, Mexico has 48 million of its citizens living in poverty (Intl. Solidarity 1).

The choice to leave Mexico behind, however, is not without risks. The wage earner must either leave his family behind, or bring them also to the United States amid a dangerous border crossing. There is always uncertainty about what lies ahead, and as Baca confirms, the work standards are often harsh and take advantage of the eager Mexican laborer. He sees many who “search for pearls in the darkest depths/ of their dreams/...trying to cross poverty to just having something” (35-37). Immigrants find work where it is available, usually involving seasonal, manual labor without benefits, besides the lowered pay scale. In the farm industry alone, which

Baca addresses in his poem, up to seventy percent or 500,000 people are “guest workers” according to the Reuters News Agency (Gross 1).

However, all these considerations remain in the background because there is the hope to achieve the goal of a better life. In the United States, children have a chance for a higher quality education and medical care. There is also the availability of government programs to help the immigrants. American society is more economically advanced, and the idea of sharing in what it provides is very appealing to the Mexican worker.

Additionally, America is rich in Hispanic influence. Spanish speaking is encouraged. Mexican culture is widespread, especially in the Southwest. There is a vital network of others to assist in any transition issues, and strong communities have been built. The U.S. Census Bureau documented 4.9 million Mexicans living in the United States in the year 2000, which is actually far below the actual numbers. In 2003, according to the UCLA NAID Center, Mexicans represented five percent of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (Mex. Workers 3). The contribution of Mexicans is great and they play a key role in the economy. If the employment sector figures are analyzed, nineteen percent of the work force is in the farming industry, seventeen percent in the cleaning industry, twelve percent in construction, and eleven percent in the food industry, according to the Pew Hispanic Center (Mex. Workers 2). Where there has been a lack, the Mexican worker has responded.

These contributions are overlooked by many Americans, who are persuaded by leaders who raise the alarm of job loss. Baca also illustrates an aging, nameless figure who spreads this message on TV (12-17). The outcry over the number of immigrants led to a bill from Congress in 2006 to build a 700 mile fence along the Mexico border (Gross 3). Hispanics have the highest

illegal immigrant population in the United States, which numbered 11 million in 2006 (Saunders 2). Added to this are approximately 500,000 who cross the border illegally each year, according to the Pew Hispanic Center (Saunders 2). Presented with this outlook, some Americans feel threatened.

Jimmy Santiago Baca's viewpoint in his poem is influenced by his objection to Mexican workers being blamed for taking jobs away. He rather insists they have not benefited as well as they deserve and agrees with the Marxist idea that there are some who have and many more who do not. Ultimately, Baca believes they are paying with their very own lives. The path to the American dream is difficult to reach for the Mexican worker. In contrast, many Americans feel they have received too much opportunity. However, Mexicans take the jobs that others reject. They are unfairly criticized for the labor situation which exists in America, where the jobs are as diverse as the people. Mexicans are not stealing jobs, but are contributing to solve a need.

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Guilty when Proven Innocent: The Earl Washington Trial Divulged

One can no longer assume that America has matured beyond its years of racial slurs, lynching, segregated schools and unethical acquittals. These words should trigger our minds to think backwards. Back to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's. Unfortunately, times when one is treated as guilty when proven to be innocent have lurked into our present. Earl Washington Jr.'s case is a warning to those who have yet to acknowledge the imbalanced justice system in place today. Washington's case has been analyzed by many lawyers, teachers and professionals, all of which help to uncover the fraudulent goals of our court systems and law enforcement. With much persistence, Washington's legal team has sparked changes in our legal system by way of new legislation and the disposal of ineffective rules.

What would become the beginning of 18 wasted years behind bars, begins in May of 1983. In Fauquier County, Virginia, a drunken Earl is arrested after breaking into the home of Helen Weeks, a 73-year-old woman beaten with a chair after surprising the intruder in her home ("Missteps"). With the gun stolen from Weeks' home, Earl Washington confessed to shooting his brother in the foot after a heated argument over a girl ("Missteps"). While Washington is unable to recollect everything on the night of his arrest, police notes and court records have documented Earl's remorseful behavior after realizing he had beaten Ms. Weeks ("Freedman"). Nonetheless, as a result of these two crimes, two fifteen year prison terms were arranged after Earl's honest confession ("Missteps"). It is important to know the sequence of events leading up

to Washington's trial for the murder of Rebecca Williams. The elimination of Constitutional rights is evident throughout various aspects of Washington's case. Malicious wounding and statutory robbery charges did not warrant the Fauquier County police to perform a devious interrogation process, undocumented and unrecorded.

