



Volunteer State Community College

Best Essays

2022-2023

Volunteer State Community College

Best Essays

of

2022-2023



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Introduction

Volunteer State Community College's *Best Essays* highlights some of the best writing created by students at Volunteer State. Each year, instructors at Volunteer State nominate students who have demonstrated excellence in writing and invite them to submit an essay to our selection committee; that committee of Vol State faculty then works collaboratively to choose superior student work for publication. *Best Essays*, then, represents the exemplary writing of student authors, the support of their instructors, the efforts made by nominating faculty, and hours of hard work the selection committee does in reading and choosing the best of the best submissions.

The purpose of this publication is twofold: first, to showcase exemplary student writing by Vol State students, and second, to provide our faculty with helpful tools for teaching writing and critical thinking skills to our students.

The student essays published here exhibit the elements essential to high-quality, college-level writing. They are original, thoughtful, well-developed, well-organized, and carefully edited documents. The authors' voices are strong, the prose is engaging, and the pieces are written with a clear sense of audience and purpose. The work in this volume includes expository and personal essays, literary analysis, short research-based essays, and longer, more advanced researched arguments. The student submissions are separated into four categories, and one student in each category is awarded a prize for his or her work. Prize winners are chosen based on creativity, originality, critical thought, organization, and an awareness of the fundamentals of good writing.

Section 1 focuses on expository writing such as personal responses to selected topics and essays that do not typically include formal research. The essays generally rely upon the rhetorical modes of narration, description, illustration, and analysis.

Section 2 focuses on literary analysis essays written for our sophomore literature classes.

Section 3 focuses on short research essays written for English Composition 1. This category gives first semester composition students the chance to show off their beginning collegiate research skills without having to compete with more advanced writers. Good research essays employ rhetorical modes such as comparison and contrast and/or analysis of cause and effect as a means of critical engagement. They include research from a limited number of sources.

Section 4 focuses on research essays written by students taking English Composition 2 (English 1020) and other courses in which research-based writing is required. The critical discussions are well-developed, and the research for some of these essays may be substantial. The student essays appearing in this publication were submitted between the fall 2022 and summer 2023 terms. We think they demonstrate both the excellence and diversity of student writing at Volunteer State. We would like to thank all the professors who nominated student essays and encouraged students to submit. We'd also like to extend our sincerest congratulations to the students whose work appears here. It is our goal to continue to develop this project and to publish the best student writing at Volunteer State in a way that is meaningful to both students and faculty alike.

Editor Emeritus Leslie LaChance
On behalf of the *Best Essays* Committee

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Section 1:
Expository Writing

CATEGORY PRIZE WINNER

Nicholas Hunter

Professor McMillion

English 1010

11 September 2022

A Rose Grew from Stereo

Depression is a clawing, grasping, binding thing, a pitch-black mass that fills you with anxiety, chokes you with confinement, and rots away your passions. It's a beast I've been clawed, grasped, and bound by since I crashed into adolescence, one that pushed me into isolating myself and shutting out those around me. Once I was locked into my self-made prison, the only things that could slip in from the outside world were the flows, hooks, and bars of rap music: the spoken contraband that changed my life.

My first encounter with hip hop came at fourteen, a year after my struggles with depression began. Growing up, I was given little in the way of guidelines for maintaining my mental health. The few male role models I had were stoic and unflinching, the type that never let the world bother them. So, like those paragons of masculinity, I decided the best thing to do was to bury my feelings and never discuss them; unsurprisingly, this only made things worse. I'd sit alone in my room, scrolling through my barren *iTunes* library—mainly consisting of soundtracks, scores, and the occasional edgy rock song—looking for background music for my angsty ruminations. Eventually, this grew old, so I sought out new releases and stumbled across something different— a rap album, *2014 Forest Hills Drive*, by J. Cole. The novelty of listening to something other than the *Transformers* score for the fiftieth time prompted me to give it a try.

The introduction started slow, with the high notes of a piano twinkling over ethereal white noise. A voice, strained and suppressed, echoed over the dreamy instrumental: “Do you wanna, do you wanna be, happy?” The question lingered, hanging over the song like a dense raincloud. Smooth, low tones crawled from a saxophone, rolling over the track like a silk carpet. He asked again, hushed, unsure, as if questioning himself as well as the listener. The music swelled, the piano’s twinkling turning to dazzling light as his introspection continued, his question turning from happiness to freedom— to be free from pain and free from scars, all the ailments of life, each line thrown like a punch to the stomach as I shared in his contemplations. By the time the song faded out, I was hooked.

I binged through the album, then replayed it again and again until every line was drilled into my memory. Cole had dealt with the same thoughts I had begun to grapple with as a young teen, but now he could share his gift of hindsight as an adult to illustrate his troubles and guide the listener through them. He spoke about first loves, societal pressure, and a struggle to define yourself and what masculinity means to you. It was a type of music I’d never heard before, one that asked the listener to look inwards and change. It became my sanctuary.

I burned through album after album, artist after artist, chasing new stories and ideas across the genre. I heard weighty tales of violence and pain on B.I.G.’s *Ready to Die*, inspirational stories of a young artist grappling with fame in Logic’s *Under Pressure*, and the reflections of a street hustler turned poet through Nas’ *Illmatic*. My ways of thinking began to change as my introspections grew deeper. The art I consumed began to challenge me, making me reconsider my ideas of masculinity, growing older, and how I saw society at large.

My depression clung to me as I got older, but it wasn’t as overwhelming as it once was.

I found ways to deal with my emotions as they arose by confronting them, accompanied by whatever song in my library best fit the moment. I wasn't alone anymore; I could fall back on the tales and experiences held within my playlists. Saba's *Care For Me* painted a grayscale picture of his life after the death of his closest friend and how his ensuing mental crisis affected him. In my lowest moments, I'd put on Isaiah Rashad's *Cilvia Demo*, telling an equally grim and uplifting tale of his struggle with mental health and how it changed him forever. Rap was both a weapon to fend off the beast of depression and a shield that could ward away my worst days with its insightful words and comforting tales.

While I'd like to say this was my cure-all, that I was freed from my prison and unclawed, un-grasped, and unbound, I still struggle even today. As isolation became the norm during the pandemic, my mental state only worsened as I was laid off from my job and grew distant from friends; but just like *Forest Hills Drive* before it, another album arrived right when I needed it. Denzel Curry's *Melt My Eyez See Your Future* told the story of a man disillusioned with the world and plagued by his inner demons. Just as I did before, I could reflect on my life in the same way Cole had prompted me to eight years ago and, once more, become stronger for it.

Within these albums, I discovered how to understand my emotions and evaluate where I was in life. I still use these same techniques today to persevere. While I haven't overcome all my issues, by exploring the world of rap and connecting with its poetry, I'm more resilient now than I've ever been.

Natalie Robinson

Prof. Ormsby

English 1010

Date

What If

The clock struck 3 a.m., and I couldn't sleep. There was a stain on the ceiling in the ramshackled trailer my family called home. I needed a change—however, not like a haircut, but a big change. I decided to ask myself the question, “What if?” The definition of anxiety is the feeling of uneasiness about an event of uncertain outcome. In that threadbare bed in the witching hour, I had a revelation. What if I could achieve anything? What if I always had a positive attitude? What if my anxiety was wrong?

The blackboard read, “SECOND GRADE. MATH. MRS. BIGLER.” I was a wide-eyed and confident pupil initially, but as class progressed, that optimism and excitement slowly began to fade. “What’s wrong with you?” or “Well, if you cannot understand that, then I cannot help you,” Mrs. Bigler would exclaim with a scowl on her face, in the middle of class, after I asked the same question twice. My face would be reddened with embarrassment, eyes welling with tears; I was defeated.

Not long after a few bad grades, the snowball effect began to take place. Add relentless bullying, isolation, and a turbulent home life, and the only way I learned to cope was to convince myself that I did not care about school. Honestly, I did care. What else is there to care about when you are a young child? I soon realized that if you cannot grasp the concepts in a traditional classroom setting, you will get left behind very quickly. So I slipped through the cracks, consequently, and just survived.

That is exactly how it went for the next twelve years. I survived, not thrived. The funny thing about school is that you can do poorly, yet if you don't have any behavioral issues, and you don't say a whole lot and bother the normal students, you will keep getting promoted. I was a fly on the wall, merely an observer. Every summer, I'd have a pep talk in the mirror: "This is going to be the year, Natalie." But deep down, I knew after failing forward all these years, without a plan or support, that would not be possible. Other students could be good at quadratic equations; they could calculate atomic weights and play guitar and slam dunk a basketball, but because of years of anxiety and the resulting failures, I simply could not. As graduation time neared, a teacher smiling brightly handed me two tickets, gold-embellished and printed on heavy card stock. I sat at my desk running my fingers lightly across the lettering, pondering my tickets. Instead of feeling excitement and hope for my future, they felt a bit like a joke. What was I celebrating? Not occupying a desk in the back of the classroom five days a week? Just then, a hard tap on the shoulder came from behind. A shiny-haired girl with braces to match asked, "Hey, I have a lot of family; can I have your tickets?" Thinking for a moment and realizing I had no one to send my tickets to, I handed them over.

Life continued, and I continued to hand my metaphorical tickets over. I drifted along like a weathered piece of driftwood at sea, only going where the wind blew. Although I do not regret any of my choices because I had great adventures and met fascinating people (all of whom seemed to have handed their tickets over in a sense as well). I married a wonderful man and had three of the best children a mother could ever have. Yet as the children grew, an urgency inside me to gain knowledge grew as well. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, I had to figure this life out so my children would have someone to share their tickets with, but how?

Truly, it struck me out of nowhere that night, about seven years ago now. What if Mrs. Bigler was wrong? What if I positively never gave up, even when I felt scared, anxious, or even failed? What if things turned out well for me? Not just well, but what if things turned out great? This would be a great task for me to accomplish, and I wanted to do this as fast as possible, considering time is not exactly on your side in this human experience. I needed the first step. I started observing other people's behaviors and lives. Outwardly, they seemed far more organized with their finances and with their lives in general. I learned to organize and eliminate every possible distraction if it didn't pertain to my "what if" goals until I grasped these concepts. Eventually, the bills were getting paid on time, I was no longer late for work, and my children's studies improved. I found the more organized I became, the lower my anxiety level became. This was a success. I again stared in the mirror and asked myself another question: "If this was possible, what else could I do by having a positive attitude, sticking to a plan, and avoiding distractions? Could I truly become limitless?" This was an exciting challenge for me!

I wanted to teach my kids to feel proud of themselves, so I decided to learn about living a healthier lifestyle. Again, I observed other people's eating habits and researched online about fitness. Surprisingly, over the years, I began to lose weight and become more physically active, therefore, increasing my self-esteem. This action cemented my theory that with minimal distractions and dedication, I could do whatever I wanted to in this world. So, naturally, the next set of what-ifs began to arise. What if I went to college? What if I passed all of my classes? What if I could set a good example for the other "pieces of driftwood" in this world? I didn't know anything about higher education except for what I had read in books or on the Internet. I wanted to dip my toes in initially, rather than jump in (although I highly recommend that method as well). I went to a technical college and did very well—so well that I found it to be rather easy. I

wanted to test my working theory that anyone can accomplish anything they'd like on this rock flying through space. I wanted to prove I am creating my own reality. So what if I went to community college?

Here I am at the Thigpen Library, five weeks into my first semester at Volunteer State Community College, keeping up with the other students. My what-ifs are now, indeed, more bold and outlandish than before. I use words like "Masters degree" or "Ph.D." The great Carl Sagan once said, "Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known."

I do not know where this education will take me, but for the first time ever, when I wake up, I'm excited for the challenges the day may bring, and when I close my eyes at night, the possibilities of tomorrow feverishly dance in my head.

Madelyn Jackson

Professor Ormsby

ENGL 1010

15 February 2023

Leaping

“Let’s think. What are some of the things you want out of a job?” Russell asked. He knows me best, and I trust his judgment. So, of course, I went to him first when trying to decide what to do with my life. But to me, that was the very question I was trying to answer: What do I want to do? And if I knew that I wouldn’t be stuck at this restaurant, bagging up pats of butter, and desperately trying to figure out what to do with my life.

“I don’t know,” I replied, “I want to be able to be creative. And I want to love what I do.”

He stood there thinking for a moment before asking, “Have you ever thought about teaching?”

Something lit up inside of me at that moment. Teaching! That was it. That was the thing that had been in the back of my mind. “Yes, actually. That sounds really good. I think that’s it.” I hadn’t seriously considered teaching until then, but something about it just felt right.

I immediately flashed back to both third and sixth grade. I thought of the teachers who shaped and inspired me. I thought of how much I respected them and how they made my long days of learning fun and interesting. That’s when I decided that I wanted to do that too. I wanted to be able to reach a child with learning and to have them love school. But the question that kept coming back to me was “How am I actually going to do that?” I don’t know enough about children to be able to teach them and to spend so much time with them. What if I’m not patient enough? His voice cut through my thoughts- “What grade would you want to teach?” That was

another worry of mine. I contemplated my options and ended up coming up with elementary school, more specifically third grade. Once again, I retreated into my memories.

The first day of school always had this energy to it. My eight-year-old self couldn't wait to meet my new teacher, see familiar classmates once again, and take in my new haunt for the next year. I walked in and immediately saw these light blue lockers that made me excited and ready to start a new grade year. As introductions were made between my mom and my new teacher, I looked around the room at the neatly arranged desks and searched for my name on a propped-up tag. I spotted one of my second-grade friends and had this feeling that it was going to be a good year. And it was. I loved my teacher, I loved her style, and I felt comfortable with my surroundings.

Ms. Kennedy was very tall, had fine blonde hair, and had a fiancé from Wisconsin. She frequently practiced her version of a Wisconsin accent for us and kept us apprised of her life. Ms. Kennedy was a first-year teacher, and I remember thinking that she was doing great for a newbie. She made that classroom feel alive. It was always full of color, projects, and new things for us to discover. She let us be creative and express ourselves. Our writing notebooks were to be covered in pictures and magazine clippings that reflected our personalities and our lockers. We were given writing prompts and the opportunity to sit anywhere in the classroom to carry our assignments out. While other students opted for the bean bags in the reading corner or on the rug, I frequently chose to sit on the floor in front of a large window overlooking a small patch of grass where a large tree grew. I stared out of this window often, my little imagination running wild, and sometimes even almost forgetting to write.

I look back on that class as one of my favorite school years, and I look back at Ms. Kennedy as one of my favorite teachers, a teacher that made learning fun and made me feel

connected to her as a person, even for being just a kid. “I think I’d like to teach elementary. Third grade sounds good. I really liked third grade. They’re a little older and more independent. They’re old enough to know how to read, but I’m not quite having to prepare them for middle school.” That was sounding better by the minute. At that age, they just get to be kids. They’re exploring more, soaking in new information, and looking at everything with wonder. When I think back to childhood, I think that year encompasses it best.

I went back and forth with my decision for a very long time. I frequently questioned my abilities and my determination. But whenever I started telling friends and family that this was in fact what I was going to do, the answer was frequently “I can see you as a teacher!” and “Yes, I can see you shaping young minds.” This validation spurred me on to start working towards my newfound goal. I was on a mission to find out more. I started messaging my old teachers from sixth grade, whom I especially looked up to, and was actively looking for opportunities to get started in the profession. Throughout this process, I would think back to my school years and favorite teachers and try to pinpoint why exactly it felt so right.

Ms. Vickers was my sixth grade English teacher. She wrote free verse poems, shared her inspirations, taught us about Maya Angelou, shared her life updates, and eventually her own book with us. But most importantly, she helped me find my love of writing. Each week I looked forward to the days when we would do cold writes. She would give us a specific plot, one setting, two characters, and three objects to include. I immersed myself in these stories and was never quite finished with them by the end of the allotted time, but it made me develop a love for writing that is unmatched by any other hobby or activity to this day. I looked up to Ms. Vickers, and to this day I hold her in very high esteem. When I told her my decision on becoming a

teacher she replied, “I’m proud of you, and that doesn’t surprise me.” Those words meant a great deal to me.

I eventually started working at Primrose School of Nashville and discovered that I truly love working with children, connecting with them, and seeing how their minds work. There was one specific class, EPB (Early Preschool B), that quickly became my favorite. The first time I went in I was intimidated by the number of kids, the noise level, and the chaos. This was not one of the most organized classes I had been in. However, after being in the same classroom for many consecutive days, and even weeks, I began to feel like I was making a personal connection with the children, and that made me very happy. I was able to help them to stop crying as their parents dropped them off and remember their favorite toys, games, and songs. During this time, I also met a lot of great teachers who all had their own effective styles and ideals of teaching, which helped me to develop my own. But even with teaching feeling right to me, there is always a part of me that questions every decision I make, no matter how much I am sure that I’m right. I went through a very rough time after working at Primrose, and I started questioning if teaching was in fact what I wanted to do.

“I did like the idea. But nothing feels right at the moment, so I don’t know what to do,” I expressed. And then came a push that I needed.

“Nothing ever feels right to you. Either you live your life stagnantly, or you take a leap you’re not 100% sure about. I’m never 100% sure about anything. But I am 100% that I’ll be much happier once I’ve made decisions and taken risks,” Russell replied. I circle back to those words often. Even though it took me a couple of years to put that into action, I finally saw that there would never be perfect timing and that if I didn’t start to work towards my goal now, I

never would. And here I am now in my first semester in college, making sure to take the leaps I need to, one step closer to becoming a teacher.

