
Media Messages

MEDIA MESSAGES

If “Dances With Wolves” had been about *people* who happen to be Indians, rather than about *Indians* (uniformly stoic, brave, nasty to their enemies, nice to their friends), it might have stood a better chance of acting as a bridge between societies that have for too long woodenly characterized each other.

Indians in Aspic,
michael dorris

Each year American society invests \$160 billion in higher education, more per student than any nation in the world except Denmark. A full 45 percent of this money comes from the federal, state, and local governments. No one can say we are starving higher education. But what are we getting for our money, at least as far as the liberal arts are concerned?

The Visigoths in Tweed,
dinesh d'souza

The campuses are no more under siege by radicals than is the society at large. It has been clever of the Kimballs and D'Souzas to write as if it were so. It is always clever of those in ascendance to masquerade as victims. Rebecca Walkowitz, the newly elected president of the *Harvard Crimson*, understands perfectly how this dynamic works. . . . Walkowitz has said “. . . It's important to remember who has the power here, because it's not students. Who would dare criticize a professor for political reasons now? In addition to fearing for your grade, you'd fear being pilloried in the national press.”

What Campus Radicals?

rosa ehrenreich

The feminist objection to pornography is based on our belief that pornography represents hatred of women, that pornography's intent is to humiliate, degrade, and dehumanize the female body for the purpose of erotic stimulation and pleasure. We are unalterably opposed to the presentation of the female body being stripped, bound, raped, tortured, mutilated, and murdered in the name of commercial entertainment and free speech.

Let's Put Pornography Back in the Closet,
susan brownmiller

MINABERE IBELEMA

Identity Crisis: The African Connection

in African American Sitcom Characters

Born in 1952, Minabere Ibelema is a professor of journalism at Eastern Illinois University. He has written many scholarly articles, as well as essays for the popular press, on images of African-Americans in the Western media. His research suggests that, in general, media portrayals tend to undervalue what is unique to African-American culture and, instead, tend to stress the importance of black American assimilation into mainstream white cultural values.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Think about a television sitcom with which you're familiar. In what ways is this show a realistic portrayal of American life? In what ways is it unrealistic? How influential do you find this sitcom to be as far as shaping your values and ideas?

2.

Survey your own television viewing habits. How often do you watch TV? What types of shows do you most enjoy? What are some of the main reasons you watch television?

Besides concerns with representation and coverage, studies and critical appraisal of African Americans in the media have focused on their portrayal from the early years of film at the turn of the century, through radio a few decades later, to television in the 1980s. The thrust of these studies is that their portrayal has been negative and stereotypical.¹ Among the stereotypes identified by critics and researchers are the shiftless Negro, the happy-go-lucky singer/dancer, the street-smart hustler, the buffoon, the fat, docile mammy, the matriarch, and the lecherous black man.²

These stereotypes have evolved through the various media and apparently reflect deep-rooted societal attitudes towards African Americans. Some scholars have traced some of the stereotypes to Euro-American perception of Africans and African culture.

Anthropologist Elliot P. Skinner, for instance, sees a link between the negative portrayal of Africa and the views held of black Americans by white Americans. "This portrayal has meaning for American society in that the presence of blacks in America serves to underscore the supportive myths about Africa," Skinner has been quoted as saying. If this is the case, then the portrayal of African Americans in relation to their African cultural identity may be revealing of the nature and impetus of media stereotyping.

But in spite of the potential insight, little has been done to examine the overt portrayal of blacks in the media with regard to their expression or projection of identity with African culture. Even studies and critical appraisals of the television program *Roots* glossed over this element apparently because, as a miniseries, it could not have established a pattern from which to draw larger conclusions.³ This study explores the African connection in the characterization of African Americans by examining how the theme of African cultural identity is dealt with in television situation comedies.

Three specific questions are examined: (1) How frequently is identity with African culture an episodic theme in situation comedies featuring major African American characters? (2) Is development of that theme, taken as a whole, supportive or dissuasive of such identity? And (3) What theoretical perspectives best explain the supportive or dissuasive portrayal?