While in custody, Earl Washington was questioned about five different murders and confessed. Three of these confessions involving rape were dropped due to their inconsistency with the actual crimes ("Testing"). Witnesses from each case were also able to eliminate Washington in a series of lineups ("Missteps"). Unfortunately for Earl, Rebecca Williams was not around to back up Washington's innocence. With an IQ of 69 (average being 100), Earl Washington has a prior history of fabricating bogus confessions and answering questions in hopes to please the interrogator ("The Problem"). According to one of Washington's lawyers, Earl has developed a "coping mechanism of pleasing authority figures, when police let him know what they wanted, he gave them that. He didn't see the danger" ("The Problem"). Washington's former school teacher, familiar with Earl's childhood behavior, addresses the artificial confession. "[Washington] is very easily led. He tries to do what is asked, but has no idea what is expected of him" (Freedman). Clearly, the system needed someone to pin Rebecca Williams' murder on, an individual less conscious of Miranda rights and underhanded motives. The system saw Earl Washington as a defenseless target waiting to be preyed upon. Former employers added to the observations given by Washington's school teacher, "[Washington] was going to agree with whatever you said. Sometimes he knew what you were talking about, sometimes he didn't" (Freedman).

While Earl's mental handicap invited police to sway Earl's answers, Professor Eric Freedman of the Hofstra University School of Law tends to believe race is partly to blame:

“...they extracted from Mr. Washington a ‘confession’ to attempted rape, and then to a series of sex crimes. Would they have done so if he had not been black and the victim white? There is no way to know, but the question certainly lingers” (Freedman). Freedman is not the only individual to pull out the race card after reviewing details of the confession. According to one of Washington’s defense attorneys, Earl’s responses are not a reflection of guilt but a sign of cultural respect. “...to get by in his community as a mentally challenged black man was [to say] ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘Yes, sir,’ is an easy answer for him. It means he’s pleased his interrogator” (“Missteps”).

Here is Earl, confessing to stabbing Rebecca once or twice, when truly she was stabbed 38 times, to kicking in the door, when it was found in perfect condition, and to being alone with her when her infant and toddler were indeed present in the apartment (Jackson, “Sentenced”). Earl declared Rebecca was a short African American woman; funny, Ms. Williams was 5’8” and obviously Caucasian. Earl later explains, “I guess I just agreed with whatever [the police] told me, that’s what I agreed. Whatever they said, I agreed with, I guess” (“The Problem”). The police were unwilling to throw out the Williams confession even after Washington retracted his statement (“DNA”). Prosecutors further insisted Earl was responsible for Rebecca’s murder, reminding the court that Earl had voluntarily waived his Miranda rights; making his confession applicable during the trial (“Missteps”).

After a three-day trial, Earl Washington was sentenced to death, not life in prison but the electric chair (Jackson, “Sentenced”). During Earl’s trial more than a few key components were conveniently left out that could have swayed the final decision. The judge declined efforts to have hair from the scene tested, and the police gave direction to the lab not to test the hair follicle evidence (Jackson, “Sentenced”). Prosecutors failed to reveal the false confessions Earl made

prior to the Williams' confession and Washington's IQ of 69. A psychiatric evaluation was never given to Earl, so proof that he was unable to understand the consequences of waiving his Miranda rights was also withheld. Furthermore, the inconsistency of the police notes, resulting in unexplained gaps was never divulged during this trial (Freedman). "Had Mr. Washington been competently represented, he would have been acquitted at trial. But he was not" (Freedman).

Every appeal following was denied. Forensic evidence of semen at the scene of the crime was further tested, ruling Washington out. The ruling still stood. Again in 1993, more DNA tests were completed on the blood and semen found on Rebecca Williams. DNA traces found as a result of these did not match that of Earl Washington's ("DNA"). Virginia's governor Wilder believed this only proved Washington had an accomplice in the crime and was no longer the only rapist. On Wilder's last day in office, Washington's sentence was modified to life in prison ("Missteps"). While Rebecca died in the arms of her husband, her last words clearly stated the assassin was alone (Jackson, "Earl"). Some argue that one is guilty until proven innocent, but even this is not the circumstance in Earl's trial. Every ounce of hope, every confirmation of truth is void.