Section 2:

Literary Analysis

CATEGORY PRIZE WINNER

Sydney Coile

Professor Eades

ENGL-2045-008

29 November 2022

The Beauty in Death

Is it possible for death to be a happy ending? Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych" both end with the death of each story's protagonist: the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and Ivan Ilych in "The Death of Ivan Ilych." One is brutally murdered, and the other dies from a degenerative illness, respectively. Many would argue this makes both stories' endings tragic. However, upon facing death, key characters face a startling realization: the grandmother's murderer, The Misfit, realizes there is no appeal in murder, and Ivan Ilych realizes he has lived a meaningless life full of greed and deception. This moment of realization in each story is what makes both stories end in a positive light.

Not much is known of The Misfit until the end of O'Connor's story, just that he is a dangerous criminal, but once the reader is personally introduced to him through the family's encounter with him, his evil nature is truly revealed. He seems prideful of his criminal lifestyle, seen through his smile when the grandmother identifies him as The Misfit (O'Connor 144). As the grandmother tries later to convince him to spare her life, he states there is "No pleasure but meanness" (O'Connor 148). It seems The Misfit is a man who only finds joy in crime and

destruction. Despite this front he puts on, the following events show that he is conflicted about his lifestyle. First, O'Connor describes The Misfit's eyes as "defenseless-looking" after he has murdered the grandmother, a subtle but notable hint at his realization. Secondly, there is O'Connor's last line of the story, when The Misfit says murder "[is] no real pleasure in life," a direct contradiction to his previous statement about pleasure. The Misfit's initial statements and actions make him out to be a heartless murderer, but as he speaks with the grandmother and contemplates her murder, there is a great change of character. He goes from a proud criminal to a defeated, empty man. He believes crime is the only way for him to live, but his encounter with the grandmother reveals to him that it is actually a meaningless life. Since the ending of O'Connor's story is up to interpretation, one may see this realization as the spark for The Misfit to turn his life around and live it devoid of murder and crime, something that anybody would say is a good thing.

Matthew Fike provides a religious perspective on The Misfit's transformation in his article, "The Timothy Allusion in 'A Good Man Is Hard To Find,'" a perspective that is vital to understanding just how much The Misfit's encounter with the grandmother changes him. There are numerous allusions to the Bible in O'Connor's story, but the most important revolves around the last moments between The Misfit and the grandmother. When the grandmother sees The Misfit's evil character break down—"If I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack..." (O'Connor 148)—she is overwhelmed with compassion, touches him on the shoulder, and claims him as her own. As Fike explains, Paul in the Bible describes this as the touch of grace given by God. Essentially, the grandmother was filled with God's grace when she saw The Misfit's suffering, and her subsequential touch then filled The Misfit with grace. Though The Misfit proceeded to murder her after this touch, one

can see how the grace works within him through his final words and demeanor at the end of the story. As a writer known for religious allusions, O'Connor's biblical references are not to be taken lightly; when she makes a reference, it is important. In this story, this allusion is used to represent The Misfit's realization and transformation towards a better life. With this allusion in mind, it is arguably clear O'Connor meant for this story to end with a positive outlook, despite its tragic veil.

Upon first reading Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych," it is a sad story: a man lives an empty life and does not realize it until he is dying, and he then proceeds to die. It is a fair interpretation that this story was purely a warning to readers to not be enticed into a meaningless life of materialism. After all, that is the biggest dilemma Ivan Ilych faces once he understands that he is dying: he realizes he wasted his life on material things, and he cannot find the true values of life. This existential crisis turns into a comforting understanding, though, when his estranged family shows him compassion in his dying moments, and he sees that love and compassion are the values he was missing all along. Tolstoy wraps the story up quickly once Ivan becomes aware of this, his agony now turned to joy and his aversion of death transformed into acceptance. Ivan Ilych changes dramatically once he is forced to face mortality. He begins as a man of selfish greed that reveres death, and he grows more and more bitter with age and as his illness worsens. He notices this change when he is playing cards and no longer has the excitement he used to have: "He saw how upset Mikhail Mikhaylovich was...And it was dreadful to realize why he did not care" (Tolstoy 822). He still has not grasped the reason for his bitterness, though, so he stays miserable. It is not until days before his death when the realization hits him—"All you have lived for and still live for is falsehood and deception, hiding life and death from you" (Tolstoy 840)—and his visceral reaction to this initiates his transformation, as

he now understands his life was empty. He fully transforms once he sees the meaningfulness in his family's care for him, and he feels sympathy for them, an unfamiliar feeling that makes him finally whole. His final waking moments are full of joy as he finally knows what makes a fulfilling life. He goes from a materialistic, selfish man afraid of death to one of compassion that embraces mortality.

William Giraldi addresses numerous viewpoints on "The Death of Ivan Ilych" in his article, "The Way of All Flesh: On Tolstoy and Mortality," but the key analysis is how he ties Ivan Ilych's acceptance of death to that of Jesus'. Just as Jesus asks, "Why has Thou forsaken me?" Ivan too ponders on his terrible fate (Giraldi 215). Once they accept their mortality, though, both die at peace with the words, "It is finished," an important allusion Tolstoy used for readers to see this connection. Jesus' crucifixion started as a cruel fate but led to eternal freedom. In a similar manner, Ivan Ilych's illness and mortality begin as blasphemy, but in the end, they lead him to true peace as he finds the right values in life. Neither Jesus' nor Ivan's realizations could have been achieved without their deaths. Therefore, despite the tragedy of death, Tolstoy's story arguably ended optimistically because the tragic death paved the way for a significant, positive transformation.

Flannery O'Connor and Leo Tolstoy's stories both end on somber notes. O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" ends with the murder of an innocent family, and Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilych" ends with a man dying after living a life focused on trivial matters such as class and materialism. These authors did not write dark stories purely for their enjoyment, though. They wrote these stories to provide the readers a lesson. Further inspection allows readers to find optimism in these solemn endings. Both stories revealed significant transformations with key characters: O'Connor's antagonist The Misfit went from a man who

reveled in being infamous to one who found no pleasure in murder, and Tolstoy's protagonist Ivan Ilych, a death-fearing man of selfish greed, became a man of compassion that accepted his mortal fate. There is no arguing that death is a sad event. However, the deaths in these stories evoked a change of character. These changes were for the better, and because of these changes, these stories arguably ended optimistically.

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Skylar Bridges

Professor Chanin

ENGL-2120-002

5 December 2022

Fate and Free Will

Predetermined fate in naturalistic literature leaves in question the balance between the impact of individual free will and the inevitability of destiny. Naturalism discusses the result of man's heredity and environment in the fate of the individual being, leaving outcomes "determined by conditions beyond his or her control" (Pizer). However, this concept of fate beyond the control of the individual diminishes the impact and importance of man's actions. In Jack London's "To Build a Fire" and Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour," outside forces and predetermined destiny control the character's fate in both stories, but the man's arrogance and Mrs. Mallard's irrationality also contribute to their own deaths.

The desolate winter landscape in "To Build a Fire" reflects nature's power and the man's doomed, predetermined course, while the bright, hopeful spring scenery in "The Story of an Hour" parallels Mrs. Mallard's envisioned future of free choices. The Yukon trail is extremely isolated with harsh, unforgiving weather. After detailing the frigid temperatures, the narrator notes the day possessed "an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of the sun" (London 593). The extreme conditions provide a sense of foreboding of the man's impending death. The combination of desolate snow landscape along with the unusual darkness fills the reader with dread and implies the approach of something sinister lying beyond the man's control. In contrast to the bleak setting in "To Build a Fire," "The Story of an Hour" includes bright, lively scenery. Mrs. Mallard gazes out her

window at “the tops of trees that were all aquiver with new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air [...] There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds” (Chopin 421). The bright, fresh setting reflects Mrs. Mallard’s realization of her potential opportunities and visions of freedom without her husband. Similar to the frigid winter landscape alluding to the man’s impending doom, the springtime scene outside Mrs. Mallard’s window suggests a bright future of newfound freedom.

The events of both stories appear to be controlled by destiny at first glance. In “To Build a Fire,” the man falls through the ice into water “at a place where there were no signs, where the soft, unbroken snow seemed to advertise solidity” (London 598). Breaking through the ice and getting soaked in the freezing temperatures alone almost secures his death. Having suddenly fallen into water in an area that seemed safe, this fatal error is completely out of his control and leaves him at the mercy of nature. The freezing conditions are contrasted with fire, which is described as “snapping and crackling and promising life with every dancing flame” (London 599). While the fire symbolizes life and hope for survival, it is constantly deterred by nature. When the man is finally able to create fire, it is immediately extinguished by snow, implying the man’s fate is controlled by nature or outside forces. Similarly, in “The Story of an Hour” Mrs. Mallard’s envisioned future is stripped away when her husband is revealed to be alive (Chopin 422). Mrs. Mallard’s decision to live freely has little impact on her actual fate, which is out of her control. The revelation of his false death seems completely unfathomable, implying that her fate is predetermined. The individuals in both stories do not seem to have power over their own destiny, which appears to be controlled by a larger outside force.

While in “To Build a Fire” the man’s fate seems to be predetermined, his arrogance and foolishness also contribute to his death. Throughout the story, London repeatedly reminds the

reader of the old man from Sulphur Creek's wisdom, specifically using fire to represent his knowledge (Reesman 44). The old man's wisdom is contrasted with the ignorance of the man who did not "meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general" (London 594). Unlike the old timer who acknowledges man's weakness and respects the power of nature, the man considers himself invincible and does not see nature as a threat. However, he later realizes his folly, lamenting that he had laughed at the old man and realizing "one must not be too sure of things" (London 597). Instead of considering the man's advice, he disregards it completely and believes himself stronger than nature. The man was blinded by his arrogance and made foolish decisions that intertwined with the foreboding doom and led to his own fate.

Although she did not have an active role in her fate, Mrs. Mallard's unrealistic expectations of freedom indirectly result in her death. After learning of her husband's passing and briefly mourning, in a "suspension of intelligent thought" Mrs. Mallard decides there "would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself" (Chopin 421). Mrs. Mallard has irrational assumptions about the opportunities of her future, especially as a woman during a time period of limited gender equality. Additionally, the extreme level of freedom she desires is unachievable without complete isolation. Mrs. Mallard's "unrealistic expectations of absolute freedom" leave her only with the option of death, making her a "victim of her own extreme self-assertion" (Berkove 152-158). Mrs. Mallard is so blinded by her own desire for complete independence that she loses all rationality. A total freedom from any attachments to others is physically impossible; the only method of achieving such an absolute freedom would be death, ironically leading Mrs. Mallard to achieve absolute freedom through her demise.

While the characters seem to have a predetermined destiny, their own free-will is also an agent of their downfall. In “To Build a Fire,” the man’s impending doom is foreshadowed in the frigid, foreboding surroundings. While his pride and stupidity do contribute to his death, outside factors from nature such as hidden thin ice also control his fate. The flourishing descriptives in “The Story of an Hour” imply a bright future of freedom ahead of Mrs. Mallard. After the revelation of her husband’s survival, which leads to her sudden death, the springtime imagery instead serves to further illustrate the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of her fate. Whether their decisions are their own or an illusion of choice, the character’s actions seem to intertwine with outside forces controlling their fate. Similar to the characters’ own egotistical actions contributing to their own demise, perhaps it is arrogant to assume the individual man has free will and holds power over the larger force of fate.

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Section 3:
Short Researched Essays

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ENGL-1010-C98

14 November 2022

Standardized Tests Must Not Be Eliminated

Students all around the U.S. would describe high school with one word: stressful. Many things can contribute to this teenage stress, whether it be a presentation in their biology class or an upcoming marching band competition. One thing every high schooler dreads, though, is the standardized test. These exams, such as the ACT and the SAT, are usually required to be taken by every high school student. These scores contribute to a student's college application process and are used for analyzing their academic readiness. However, due to their difficult and distressing nature, many people show their disapproval of these tests, believing them to be insufficient to evaluate the full extent of a student's academic abilities. But despite the criticisms standardized tests receive, the ACT and SAT serve a crucial part of a student's college admission process, bridging the gap between applicants from different qualities of high school, providing validation to a student's grade, and preventing a rigid evaluation system for college applications.

To begin, the ACT and SAT provide a bridge between students from larger schools with more advantages and students with fewer opportunities given to them. High school quality around the nation varies drastically, from wealthy, prestigious private schools to less-resourced, rural high schools. Differences in their schools' resources and funding result in some students' ability to take advantage of a greater diversity of opportunities like extracurriculars, giving them a greater advantage on their college applications. Because standardized tests are scored

objectively without bias and are required to be taken by everyone, colleges can utilize this tool to judge a student's application without the influence of unfair advantages. Martin Yu and Nathan Kunsel, the authors of the article "The Importance of Standardized Tests in College," state that according to research, standardized tests are predictive of grades earned at all levels. They are also great tools to check for differences in high school quality. Many students are offered opportunities to show their potential that many others are not, mostly due to the resources and money a school has. However, the opportunity to take the ACT or SAT is one of the few elements that is consistent across all students, giving them all a chance to express their abilities.

In addition, standardized tests provide supporting evidence and legitimacy to a student's grades to counter the influence of grade inflation. Each high school teacher has his or her own unique way of teaching, assigning, and grading assignments. Due to this factor, two students that are studying the same subject might have the same degree of understanding but ultimately receive different number or letter grades on their transcripts. This can also be the work of teacher bias and unfair grade inflations. According to the article "Do Standardized Tests Improve Education in America," teachers' grading practices can be "subjective and uneven." They might have conscious or unconscious biases for various students in their class (ProCon). This evidence illustrates the advantages some students may have because of a teacher's emotional influence, unfairly inflating their grades. Each teacher's rubric and criteria also vary, playing a part in different students' grades. On the contrary, standardized test scores are able to provide crucial objective data that GPAs are not able to capture. The ACT and SAT are also graded in a way where the difficulty does not impact the overall score (in other words, curved), so the legitimacy of these scores would be more significant compared to normal school grades.

In contrast to the popular controversy of the college application process being easier without the submission of standardized test scores, colleges—especially competitive ones—follow a more restrictive evaluation system without those scores. College admission officers check for more than just grades—they try to grasp the applicant’s character from factors such as extracurriculars, essays, and teacher recommendation letters. However, without the ACT or SAT scores, they would have to weigh other components of the application more heavily to determine a student’s academic potential. Among the extra components, the college administrator would need to be stricter when judging a student’s statistics. Students who may not be from the most rigorous preparatory high schools—such as magnet schools—are at a disadvantage because the quality of their extracurriculars may already not be as high as students from private schools. Not submitting a test score decreases the amount of data that an admissions officer can have about the student, therefore lowering the chance of acceptance. Lauren Berlinsky-Schine states in the blog “Should You Apply Test-Optional for the 2020-2021 Cycle?” that “...students who applied to a test-optional school who submitted scores above the 25th percentile were accepted at roughly two times the rate of students who applied without submitting scores...Somewhat surprisingly, even students who submitted scores below the 25th percentile were accepted at a rate 1.25 times that of students who did not submit test scores.” This data suggests that it is harder to get accepted without standardized test scores, and colleges judge the other components of a student’s application more harshly than if scores were submitted.

Many students, teachers, and parents alike argue that standardized tests are discriminatory—they are unfair to minorities and less wealthy students. This is a valid argument; for example, students with lower income cannot afford extra prep courses, and they are also more likely to have part-time jobs, interfering with their study time. In the article “Standardized Tests

Reward Kids from Wealthy Families,” Eloy Ortiz Oakley, Chancellor of California Community Colleges, states that “many well-resourced students have far greater access to test preparation, tutoring and taking the test multiple times, opportunities not afforded the less affluent...” Thus, despite an objective scoring system, some students are still given extra test prep advantages that boost their scores.

However, it should be noted that the college admissions officers reviewing applications are trained and experienced professionals. Most schools judge the applicants holistically—in other words, a student’s home life and income will be considered. In “What Are Holistic Admissions,” the author writes, “Under a holistic admissions policy, a student with a 3.8 GPA might be turned down while an award-winning trumpet player with a 3.0 GPA might get accepted...In general, holistic admissions take into account a student's interests, passions, special talents, and personality” (Grove). Offices of undergraduate admissions take account of every part of an application. They want to know the applicant’s personality rather than just mere numbers. Colleges also know that some students from better-quality schools are offered more opportunities and resources, therefore holding higher expectations compared to lower-income students. The lack of resources for some schools is one reason why colleges use holistic approaches to judge students.

Despite the criticisms and drawbacks that standardized exams have, the ACT and SAT as a whole do not impact a student negatively, including ones who are not as well-resourced. These tests not only bridge the gap between students from larger schools with more advantages and students with fewer opportunities given to them, but they also provide accurate information about a student’s academic progress without the influence of grade inflation and biases. On top of that, the removal of standardized tests will not actually open doors to more students. It will

lead to stricter evaluation systems that judge more heavily on other parts of the application. With these factors in mind, standardized tests must remain mandatory.

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30 November 2022

3,100 Miles from Home: The British Museum and the Benin Bronzes

In 1896, the West African metropolis of Benin City and its royal palace was adorned with thousands of plaques, masks, and statuettes, each a hand-crafted piece forged by generations of skilled craftspeople and metallurgists. They ranged from plaques depicting proud, stoic kings armed with curved ceremonial blades to meticulously detailed leopards that emanate power and majesty. These products of centuries of artistic development, now known collectively as the “Benin Bronzes,” could be found throughout the Kingdom of Benin. Merely a year later, thousands of them would be stolen. The Kingdom of Benin fell victim to a “punitive expedition” from the British Empire, which sacked the city and stripped it of its valuables. Many of the bronzes were sent back to Europe and auctioned off to private collectors or donated to museums.