Research Methods and Rationale

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Situation comedies or "sitcoms" were chosen for this study for several reasons. First, they are the most popular form of programming (*World Almanac*, 357). Second, of all dramatic programs (night and daytime soaps, cop shows, adventure series, mysteries) sitcoms have the highest African American representation (Reid). For instance, compared to other dramatic forms, there have been more sitcom programs that revolve around African American characters. Third, contrary to popular belief, as David Marc notes, sitcoms tend to be more reflective of societal tendencies than any other dramatic form.

Given these considerations then, an examination of sitcoms is as good a beginning as any for the study of the subject of this paper.

The programs examined are *Sanford and Son*, *What's Happening*, *The Jeffersons*, *Diff'rent Strokes*, *Facts of Life*, and *Gimme a Break*. All but one of these programs feature blacks as the main characters. The exception, *Facts of Life*, has one major black character.

Data for this paper were gathered first by perusing the synopses of every episode of the programs. Episodes dealing with racial or ethnic identity were selected and viewed for the critique. Scripts for episodes that for logistical or contractual reasons could not be viewed were obtained and perused. Thus, the research data do not represent casual references to issues of identity; they represent only treatment of the topic as an episodic theme.

Frequency of Identity as Episodic Theme

Very few episodes of the programs explore African American identity with Africa as a primary or secondary storyline. No episode of *Gimme a Break* deals with racial or ethnic identity. Only one episode of *What's Happening* deals with a racial theme⁴ and none deals with cultural identity with Africa. *The Jeffersons* has one episode that deals with African ancestry and *Facts of Life* has one on African identity. Another episode of *Facts of Life* explores interracial dating. *Diff'rent Strokes* has one episode dealing directly with African identity and *Sanford and Son* has two.

Nature of Portrayal

There is a definite pattern in all the episodes on African or racial identity. First, concern with African identity results from a personal crisis. The African American character does not project his African cultural identity in normal times. Overt awareness and projection are triggered by an event or in moments of self-doubt. Secondly, the character begins to engage in uncharacteristic behavior, rejects most social norms, and acts in exaggeratedly strange ways. In other words, overt awareness and expression of African identity is portrayed as a form of personal revolution and social rebellion. Thirdly, the character is confronted with "evidence" that convinces him that assertion of African identity is not necessary. Fourthly and finally, the character reverts to his old ways, and the identity crisis is over.

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One of the two episodes of *Sanford and Son* dealing with African identity is the most illustrative of this pattern of portrayal. In that episode, entitled "Lamont Goes African," Lamont Sanford's meeting with a princely Nigerian woman precipitates a fanatical embrace of his African heritage. He drops the name Lamont in favor of an African name, replaces his Western shirts with "dashiki" and insists that his father, Fred Sanford, not eat sausage because it contains "pig poison." When Lamont comes home for the first time following his cultural conversion and tries to persuade Fred to accept his new identity, the following dialogue ensues:

Lamont: I'm a black man, right?

Fred: You can say that again. (Laughter)

Lamont: So I should have a name and a language and clothes that let everybody know I am a black man.

Fred: Listen, people will know you are a black man if your name was Spiro D. Agnew.
(Heavy laughter)

Lamont: We shouldn't even have these names. Do you know any white people with names like Lumumba, or Kasavubu or De Shaka?

Fred: I don't even know no black people with names like that.

Lamont: That's the point, pop. Black people in America have been cut off from their homeland for so long they don't even know the names of their ancestors.

Fred: My father's name was Sanford, his father's name was Sanford. And their fathers'. We've all been Sanford. Now I've been cut off from my homeland a little over 30 years.
(Laughter)

Lamont: And I suppose that's when your ancestors left Africa, ha?

Fred: No, that's when I left St. Louis. (Heavy laughter)

Lamont: I'm talking about before that.

Fred: Before that, well, that was ancient history. Don't even bring that up. *Lamont:* Pop, what we called ourselves before we called ourselves Sanford is what is important to black people, because that reflects where we originally came from. And that's why I have chosen a name that leaves no doubt about my origin.