Virginia's 21-day rule, stating no case may be re-opened, even in the presence of new evidence then left Washington in jail with little hope of being released. "The 21-day rule is a cruel joke. Its purpose is to make executions happen faster. Earl is alive today because of years of work by anti-death penalty activists" (Harabin). Early in 2000, Washington's advisors requested Governor Gilmore to request more DNA testing due to new technology advances ("DNA"). Months went by, angering and igniting the press to seek answers for the silence. In June of the same year Governor Gilmore announced the order for new DNA, giving a two week deadline to make known the results. Months passed before the press began to buzz, causing

Gilmore to announce his decision for a full pardon on Washington's capital charges (Jackson, "Sentenced"). The Short Tandem Repeater test not only cleared Washington, but revealed the true perpetrator ("DNA"). Amazingly, 18 years of unwarranted punishment wasn't enough to free Washington immediately. Gilmore forced Earl to serve the remainder of the time he owed for the robbery of Ms. Weeks and the quarrel with his brother. On February 12, 2001 Earl Washington became a free man once again ("Beyond").

Several questions have been raised, among them, questions of how Earl Washington came within nine days of being executed. Not surprisingly, those involved in the Washington case declined any comment on their impact on Earl's unjust trial (Glod, "Inmate"). Most of those who did cooperate with the press firmly stated the justice system worked, and Earl Washington committed the crime (Glod, "Inmate"). Debra Holmes, an African American juror in Washington's case confesses to never being one hundred percent certain he was guilty. "With him being slow, he probably didn't understand what the police were talking about...and if you're a black man and they think you're guilty, they're going to make it so (Glod, "Former")." When did America become OK with sending a man six feet under on a "pretty sure" feeling? Additionally, why do we allow the color of one's skin to affect the outcome of these verdicts? Debra Holmes also admitted to yielding to the guilty verdict after the rest of the mostly white jury warned her they would stay the entire night to see that he was convicted if need be. In just under an hour, Washington's fate was decided. Holmes, one of the only two black jurors to sit in on Washington's trial, now realizes how her role was critical in what could have become the death of an innocent man.

Debra Holmes was not the only individual who recognized Earl's innocence. J. Dickson Phillips Jr., now retired from the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeal, reveals the abnormal attention

given to Washington's case: "...that court sent Washington's case back for more hearings-the only Virginia capital case to get that kind of scrutiny for 10 years. But a lower court pronounced potentially exculpatory evidence inconclusive" (Green). Philips said he felt legally bound to uphold the sentence and only wished he had found a way to stop it (Green).

Although these individuals played roles in the conviction of Earl Washington Jr., the blame should be placed on the system. Thorough representation should be the primary concern of any individual facing the death penalty or life in prison. A quick overview of Washington's case might suggest that his lawyer, John W. Scott, might not have given this case one hundred percent. Peter Neufeld of the Innocence Project at the Cardozo School of Law recognizes the poor judgment calls made by Earl's lawyer. "The lawyer did a bad job. There was police and prosecutorial misconduct, and there was a coerced confession from a man who was retarded" (Glod, "Former"). How comfortable would one be to know their fate lies in the hands of a "newbie" attorney, still wet behind the ears, trying their very first capital case? While a victory would have made for a great movie plot, Washington's case cried for new defense. Clearly, Earl Washington needed someone capable of not only proving his innocence, but winning! Robert Hall took over Earl's case after a civil rights suit was filed arguing that inmates on death row should be entitled to free, justice-seeking representation (Harabin). Why does one need to fight on the behalf of someone who is incapable of representing themselves? Why do we support a system so corrupt that individuals in the midst of death are not given a fair shot at demonstrating their innocence? Most of us wouldn't trust a new lawyer in a driving violation trial, let alone a capital murder case! Scott dropped the defense ball several times over the course of Washington's trial. Not only did he keep vital information from the jury, including his IQ and DNA evidence, but he failed to use outside sources, the people (Harabin). Scott failed to ask for

public money to hire a mental health expert because he thought his request would be declined by the court. After years of analyzing Earl's case, legal analysts report that an experienced defense attorney would have known the defendant was entitled to a legal expert (Harabin). Jacob Dodson, a juror during the trial, remembers Earl's weak representation. "I figured the defense was saying he was guilty, too, because they didn't put on much of a case...The only thing they challenged was his [statement], but the judge ruled that admissible" (Testing). There are endless opinions on how Washington's defense could have saved the defendant from the initial conviction. Regardless of what Scott failed to present to the judge, or why he failed to do so, we should zoom in on why there are no rules preventing this chaotic scenario. What if Robert Hall never intervened, picking up the larger pieces in Washington's trial, saving him from execution? During Washington's stay on death row, he was forced to listen to the staff run tests on the electric chair not far from his cell (Jackson, "Sentenced"). The reality that Earl Washington could have faced death in this very chair should be a frightening thought to all of us, not just to Earl.