Now, over a century after the battle, the British Museum holds 944 of these pieces—more than any other institution in the world—according to the Digital Benin initiative. The government of Nigeria, the modern-day home of Benin City, has formally requested the return of the Benin bronzes from dozens of institutions. The British Museum has continually denied repatriation, arguing that the Benin bronzes play an essential role in their goal of providing a comprehensive education of human history. While this is a valid argument, there is still a strong case to be made for restitution due to the moral implications of keeping artifacts taken through

war. With ownership of the bronzes disputed by both sides, an effective compromise could be reached through a mix of conditional repatriation, digital exhibits, and rotating artifacts.

In recent years, Nigeria's National Commission for Museums and Monuments has submitted multiple requests to institutions across the Western world to return the Benin bronzes so they could be displayed within local museums. A common point of argument is that these artifacts were undeniably stolen from the Kingdom of Benin, which the British Museum doesn't dispute— their website describes the sack of Benin and its royal palace, stating that “Its shrines and associated compounds were looted by British forces, and thousands of objects of ceremonial and ritual value were taken to the UK as official 'spoils of war'” (British Museum). Considering how they arrived at these museums, those in favor of repatriation argue that it's inherently immoral to keep these artifacts and refuse their return. This point was echoed in a recent statement from the Beninese Prince Aghatise Erediauwa: “The truth is that no argument can change looted works into unlooted works or stolen works into unstolen works. There is simply no moral or legal basis for persistently retaining cultural property which was looted during military expeditions or in unequal negotiations, for that matter” (qtd. in Ables).

As a result of these requests, multiple museums across the West began the repatriation process. The Horniman Museum in London agreed to return seventy-two of their bronzes (Horniman), the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art returned twenty-nine (Ables), and the German government moved to transfer ownership of over one thousand bronzes across multiple institutions to Nigeria (Marshall). These institutions have implemented either full repatriation of their bronze collections or other reasonable compromises in which they can keep a small portion of the collection on a long-term loan.

While other museums have begun returning their shares of the artifacts, the British Museum has maintained that this would be a disservice to the museum and its visitors. An official statement on the subject was released by the museum in 2021 which stated: “The strength of the British Museum collection resides in its breadth and depth, allowing millions of visitors an understanding of the cultures of the world and how they interconnect over time. . .” (qtd. in Munshi). While its initial statement did little to address the issue at hand, the museum hinted at its position on repatriation—maintaining its collection as it stands is the institution’s priority, and returning the artifacts would diminish the museum’s strengths of “breadth and depth.” Their stance was recently reinforced in a speech from the Chair of the British Museum, George Osborne, which further argued that their strengths and legacy would be undermined by restitution:

Why the calls to break these extraordinary collections up, send them back from whence they came? It’s because we’re not just a museum of the world, for the world – we’re a museum in the world. . . Yes, we hear the voices calling for restitution. But creating this global British Museum was the dedicated work of many generations. Dismantling it must not become the careless act of a single generation. . . because we believe in this Museum of our common humanity (1-2, 4).

Osborne’s argument solidifies the museum’s point; by “breaking up” the museum’s collection, the institution would stray from its goals of presenting a cross-cultural education of human history.

Currently, the British Museum remains against repatriation as a concept. However, an effective middle ground between full repatriation and the museum maintaining its collections

could be reached through collaborative efforts and an exchange of artifacts. Such a compromise would involve conditional repatriation, with the British Museum transferring official ownership of its bronze collection to Nigeria but with a selection of those pieces—hand-picked by the Nigerian government—remaining in the British Museum on a long-term loan. This process could be mediated by a good faith third-party, like UNESCO, to ensure the British Museum retains enough of the collection to continue its goal of effectively teaching human history. The German government implemented this system of partial repatriation in their previously mentioned exchange: Nigerian authorities were invited to select a number of pieces to be kept in German institutions “as cultural ambassadors for Nigeria” (Marshall), setting a precedent for this form of restitution.

Following this, the British Museum and the Nigerian government could collaborate on creating a digital exhibit hosted in London to provide educational content in line with the British Museum’s goals. This exhibit could include interactive 3D scans of the artifacts accompanied by educational videos, such as recorded retellings of Benin’s oral history. There are multiple benefits to transitioning toward a digital exhibit. Considering that the British Museum currently holds over nine hundred bronzes, they could provide far more visibility of these artifacts through digital means since they couldn’t easily display all nine hundred in a physical exhibit at once. Such an exhibit could also be shared via the British Museum’s website or sent to educational centers across the world, opening access to the public regardless of their location. Due to its digital nature, it could also be easily transported, allowing the exhibit to travel to other museums with logistical ease. Through a digital exhibit, the British Museum could advance its stated goal of acting as a “museum of our common humanity” by maintaining a

standing exhibit within the museum while providing global access to a valuable look into West African history.

Finally, this exhibit could then be supplemented with physical displays of the artifacts on loan from Nigeria. These artifacts could be rotated with others in Nigeria's collection to create an exciting variety that would promote interest in the British Museum and incentivize return visits. This display, alongside the collaborative digital exhibit, would be a convincing show of friendship and cooperation between Nigerian authorities and the British Museum, one that presents a strong shift away from Britain's colonial past.

Through these methods, ownership of these historically significant art pieces could be placed back in the hands of the Nigerian government while allowing the British Museum to meet its goals of educating its visitors with authentic, tangible art pieces. While institutions like the British Museum are invaluable educators in the field of human history, cultural groups should be able to tell their own history. By keeping the Benin Bronzes in London, 3,100 miles from their original home, we remove their historical context and deprive the Beninese people of their own past. Through their return, in the museum's words, we can better provide "an understanding of the cultures of the world and how they interconnect over time."

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10 November 2022

Non-Violence For Social Justice

The idea of fostering love to combat hate has been a concept since the beginning of mankind. This practice can be seen with Jesus Christ sharing the gospel, later with Gandhi attempting justice for India, and then Martin Luther King Jr., battling for African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement. These influential figures have applied ethics that have come before their time and then used them to combat the issues currently at hand. Gandhi was inspired in part by Jesus, and then from Gandhi, MLK was much inspired to also practice nonviolence. Gandhi's influence on Martin Luther King Jr. positively impacted the Civil Rights movement as MLK adopted Gandhi's practice of nonviolence for social change.

When faced with something or someone expressing so much hate, it can be easy to want to respond with violence. However, in adverse times, Gandhi drew upon several influences, including Christian ethics, in order to combat the conflict between the Hindus and Muslims and to end British rule of India. After seeing his success, MLK decided that he also would use a similar tactic to fight against the oppression of African Americans and further the Civil Rights movement. In the article "Martin Luther King Jr. Day: an American Holiday," by Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass, the writers explain how King discovered Gandhi's philosophy during his theology studies. As the writers elaborate, "The Indian independence leader's success in using nonviolent civil disobedience led King to hope that the same tactics could work for African Americans in the United States" (Kass 5). King saw how Gandhi's tactics of nonviolence achieved India their freedom from Britain and believed that he could advocate nonviolence to achieve African Americans their freedom of oppression in the United States. The two influential

figures believed that when using nonviolence to combat evil, the side of justice and love will always win, and they were right. To illustrate how nonviolence achieved success, King's nonviolent protest, The Montgomery Bus Boycott, eventually led to the desegregation of public transportation in a Supreme Court ruling.

Many times, in life, when one wants to achieve something of significance, it often does not come without contributing a meaningful piece of oneself. Similarly, Gandhi believed that suffering was necessary for social change to occur. Being inspired by this, King applied Gandhi's practice of suffering in exchange for justice when leading the Civil Rights movement. In the article, "The Wisdom the World Needs," by Peter Phan, the author talks about Gandhi's own term, "satyagraha," which describes Gandhi's method of nonviolence. In this practice, the author explains, Gandhi applies Ahimsa (non-injury) and Tapasya (suffering) to his practice of nonviolence. With the use of Ahimsa and Tapasya, Phan describes how Gandhi believed that humans must be ready and willing to accept suffering if justice is to ever be attained (Phan 5). Gandhi and King understood that attaining such a monumental goal also required deep amounts pain and perseverance. This inspiration King gained from suffering for a greater good truly propelled the Civil Rights movement. When bystanders began to see what great amounts of torture these activists were willing to endure, it gave off an extremely powerful message of how dedicated each person was to the cause of nonviolence and how love conquers all.

Gandhi deeply believed within his heart that when fighting evil with peace, justice would always prevail in the end. His teachings and practices proved him to be successful. Additionally, not only did it create success for himself by contributing to India's freedom from Great Britain, but he also lit a fire inside many other people, one importantly, MLK. King contributed heavily to the Civil Rights movement. The Montgomery Bus Boycott led to the

desegregation of public transport, the Birmingham Campaign paved the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the March on Washington launched a powerful Civil Rights Bill in Congress. King's significant contributions can be attributed in part to his inspiration from Gandhi. The power of non-violence proved to leave lasting impacts on generations. In the article, "Observing Martin Luther King Jr. Day," by the States News Service, the author quotes King on how he said he wanted to be remembered:

I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say on that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. And I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major. Say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all the other shallow things will not matter. (State News Service)

Martin Luther King gave an incredible piece of himself to making the world a more equal place. He advocated for love, for all humanity. He fought his entire life for a cause because he believed so deeply in it. Gandhi's teachings, adapted by King, drastically influenced the Civil Rights Movement in a positive manner.

In conclusion, the Civil Rights Movement was propelled by Gandhi's positive influence on Martin Luther King Jr. Gandhi sparked King's interest in using Christian morals of nonviolence to end hatefulness, Gandhi encouraged King to endure suffering in order to attain social justice, and Gandhi's influence helped craft King into an influential figure. Gandhi's advocacy of nonviolence deeply resonated within MLK and helped structure his philosophy of nonviolence. Gandhi's influence on MLK significantly provided good for the Civil Rights

Movement. His actions of nonviolence struck the world deeply and created sound waves around the world, continuing to this day. Both influential figures spent their lives invoking social change and equality through nonviolence, and ironically, both were killed in a violent way. Despite this tragedy, this is one last way for these men to go out of this world proving the point that they spent their lives on. Even though they were killed violently, it shows that violence was not the answer and did not solve anything. They were murdered, but their words live long. Their bodies may not be present, but decades later, their memories and impact continue to deliver a message to the present world: violence is never a solution; only love can destroy hate.

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Modern American History

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The Private Prison Industry in the United States: Then and Now

The United States has an ugly history of exploitation of groups and industry for the sake of making a profit. The most infamous is the enslavement of African Americans mainly in the Southern United States. In high school, most of us are taught that the institution of slavery ended with the emancipation of slaves and the ending of the Civil War. What children aren't being taught is that an institution like slavery isn't always so easy to dismantle.

Modern private prisons in the United States came about in the 1980s, but the concept of private institutions aiding the government in dealing with overpopulated, state-run prisons began in the Reconstruction period in the late 1800s. The Civil War had ended, and the Southern states had found themselves in financial ruin after the loss of their free labor force and the expenses of post-war reconstruction. As Gibson explains, white Southerners would quickly find a way to recover financially from their losses while also limiting the legal rights of the newly emancipated slaves. By expanding the convict leasing system, contractors could lease prisoners from the state, and in exchange, would house, feed, and clothe these men and pay the government a small fee. The prisoners, mostly black men, would do work like picking cotton, mining coal, and laying railroads. To keep up with the labor demand, arrests increased from petty crimes such as theft or vagrancy that were designed to target poor black and occasionally poor white communities (Gibson). Bauer explains that as the inmate population at these work camps increased, so did the

annual convict death rate, averaging between 16 to 25 percent. Unlike the slaves of the previous decades, inmates were cheap and expendable, so there was simply no incentive for lessees to not to work people to death. A Southern man in 1883 was reported to say, “Before the war we owned negroes. If a man had a good negro, he could afford to take care of him: if he was sick, get a doctor... But these convicts: we don’t own ‘em. One dies, get another” (Bauer).

Although convict leasing ended in the early 20th century, a dangerous loophole in the 13th amendment still permitted the enslavement of prisoners to continue to work without pay within the prison system. Bauer reports that in 1967, Terrell Don Hutto owned a massive cotton plantation where mostly black convicts would work without pay. Texas and Arkansas were so impressed with his operation they hired Hutto to run their entire plantation-based prison systems. Hutto would go on to found the first private prison corporation and sell shares on the stock market, CCA (Bauer). This corporation still exists today under the name of CoreCivic and remains a top player in the private prison system in America, among companies like GEO Group and MTC (Jacobson).

During the height of Ronald Reagan’s “war on drugs” campaign and the tough on crime era in the 1980s, incarceration rates and operation costs of prisons skyrocketed. As an attempt to combat the growing number of drug addicts during this time, the Reagan administration put in place policies that targeted drug offenders with hefty jail sentences for nonviolent offenses. These policies were continued throughout the eighties and nineties and upheld by subsequent Republican and Democratic administrations. As a result, incarceration across the country skyrocketed. Between 1980 and 1997 the number of people incarcerated in the United States increased from 750,000 to a daunting 1.7 million. (Jacobson). Just as they had done a century

before, the United States government turned to the private sector for relief from the overpopulation of the prison system and the increasing operating costs.

Private prison companies claimed to be more successful in the prison industry as they were able to build facilities faster without having to need voter approval and claimed to provide higher quality facilities and care than could be provided from the government while saving the taxpayer millions of dollars. However, as Jacobson explains, these claims have been under scrutiny, and no government study, including one conducted by the General Accounting Office in 1996, could prove any such savings. Five years later the Department of Justice conducted their own study showing that the private sector only ever saved about one percent of the projected 20. (Jacobson).

Just as they did in the 1880s, for-profit prisons in the twentieth century relied on the number of inmates housed in their facilities to turn a profit. Instead of subjecting their prisoners to slave labor, these companies were generating daily per diem payments from the government for every bed filled within their facilities. For instance, Jacobson reports that in 1987, CCA (now known as CoreCivic) charged the government \$32.17 per inmate housed in their facilities per day. Just ten years later in 1997, that same company was charging \$42.72 per inmate. That is a 33 percent increase; however, their operating costs during this time only increased 8 percent. (Jacobson). The only way for any for-profit entity to create revenue is to increase their market share value and to cut expenses. This is problematic considering the kinds of expenses being cut were the number and wages of correctional officers, educational opportunities for inmates, and mental and physical health care (Jacobson). These for-profit prison companies have been accused of focusing only on the continued incarceration of mostly poor and black citizens rather than the rehabilitation of these inmates, so they are less likely to return to these same institutions.

Though the source of income for these companies has shifted from cheap labor to per diem payments from the government, the targeted inmate demographic has remained the same. Policies made during the “tough on crime” era that began under the Reagan Administration disproportionately targeted poor black Americans. In the 1960s to the 1980s, black people were twice as likely to be arrested for drug related offenses; by the end of the 1980s, they were five times as likely to be arrested (Hallet). These companies may have not put these policies in place, but the for-profit prison system has profited from this kind of discrimination for well over a century.

In more recent years, private prison companies, like GEO Group, have fallen under fire for their involvement in immigrant detention centers started under the Obama Administration and its continuation under the Trump Administration. GEO Group saw a growth of about five to seven percent from their detention centers (Jacobson). Not only is GEO Group making profit from American citizens but also from illegal immigrants that were being housed indefinitely in these privately owned detention centers (Jacobson). Following public outrage over the treatment of immigrants, the two parties had split opinions surrounding these private companies. Democrats were calling for the complete divestment and dismantlement of the industry all together, and Republicans were holding strong to the fiscal benefits the government and the taxpayers get from these companies.

The end of the private prison system may come sooner than expected. The current political climate and the public’s knowledge and involvement in the issue could pressure future policy makers to, at the very least, more strictly regulate the goings-on of these companies and their facilities. A reporter for CNBC stated, “There has to be some things in our society that we agree are not a business opportunity” (Jacobson). The well-being of people, American or foreign,

criminal or law abiding, should not be in the hands of companies only looking to make a profit at their expense.

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Section 4:
Advanced Researched Arguments

CATEGORY PRIZE WINNER

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Prof Cocita

English 1020 C02

3 December 2022

Housing Insecurity: A Repercussion of Community Progress

As cities in Sumner County, Tennessee experienced a building boom and became affluent communities, locals and transplants alike were fond of the area's growth and the cute little shops and eateries that accompanied it. Not everyone celebrated. As it kicked off a new year of fundraising and service, the United Way of Sumner County shared statistics indicating that close to 60,000 working-class households in Sumner County live above the federal poverty line and are not eligible to receive any sort of assistance; yet they earn far less than the average cost of living for the county ("Large Turnout"). The income gap they face is impossible for even the most resolute laboring class employee to overcome without assistance. Cost-of-living hikes are causing Sumner County residents to face homelessness, and local leaders and government officials should acknowledge that the area lacks housing resources with immediate availability and swiftly provide suitable solutions.

In communities just north of Nashville, as the cost-of-living increased, so did the number of people who became housing insecure. On the authority of Family Promise, housing insecurity is defined as households who do not have safe and satisfactory living arrangements partially due to fear of eviction ("What Is"). For years men and women in Sumner County have risen each day and worked hard to provide for themselves and their families but were one car repair, medical crisis, or week of lost wages away from being homeless. The United Way has done a national

study called A.L.I.C.E., an acronym for “Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed” (“Meet Alice”). In Sumner County, it showed sixty thousand working-class households representing all races, ages, and backgrounds that feared homelessness due to eviction. They barely earned enough to pay their bills while property values and housing costs skyrocketed. This led to many having to face eviction and homelessness. In her article on eviction in Hendersonville, Alexandria Koehn shared that families who rent have been faced with the choice to pay astronomical rent increases of 20-50% at the time of lease renewal or move. It has become a common occurrence for working-class families who cannot afford these increases to have more than one household living in a single-family dwelling to share expenses.