Fred: And what's your original new name?

Lamont: Kalunda. (Scattered laughter)

Fred: Kaa what? (Laughter)

Lamont: Kalunda.

Fred: If you think I'm gonna change the sign from Sanford and Son to Sanford and Kalunda, you're crazy. (Laughter) (*Sanford and Son*, "Lamont Goes African," Tandem Productions, 1972.)

After some jesting with the name, Fred said, "It just doesn't sound right for a junk dealer. With a name like that you should be driving an elephant, not a truck" (Heavy laughter). Fred was unsuccessful in convincing Lamont to shed his new identity, but a subsequent development in the plot did. During a visit by the Nigerian woman, Olaiya, Lamont is irked by Fred's continued skepticism about the "African thing," as Fred calls it, and they both go into a spirited argument. Olaiya is stunned by Lamont's conduct and chastises him for disrespecting his father, a behavior she says is not tolerated in Africa. Before departing, to underscore her disapproval of Lamont's behavior, Olaiya counsels Lamont: Brother Kalunda, you have far to go along this path you have chosen for yourself before you reach your destination. Do not mistake Dashiki and sculpture and hairstyle for Africa, because they aren't. Nor can you expect merely to put on that cloth and become such a man as your ancestors were. The clothes you can put on and take off; it is the heart you must change—the heart.

This counsel apparently convinced Lamont that African identity, at least in the forms he was expressing it, was not for him. Soon after Olaiya's departure, Lamont shed his dashiki, and when Fred referred to him as Kalunda, he responded: "The name is Lamont." There was no explicit or implicit commitment by Lamont to "change the heart," and subsequent episodes of the program reflected neither an outward expression that Lamont engaged in nor the inward transformation that Olaiya prescribed.

An episode of *Diff'rent Strokes* entitled "Roots" explores the issue of identity with the same pattern of crisis, resolution, and normalcy. The two black boys living with a benevolent white millionaire take steps to assert their African cultural identity after being told by their Harlem mate that they were getting indoctrinated into white American culture. They suddenly became aware that their adoptive father takes them to ballets and similar elite cultural events, but not to black ones. The boys adopt African names, insist on eating only ethnic dishes, obtain African cultural artifacts, including decorative masks and drums, mount them all over their rooms, and begin to beat their drums to a deafening frenzy, screaming in the tradition of Tarzan movies. After trying in vain to get the boys to moderate their nascent cultural expressiveness, their adoptive father, Mr. Drummond, turns to a black psychologist for help. The psychologist gets Mr. Drummond to admit that he has done little to expose the boys to black culture and influences and to promise to redress that. And he counsels the boys that "blackness isn't just a matter of what you eat or the way you walk or talk. It's the way you think, feel and conduct your life." (Tandem Productions, 1981, *Diff'rent Strokes*, "Roots"). With the family crisis thus resolved, the boys return to normalcy, the masks and drums all gone.

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Another example is an episode of *Facts of Life*. Tootie, the black character among a group of white students, has an identity crisis when her segregationist new boyfriend implied that she may be becoming too "white." In the episode entitled "Who Am I?" Tootie begins to assert her cultural differences with her white mates in every way possible. She even refuses to go to a dance contest with a white dance partner with whom she won the contest the previous year and opts instead for her black boyfriend. But during the dance she realizes that the boyfriend is not nearly as good a dancer as her white partner. An ensuing dialogue with the boyfriend convinces Tootie that her nascent concern with her cultural identity is unwarranted. Accordingly, she turns again to her white dance partner and they win the contest again.

The pattern of thematic development in these three episodes is typical of all the episodes dealing with African Americans' identity with their ethnic origin.⁵ That is, African American identity with African culture is depicted as a passing fancy that surfaces only in times of cultural identity crisis, rather than as an enduring element of the black psyche. In no episode is the new awareness sustained to the end. In "Lamont Goes African," it is not clear why Olaiya's well-meaning advice to Lamont causes him to abandon his new cultural views. In "Roots," the *Diff'rent Strokes* episode, the adoptive father makes promises to the boys to appease them and so they give up their new cultural commitment—entirely. And in "Who Am I?" Tootie returns to her "normal" ways for very tenuous reasons. The moral of each story seems to be that nascent identity with African culture is an abnormality, and, like most abnormalities, it can be rectified with appropriate measures or in due course.