The only comfort in becoming familiar with the Earl Washington case is the knowledge of how these events have sparked change in our judicial system. Washington's case has prompted the Virginia Supreme Court and the General Assembly to decrease their death penalty execution rates. While we cannot expect change overnight, several proposals have been submitted suggesting an end to the executions all together. Included in such proposals are laws making DNA testing and new trials for inmates an easier process. In 2001, a law was passed stating any inmate who believes DNA testing would support their innocence plea, is allowed to do so at anytime, loosening the senseless 21-day rule (Baskerville). A deputy from Chesterfield County recognizes changes being made in the system, "This is a new Virginia Supreme Court.

They're taking their time, looking at these cases in more detail and imposing more standards (Masters, B01). The labs which reviewed Rebecca Williams' DNA have also been investigated with a fine tooth comb. Virginia is also expanding its DNA data bank after a new law was passed in effort to raise the level of efficiency (Baskerville). Saliva samples will now be taken from everyone who commits a violent crime, not just convicts as they have done in the past. The new law in place will allow for officials to catch criminals at faster rates, a law that would have been beneficial in the Washington trial ("DNA").

In a poll conducted by the American Bar Association, an overwhelming 82 percent believe the death penalty should not be given to those who test as mentally challenged (Clemency). Why aren't those voices heard? The case of Earl Washington could happen to anyone. We have a false sense of security in the comfort of knowing we are innocent until proven guilty. Washington's case teaches us this might be the standard in some cases, but race, money and politics have the ability to alter this perspective. "Just because Earl Washington worked his way through the system, that doesn't mean that the system always works for somebody like Earl Washington" says Republican Senator Kenneth Stolle (Baskerville). The United States judicial system is evidence that today's date has not rid us of unfair prejudices in the court room. If innocence is irrelevant, it is our duty to fight for further changes in laws that hinder the innocent voice. Failure to do so will only continue this cycle of racism, something we have naively believed to have been left in the past.

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Reading and Writing – A Life in Words

The written word has been a part of my life since before I can remember. My mother told me that she would read to me at bedtime every night from the time I was a baby, and that I loved it so much that when I was little, I would sometimes put on my pajamas in the middle of the afternoon just so I could demand that she read to me. Naturally, with a start like that, I became a voracious reader once I could read for myself. I think everyone who loves reading eventually tries to write their own stories. I've always wanted to be a writer, but I've always thought I couldn't write very well.

I still vividly remember a paper I wrote for a school assignment in third grade, a story about the travels of a dollar bill as it crossed the city, being spent by person after person, until it miraculously came back to the person who first spent it that morning. Unfortunately, I got a "D" grade and some negative comments from my teacher, because she hadn't asked for a story on that assignment. I didn't try to write any stories for a long time after that.

I did write papers for other classes and usually received good grades. In high school, I didn't have the nerve to apply to the school newspaper, but I did work on the yearbook. But my yearbook writing mostly involved writing the captions under group pictures: "Here's the football team after their victory over our rival, Harlan High School!" It wasn't writing that really demanded much in the way of imaginative writing skills. And as a biology major in college, I was mostly writing laboratory reports, usually consisting of long lists of test results and measurements. That early desire of an enthusiastic reader to write her own stories languished, unfulfilled.