Cohabiting is manageable for a temporary reason like recovering from a medical crisis or a longer-term season such as rebuilding after job loss. However, with the pace of inflation, it can feel hopeless when families are forced to cohabitate because the cost of living is rising higher than wages can manage. There is no sign that this trend will change, so there is no relief in sight. A daycare worker from Hendersonville, who works 40 to 80 hours a week to take care of her family, shared with WTVF that she feels pushed out of Hendersonville. The article validated her feelings by sharing that rent has gone up 17% in Sumner County and has increased 19% in neighboring Davidson County, and tens of thousands of working-class families could not afford rent or buy a house in the current market (“We’re Getting Pushed”). The exclamation of numerous locals is that something needs to be done to help those being pushed out of their homes by colossal rent increases. Regrettably, laws concerning rent and rent increases are in favor of the property owners, and there is nothing legally these families can do to protest the high rent increases that can often lead to eviction and homelessness. The conversation about this local childcare provider facing eviction and homelessness called for local leaders and government

officials to work together with the community to produce a resolution. Hendersonville commissioners deferred commenting to the mayor's office, and Mayor Clary had not responded at the time WTVF authored the article. The daycare worker was forced out of her home and had to move in with her boyfriend's family ("We're Getting Pushed"). This is not an isolated incident. Stories like this family being evicted from their home are often downplayed or ignored by those who possess the power and position to implement changes that could bring relief to thousands of households.

According to William Deshazer, the argument Sumner County natives and their neighbors in the Nashville area have tirelessly brought to the table concerning housing insecurity has been muffled by the sound of 400,000 families moving from larger cities to Middle Tennessee during the last decade. These transplants are prepared to pay more for housing and have spurred tremendous growth in the area. According to The United Way of Sumner County A.L.I.C.E. study, most households, an estimated 58%, are enjoying growth, but that is not everyone's story. An estimated 9% of locals live in pockets of poverty and rely on government assistance to help fulfill their basic needs. The remaining 33% of area residents are struggling to keep up with the cost-of-living increases that have come with community progression ("Meet ALICE"). These families make too much money to receive government assistance but do not earn enough to afford the cost of living in Sumner County, and eviction and homelessness are a reality for many families in Sumner County and neighboring Nashville.

Moreover, making homeless camps a felony in the state of Tennessee may help keep our parks and roadsides more presentable, but it does not help the area's unhoused get the assistance they need. According to Newsy's article on tackling homelessness, there are no laws to protect or provide for frightened families that face eviction and homelessness, but there are laws to

prosecute Sumner County families if they have nowhere to go and fall asleep in a public place.

If a family is pushed out of their home by rent increases, there is not one shelter for the homeless, and there are no laws to protect the unhoused. The waiting lists for housing vouchers through THDA in Sumner County are closed and they are not accepting applications now (“Tennessee Housing”). If a resident is facing eviction and or homelessness and needs immediate assistance, they are sent to the local housing authorities where their name is placed on a waiting list. There are no immediate housing options available through either of the two county housing authorities, and the waiting list could take years to work through (“Gallatin Housing”; “Portland Housing”). Sumner County does not have emergency shelter assistance, and government housing could take years to access. What is a household that needs help today to do? Some families can move in with friends, stay with family, or in a hotel. Regrettably, there are those who end up living in their car or a tent set up in a local field because there is not one emergency or long-term shelter for the unhoused in Sumner County (“Find Shelter”). On nights that temperatures drop below freezing, well-meaning area churches take in homeless men from Nashville’s Room in the Inn program (“Winter Shelter”). Many do not realize that while they minister to men bussed in from Nashville, their own neighbors, homeless Sumner County residents, are left out in the cold. It is hard to believe that in communities with new parks, business complexes, neighborhoods, and malls there are families living in their cars on frigid winter nights.

Muriel E. Bowser, mayor of Washington, DC, has helped set an example that could be used as a template for the changes residents need to see in Sumner County. David Bowers shared that DC officials acknowledged that 1 in 6 families in their area are housing insecure. They also admitted that current waiting lists for assistance will take years to work through, and it is their duty to help provide adequate housing for their residents today (Bowers). With these things in

mind, the administration in DC began putting a portion of the taxes collected in the buying and selling of houses into an established fund for building affordable apartment complexes. They also upheld a law that makes it the government's responsibility to provide shelter for homeless residents on nights the temperatures drop below freezing. On nights the shelters are full, the mayor has rented hundreds of hotel rooms in a single night to keep up with that humanitarian effort (Bowers). Passing laws that ensure temporary housing for the homeless on nights temperatures drop below freezing and allocating tax monies from the buying and selling of houses to be placed in a fund to build apartments for the homeless and housing insecure is just the type of aid needed in Sumner County.

Unfortunately, not everyone believes that it is the responsibility of the state and local government to provide help for those who find themselves in a housing crisis. It has been suggested that the reason more than 60,000 working-class families in Sumner County, Tennessee are housing insecure is because they did not plan for their future by investing in a college education. The thought is, with sizeable incomes like those earned from a career secured by having received a degree, these families would have been better equipped to support themselves and navigate the ebb and flow of the economy. Statistics would argue that 4.1% of individuals holding bachelor's degrees are currently unemployed, and of those with degrees that are employed, 41% are not working in the field for which they have a degree ("Unemployment Rate"; "Percentage of Recent"). Having a degree neither guarantees a career of choice nor a sizeable income. The issue at hand is not whether these families may have benefited from having gotten an education, but what one-third of the population in Sumner County needs to improve their present circumstances and outlook. Financial counselor Dave Ramsey says you should not spend more than 25% of your monthly income on rent ("How Much"). Using this suggestion, the

average rent allowance for a citizen in Gallatin, Tennessee, the county seat, is \$709 a month. This is based on the average hourly wage in Gallatin at \$16.37 an hour (“Average Hourly”). This sounds like a fair and generous wage, but a 2–3-bedroom rental in the area costs \$1700 a month (“Rental”). There is a \$1000 burden that not even the most determined tradesman can sustain long-term without assistance.

I had the privilege to speak at the Sumner County United Way’s Impact Breakfast in August. I shared my personal experience with housing insecurity as a single parent of three and how I utilized local help center resources to sustain my family through being unemployed. I was jobless when my children were small due to issues with childcare and recovered by starting a cleaning business. I later managed a loss of income due to a recession with food stamps and credit cards. Then I had to take two jobs at lower-than-average wages to pay back the debt. It was a joy to share that, with arduous work and encouragement from myself and the community, my older children had graduated college, gotten married, and were living in their own homes (“Large Turn Out”). But just when my youngest, an adult survivor of cancer, had been declared in remission, our property owner increased the rent by 20%. The proprietor advised me that I had 30 days to comply or move. The average cost of rent throughout Sumner County, Tennessee is \$1700 (“Rental Listings”). My son and I were evicted, could not afford another rental in the area, and moved into a friend's basement apartment where we now live. Our story is just one of the 60,000 families who make too much for state federal assistance, a maximum monthly income of \$2,750 per month, but cannot afford the cost of living in Sumner County, Tennessee, \$7,916 per month (“Supplemental Nutrition”; “Meet Alice”). As part of the working class, over a span of twenty years, I navigated job loss, a national recession, and a child with cancer by utilizing temporary assistance from government and non-profit agencies and using credit cards. However,

when I was given an ultimatum to pay 20% more for housing or find another place to rent, I could not comply. I went from being housing insecure to being homeless in an afternoon.

Sixty thousand blue-collar households, representing all races, ages, and backgrounds, currently fear homelessness because they scarcely make enough to pay their living expenses. Home values are skyrocketing, and so are housing prices, which put the working class in a position to be evicted for noncompliance regarding rent increases. Due to the inability to overcome the cost-of-living gap, eviction and resorting to outside living spaces which result in dangerous and inhumane conditions are realities for many families in Sumner County. If a family is pushed out of their home by rent upsurges, there are no affordable housing options, not one shelter for the homeless, and there are no laws to protect the unhoused. Some families navigate a housing crisis by cohabitating with another household or renting a room, but those without local connections or the resources to pay upfront weekly for a hotel are pushed into dangerous and inhumane outside living spaces. Moreover, laws making homelessness a crime can trigger frightened families into hiding from the authorities, those that should be helping them gain access to resources that provide food, clothing, and shelter. Celebrating growth and progress should slow down until local community leaders and government officials admit that Sumner County lacks housing resources with immediate openings and begin working towards satisfactory solutions.

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30 April 2023

Integrity in Capital Punishment

Few things rival the pain of the loss of a loved one due to violent murder. Besides pain, murder leaves family members of the victims with so many questions. When these horrific crimes take place, loved ones often ask questions like “what happened?” or “could the crime have been prevented?” Friends and family members even question if they could have done anything to save their lost loved one. In our modern-day society, our justice system is one thing that protects us from becoming victims of violent crime, and it helps find justice for victims. Police gather evidence, detectives take that evidence and try to find out who committed the crime, and prosecutors take the suspect to court, try to convict them, and send the convicted to prison. In some states, a murder conviction can be punished with the death of the guilty person. A conviction can also help the families of victims answer those painful questions about what happened or if they could have done anything to help their loved one. A conviction in a criminal case is modern society’s source of justice for the victim of a crime, but the criminal justice system can place their priority on achieving a verdict of guilt, not necessarily finding the responsible party and holding them accountable. The death penalty is a polarizing topic. Most people are either for or against capital punishment, but the most urgent problem is the integrity within the whole system. In order to address problems of the integrity of the system, police and prosecutors need to be held accountable; currently the system is filled with misconduct, false confessions, innocent people being charged and convicted,

botched executions, and racism. There should be no executions until there is a solution to these miscarriages of justice.

When the topic of the death penalty arises, generally, people fall into one of two camps. In one camp, they support capital punishment. Those who support the death penalty believe that people that commit the worst crimes in society should be permanently removed from this earth and put to death. Death penalty supporters also believe that the death of a guilty person is justice for the victim and the victim's family. This may stem from biblical sources. In the book of Genesis it states, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (NIV, Gen. 9.6). This comes early in the first book of the Bible and in one of the beginning chapters. The idea of using death as the ultimate punishment is as old as humankind. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the first recorded death penalty law was in the eighteenth-century B.C. This was in Babylon, under King Hammurabi. The death penalty in the United States goes back to the earliest days of European settlement in North America. Hugo Adam Bedau, Ph.D. professor of Philosophy at Tufts University, and Paul G. Cassell, a district court judge, wrote *Debating the Death Penalty: Should America Have Capital Punishment? The Experts on Both Sides Make Their Case*. In this book, Bedau tells of the first execution of a European Colonist in the Virginia Colony in 1608, only one year after the colony was founded. Supporters of the death penalty generally value justice; they see justice in a black and white kind of way.

In the other camp, people are against capital punishment and believe that the death penalty is wrong. Those against the death penalty have differing reasons why they take this stance. The reasons range from inhumaneness to racial and economic biases. Just as the history of capital punishment goes back in history, so does the opposition. Bedau and Cassell

also quote historian Luis Masur. Masur tells of “a diverse group of [early] Americans [that] considered the death penalty morally and politically repugnant” (qtd. in Bedau and Cassell 16). In addition, in 1972, the United States Supreme Court ruled the death penalty was unconstitutional under both the 8th and the 14th amendments, only to have it reinstated a few years later. It may be said that people that are against the death penalty value compassion. Then there are people that have mixed feelings. This group believes that the death penalty is appropriate in some circumstances, usually based on the severity of the crime or the number of people that were killed. Most people do have an opinion on this topic, and it is completely normal if that opinion is a strong, passionate one.

The current crisis is that in the search for justice, at times, there is a rush to secure a conviction. Sometimes this rush is motivated by finding justice for the victim and the family. Other times, the rush is for political reasons. Either the investigators or prosecutors want to close a case to help their image in one way or another. As hard as it may be to believe, misconduct in the original investigation and subsequent trial amongst police and prosecutors is very common in death exonerations. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, a website that gives information about the current state of the death penalty, “Police or prosecutorial misconduct is rampant in death-row exoneration cases ... misconduct [was found] in 54% of all exonerations [and] rising to 72% in cases in which exonerees had been sentenced to death” (“Report Finds Rampant”). That means in all cases where someone has originally been found guilty and then it was proven that they did not in fact commit the crime, over half of the time there was misconduct. In the cases where the exoneree was originally sentenced to death, and then exonerated, almost three quarters of the time there was police

and/or prosecutorial misconduct. This is a serious problem in our criminal justice system. This problem goes well beyond whether capital punishment is morally right or morally wrong.

Misconduct can range from an honest mistake to clear criminal activity. There are tactics that investigators use to get the accused to admit that they did something that they did not actually do. Investigators will use psychological maneuvers such as marathon-length interviews and sleep deprivation to confuse their suspects. Steven Frenda, Ph.D., Shari R. Berkowitz, Elizabeth Loftus, and Kimberly Fenn wrote “Sleep Deprivation and False Confessions.” In this, Frenda notes that lengthy interviews where most of the confessions were later proven false “lasted more than 12 [hours], with many lasting for longer than 24 consecutive hours” (Frenda et al). To assist the investigators in confusing the suspect to get them to admit guilt, they keep the suspect awake for extended periods. According to Frenda, “Research has linked sleep deprivation with false and distorted memories of past events” (Frenda et al). In the same article, Frenda notes that of all death penalty exonerations, 15 to 25% of defendants were convicted due to a false confession. When looking at cases of misconduct and false confessions, one has to ask, why is this happening? The only logical conclusion is that the motivation for the people empowered to seek justice for the victims is concern about their own professional or political advancement rather than finding actual justice.

Another common tactic used to force a conviction is for investigators to knowingly allow mistruths that help find guilt to enter the conversation. Shareef Cousin was convicted at the age of seventeen for the murder of Michael Gerardi in New Orleans on March 2, 1995. Later, Cousin was exonerated. In a *New York Times Upfront* article, Peter Vilbig wrote about this case. According to Vilbig, Cousin was convicted due to one eyewitness testimony. The

testimony was given by Gerardi's girlfriend, who ran away when three men approached Gerardi and shot him. At the scene of the crime, when police arrived and interviewed the girlfriend, she told them that she did not have her glasses or contacts in at the time of the crime and would not be able to identify the killer. Later at the trial, on the witness stand and under oath, she pointed Cousin out as the killer and stated that she would never be able to forget his face. Cousin had an alibi; he was playing in an intramural basketball game at the time of the murder. The police and the prosecutor knew that this witness was either lying at the crime scene or during her testimony in court. According to Vilbig, in addition to the witness testimony of the girlfriend, "Prosecutors withheld strong evidence pointing to the possible guilt of three other suspects" (Vilbig). Cousin is fortunate that the justice system eventually worked in his favor, and he was not only released but also fully exonerated of the murder of Gerardi. Cousin's case is a clear example of police and the prosecution allowing eyewitness testimony that they knew contained mistruths into the courtroom. In Cousin's case, that mistruth led him to be wrongfully convicted.

A disturbing trend in modern capital punishment is the physical ineffectiveness of the prison system's ability to actually carry out executions in the designed way. In a *New York Times* article by Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs titled "Death Penalty Researchers Call 2022 'Year of the Botched Execution,'" Bogel-Burroughs reports how more than a third of executions carried out in 2022 were mishandled. Nationwide in 2022, there were 18 executions. Bogel-Burroughs describes seven of these "visibly botched executions that took place in three states as 'shocking'" and "visibly problematic" (Bogel-Burroughs). He goes on in the article to tell of three of the seven alone happening in the state of Alabama. In one specifically, "Death chamber staff members [had to] cut open [a] man's arm to insert an I.V." to administer the

drugs to kill him (Bogel-Burroughs). To give credit to the states of Tennessee and Alabama, they have paused executions to work on the issue. Other states, including Texas and Oklahoma, show no signs of slowing their executions. According to Bogel-Burroughs and multiple other online news sources, Oklahoma plans on executing 25 prisoners in the next 29 months, which started at the beginning of 2023. The Constitution of the United States, specifically the 8th amendment, “Prohibits punishments that ‘involve the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain’” (“Evolving or Fixed Standard”). A lot of these botched executions are direct violations of a wanton infliction of pain.

One of the ugliest truths about this issue is that there is a racial element here. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the same study that found rampant misconduct in cases of later exoneration “found that government misconduct was more likely to occur in cases involving Black defendants” (“Report Finds Rampant”). Like Cousin, who is black, Kevin Cooper was convicted of murdering the Ryen family and a neighbor boy, all of whom were white, in California in 1983. Award-winning journalist Nicholas Kristof wrote about this case in the *New York Times*. He titled his article “Is This an Innocent Man on Death Row?” Cooper is still in prison, but it is very likely that he is innocent. Thankfully, one member of the Ryen family survived this horrible attack: the young son named Josh. When the police questioned Josh, he told them that the attack was committed by several white men. Four days later, the sheriff in charge of the case announced that Cooper was the primary suspect. Cooper had just escaped a local minimum-security prison, and there was evidence that he had been hiding in the neighbor’s house. There was no evidence of him at the Ryen’s home or that connected him to the crime in any way. There was hair found clutched in the hands of one of the victims. It was not a match to Cooper, nor was it hair from an African

American. There was a full DNA profile found on a towel at the scene, likely from the murderer. The DNA on the towel did not match Cooper or any of the victims. When Cooper was interviewed by Kristof in prison, Cooper made the statement that is obvious to most people looking into this case. Cooper said, "If I was a white man, or if I was a wealthy Black man, I would not be in prison right now." In Kristof's article, he responded by saying, "Of course he's right" (Kristof). According to the evidence on the Death Penalty Information Center's Website, cases of wrongful conviction and excessive wrongful imprisonment happen at a much higher rate among black men and people without means, of any race. Writer Russell Contreras gives some shocking stats in his article "Report: Black Americans More Likely to be Wrongfully Convicted" on the online news service *Axios*. Contreras reports that "black Americans are seven times more likely than white people to be falsely convicted of serious crimes and spend longer in prison before exoneration." Specifically, he notes that while black people represent 13.6% of the total U.S. population, yet they account for 53% of the total exonerations (Contreras). This tragedy is happening to people that cannot defend themselves.