It is important to emphasize that in no episode is African (or African-American) culture denigrated. In "Lamont Goes African," for instance, the Nigerian woman is portrayed as beautiful, intelligent, cultured, and dignified. Even the skeptical Fred ends up trying on the dashiki and owning that there is substance to the "African thing." Nothing in the portrayal could make a strong case of racism, per se. Yet the portrayal of African Americans' cultural identity with Africa as a transient abnormality begs for explanation.

Theoretical Perspectives on Portrayal

The pattern of portrayal identified here bears some resemblance to a theory of identity evolution first postulated by William E. Cross, Jr. Cross posited that African Americans come to terms with their identity through a process involving five stages: The preencounter (or pre-discovery) stage, the encounter (or discovery) stage, the immersion-emersion stage, the internalization stage, and the commitment stage. The programs under analysis imply the first stage, specify the second stage, deal rapidly with the third, and reverse the process before it reaches the fourth and fifth stages in which permanent transformation is attained.⁶ While Cross states that progression to the final stage is not automatic and, in fact, that some people revert to preencounter characteristics, there is no suggestion that reversion is the dominant or usual tendency. And while there are no figures on the rate at which African Americans come to terms with their identity (internalization-commitment) and it is probably impossible to quantify, studies of groups such as black Moslems suggest that those who have the encounter and immersion experience do not typically revert to their preencounter outlook (see, e.g. Essien-Udom; Porter and Washington). Thus the portrayal of identity with Africa as a transient phenomenon does not seem to have a basis in reality.

There is probably no one theory that exclusively explains the pattern of portrayal identified here, but two theories seem to be the most plausible, namely, media determinism and cultural assimilation. The dictates of the medium and media producers' inherent belief in the soundness and vitality of the American sociopolitical and cultural system seem to be the most plausible explanations for the portrayal.

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Marshall McLuhan's notorious aphorism that "The medium is the message" provides a general basis for understanding the constraints of the medium on the message.

McLuhan's point, in essence, is that every medium places some parameters within which the messenger must work. For this study, the parameters are those of the medium of the situation comedy.

The format of the sitcom is quite rigid. As Sholle notes, "A look at its structure . . . reveals a fixed form that limits not only possible narratives but possible solutions." Unlike straight dramas, which thrive on what Hollywood calls "cliffhangers," sitcoms have self-contained episodes. Few episodes have storylines that are "To be continued." Therefore, the plot for each episode has to be developed and resolved within the 23 or so minutes of actual body time. That forces a quick resolution to every storyline. And since the episodes are self-contained, writers avoid leaving "unfinished businesses" which will affect the storylines of other episodes. They are especially careful not to introduce a new situation to the situation comedy. That explains, for instance, why Rebecca never goes to bed with Sam (in *Cheers*), and Fred and Lamont always lose whatever wealth comes their way. If Lamont had not abandoned his nascent Africanness, for instance, the "situation" of *Sanford and Son* would have changed in a way that would have affected future storylines.

In regular drama there is continuity in story line. For that reason, a theme introduced in one episode is likely to remain with the show indefinitely or for several episodes. In contrast, sitcom episodes tend to be independent of each other. The characters and their situation are the elements of continuity. The storylines are not. The sitcom medium, thus, limits the options for ending its episodes.

Also, since sitcoms thrive on exaggeration, the exaggerated behavior of the transformed characters may be attributed to the medium. In this case, the exaggeration provides a justification for treating the new identity as a passing crisis. Thus the medium not only prescribes the nature of characterization but also justifies a particular resolution. However, though exaggeration is a common element of comedy, it is not an essential one. As Mel Watkins has noted, for instance, traditional African-American comedy derives more from nuances of delivery than [from] punchlines. Producers and writers in the programs here did not have to resort to exaggeration. Also, though the medium limits options for ending episodes, it does not specify them. Thus, producers who have reason to modify characters or situations still do so. Therefore, neither the whimsical element of comedy nor the constraint of sitcom plots satisfactorily explains the portrayal of African identity as transient.