Until I discovered science fiction fandom. There's a sub-set of the literary arts that's called "fan-fiction," where fans of a particular author or television show write their own stories based on the milieu or characters of the book/show/movie. The first time since third grade that I tried writing a short story was a fan-fiction story set in the universe of the 1990's television show Forever Knight, a show about a vampire police detective. With fear and trembling, I shared my story with a group of on-line Forever Knight fans, and they liked it! They encouraged me to write more! So I did: Forever Knight stories, Quantum Leap stories, Lois and Clark stories, etc. I won't say my stories were great literature, or even very good, but at least they didn't cause people to run away screaming, and they gave me a lot of writing practice. When the television show Buffy the Vampire Slayer came along, I was so inspired by the show and the characters that I took a further step into the fan-fiction universe and started writing and editing fan magazines or "fanzines." Fanzines are home-produced, amateur short-story collections built around a particular show or a character from a show, usually printed at Kinko's and sold at-cost at science-fiction conventions. I was suddenly a publisher as well as a writer, and my fanzines were popular enough with other Buffy fans that a couple of my fanzines won "Fan Quality" awards at conventions.

But I wasn't satisfied with simply writing stories about characters that another writer had dreamed up; I wanted to write my own original stories. So when a friend told me about National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo, I decided to try it. NaNoWriMo is an international writing effort, where every November thousands of ordinary people – not professional writers – commit to writing a 50,000-word novel in 30 days, just to prove to themselves that they can (and for the bragging rights, of course). The first year I tried it, when I hit that 50,000-word mark near midnight on November 28th, I was exhausted, sleep-deprived, brain dead – and exhilarated. In the

years since then, I've been known to bring my laptop to the Thanksgiving dinner table in order to write a few more pages while eating dinner.

NaNoWriMo has not only made me a novelist (unpublished, but still a novelist!), it's done something else for me as well: It's helped me to be unafraid of writing crap. Any 200-page novel written in the space of one month is guaranteed to be utter and complete dreck. I've written a terrible mystery, part of an execrable fantasy (I didn't manage to write 50,000 words that year), and a totally illogical action-adventure spy story. But as Hemingway said, writing is re-writing, and you can't start the re-writing until the initial writing is done. My first draft may be terrible, but it's only a first draft, and there will be many more drafts to come.

I've come a long way from that third-grader who was convinced that she couldn't write anything. And I have a long way yet to go, but at least I'm on my way, and may yet become a paid, published writer.

Scout's Longest Journey: Coming of Age in the South

Harper Lee's 1960 novel To Kill a Mockingbird and the 1962 movie adaptation directed by Robert Mulligan both start with an idyllic childhood summer in the sleepy Southern town of Maycomb, Alabama in 1933, during the Great Depression. This seemingly perfect childhood world of tire swings and imagination is interrupted all too soon by the realities of the racist culture of the South. We're introduced to the Finch family: Jem, age 10; Jean Louise, otherwise known as "Scout", almost 6; their father Atticus, a lawyer; and their black housekeeper/cook, Calpurnia, who is considered a "member of [the] family" (137). We then see the changes in their world brought about by a controversial trial and its repercussions. The children's ideal world starts to tarnish when their father's work on this racially motivated trial starts to encroach on their lives. Scout's world is particularly changed – there are some things that Scout is initially too young to understand, despite her native intelligence. She doesn't know anything about how to be a girl, and suffers unwillingly through various lessons in proper behavior for a young lady. She doesn't understand racism, despite living in a culture permeated with it. And this innocent girl doesn't understand the nature of evil – the scariest thing in her world is the Radley house, where the crazy man Boo Radley lives. But the three-year journey of the novel (and the shorter time-line and more simplified story of the movie) starts Scout on the road to adulthood. By the end of the novel and movie, she has much more knowledge of the world and has direct experience of some of the worst – and best – of human nature.

One of the ways that Scout changes is in becoming more of a proper “young lady.” Scout has been raised by her father, and spent most of her childhood playing with her older brother, so she doesn’t know much about “ladylike” behavior. The film version of To Kill a Mockingbird is a fairly faithful reproduction of the novel, but has some significant differences, including the elimination of most of Scout’s training to become a “lady.” In the movie, Scout, as wonderfully portrayed by Mary Badham, is a tomboy who lives in overalls, and is mortified the first time she is made to wear a dress, on her first day at school. In reality, a girl of Scout’s background would have grown up wearing a dress to church every Sunday, at the very least, as shown in the book’s description of the dress Scout wears to Calpurnia’s church, complete with petticoat and pink sash. In the novel, Scout’s forced feminine maturation is more a matter of being required to spend time with the women visiting in the parlor than it is a matter of wearing dresses, although she does worry about the “starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary” (136) lying in wait for her. It’s only when Scout is forced to spend more time with Calpurnia that Scout reluctantly concludes that “there was some skill involved in being a girl” (116). In the movie, Miss Maudie stands in for Aunt Alexandra, who doesn’t appear at all in the film. Miss Maudie is also more traditionally feminine in the movie, as she’s never seen working in her garden in overalls, as described in the book, so she is a more feminine role-model for Scout.