One area where it can be said the system is correct is the handling of convicted murderers with mental illnesses. On June 20, 2002, The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Atkins vs Virginia* that putting people to death that are mentally ill is a violation of the eighth amendment. Recently, Nikolas Cruz, the shooter that killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, was spared the death penalty when the jury could not unanimously agree that he should die. One of the main causes for this vote was Cruz's mental health. This was not a popular decision. The Death Penalty Information Center put out an article titled "Non-Unanimous Florida Jury Sentences Nikolas Cruz to Life Without Parole for Parkland School Shootings." In this article, the Death Penalty Information Center quotes

several people involved with this case that were extremely unhappy about the lack of a death sentence. Lead prosecutor Michael J. Satz told the jury that Cruz “was a coldhearted, notoriety-seeking sociopath who planned the rampage and carried out ‘a systematic massacre’ in which he ‘hunt[ed] his victims” (“Non-Unanimous Florida Jury”). There were more people upset about the Cruz decision, people from family members of the victims all the way to the governor of Florida. The article went on to describe evidence that Cruz’s defense team presented that shows he was born with a neurodevelopment disorder resulting from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Cruz’s defense attorney described Cruz as “a brain damaged, broken, mentally ill person, through no fault of his own” (“Non-Unanimous Florida Jury”). A lot of times, the morally right decision is not the most popular decision. The Supreme Court and the justice system are correct in this case. Mentally ill people need help, not execution.

The issues behind the lack of integrity in the criminal justice system and capital punishment are issues that most will agree need to be fixed. This is where everyone’s values should align. Those that value justice and those that value compassion should be able to find common ground in ensuring that innocent people should not be falsely accused or convicted of any crime. In fact, according to a Pew Research study from April 2021, over three quarters of Americans say there is a risk that innocent people may be put to death (Nadeem). There is a need to solve this problem before we can debate the morality of capital punishment. How can society find justice for the victim of a crime and their family, while not taking freedom away from an innocent person? When an innocent person is convicted of a crime, there is no justice. These tragedies rob an innocent person of their freedoms, they deny justice to the victims, and they hurt all of society. Society in general is another victim in this circumstance. When an innocent person gets convicted of a crime that they did not commit, there is a dangerous

person still free and able to hurt someone else. In addition, these situations also take away from the integrity of the justice system as a whole.

Now the question is, what is the solution to this problem? The first step would be accountability for the people entrusted by society to find justice. In the Death Penalty Information Center article about misconduct, there is a quote from the chief public defender in Pima County, Arizona, Joel Feinman. Feinman said he has “never heard of any prosecutor being arrested for misconduct, and almost no prosecutors are fired or disbarred for misconduct” (“Report Finds Rampant”). The best place to start to right these wrongs would be to hold prosecutors and police accountable for misconduct and dishonest dealings. These are people that should be held to a higher standard to begin with; it comes with the responsibility of their positions. In addition, if there is a chance that an innocent person may be put to death, then all capital punishment should be stopped. There should be no room for error when considering whether someone’s life should be taken.

A conviction is the source of justice in a modern civilized society. The conclusion of a nightmare is the best that can be done by a justice system for families and loved ones of murder victims. For some, this is justice, and for some more honest people, it is revenge. The criminal justice system has the responsibility to find the actual killer, not rush to judgment and point to guilt and imprison the wrong person. When the wrong person is convicted, there is another victim of this crime. Now an innocent person is incarcerated and could eventually lose their own lives. Normally, the topic of the death penalty debate sticks to whether the actual punishment is right or wrong, but it needs to go deeper. People need to look at the integrity of the actual conviction. People need to look into how the conviction was obtained. Did investigators do their due diligence and find the right person, or did they coerce a false

confession, and did the prosecutors follow the legal and moral laws of the court? To protect the freedom of everyone involved, the victims, the accused, and all of society, the main focus must be to find and convict the right person, no matter how long that would take.

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Clean Needles Save Lives

The United States is in the midst of an ongoing war on drugs that has taken the lives of many good people. As a nation where the preservation of life and health are upheld as basic human rights, access to health and preventative services should be accessible to those who need it most. The ones in need of these services are injection drug users (IDUs), despite the public perceptions that they do not care about their health since they inject harmful substances into their bodies. As a society we should care for the wellbeing of these individuals and advocate for safer injection practices. One way of doing this is through harm reduction practices such as syringe service programs (SSPs). These programs are effective in reducing the dangers that come with injection drug use. Harm reduction is practiced every day in our society: when we put our seatbelts on, when we put helmets on when riding a motorcycle, and when we use condoms to prevent pregnancy and transmission of STDs. In the same way, SSPs are useful harm reduction tools that mitigate the harmful effects of injection drug use by providing sterile hypodermic needles to IDUs. This reduces the risk of infection such as from the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), viral hepatitis, and other bloodborne pathogens and infections. SSPs not only offer access to “clean needles” but often also serve as a gateway to health services, overdose prevention education, rehabilitation, housing, and many other services either provided in-house or by referral.

SSPs were first established in Europe but began gaining traction in the US during the early 1980's. They began as an underground operation run by concerned activists and addicts in response to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980's. Despite the fact that SSPs have existed for over 30 years, the restriction on using federal funds had been in place since 1988 but was later lifted in 2016. The lifting of the ban is a huge step forward, but states and local governments are still in charge of implementation of these programs. According to research, SSPs have been demonstrated to reduce the rate of HIV and viral hepatitis infections, as well as other bloodborne illnesses. So why are SSPs not more widely available? The reason is that SSPs are still a polarizing subject among communities and government. While many people may believe that SSPs encourage drug use and are not cost-effective, SSPs should be supported by our communities and government, and rules and regulations that make it difficult for these programs to operate should be repealed.

SSPs have always been a topic of debate, with one of the biggest barriers being the strong moral opposition stemming from either religious or ethical beliefs that these types of programs promote and encourage drug use. Sociologist Kelly Szott noted in her research study "Heroin is the Devil" that these perceptions often stem from a strong belief that drug use is a sin and that addiction is a weakness in morality. These types of moralistic perceptions may lead to the conclusion that the only way out of addiction is complete and total abstinence. SSPs fail to meet these standards, as these programs meet addicts at any stage of their addiction--whether they are ready to seek recovery, not able, or not willing to quit just yet (Spaulding and Canady 10). SSPs respect the autonomy of IDUs and understand that some might not be ready for recovery. Yet this does not mean that they do not need the assistance or care about their health.

Opponents of SSPs fail to recognize that these programs play a critical role in reducing the adverse effects of injection drug use. According to a study published in the *Public Library of Science*, there is no link between the establishment of SSP and an increase in drug use or crime (Teshale et al.). In the same study, epidemiologist Eyasu H. Tashale and his colleagues report that in many cases “reduced frequency of injection” was attributed to SSPs. These programs do not encourage or promote drug use. They encourage self-care and foster trust between SSPs and participants. This level of compassion increases the likelihood that participants will initiate rehabilitation on their own. Knowing that someone cares for their wellbeing may be the driving force for an addict to start recovery. Addiction is often a lonely road paved with self-loathing, loneliness, and secrecy. Often addiction may be numbing physical or emotional pain. SSPs can be the difference between life and death for some IDUs. Ignoring and stigmatizing IDUs is not going to help or solve the situation at hand.

Changing perceptions of SSPs can be challenging. People may have reservations about how cost effective these programs are. Although a large amount of research has been conducted to show that these programs reduce the incidence of lifelong illnesses and reduce medical costs among injection drug users, “local and state officials have resisted the establishment of new SSPs and have worked aggressively to close down existing SSPs” (McMullen et al.). But with the threat of contracting a lifelong illness each time someone injects themselves with a dirty needle, SSPs are a crucial tool in preventive care. The possibility of severe skin infections and bloodborne diseases is much more prevalent in IDUs. This is due to many factors, including unsafe injection practices, injecting in unsterile environments, and needle sharing. With many IDUs lacking health insurance, the cost of treating these infections trickles down to every taxpayer in this country. A study found that the estimated cost of living with HIV was \$300,000

per person in the year 2017 (Jiang et al.). Though HIV infection rates are not where they were in the 1980s, preventative public health measures should be taken to avoid further infections. An article published by the *American Journal of Public Health* noted that “every dollar spent on improving syringe access can save more than seven dollars in avoided HIV treatment expense alone” (Davis et al. 1565). This figure does not account for co-infections such as viral hepatitis and other bloodborne infections, but it shows the impact SSPs can have on our economy.

In 2015 Scott County, Indiana was at the center of a historic HIV outbreak, resulting in “more than 237 cases of HIV infections in a single year in a county of just 24,000 people” (Russell). Of those infections, 95% were also co-infected with hepatitis C. All of the infections were “directly correlated to injection drug use” (“Indiana Needle”). Former Vice President Mike Pence, who was governor of the state of Indiana at the time of the incident, signed an executive order implementing a state supervised SSP (Russell). This was the first SSP in the state of Indiana. Although the approach was successful in reducing infection rates, the rate of overdoses remained high. As a result of stigma and opposition expressed by community members and local officials, it was determined that the program would close by the end of 2021 (“Indiana Needle”). This action threatens the progress made so far. Furthermore, the implications of such action could result in another incident of high infections. It should be noted that in 2020 only one new case of HIV was reported in Scott County (“Indiana Needle”). The takeaway with Scott County is, had there been an SSP implemented prior to the breakout, the incident might have been avoided altogether.

Attempts to implement more SSPs have been slowed down or hindered. Part of the reason is the lack of community and government support and acceptance. Much of this is because of public uproar linking SSPs to greater rates of needle litter and crime. Due to these

concerns, some programs have been forced to shut down or operate under regulations that are not best for practice (Allen et al.). In a study conducted by psychologist Stephanie D. Spaulding and Brittany E. Canady, it was determined that the return rate of needles distributed at SSPs was at a base line average of 90% (11). Furthermore, overdoses may be attributed to the increase in manufacturing of illicit fentanyl (Davis et al. 1565). SSPs are useful in reducing overdoses because many of the programs provide test strips to test for the presence of fentanyl and naloxone to reverse drug overdose. Because these institutions continue to be under scrutiny, there are many that have been forced to close, as was the case in Kanawha County, West Virginia.

In a study published by the *Harm Reduction Journal*, authors Sean T. Allen and colleagues report on the closure of the Kanawha County SSP, which had been housed within the county's health department. In the study they reported that because of the mounting public outcry over the program, law enforcement set in motion a number of restrictions, including requiring evidence of county residency, proof of identification, and only distributing retractable needles. These limitations made it difficult for the program to continue running, and as a result the program was suspended permanently in 2018 (Allen et al.). This study is noteworthy in highlighting the barriers to access. Because these programs serve predominantly poor and homeless members of society, it can be difficult to meet requirements such as providing identification. These restrictions make it hard not only on SSPs but also on the participants. Because there is so much stigma associated with addiction, participants might be more reluctant to seek help if they have to meet criteria.

In the same study conducted by Allen and his colleagues following the closure of the Kanawha County SSP, many participants reported that they were significantly affected by the

closure. IDUs reported that they took the risk of buying used syringes, knowing that the risk of infection from HIV or hepatitis was possible, because of the lack of access to clean needles. Many also admitted that they were more likely to use a discarded syringe. Although access to sterile syringes was still made available at a nearby clinic, participants reported that it was nothing like the Kanawha SSP. Many of them noted that they felt stigmatized for their addiction by the personnel at this clinic (Allen et al.). The closure of the SSP in Kanawha County is important in understanding how the closure of these programs has an effect on public health, more specifically on the health of IDUs. It is imperative that we understand that closing or implementing stricter policies on these programs only further exacerbates the problem at hand. Among the many policies is the distribution of retractable needles: because these needles can only be used once, it poses a higher risk of infection due to IDUs taking syringes apart so they can reuse. In addition, because retractable needles are only intended to be used once, this also increases the chances of needle sharing if the participants are not able to access an SSP. The “one for one exchange” also poses an important barrier set by policies. This policy is harmful because it limits the number of clean needles used for each injection. Limitations on the number of needles distributed not only put the IDUs at risk of sharing needles but along with that present a higher risk of infection (Allen et al). These infections could be anything from a blood borne disease to endocarditis, an infection of the inner lining of the heart. Cases of endocarditis in injection drug use are directly connected to unsafe injection practices such as reusing needles (Davis et al. 1564). This action poses a higher risk of bacteria being introduced into the body. In addition, some IDUs might be supplying other IDUs who might not be able to get to the program. This action also has criminal implications because of laws that prohibit secondary distribution of drug paraphernalia.

The criminalization of drug paraphernalia also affects how SSPs operate. Per the Department of Justice, “Under federal law the term drug paraphernalia means ‘any equipment, product or material of any kind which is primarily intended or designed for use in manufacturing, compounding, converting, concealing, producing, processing, preparing, injecting, ingesting, inhaling, or otherwise introducing into the human body a controlled substance.’” (“Drug Paraphernalia”). Research led by Marcelo H. Fernández-Viña and his colleagues found that laws that criminalize the distribution and the possession of syringes influence the effectiveness of these programs. Though several states have taken steps to decriminalize the possession of syringes or have enacted laws exempting SSPs and participants, there are still states that do not have clear laws regarding the possession of syringes. Eighteen states in the U.S. do not have any laws in place that exempt SSP participants from paraphernalia laws (Fernández-Viña et al.). Because much of the equipment distributed at SSPs falls under the umbrella of paraphernalia, possession of these items presents a legal barrier for participants. Among those items are fentanyl test strips which can be lifesaving to IDUs (Davis et al. 1565). This threatens the effectiveness of SSPs. If IDUs are aware of law enforcement presence in the vicinity of an SSP, they will be less likely to return their used needles for fear of legal repercussion.

Eliminating paraphernalia laws would mean fewer people going to jail for simple possession. IDUs would feel safer going to SSPs knowing that that they will not be criminally penalized for being in possession of a syringe and/or other items provided by SSPs. Criminalizing the possession of paraphernalia further impedes any chance of recovery for IDUs. Communities need to be better educated about what addiction is and how these programs help not only the addicts but everyone in the community. Our government leaders need to understand that complete support is needed--not only in the form of funding but also in the form of vocal

support. Understanding the literature behind syringe service programs will help people better understand that this is neither encouraging drug addiction nor condoning it. It is simply saying if you are going to go down this path, do it in the most responsible way as to minimize harming yourself and those around you.

As a society we need to do better in finding ways to help people struggling with drug addiction. We need to face the fact that drugs are not going anywhere. The growing crisis is not only felt in the U.S. but all around the world. Yes, some addicts have chosen a life of addiction, but others have fallen into the cycle of addiction due to trauma or physical pain. Whatever the reason, it should not matter. SSPs will not end addiction, but neither will inaction, criminalization, or stigma. For decades these programs have been proven to decrease the rate of infection and create opportunities for IDUs to get the treatment they so desperately need. It is time for our government to openly accept and encourage the implementation of these programs and stand up to those who oppose them merely on moral grounds.

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Abstinence-Only Education: Does It Truly Work?

Annually, the United States federally funds fifty million dollars towards Abstinence-Only Until Marriage programs (Kendall 1). Abstinence-Only Until Marriage (AOUM) education, also referred to as abstinence-only education, is the primary method of sex education in the United States. Abstinence-only programs put extreme emphasis on abstinence as the only true method of birth control and oftentimes reject or even exclude other valid methods, such as condoms or hormonal birth control. While abstinence is the safest method of birth control, abstinence-only education is ineffective in both informing and protecting teenagers from the risks of sexual relationships and should be replaced with comprehensive education.

Some may argue that the abstinence-only approach to sex education is the best way to prevent teen pregnancy and STDs. In some aspects, this is true. Abstinence is indisputably the safest method of preventing both teen pregnancies and STDs, including in comparison to well-known contraceptives. Gold and colleagues in their health education article note that latex condoms have “method failure rates between 0.5 and 7%...[and] user failure rates between 12% and 70%” (1). While largely effective when properly used, contraceptives such as condoms are not completely foolproof in preventing pregnancy or STDs. In contrast, abstinence completely avoids both risks for teenagers, making it the much safer option.

That being said, abstinence-only education, in practice, is significantly ineffective in delaying the age of initiation of sex in teenagers and preventing the risks from sexual

relationships, such as teen pregnancy, compared to comprehensive education. Most abstinence-only programs do not leave positive lasting effects on teenagers. Authors Santelli and Kantor in their journal article analyzing the flaws of abstinence-only education, summarize the findings of a 2008 article, stating, “Kirby found that most abstinence programs do not help teens delay the initiation of sex and only 3 of 9 [programs surveyed] had any significant positive effects on adolescents [sic] sexual behavior” (3). Even with the strong ideals of abstinence emphasized in abstinence-only education, many teenagers ultimately are not persuaded against sexual relationships. As a result, teenagers may be put at even higher risks of teen pregnancy and STDs, considering that not only were they not effectively persuaded towards abstinence, but they were likely also dissuaded from using contraceptives such as condoms and hormonal birth control. Some states that notably rely on abstinence-only education, such as Texas, show just how significant this effect can be. Washington D.C.’s *Morning Edition* shares a report from Lauren Silverman about the teen pregnancy situation in Texas. “The Dallas and San Antonio areas, for example, had teen pregnancy rates 50 to 40 percent above the national average,” Silverman reports. “Here’s the thing– teens everywhere are having sex. Gwen Daverth CEO of Texas Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy says the high numbers in Texas reflect policy, not promiscuity” (“In Texas”). She further asserts that in Texas, “nearly 85 percent of high schools teach abstinence only or don’t have any sexual education at all” (“In Texas”). Combined, the numbers Silverman found in her research show a reasonable correlation between the exceedingly high rates of teen pregnancy in Texas and the state’s method of sexual education.