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A more cogent explanation of the depiction is the media's tendency to portray mainstream American values and tradition as all-serving and selfredeeming. Lee Loevinger's "reflective-projective theory" of mass communication explains this tendency. Loevinger "postulates that mass communications are best understood as mirrors of society that reflect an ambiguous image in which each observer projects or sees his own version of himself and society" (252). Loevinger supports his characterization of the nature of mass communication by arguing that:

A nation or community is formed by common interest and culture—by a common image and vision of itself. But to have a common image or vision, there must be one that is seen, understood, and accepted by most people, not merely by a minority or by an elite. This requires that the social image reflected in the media mirrors be one that truly reflect the masses. (p. 256)

While Loevinger's argument is aimed at those who wonder why television is not dominated by elite programming, his point does also explain why African-American expression of African identity is portrayed as rebellious and transient. To let the characters' new identity become permanent would be to suggest that American mainstream values [are] not good enough for all Americans. That would be a deviation from the collective image in Loevinger's theory. Moreover, as Gans has noted, the media rarely blame American mainstream political and social values for American problems (in the sense that they blame communism for the problems of the Soviet Union, Cuba, or Nicaragua, for instance). Rather the media treat them as rectifiable conditions or "as deviant cases, with the implication that American ideals, at least, remain viable" (Gans, 42). Thus, the African American characters' reversion to their old identity serves to reinforce the viability of mainstream values and to uphold the collective mirror. That is, all problems can be redressed in the context of mainstream values, not outside them. The portrayal of African Americans is also consistent with Milton Myron Gordon's theory of assimilation in America. Gordon posits that the concept of assimilation, rather than that of "the melting pot" or "cultural pluralism," is the dominant tendency in race interaction in the United States. Gordon writes that assimilation is characterized by Anglo-conformity, which has "as a central assumption the desirability of maintaining English institutions (as modified by the American Revolution), the English language, and English-oriented cultural patterns as dominant and standard in American life" (88). That

contrasts with the melting pot (in which all cultures contribute to a shared new standard) and cultural pluralism (in which each culture maintains its separate identity in coexistence with others.) The programs seem to encourage Anglo-conformity, with minor tradeoffs as necessary.

That minority portrayal is consistent with the goals of assimilation is further supported by stages in minority presence in the media. Cedric Clark has identified four stages in the portrayal of minorities as: (1) nonrecognition (when the minority is hardly present in the media), (2) ridicule, (3) regulation (when the group is portrayed in roles that convey adherence to law and order), and (4) respect. These stages may be explained as follows: A minority group is initially ignored in the media because it is not considered a part of the culture. But when that minority can no longer be ignored (for social or political reasons), it is ridiculed to discredit its culture and values. Discrediting of the group's culture induces self-doubt within the group and thus a willingness to be assimilated into the dominant culture.⁷ Regulation then would have the effect of conditioning the dominant culture for acceptance of the minority. Having been assimilated, at least to a satisfactory degree, the minority is then respected. This granted, one may add "maintenance" as a fifth level of portrayal by which assimilation is reinforced. Thus, projection of African identity as a transitory frame of mind may serve to remind African Americans that they have no reason to look beyond their American identity.

It is important to distinguish between this argument and the one that attributes black characterization to the stereotypical images held of blacks. Crediting the idea to Tony Brown, Melbourne S. Cummings writes, for instance, that the characters in most black sitcoms are "appealing precisely because (their) images do not disturb or dispute the overall view of black people generally held in the minds of the viewing American audience." However, the unprecedented popularity of *The (un)stereotypical) Cosby Show* defies this theory. Granted one can dismiss *The Cosby Show* as an exception. Still, the larger idea that mainstream values, not stereotypes, per se, are the dominant force in program creation and acceptance provides a more compelling explanation of black portrayal on television. Certainly, stereotypes are inherent aspects of cultural values. But as *The Cosby Show* demonstrates, consistency with other aspects of the values can override stereotypes in determining program acceptance and popularity.