Another lesson that Scout learns is the heartbreaking reality of racism and injustice. Tom Robinson, a black man, is falsely accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell, and Atticus is assigned to be his defense lawyer. Since the townspeople’s racism cause them to immediately declare the black man guilty, Atticus’ strenuous defense of Tom brings out the worst in some of Maycomb’s residents, who think he shouldn’t work so hard to defend a black man. Their resentment spills over onto Atticus’ children in the novel, although the movie eliminates almost

all of the racist interactions the children have with town residents. At the beginning of the story, Scout doesn't seem to recognize racism, despite growing up in the middle of the racially-segregated South. Her father Atticus has egalitarian ideals that are unusual for this time and place, and he has passed those principles on to his children. This is illustrated by Scout's ignorance of the meaning of the epithet "nigger-lover," a term used by several people during the course of Tom's trial. She may not be entirely clear on what it means, but she knows it's bad, and she tries valiantly, yet ineffectively, to defend her family's honor with her fists. However, the movie differs greatly from the book, because in the movie the only person who ever uses that term is Bob Ewell, Mayella's father. In the book, that hateful epithet is spoken by a number of people, including a member of the Finch's own family, Scout's cousin Francis. Through the reactions of the townspeople, Scout comes to recognize the undercurrents of racism that she had never noticed before, but since she is starting to become better acquainted with the town's black population through Calpurnia, she doesn't understand why defending a black man is such a terrible thing. When Scout is captivated by the prospect of visiting Calpurnia's house to see how her family lives, her Aunt is adamant that such a visit is not appropriate. In the movie, the children have much less contact with the town's black residents, which greatly reduces the impact of the children's reactions to the injustices of racism. In fact, the only black person the children talk to in the movie, except for their housekeeper Calpurnia, is Reverend Sykes, during the trial. When Tom is declared guilty, it comes as no surprise to anyone except Jem and Scout, who believed that justice – and their father's skill as a lawyer – would prevail.

The most important lesson that Scout learns is the nature of human evil. The sadly commonplace evil of racism permeates Tom's trial and the attitudes of many of the townspeople. This evil is so commonplace that it takes an outsider, the boy Dill, to see it clearly. He becomes

so upset at Tom's treatment by the prosecutor that he starts crying during the trial. He knows this behavior is wrong, "the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too" (201) as Mr. Raymond says, understanding exactly why Dill cried. Unfortunately, this scene was not included in the movie, so we do not get a chance to see the children's reactions during the trial.

Scout also learns that evil is not always where you think it is. Jem, Scout, and their friend Dill are both fascinated by and frightened of the neighborhood boogeyman, Boo Radley. They spend a great deal of time and imagination on Boo, whom they envision as the epitome of evil – "six-and-a-half feet tall" (13) with bloodstained hands, a scarred face, and yellowed, rotten teeth. They enjoy reenacting his supposed crimes and plot ways to get him to come out of his house, with no success. But when someone starts delivering small items to the knothole of the tree near the Radley house, including two carved figures of a young boy and girl that look suspiciously like Jem and Scout, they come to suspect that these gifts are being left by Boo, and they start to think of him more sympathetically. The film has a wonderful opening sequence where we see the various gifts that had been left in the knothole. Eventually, the demonized Boo is supplanted by Bob Ewell, the father of the rape "victim," who continues to bear a grudge against Atticus despite feeling that he has been vindicated by the guilty verdict. Ewell realizes that Atticus has made a fool of him by demonstrating during the trial that Mayella was actually beaten by her father, not Tom. Ewell attempts to get his vengeance against Atticus by viciously attacking Jem and Scout, a scene depicted with terrifying effectiveness in the film. This attack has deadly results when Boo kills Ewell while defending the children. When Boo, the supposed lunatic, rescues Jem and Scout, the lesson is complete – the monster in our midst is not necessarily who you think it is, as Scout realizes when she finally stands on the Radley porch.