The statistics in Texas are not the only numbers displaying the failure of abstinence-only education; the documented success of comprehensive education programs further calls attention to the ineffectiveness of abstinence-only education. Santelli and Kantor discuss the effectiveness

of comprehensive education, commenting, "...two thirds of comprehensive programs had strong evidence of positive effects on teens' sexual behavior, including both delaying first sex and increasing condom and contraceptive use" (3). Comprehensive education continuously and consistently outperforms abstinence-only education in their combined goals of protecting teens from pregnancy and STDs, despite not only focusing on abstinence. Though abstinence may be the most effective method to prevent STDs and pregnancy, abstinence-only education, in practice, is ultimately ineffective.

Abstinence-only focused education does not effectively teach teenagers about safety regarding sexual relationships. In their journal article over the history and effectiveness of abstinence-only education, Kantor and colleagues report that:

The number of young people reporting that they had received formal instruction about birth control in either a school or a community-based program declined substantially between 1995 and 2002. Among males, 81% reported in 1995 that they had learned about birth control, compared with 66% in 2002; among females, 87% reported in 1995 that they had receive [sic] instruction about contraception, compared with 70% in 2002. In 2002, only 62% of females and 54% of males reported that they had received any instruction about birth control prior to initiating sexual intercourse. (Kantor et al. 12)

Abstinence-only education, especially in more modern years, is taught too late in childhood to be truly useful and effective in preventing the risks that come with unsafe sex, especially considering the numbers in Kantor and colleagues' study that found that only a bit above half of the people interviewed in more recent years reported receiving education before intercourse. Along with the poor timing of abstinence-only programs, many also teach with grossly misinterpreted statistics in order to enforce abstinence. Malone and Rodriguez in their journal

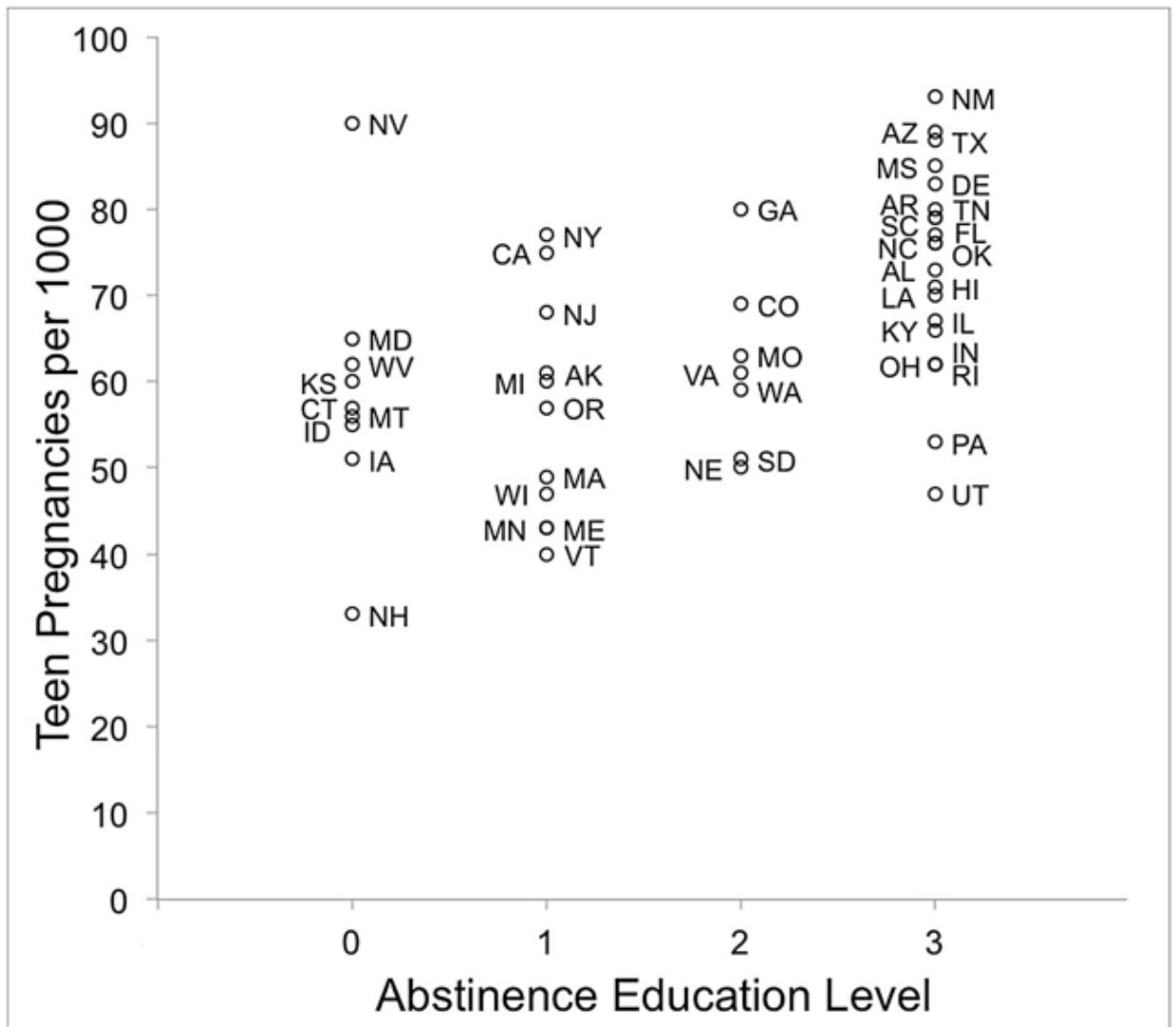
found that one such program taught that, “[t]he condom has a 14% failure rate in preventing pregnancy..” despite the fact that, “in reality, the failure rate for male condoms for people who use them consistently and correctly, known as the ‘method’ failure rate, is 2 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)” (5-7). By knowingly misinterpreting official information about alternate contraceptives like condoms, such as by conflating user and method failure rates, teachers following abstinence-only programs give their students a false idea of the effectiveness of condoms. This false idea, in turn, can cause teenagers to be less likely to use condoms, thus increasing their risk of pregnancy and STDs and making abstinence-only education counterintuitive. In addition to the lack of effective education and misinformation, the abstinence-only approach simply does not last long-term. In an article published by the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, authors Hannah Bruckner and Peter Bearman state, “88% of the pledgers (people who pledged to abstain from sex until marriage) have sex before they get married, whereas 99% of nonpledgers have sex before marriage” (275). Considering a significant majority of pledgers still have sex before marriage despite being taught abstinence and that the margin between the pledgers and non-pledgers is so small, it’s logical to conclude that abstinence-only education is not very effective in promoting abstinence in the long-term.

On top of its general ineffectiveness, abstinence-only education disproportionately negatively affects minority groups. Dr. Reyes, a nationally known Latina professor, in a publication for the National Women’s Health Network, details how the standards of abstinence-only education had an especially negative effect on her because of her Latina background. Reyes highlights how Latinas have some of the highest teen pregnancy rates out of any ethnic group and how she believes this stems from her culture. She describes how machismo (masculinity focused on the domination of women) played a major role in how women were expected to be

virgins and not talk about their sexuality because it was taboo, to the point that many did not even know the names of their reproductive organs (Reyes 6). In cultures like Reyes', the lack of comprehensive sex education has an especially negative impact because it deprives teenagers of what may be their only opportunity to learn effective methods to prevent teen pregnancy and STDs, given that parents will likely not teach their children due to taboo.

Alongside ethnic minorities, social minorities also face a greater negative impact from abstinence-only education. In her article examining the effects of federal funding for AOUM programs, Kendall finds that “[f]urthermore, by 1999, six states required teachers to tell students that abortion and homosexuality are physically and psychologically damaging to individuals and their community” (24). For women and LGBTQ people, these types of standards can be exceedingly damaging because of the shame and stigma they associate with oftentimes necessary healthcare and varying sexual orientations, which can put social minorities in both physical and emotional danger. Not only is abstinence-only focused education ineffective in teaching teens, but it is also exceptionally and most notably harmful for ethnic and social minorities alike.

Due to the ineffectiveness of abstinence-only education, teenagers are at higher risk of teen pregnancy and STDs. Authors Hall and Stanger-Hall, in their research report about the trends between abstinence-only education and teenage pregnancy rates, found that, “level 3 states (states which actively emphasized abstinence-only education) averaged 73.24 teen pregnancies per 1000 girls aged 14-19,” in contrast to the “level 1 states (states which covered abstinence as part of a comprehensive program) [which] had an average 56.36 [per one thousand girls]” (4). Hall and Stanger-Hall’s report shows an apparent correlation between the abstinence-only approach taken by many states and the increased rates of teen pregnancy in those states.



Stanger-Hall and Hall, Fig.1, p. 5

Information gaps from the standards of abstinence-only education also influence the rates of STDs. An article in *The Education Digest* reports how “[s]ome strict abstinence-only-until-marriage programs actually discourage the use of [condoms]... In reality, research has shown that using a condom for protection from HIV is 10,000 times safer than not” (“Abstinence Only” 48-49). Abstinence-only focused programs actively put teenagers at significantly greater risks of contracting STDs such as HIV because of the discouragement of contraceptives, endangering teenagers' health.

In stark contrast to abstinence-only education, comprehensive education significantly and effectively decreases the rates of both teen pregnancy and STDs. Where abstinence-only programs may discourage use or outright avoid conversations about contraceptives like condoms, comprehensive sex education seeks to provide teens with medically-accurate and age-appropriate information about sexual health and relationships, in addition to explaining the benefits of delaying such relationships. Numerous studies prove that the comprehensive approach to sex education has overall better effects on teens. For example, Santelli and Kantor comment, “40 percent of the comprehensive programs examined achieved the three important effects of delaying the initiation of sexual intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, and increasing condom or contraceptive use” (8). Statistics such as the one found by Santelli and Kantor demonstrate a clear benefit of comprehensive education over abstinence-only education. While abstinence-only education’s positive effects are ultimately short-term, if existent, comprehensive education retains its usefulness long enough to show its effective and lasting impact of reducing the main risks related to sexual relationships. As a further result of comprehensive education’s effectiveness in achieving its three main purposes, teen pregnancy rates in countries that have started using this approach to sex education have begun to see a positive decrease. New York University published a news release on the decrease in rates of teen pregnancies in countries that began receiving financial support for comprehensive education programs. The university notes that, “teen birth rates dropped by 1.5 percent in the first year...[and] 7 percent by the fifth year” (1). While these results may originally sound insignificant, it’s important to realize that they represent only the start of a compounding decrease in the rates of teen pregnancy, as evident by the change in one and a half to a full seven percent. It should also be noted that each percent of decrease describes a difference in the lives of

hundreds if not thousands of individuals. As a whole, these statistics show the success of funded comprehensive programs in numerous other countries and suggest a trend that could be followed by the United States to benefit teens' livelihood and health by decreasing teen pregnancies.

There are numerous factors that could lead to better implementation of comprehensive education amongst the states. For instance, both the federal and state governments spend millions of dollars annually on abstinence-only education despite its proven flaws. In a journal for the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), author Claudia Trevor explains, “A new community program called Respect received \$1 million from the state of Florida to provide abstinence-only education exclusively to young people in Osceola county” (17). This one million dollars in funding is not representing the entirety of Florida either; it is the funding of one singular program in a singular county in the state. Despite a plethora of studies proving that the abstinence-only approach to sexual education is largely ineffective, programs like Respect in Florida are still receiving huge sums from their state governments. If comprehensive programs could have the same backing as scientifically disproven abstinence-only programs, more teenagers could have proper access to an effective form of education and as a result be much less likely to suffer the consequences from STDs and teen pregnancy. In addition to a difference in the allocation of funds, states can make a change in their laws regarding sexual education programs. Authors Hall and Stanger-Hall also discovered that “[o]f the 50 U.S. states, only 38 states had sex education laws. Thirty of the 38 state laws contained abstinence education provisions, 8 states did not” (3). State governments have the opportunity to be more proactive in preventing teens’ risks of both pregnancy and STDs by passing laws to promote comprehensive education in more schools. The states that passed abstinence-based laws can also better help teenagers by listening to modern studies of the flaws in abstinence-only

education and changing their legislation to better reflect the needs and values of teens. With a combination of improved funding and proactive legislation, state governments can spread the benefits of comprehensive education in schools across their respective states and protect their youth from the risks of sexual relationships.

Sex education for teenagers should not only focus on abstinence. Abstinence-only education has proven to be ineffective in teaching teens about how to prevent STDs and teen pregnancy due to its overly restrictive standards and timing. Such lacking standards also cause disproportionate harm to ethnic and social minorities who may face shame and stigmas preventing them from other sources of education. As a result, teens who primarily receive abstinence-only education encounter higher risks of teen pregnancy and STDs. Comprehensive education has proven time and time again throughout many surveys and studies to be a truly effective method of education that reduces teen pregnancy and STDs. For the overall safety and wellbeing of teenagers, state governments should not focus on abstinence-only education and should promote a more comprehensive approach.

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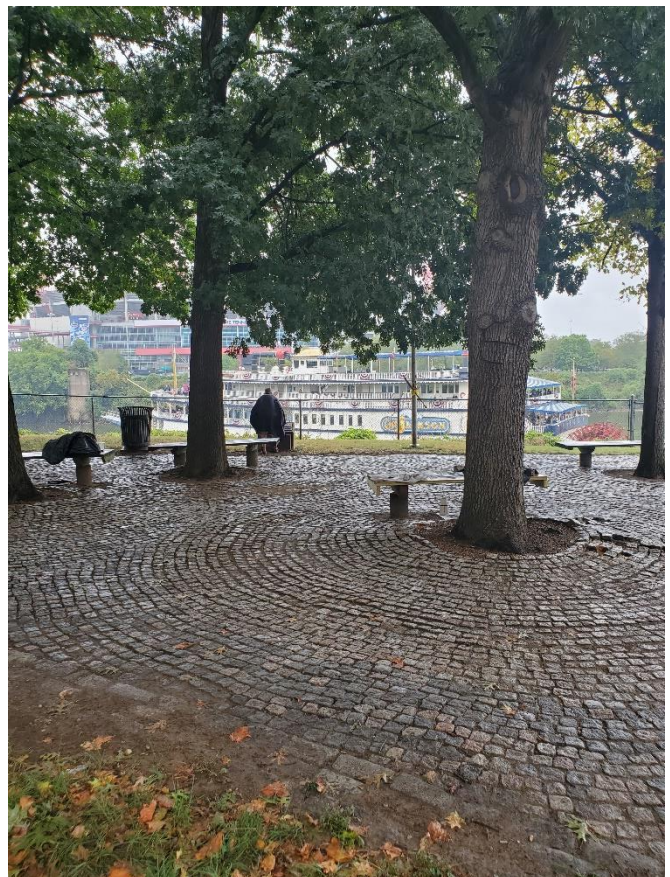
Lana Lowe

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Hist 2030

23 Sept. 2022

Fort Nashborough



How did we get here? Today Fort Nashborough is a haven for the homeless, drug addicts, and squatters, though you won't read this when searching the location unless you specifically look at reviews on *Google*. *Nashville.gov* just states that it's a self-guided walk-through open

from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (“Fort Nashborough”). The log cabins standing there today are a smaller replica of what once was, built in 1930 and funded by the local Daughters of the American Revolution, and then rebuilt in 1962, and again in 2017 (Currey, Hance). In 2017 a feather sculpture was also built to honor Native Americans and included names of a few tribes as well as their parts in the history of the area (Hance). The early settlers faced strong opposition from Native Americans and experienced many attacks, mostly incited by a Native American man named Tsi'yu-gunsini, who is more commonly known as Dragging Canoe (Bucy 8). Dragging Canoe led a group of warriors that had split from the Cherokees and were referred to as the Chickamaugas’ (Bender). His attacks caused many settlers to flee to safer areas. However, to say it like that is mostly from the perspective of the settlers. Dragging Canoe was defending Cherokee land from the invasion of early pioneers. The establishment of Fort Nashborough by James Robertson, though not the beginning of conflict between early Tennessee settlers and Native Americans, was a casualty in the hostilities between Dragging Canoe and the settlers; created illegally, it suffered increasing attacks as Dragging Canoe sought to defend Cherokee territory.

It wasn’t called Fort Nashborough until after the Revolutionary War in honor of General Francis Nash (Gailani). But let’s go back in time. What we call Fort Nashborough today was originally created by settlers led by James Robertson in 1780 (“Fort Nashborough”). It had different names then, “French Lick Station,” “The Bluff,” “Bluff Station,” or simply referred to as “the fort” (Carey). When reading about Fort Nashborough, one of the most notable things one will find is information on what is referred to as “The Battle of the Bluffs.” In fact, a marker used to be near the entrance that gave a brief description of the “The Battle of the Bluffs,” but after the fort was demolished in 2015 and rebuilt in 2017, it was not reinstated (“Fort

Nashborough Historical Marker”). Forts built by early settlers were not simply a means of providing shelter: they were a way of claiming the land as their own and used for security (“Forts”). The settlers building the fort knew they were likely to experience attacks, and the leading founders of the fort were not just refugees or simply trying to find a good place to live: they were technically rebels.