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The Cosby Show epitomizes family wholesomeness, fun, and comfortable living, in easy combination with individuality, adolescent misadventures, and adult wisdom. These are aspects of the American cultural vision which, without going into a detailed analysis of the factors of program popularity, must be elements of the popularity of *The Cosby Show*. Moreover, while the program is nonracial in tone and theme, it seems to convey a sense that the American ideal has no regard for race, and perhaps that African Americans are at last an integral part of that ideal. In short, *The Cosby Show* seems a perfect exemplification of the reflective—projective—mirror theory.

Conclusion

The foregoing findings and analysis suggest two predictions on media portrayal of African Americans. One is that, even if society's stereotypical views of African Americans continue, African Americans increasingly will be portrayed positively—successfully—in the media, if the programs tap into aspects of the American collective self-image that can override the stereotypical views. Conversely, and for the same

reasons, African American assertion of African cultural identity is less likely to be endorsed in mainstream entertainment programs. Certainly, it will not be a recurrent theme in such programming. *Works Cited*

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<sum>Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

What is the main question that Ibelema raises in this essay and what answer does he offer to this question?

2.

In paragraph 5, it is stated that “sitcoms tend to be more reflective of societal tendencies than any other dramatic form.” How does this statement compare with your journal entry regarding the realism and effect of a sitcom on you?

3.

How do the five stages of identity processing compare or contrast with the television examples that Ibelema uses in this piece?

4.

What are some of the main reasons why Ibelema might have written this piece, and for what audiences might this piece be intended? Explain.

5.

Many of the television shows used as examples in this piece are from the 1970s and early 1980s in America. Brainstorm about current sitcoms that feature black characters and predict whether the images today might be different.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Watch several episodes of a current sitcom that features African Americans, and analyze the issues with which the characters are confronted as well as their reactions. From these observations, what conclusions can you draw about the African American character as portrayed on television?

2.

Analyze the portrayal of African Americans in a currently popular movie or a current best-seller.

3.

Using several current outside sources, write an essay in which you synthesize these sources as well as your own observations in order to answer this question: To what extent do popular television sitcoms affect the viewer?

MICHAEL DORRIS

Indians in Aspic

Michael Dorris contributes frequently to the New York Times, where this essay first appeared in February 1991. He is the author of The Broken Cord and, with his wife, Louise Erdrich, The Crown of Columbus. Both Dorris and Erdrich are actively involved in issues and concerns related to Native American communities.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Think back on your earliest impressions of American Indians. What did you think Indians were like? Where did you get this impression—from a book, a story you heard, a television show, a movie, something else? Try to remember the specific source that shaped your views on Indians. Did this source present you with what you would now consider a fair picture? Explain.

2.

Use your imagination: You get the chance to star in a Hollywood movie hit. You can be either a member of a group of early settlers or a member of an Indian tribe. Which do you choose to be and why?

CORNISH, N.H. The Sioux and Lieut. John Dunbar, the character enthusiastically played by Kevin Costner in “Dances With Wolves,” meet auspiciously: He’s naked, and that so disconcerts a group of mounted warriors that the naïve young soldier lives to tell the tale, a sort of Boy Scout Order of the Arrow ritual carried to the nth power.

Dunbar, renamed Dances With Wolves, quickly earns merit badges in Pawnee-bashing and animal telepathy, and marries Stands With a Fist (Mary McDonnell), a passionate young widow who just happens to be a white captive cum Campfire Girl of impressive cross-cultural accomplishments. Eventually the “With” family strikes out on their own—the nucleus of a handsome new Anglo tribe—sadder, wiser and certainly more sensitive as a result of their native American immersion.

Mr. Costner follows in a long tradition of literary and cinematic heroes who have discovered Indians. Robinson Crusoe did it off the coast of Brazil, Natty Bumppo did it in New York State and everyone from Debra Paget (“Broken Arrow,” 1950) and Natalie Wood (“The Searchers,” 1956) to Dustin Hoffman (“Little Big Man,” 1970) and Richard Harris (“A Man Called Horse,” 1970) has done it in Hollywood.