Scout has learned a great deal by the end of this long journey, some good, and some bad. She has seen bravery and cowardice, honor and shame. Unfortunately, Scout's journey to self-discovery is greatly condensed by the simplification of the story to fit it into a two-hour movie. In the movie version, Scout's *bildungsroman* became a simpler story of the trial and its aftermath. Scout's lessons in the novel, though, are very clear. She discovers that, all evidence to the contrary, she really is a girl, and must soon join the world of "fragrant ladies" (233) and missionary teas, although she likes the honesty and plain dealing of the men's world, and hopes to avoid the worst hypocrisies of that looming pink cotton prison. She has become sadly aware that no matter how good a man and how good a lawyer Atticus is, the prejudice and racism in the "secret courts of men's hearts" (241) will win, and justice will lose, unless those hearts are changed. She has learned that there are worse monsters in her world than a sad, shy recluse, whose only real crime was not fitting into the world he was born in. And she has learned that the death of innocence, like "the senseless slaughter of songbirds," (241) is a sin.

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Wind Power: A Fresh Breeze or a Brewing Storm?

Clean energy. Wind Power. The phrases seem almost synonymous. They conjure images of a beautiful, pollution-free future, a future with lines of wind turbines spinning majestically, producing the power to run a country from the clean wind. The wind does not need transporting to the power plant; it is its own transport. It is never used up, and it produces no by-product which must be disposed of. It is the ultimate in “green” energy sources. This is the picture presented to the public by the supporters of wind power.

There is, however, a dark reality behind wind power and the extensive groupings of turbines, called wind farms, that supply it. Many people are just becoming aware of it, and they are trying to sound the alarm before it is too late. People who live near wind power installations are raising concerns about aesthetics and health issues. The wind turbines are killing large numbers of birds and bats. The actual power output of the turbines is intermittent, nowhere near enough to replace “traditional” power plants, and requires government subsidies to be profitable. The truth is, wind power exacts a high price both socially and environmentally, and gives very little benefit in return.

On the surface, wind power seems like the environmentalist’s dream come true. It is promoted as the energy source that is sustainable, environmentally friendly, and competitive – even profitable, in today’s energy market. It is seen as one of the best current alternative energy options, and one that will go a long way toward reducing our use of fossil fuels. According to

the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), “With continued government encouragement to accelerate its development, this increasingly competitive source of energy will provide a steadily growing share of U.S. electricity . . . without consuming any natural resource or emitting any pollution or greenhouse gases. Wind energy works for our economy, environment, and energy security” (1).

The reality of living with wind power is rather different from the rosy picture presented by the AWEA and other wind energy proponents. Just ask the people of Denmark or the United Kingdom, who have lived with wind power for some time now. Denmark has enough wind turbines in operation to theoretically produce about 20% of that nation’s electricity. However, if the wind is not blowing steadily (and it usually isn’t), the power generated by the wind turbines is far below this. In the article “The Use of Wind Energy Should Not Be Increased” author Eric Rosenbloom says that in some years the turbines have only managed to provide about 1.7% of the energy needed. This means that Denmark still must rely on its traditional power plants, that is, its coal-fired and nuclear plants. There is another effect as well. Rosenbloom writes, “Denmark is just dependent enough on wind power that when the wind is not blowing right they must import electricity. In 2000 they imported more electricity than they exported”, and he says it is because of this that “Danish electricity costs for the consumer are the highest in Europe.”

Ineffectiveness and high power bills are not the only problems. People who live near wind power installations are finding the turbines ugly, noisy, and even damaging to their health. Wind turbines are extremely large industrial-looking structures. They inevitably become the dominant feature of whatever landscape they are introduced to. Wild mountaintops and rolling downs are reduced to production plant sites when turbines are installed. Many residents now feel that they were misled by the power companies in regards to the aesthetic impact the turbines

would have on the landscape. H. Sterling Burnett writes, “The [industry portrayed] wind farms as “parks” in order to trick their way into unspoiled countryside in “green” disguise.” It seems that, in reality, wind power installations are just as industrial as any other power generation plant. People in the UK realize this now, and many communities are fighting to prevent the installation of wind turbines. Christopher Brooker writes of one such community that is trying to prevent the placement of ten turbines near their village. He says, “Each 400 foot turbine will be...visible for miles. The scheme was opposed by almost everyone in the area, including the Maldon council, whose head of planning, James Doe, said: ‘Once built, the windfarm will change the historic landscape of the area for years to come’” (18). In essence, people are now seeing that wind turbines are commercial industrial infrastructure and should be treated as such.