It’s believed that James Robertson either took part in or at least empathized with the “North Carolina Regulator Movement” and some of the other early members of Fort Nashborough, including John Donelson and John Cotton, were also a part of the movement (Fritz, Matlock). The Regulators were essentially pre-revolutionists that opposed Royal Governor William Tryon; however, after quelling the movement, Governor Tryon put a price on the heads of any who had been a part of it (Matlock 253-254). Robertson convinced Donelson and Cotten to join him in the wilds of what would later be named Tennessee (Matlock 254). Together they established the fort that we would eventually call Fort Nashborough. However, they moved onto the land illegally.



When visiting Fort Nashborough, there are signs talking about the Transylvania Land Purchase and the Cumberland Compact, but they do not go into the full nuances of these. Though James Robertson and John Donelson are considered the founders of Fort Nashborough, there is an important distinction to be made that they were not the ones who purchased the land, but rather the ones who settled the land. What can be read at the fort mentions that just a few weeks before the American Revolution, Richard Henderson, the founder of The Transylvania Land Company, purchased 20 million acres from the Cherokee Nation and mentions the Treaty of Watauga but does not mention that the Transylvania Purchase was also known as The Treaty of Sycamore Shoals (Bucy 8, “The Cumberland Settlements”).

The Transylvania Land Company was established partly with the sole reason of making this deal with the Cherokees and at the current time was entirely illegal, as the land was still under British rule that did not allow private land deals between Native Americans and British subjects (Bender). The Proclamation of 1763 also made this purchase illegal as it restricted settlement beyond the Appalachians (Bucy 5). However, Henderson disregarded all of this and made his deal at a unique point in time, while dissent was already circulating in the colonies (Conley Chapter VIII). He met with Cherokees at Sycamore Shoals on March 1, 1775 and arranged an exchange of six wagons of goods along with 10,000 English pounds for the 20 acres of land (Bucy 8). Dragging Canoe was one of those that opposed this treaty, and he is quoted as saying, “You have bought a fair land, but you will find its settlement dark and bloody,” a promise he was sure to live up to (Conley Chapter VIII).

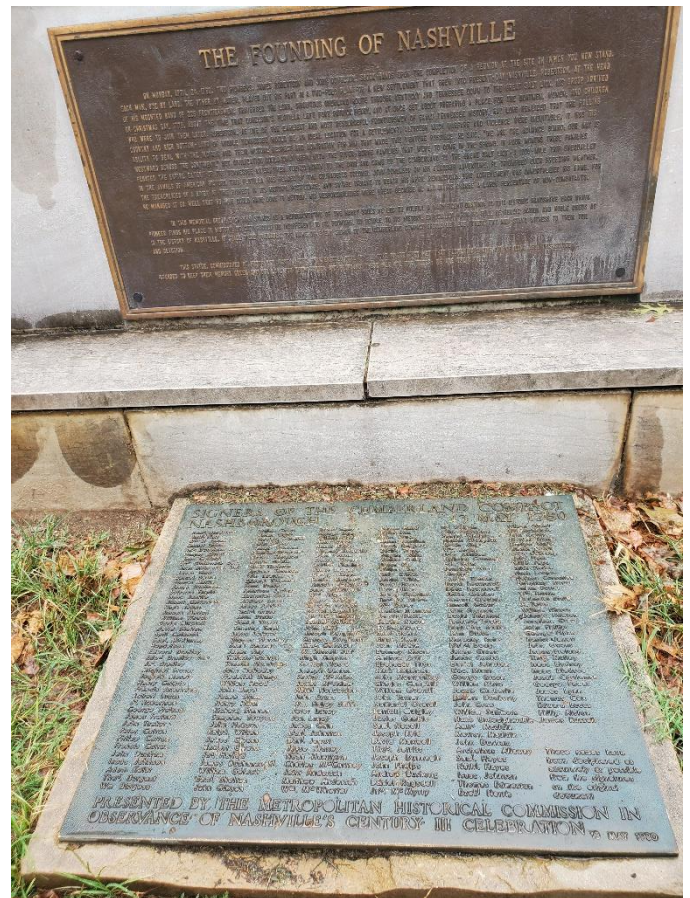


The Cumberland Compact was created after the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals in 1780 and was essentially a sort of constitution for the settlers living in a seemingly lawless area (Stealey). It not only established the election of twelve representatives from the eight stations in the area who would maintain justice but set forth the criteria for a militia to be created to protect the inhabitants from attacks from Native Americans (“The Cumberland Compact”). While much of it was a way of creating rules to live by for the settlers of the area, it also established “legal framework for land transfers” (“The Cumberland Compact,” Stealey). This was a pretty important part in the settlement for several reasons, especially since it sought to legalize what they were doing. But there is another noteworthy part of this Compact many people might not acknowledge or even notice. The express notation of a militia to protect from Native Americans in the area was already creating, or increasing, a rift between the settlers and the Native Americans. While it united the forts together, it was othering the original inhabitants of the land, something that would undoubtedly create further divisions between the peoples.

Let's go back to the establishment of the Fort now. Henderson is the one who convinced James Robertson to create the fort because after having successfully acquired the land, he deemed it necessary to create a settlement there, most likely to keep the land. While the purchase of the land had been made in 1775, Robertson did not make the journey to create the settlement until 1780 but had planted corn in the area the previous year as a way of staking claim on the land (Stealey 327-239). Robertson journeyed by land and Donelson journeyed by the Cumberland River to reach what would become Fort Nashborough (Stealey). Though Robertson's party traveled through the icy cold weather the same as Donelson's, they seemed to experience less trouble, partly because Robertson was experienced and knew where he was going (Bucy 11). Donelson's party experienced various troubles from a delay as the boats were built, issues from the weather and rapid river, and then survived various attacks from Dragging Canoe's Chickamaugas, one of which was the assumed massacre of an entire boat that fell behind due to a smallpox outbreak (Bucy 11-12). They did, however, finally arrive and begin the process of building their new homes.



The Battle of the Bluffs is arguably what makes the fort so well known. On April 2, 1781, the fort was attacked by Native Americans (“The Battle of the Bluff”). A detailed account of the battle survives from the journal of John Cotten. He vividly describes the men being lured from the fort and the battle to get back when they found themselves ambushed (Matlock). They are saved first by their own horses running through the enemies and then by the release of the fort’s dogs, an act attributed to James Robertson’s wife, Charlotte (Matlock). Gory details of scalping and gunshot wounds are given as well as mentions of many that died, one of which Cotten had referred to as a “hothead” who was one of the ones that instigated the excursion from the fort, a man named Leiper. Details of Leiper’s young wife cradling his head and the death of a young child who was only eight pulls at the heart strings (Matlock). It’s hard not to feel a connection to Cotten’s writing as he expresses his gratefulness for his family at the end, and we’re given a firsthand account not only of the horrors of battle but his own bravery and loyalty to his fellow settlers (Matlock).



So, how did we get here? It's important to remember that much of history is told by the victors. If the war Dragging Canoe waged on the settlers taking Cherokee land had been won, he would most likely be referred to as a national hero. However, there are limited resources that discuss him and even fewer that do not cast him in a negative light. Some of the positive ones praise his military prowess and refer to him as a Cherokee Patriot (Bender). Many of the signs at Fort Nashborough today refer to the "danger from Indians," a direct quote, and describe the fort as a defense against their attacks. They mention the "Battle of the Bluffs," and a statue of James Robertson and John Donelson shaking hands is immortalized on the grounds as well as all the names of those who signed the Cumberland Compact. If one only were to visit the fort and read these signs, they tell the story of pioneers creating a home for their families and others despite tremendous opposition from Native Americans. They depict the struggles that Robertson and Donelson faced to even reach the area in their respective parties and then to keep it safe from violent attacks.

However, the signs do not explain why there was opposition, and there are multiple sides to every story. Until 2017 when the feather statue was erected, Native Americans were not given a voice except that of negativity at the fort. And still today the sign that mentions Dragging Canoe only discusses his violent attacks on the settlers and ascribes the reason to his opposing the Transylvania Land Purchase ("Struggle for Control"). It mentions nothing about his desire to protect the Cherokee land and its people. The other sign gives information about the tribes and the hunting ground, with mention of why the Eagle was sacred ("Hunting Ground").

In his journal John Cotten vehemently cheered the deaths of Native Americans and their being torn apart by dogs (Matlock). Near the end he mentions that they buried some of the dogs in the same graves as the Native Americans (Matlock). Dragging Canoe might have instigated

the Battle of the Bluffs, on what we're meant to believe was a relatively peaceful fort of people trying to escape British rule, but he was not the only one attacking peaceful towns and breaking treaties. Multiple times settlers proved they did not see the Native Americans as the rightful inhabitants of the lands or even as human, as Cotten refers to them as "savages" multiple times in his journal (Matlock). There was a pervasive idea that the settlers had more right to the area than the Cherokees, and the illegal creation of Fort Nashborough was just one of many ways they showed this. Then the beginning of the American Revolution forced the Native Americans to compromise or be removed ("Hunting Ground").

In his famous speech, Dragging Canoe warns that the agreement of the Sycamore Shoals would just be the beginning and the settlers would want more and more until the Cherokees were forced out, and we know today that he was right (Bucy 8). The inhabitants of Fort Nashborough might not have deserved the attacks they suffered, but they were a casualty in Dragging Canoe's war as he sought to protect his land and people. It's important to see both sides of the story, to understand that Dragging Canoe didn't simply "hate the white man" and he actually had white and half-white supporters (Conley Chapter VIII). He wasn't simply bloodthirsty: he was protecting the best interests of the Cherokees against land hungry invaders (Bender, Conley). He is quoted at Chota saying that he was "not engaging in a war against all whites, but only against the enemies of the King of England" (Conley Chapter VIII). His patriotism to not only the Cherokees but to the King of England is also notable. Likely if the American Revolution had not been successful, history would remember him differently for that as well.

Today the once proud fort established by settlers seeking to escape British rule has fallen into neglect; while not necessarily in any state of disrepair, it's as though much of the city has forgotten it. It's become a place where people lurk, and squatters, drug dealers, and homeless

have taken refuge within its walls. And perhaps that's fitting, that a place where people once lived illegally has devolved into much of the same.



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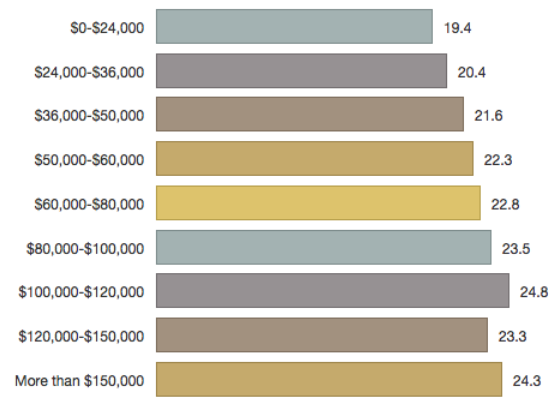
Should Colleges Stress the Tests?

Using standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT for college admission decisions is becoming a controversial topic. Many colleges decided to go test-optional during the Covid-19 pandemic. Going test-optional means a student can choose whether to submit his or her standardized test scores or not. This has proven to be beneficial to many students and colleges. While the ACT and SAT are straightforward ways to compare students, they should not be solely relied on in college admissions because the combination of high school transcripts, letters of recommendation, and other resources are better predictors of college readiness without the excessive stress.

The ACT and SAT are pen-and-paper, multiple-choice, standardized tests used to aid college admission decisions. The ACT consists of four sections--math, reading, English, and science--and takes a total of three and a half hours to take with only one ten-minute break. Likewise, the SAT has sections consisting of math, reading, and writing and language skills. It also takes three hours and fifteen minutes with one five-minute break and one ten-minute break. These tests generally start around eight in the morning and go on until noon. These tests are highly valued in the decision-making of colleges. However, standardized tests should not be heavily relied on in college admissions because the tests are unfair to students, stressful to take, and do not accurately represent intelligence.

The ACT and SAT are unfair to those with lower family incomes. To achieve a respectable score, many families feel pressured to attend prestigious tutoring and take the test multiple times. These things add up! One girl opened up and shared that her parents “spent about \$3,500 on tutoring” (qtd in Tugend). On top of this, each ACT costs sixty dollars and each SAT costs fifty-five dollars. One article states, “These are barriers to low-income students scoring as high as their intelligence allows. A student who can take the SAT four times after rigorous test-specific prep will have a better shot than one who can only afford to take it once without preparation outside of schooling—even if they are equally smart” (“Should College Require Standardized Tests?”). Many families cannot afford to pay for multiple tests on top of the egregious tutoring costs, and it is hindering the student’s future if colleges heavily rely on these scores. In the report “Standardized Testing,” Ellicott goes into detail in his writing and gives many examples of correlations between race, wealth, and ACT scores. He mentions that extensive research conveys that test scores closely align with socioeconomic status, which favors those in wealthier communities. These kids generally receive more rigorous classwork, can pay for private tutors, and can afford to take the tests multiple times. These resources are known to increase test scores and disadvantage those from a lower socioeconomic class. He then writes that African American and Hispanic students are more likely to come from lower-income households and tend to score lower on these standardized

ACT scores vs. family income



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Source: ACT, [Ge](#)

ACT Scores vs. Family Income. 11 May 2015,
www.vox.com/2014/9/29/18080522/sat-college.
 Accessed 21 Oct. 2022.

tests, despite their intelligence. Overall, the ACT and SAT supply unfair advantages and disadvantages to students depending on their socioeconomic status and race.

These standardized tests also create anxiety for many students, which hinders their performance and motivation in both school and the test. These tests are timed, which is proven to trigger stress, and hold a lot of weight in college admissions decisions. Shally-Jenson writes, “Research... suggests standardized testing contributes to unhealthy levels of student stress, resulting sometimes in serious mental health problems and even suicide” (1161). So much pressure is built up around the tests, and it creates heightened anxiety and even other mental illnesses. These stressors are known to cause performance to falter and fill the students with clouded memory, so they cannot show their true intelligence. Low scores on the test also contribute to lower self-esteem and confidence problems. Because so much importance is placed on this test, a student might feel unintelligent if he or she does not score as well as his or her friend. Also, there is a psychological principle called the Yerks-Dodson law that proves that if a person is too aroused, his or her performance will suffer. This means that trying too hard will end up in a decreased output. This is applicable here because these tests hold so much weight and create so much stress for some students, and they try too hard and decrease their performance. These students are constantly thinking about the test and the score, even in school. This leads to a decreased level of focus and productivity. All of these contribute to testing anxiety and are a solid contributor to why the ACT and SAT should not be heavily relied on in college admissions decisions.

Another psychological reason why these tests are not accurate ways to assess a student’s ability and intelligence is that the stress these tests emit can hinder memory. Acute stress can cause many biological factors, including anxiety, distress, tensing of muscles, and brain fog. All

of these reactions can hinder performance on major tests such as the ACT and SAT. Students are in a state of tension and distress while taking these tests, and those conditions can lead to a lower score than what the student could receive without the stress and anxiety coursing through their bodies. The pressure put on these students to perform well on these tests creates a reaction in which they do not perform to the best of their abilities. These tests also consume so much time and energy that they mentally drain students. One article in a student newspaper describes student Ritavash Chowdhury's stress: "He often finds himself staying up until two or three o'clock in the morning trying to get everything done." Chowdhury goes on to explain, "[Standardized testing] causes immense stress to the student. . . . It just makes them overwork and over study, and fries [the student's] brains" (qtd. in Forsythe). All these students are expected to have the best outcome possible when they are overworked and sleep-deprived. Many students are staying up late into the night to study for these tests on top of their schoolwork, jobs, and other extracurricular activities. The combination of being extremely tired and being filled with distress can lead to poor scores and can have many negative effects on the students and their mental health.

The ACT and SAT also do not provide a full picture of a person's education level. Many students are smarter than their score shows them to be. There are more aspects of intelligence and college readiness than what is tested. An article on ProCon.org explains, "Standardized tests can only, at best, evaluate rote knowledge of math, science, and English. The tests do not evaluate creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, artistic ability, or other knowledge areas that cannot be judged by scoring a sheet of bubbles filled in with a pencil." These tests do not test everything that goes into future success. As well as what is listed in the quote, cooperation

and work ethic are also not shown in test scores. All these characteristics are crucial in the prediction of success. The ACT and SAT are not correct reports of college readiness:

For the vast majority of... [Chicago State] university's graduates who scored in the middle range of the test as high school students, the ACT explained only 3.6% of the differences in cumulative college GPA. In fact, the exam over-predicted the performance of the class graduating in 1992, which had the highest average ACT score among the classes in the research study yet the poorest academic performance over four years at the university. (qtd. in Fair Test)

This is an example of when the tests got it wrong. If the tests are accurate, the class that had the highest ACT scores should have the best grade point average. However, they were proven wrong and are not good projections of a student's future.

These tests are not only an imperfect predictor of college readiness, but they also are not a good measure of one's true intelligence. So many factors go into the score a student receives. One article asserts, "Standardized test scores are easily influenced by outside factors: stress, hunger, tiredness, and prior teacher or parent comments about the difficulty of the test, among other factors. In short, the tests only show which students are best at preparing for and taking the tests, not what knowledge students might exhibit if their stomachs weren't empty" (ProCon.org). These factors, along with others, have so much impact on one's score. How are the students without the money to take it multiple times supposed to do their best the first time they take it with all these obstacles and distractions? The students who are more prepared are inevitably going to score higher. This is a problem because many of the high-scoring students who are well-prepared develop these strategies through expensive test preparation courses. If colleges heavily rely on these standardized test scores, then they will not be admitting the best applicants.

Colleges may be more likely to admit a student with a poor character who lacks motivation but tests well over a hardworking, intelligent student who had a bad test day. Going test-optional would allow students who did not get adequate sleep before the test or cannot afford a hearty breakfast to have the chance to be admitted to a college that would otherwise overlook them due to a low score.

Going test-optional also allows for more diversity within the student body. Oftentimes, minorities get overlooked and do not get the opportunity that others have. Strauss reports, “Wake Forest was among the first to go test-optional, starting in 2009. It reports on its website that ethnic diversity among undergraduates increased 90 percent from 2008, the final year in which scores were required, to fall 2017 — and there has been no difference in academic achievement between those who submitted scores and those who did not.” For Wake Forest, giving students the choice to submit their test scores or not increased the variety of ethnicities and allowed for students who would typically be neglected to obtain a college education. This proves the invalidity of test scores in certain instances since there was no academic gap between those who submitted scores versus those who did not. This opens the door for more people to obtain a college education and to better their lives.

In addition to all the other benefits of taking away the importance and stress of the ACT and SAT, teachers would also be able to teach students important life skills rather than what they need to know for one test. The whole school curriculum is centered around standardized tests. Shally-Jenson asserts, “Rather than focusing on the values of learning, educational contexts that emphasize outcomes focus students on getting the grade or test score--emphasizing what is required to do well on the test rather than focusing on genuine learning” (1161). School focusing on real-life skills allows students to be better prepared for the workforce. This also gives teachers

the freedom to teach how they want to and pass on their knowledge to their students without worrying about test scores.

On the other hand, many people who believe in using standardized tests say that they are a good indication of college readiness and academic success. On the Azusa Pacific University website, the article claims that “[i]ncluding scores from the SAT or ACT exam in your student’s application can help show schools of interest that they are academically prepared for college-level work” (Felce). This is true for those with high scores; however, these tests only help those who are in the upper level of scores. Going test-optional would help those whose scores would help them while also not interfering with those whose scores do not help them. The students who have a lower score could be just as prepared for college as someone with a higher score. Passing college courses takes work ethic, cooperation, and motivation. The ACT and SAT do not assess any of these traits. The tests only show a score of the academic overview. Many high-scoring students are not as ready as some of the lower-scoring students because many kids with higher scores have relied on their natural intelligence and developed habits such as procrastination and poor study skills.

In order to excel in college, one needs to master the habits the ACT and SAT do not represent. College is meant to prepare a student for the real world and to succeed in the workforce. One needs to be proactive and take initiative while also being easy to work with. These characteristics can be shown using a student’s GPA. The GPA--or grade point average--shows the grades a student achieves over the course of four years. Many high school courses have at least one group project as well as a mixture of assessments. These will more accurately represent what a student will face in college and the workplace. Moreover, using GPA shows

how a student will work over a period of time. The classes can take a semester to a year, which shows dedication and work ethic over the course of many months.

Another critique of the test-blind policy is that GPA as an alternative is varied based on the school. Cooper writes, “But high-school GPA is subject to grade inflation, so colleges will always need to include a more objective measure of academic aptitude alongside it.” While it is true that GPA can be inflated or deflated, it is equally as true that none of the current assessments are completely fair or objective either. The SAT and ACT are unfair to those of lower socioeconomic classes as well as those who struggle with testing anxiety. The student who can afford to take the ACT and SAT many times gets an advantage over those who can only afford to take them once or twice. However, if a student is not successful in a course, they cannot pay to get an A.

There is not one solution that is going to fully represent a student. However, there are combinations that can produce a fuller view. GPA along with rigorous coursework, letters of recommendation, and essays can show the whole picture of a student. Letters of recommendation can show the student in the workplace, in the classroom, and in their leisure time. The character reference often shows if a student is proactive and takes the lead or sits back and waits for someone else to step up first. Rigorous coursework will show that the student is ready and prepared for the workload and classwork one might see in a college class. Essays can show academic level as well and can let college admissions get to know the student and his or her personality. Overall, the integration of all of these resources gives a much more accurate view of work ethic, determination, character, and academic achievements than the ACT and SAT show.

Going test-optional while also requiring GPA, recommendation letters, and essays is the best way to fully judge a student’s readiness for college while keeping it as fair as possible.

Doing this allows for more minorities, including those from a variety of races and socioeconomic backgrounds, to have a fair chance of bettering their future with the opportunity to attend college. It also eliminates unnecessary and excessive stress that the ACT and SAT push on students. Switching the policy also gives more freedom to teachers and allows students who would generally be neglected to receive the opportunity to have the college experience. The combination of these resources also proves to be the best way to get a well-rounded view of the applicant.

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The Irony of Inclusivity: The Effects of Checking a Personal Wheelchair at the Airport

Hundreds of millions of Americans travel by air each year--business colleagues catching up with drinks at the bar, sports teams playing around with their teammates while awaiting their flight, and families happily bustling through the terminal excited to go on that long-awaited vacation. Most all these travelers navigate through the airport terminal and into their aircraft seats with minimal disruption. Can the same be said for airline travelers that use a wheelchair? Wheelchair users must check in their personal wheelchair upon arrival at the airport. The user then transfers into an airport-assigned wheelchair for use through the terminal. Two additional transfers are required for the user, one from the airport issued wheelchair to the airline aisle-chair and again from the aisle-chair to the aircraft's seat. The user remains throughout the flight without their wheelchair while it is stowed in the cargo area of the aircraft with luggage. It is ironic that the airline policies designed to accommodate wheelchair users have instead marginalized the entire group. Because wheelchair users are required to check their personal wheelchairs at the airport terminal, they are forced to be immobilized and are subjected to both emotional and physical injury, not to mention the well-documented risk of damage to their wheelchairs. It is up to airlines to retro-fit existing aircraft and build new aircraft with wheel-lock mechanisms designed to allow wheelchair users to remain in their own wheelchairs throughout their air travel experience.

Many wheelchair users are immobilized without their chair during flight. This creates significant emotional stress for the user. According to a 2013 U.S. Paralysis Prevalence & Health Disparities Survey, this scenario would be applicable to an estimated “5.4 million” functionally paralyzed persons (Armour et al. 1855). When a paralyzed wheelchair user is without their wheelchair, it is like an able-bodied person without their legs. Rebekah Taussig has authored several books and been a wheelchair user since she was paralyzed at age three. She had one of her most terrifying experiences during air travel. She had always felt disempowered traveling by air, but this time was exceptional as she was traveling for the first time with her toddler, Otto. She was overwhelmed with anxiety as the plane landed, seat belts unfastened, and doors opened. What if Otto darted for the door as she sat waiting for her wheelchair to arrive from the cargo area? She considered “if anyone in charge saw how helpless the airline had made me” (Taussig). This is representative of an entire population of paralyzed wheelchair users subjected to these debilitating traumatic events. The emotional trauma incurred by wheelchair users can be significantly reduced, dare-say eliminated, if airlines will act now by installing wheel-lock systems in their aircraft allowing users to remain in their personal wheelchairs during air travel.

Often wheelchair users are physically injured due to the transference from an airline-issued aisle wheelchair to their aircraft’s seat. A recent survey conducted by the Muscular Dystrophy Association in collaboration with other disability groups found one of the primary reasons many wheelchair users avoided air travel was “fear of injury” when transferred from the aisle-chair to the seat on the aircraft (“Muscular”). Examples of such occurrences are unfortunately easy to provide. One such example is Charles Brown. Brown is a military veteran, the president of Paralyzed Veterans of America, and one of several users that has been physically injured during a transfer. The airline staff dropped him while attempting to transfer him from his

personal wheelchair to the airline’s aisle-chair so he could be again transferred to the aircraft seat. The staff were able to finally get Charles in the aisle-chair and eventually into the aircraft seat. The pain from the drop caused Charles to go to the doctor a few days later, where he was diagnosed with a “broken tailbone, and, worse, the wound had become infected” (Shapiro and Mellonkamp). Charles spent the next three months in the hospital. Because he was paralyzed, the lack of blood flow to assist the body’s healing process, particularly with his open wound, could have become fatal. Given the current airline wheelchair check-in process, this scenario would beg attention from the airlines to review their staff training protocol and follow up measures surrounding user transfers by the staff. Furthermore, if wheel-lock systems were installed, the transfer that caused the injury would not be required.

Alongside implications of physical injury to the user is the opportunity of damaging the user’s wheelchair. Airlines routinely damage wheelchairs inside the cargo space of aircraft during flight. An estimated 15,000 wheelchairs were damaged in just over 4 years by U.S. airlines according to their own records. Many wheelchairs are customized for that specific user, so the damage incurred is not always aesthetic nor easily repairable.

Fig. 1. GG deFiebre’s damaged wheelchair at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport



Source: Hall, Jonathan. “7 Investigates: Wheelchairs Mishandled by Airlines.” 7 News Boston. 19 May 2022.
www.whdh.com/news/7-investigates-wheelchairs-mishandled-by-airlines/

Such is the case seen in figure 1 where the wheel on airline passenger GG deFiebre's wheelchair was damaged while in the cargo bay of a flight to Phoenix AZ. deFiebre was distraught upon finding her wheelchair damaged and said that this occurrence is all too common to users. Sometimes the damage is so extensive that it leaves the user without their wheelchair for an extended amount of time or indefinitely. In the case of disability rights advocate Engracia Figueroa, her custom wheelchair was destroyed by United Airlines. Figueroa's chair was a \$30,000.00 custom wheelchair with features such as specialized seating and lumbar support to mitigate recurrent bed sores. United immediately provided a loaner wheelchair so she could remain mobile. Unfortunately, Figueroa passed away "following complications from a skin ulcer after her wheelchair was destroyed" as United deliberated for weeks on whether to repair or replace her wheelchair (JoVonn). To expand, she had a bed sore that had "been healing well" while in her customized wheelchair, but in the loaner "without proper cushioning," the sore became increasingly infected, leading to her death (Shapiro and Mellonkamp). An example like this highlights how uneducated airlines are in understanding the complexities of wheelchair design. In Figueroa's case, this is self-evident, and the continued practice of requiring a wheelchair user to hand over their customized wheelchair at the airport could result in loss of the user's life. A wheel-lock system would have allowed Figueroa to remain in her custom wheelchair during air travel and would have removed the opportunity for such an occurrence.

The good news is airlines can remedy the issue of emotional and physical damages both to persons as well as equipment by fitting their aircraft with wheel-lock systems. A study conducted in 2018 at the behest of the FAA Reauthorization Act concluded that "in-cabin wheelchair restraint systems could be installed on aircraft with some minor modifications" ultimately allowing "passengers to board the aircraft and fly in their wheelchairs" ("Muscular").

Wheel-lock systems for wheelchairs have been in production for over 20 years. One wheel-lock system manufacturer of particular interest is EZ Lock. According to BraunAbility, the leader in production of wheelchair accessible vehicles in America, the EZ lock system “is a great mobility solution” that allows the user to “lock their wheelchair into place without assistance from others” (“EZ Lock”). EZ Lock systems are also versatile, accommodating both electric and manual wheelchairs. They can integrate existing mechanical and safety attributes to their own platform and allow the user to “adjust their position” as needed to provide additional comfort and mobility (McGonigal). Many wheelchair users already own these systems and use them in their personal vehicles, both in passenger and driving positions. Mobility Works is a dealer of the EZ Lock system. Their customer service provided details about the cost, stating the “retail cost to an individual with emergency release cable is \$2,050.00 installed” (Manerva). This EZ Lock kit would include both the docking station and cable release. With 5,400 aircraft in the sky during peak times, it is a safe bet if airlines got behind this, the cost of a wheel-lock system from EZ Lock would be considerably less. Any expense for this system would be more than offset by the savings associated with prevention of litigation involving damaged wheelchairs and personal injuries, not to mention the elimination of wheelchair concierge services, including thousands of purchased and maintained airport wheelchairs. Wheel-lock systems would finally allow wheelchair users the opportunity to travel by air with autonomy as everyone else is able to. This is the very definition of inclusivity. Through minor revisions to existing aircraft and redesigns to new aircraft, wheel-lock systems could be incorporated as the new industry standard for aircraft.

Examples can be provided for any process to exacerbate shortcomings, and airlines requiring users to check their wheelchairs at the airport may not be the exception. Foremost, airlines would argue they are highly leveraged and thereby debt-laden from issuance of refunds

to customers during Covid lockdowns to the tune of \$29.3 billion. Furthermore, the airline industry would direct attention to the comprehensive accommodation program instituted to provide prompt “wheelchair assistance to an individual” upon arrival (“Wheelchair”). They would inevitably wish to discuss the aggregate resource expensed involving their concierge staff to accompany wheelchair users, not to mention the cost of procurement and maintenance associated with their airport domiciled wheelchairs. Fellow wheelchair users may simply request one to review the numerous wheelchair travel websites that showcase how they navigate various environments, including airports. One such website is wheelchairtravel.org. Founder John Morris says it is just a matter of setting expectations and that his “favorite work is educating readers,” asserting wheelchair travel is both plausible and possible without significant boundaries (Morris). Other wheelchair users claim the bulkhead seating on Southwest aircraft has enough space to allow a “manual wheelchair to get close enough to the seats to transfer (“Flying”). These users might say the ability to circumvent transfers would significantly reduce the opportunity of physical injury to the user, such as the aforementioned injury to Charles Brown. Purdue engineering would be likely to build upon the transference dilemma through deliverance of a new wheelchair prototype that has been tested in simulated airport environments. This prototype would eliminate transference of the user from their personal wheelchair to aisle-chair. It would take the user, upon arrival, through the entire air travel experience, regardless of which airline or aircraft the user chooses. The prototype is “remote operated and battery-powered,” as well as “omnidirectional” (“Purdue”). It would not require staff to operate nor assist and therefore be “cost-efficient for airports” (“Purdue”). Although there are examples of injury to persons and damage to wheelchairs, user accommodation is an airline priority, not to mention the opportunity to board Southwest with a personal wheelchair. Finally, consider the design of a

prototype wheelchair that would eliminate user chair-to-aisle chair transfers altogether. Albeit the traumatic events associated with a fraction of wheelchair users is appalling, when you consider the current vested accommodations offered by airlines and the features of the Purdue prototype, many argue that requiring airlines to redesign new aircraft as well as retrofit current aircraft is unwarranted.

Although airlines did incur debt from issuance of customer refunds surpassing \$29 billion during the Covid lockdowns, they were also awarded federal aid by way of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or C.A.R.E.S. This aid “included \$61 billion in federal grant and loan funding for the airline industry” (Durbin). Simple math could deduce the airline industry would have had a net gain of \$32 billion between what they were awarded in federal grants vs what they paid out in customer refunds. Yes, airlines maintain a comprehensive accommodation program, providing prompt assistance with dedicated staff. However, airlines are required to maintain assistive disabled programs by law. Bound to adhere to Department of Transportation guidelines, “airlines are required to promptly provide” a broad range of assistance including, but not limited to the ticketing process, security checks, pushing wheelchairs, carrying luggage and chair transference (“Wheelchair”). The implication that airlines go above and beyond or even cater to wheelchair users is simply not the case. Another point made was how some websites showcase wheelchair users’ travels by air. One site even mentions the accessibility Southwest Airlines provides in their bulkhead seating area to allow a user to access the space in their own wheelchair and transfer into the aircraft seat, claiming it also helps to mitigate the potential of physical injury to the user. The problem with this point is it limits the user to flying with one airline since with “all other airlines, an aisle-chair is needed” (“Flying”). Keep in mind that Southwest is not a major international airline. Therefore Asia, Europe, and

other continents are not available options for Southwest. Furthermore, flying Southwest may reduce the likelihood of user injury since the user has only a single transfer directly from their chair to the seat, but this does not resolve the transference scenarios of user to airport wheelchair upon arrival. Then finally, Purdue claims that they have a single seamless process of transference from user wheelchair to airport chair by way of a prototype built by their engineering teams. This prototype would navigate the airport, taking the user directly to their seat on the aircraft. The problem is the prototype has never been tested in the field, but only in environments “that replicate the dimensions of aircraft aisleways,” and although the prototype could be an improvement to the multi-transferred staff-assisted program currently in place, the wheelchair user still must check their wheelchair (“Purdue”). Therefore, it is clear that airlines are fiscally viable, that they are lawfully required to assist disabled passengers, and that regardless of the choice to fly Southwest or utilize a potential prototype-to-production airport wheelchair, the core unrefuted argument remains: the user must check their wheelchair.

The lack of inclusivity for wheelchair users at airports is evident in their wheelchair check-in process. This process catalyzes an entire barrage of emotional and physical trauma including, but not limited to, immobilization of the user without their chair, the potential of hospitalization from injury due to transference or even death because their custom wheelchair was damaged in the cargo space, and the need to remain bedridden or in a substitute wheelchair that does not meet their specific medical need. The counterarguments represented are superficial and rhetorical. They all fail to address that the reason why the user is subjected to both emotional trauma and physical injury in the first place is because their wheelchair is checked in at the airport. Because counterarguments missed the point, no concrete solutions were presented. However, there is a solution to the root cause: wheel-lock systems such as EZ Lock. These

systems would allow the user to remain in their wheelchair throughout the entire air travel experience, which removes the effects of checking a wheelchair at the airport. Fellow travelers should voice their concern by contacting their Congressperson and request they act by adding language to the Wheelchair and Guided Assistance section of the Department of Transportation guidelines requiring airlines to provide these wheel-lock systems. Furthermore, airline management should contact wheel-lock system vendors, acquire bids, and allocate funding accordingly to install these wheel-lock systems and give wheelchair users the same dignity and respect we all desire.

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