As for noise levels and adverse health effects, Martin Beckford of The Daily Telegraph (London) reported, “A survey of people whose homes are situated within 1.2 miles of turbines has shown that three-quarters of them feel that the noise has damaged their quality of life while four out of five say it has affected their health” (12). The noise, described by Rosenbloom as a “deep resonating thump” can carry over a mile, and many people subjected to it daily are reporting symptoms ranging from migraines, to nausea, to depression. Even some wind power advocates, such as the AWEA, have now admitted that the turbines are noisy, although others continue to deny it. Beckford quotes a spokesman for the British Wind Energy Association as saying, “We are aware that people have concerns [about the noise] but we are not aware of any evidence that supports their claims” (12). There are other aspects of the wind turbines that can adversely affect residents’ health as well. One of these is the flickering of sunlight caused by the spinning of the wind turbines’ blades, which has proven to be mentally disturbing to people and animals who are subjected to it every day. Another is the risk of injury to people and property

from chunks of ice being flung off the moving blades during winter. This adds more anxiety to the lives of people with homes near wind turbines.

Wind power takes a heavy toll on the environment as well. The construction of wind farms is very disrupting to the landscape. It can equal or exceed the damage caused by the construction of coal or nuclear power plants. Modern wind turbines are huge, the largest standing over 400 feet tall. Installation of objects this big requires extensive use of heavy equipment, and the construction of access roads to get the equipment and turbine pieces to the site. Massive foundations must also be built to support the turbines. As quoted by Eric Rosenbloom, the hole needed for these foundations may be “30 feet deep or more and contain more than 100,000 cubic feet of concrete.” The destruction of the environment caused by these installations is massive. Rosenbloom summarizes it this way: “Erosion, disruption of water flow, and destruction of wild habitat and plant life would continue with the presence of access roads, power lines, transformers, and the tower sites themselves. For better wind efficiency, each tower requires trees to be cleared. Vegetation would be kept down with herbicides, further poisoning the soil and water.” In forested areas a typical wind turbine requires a clearing of at least 4 to 5 acres, and a typical installation usually has at least 15 to 20 turbines. This means a total of 60 to 100 acres of forest cleared at such a site.

The land is not the only thing in the environment that is damaged by wind energy. Around the world, wind turbines kill thousands of birds and bats every year. Extensive turbine installations in the Altamont Pass east of San Francisco have been responsible for bird deaths averaging over 2000 per year. A study done in Spain in 2002 found about “11,200 birds of prey (many of them already endangered), 350,000 bats, and 3,000,000 small birds are killed each year by wind turbines and their power lines” (Rosenbloom). There are several factors behind these

high numbers. One is that it is very difficult for birds and bats flying near turbines to avoid getting hit by the moving blades, since the tip speeds of the blades often exceed 100 mph. Another is that the sites most favorable to wind farms are often in the routes most heavily used by birds and bats during their migration. Efforts have been made to reduce the number of kills, but to little avail. Indeed, the San Francisco Chronicle reports “The Altamont wind farms saw an apparent increase in bird deaths last year in spite of efforts to reduce the bird kills” (Burrell B1). This was after many of the turbines identified as the most problematic had been shut down or removed completely.

All these failings might possibly be excused if wind farms produced a significant amount of energy, but they do not. The combined power output of wind turbines is meager when compared with the output of coal or nuclear plants. Wind power also requires vastly more land than the usual energy options. To illustrate this point Burnett writes, “Two of the biggest wind ‘farms’ in Europe have 159 turbines and cover thousands of acres; but together they take a year to produce less than four days’ output from a single 2,000 MW (million watt) conventional power station – which uses one percent as much space.” The only reason wind power is profitable is because of government subsidies involving, among other things, tax credits and accelerated depreciation. However, this government help combined with the relatively cheap cost of installation makes wind energy production very profitable indeed, and this is why so many power companies are now so interested in promoting it.

Wind power. It’s become an icon of society and environment - friendly energy production. Yet it is unreliable, expensive, and a blight on the landscape. It disturbs the peace of those people who must live near the turbines used in its production. It destroys wilderness habitat, leads to the slaughter of birds and bats, and does not even contribute much electricity to

the national supply. The only thing it appears to be good for is filling the coffers of the power companies. In the end wind power, for all its seeming promise, is not worth the cost.

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