Usually these visits do not bode well for the aboriginal hosts—just ask the Mohicans. Appreciative white folks always seem to show up shortly before the cavalry (who are often looking for them) or Manifest Destiny, and record the final days of peace before the tribe is annihilated. Readers and viewers of such sagas are left with a predominant emotion of regret for a golden age now but a faint memory. In the imaginary mass media world of neat beginnings, middles and ends, American Indian society, whatever its virtues and fascinations as an arena for Euro-American consciousness-raising, is definitely past tense.

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Thematically virtually all of these works share a subtle or not so subtle message: Indians may be poor, they may at first seem strange or forbidding or primitive, but by golly once you get to know them they have a thing or two to teach us about The Meaning of Life. The tradition goes back a long way. Europeans like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl May (the turn-of-this-century novelist whose books, a mixture of Louis L'Amour and the Hardy Boys, have been a rite of passage for generations of German youth) laid out a single range for Indians to inhabit: savage-savage to noble-savage. Indians embody the concept of “the other”—a foreign, exotic, even cartoonish panorama against which “modern” (that is, white) men can measure and test themselves, and eventually, having proved their mettle in battle, be dubbed as natural leaders by their hosts.

Placed within the genre, “Dances With Wolves” shows some signs of evolution. Kevin Costner obviously spared no expense to achieve a sense of authenticity in his production. He filmed on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota and defied conventional Hollywood wisdom to assemble a large and talented native American supporting cast. Great attention was paid to ethnographically correct costumes, and if the streets in the native camp seem a tad too spotless to be believed, at least the tepees are museum quality. Impressively, large segments of the film are spoken in Lakota, the language of the western Sioux, and though the subtitles are stilted—Indians in the movies seem incapable of using contractions—they at least convey the impression that native Americans had an intellectual life.

When I saw “Dances With Wolves” at an advance screening, I predicted that it would be less than a box-office smash. Though spectacular to look at, it struck me as too long, too predictable, too didactic to attract a large audience. Twelve Academy Award nominations and \$100 million in revenue later, was I ever wrong. In fact, the movie probably sells tickets precisely *because* it delivers the old-fashioned Indians that the ticket-buying audience expects to find. Dunbar is our national myth’s everyman—handsome, sensitive, flexible, right-thinking. He passes the test of the frontier, out-Indians the Indians, achieves a pure soul by encountering and surmounting the wilderness.

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Yet, if “Dances With Wolves” had been about *people* who happen to be Indians, rather than about *Indians* (uniformly stoic, brave, nasty to their enemies, nice to their friends), it might have stood a better chance of acting as a bridge between societies that have for too long woodenly characterized each other.

With such tremendous popularity, the film is sure to generate a bubble of sympathy for the Sioux, but hard questions remain: Will this sentiment be practical, translating into public support for native American religious freedom cases before the Supreme Court, for restoration of Lakota sacred lands (the Black Hills) or water rights, for tribal sovereignty, for providing the money desperately needed by reservation health clinics? Pine Ridge is the most economically impoverished corner of America today, the Census Bureau says, but will its modern Indian advocates in business suits, men and women with lap-top computers and perfect English, be the recipients of a tidal wave of good will? Or will it turn out, once again, that the only good Indians—the only Indians whose causes and needs we can embrace—are lodged safely in the past, wrapped neatly in the blankets of history, magnets for our sympathy because they require nothing of us but tears in a dark theater?

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Let's start right off with the title of this piece: What exactly *is* aspic? How might it connect to the author's point in this piece?

2.

From the first two paragraphs alone, what clues can you pick up about the author's tone (his attitude toward his subject and toward his readers)? What might be Dorris's purpose in using this tone? As a reader, does this tone/approach appeal to you? Why or why not?

3.

Why, in paragraph 5, does Dorris capitalize "The Meaning of Life"? Does this technique add to or detract from his critique? Explain your answer.

4.

In what ways does Dorris believe *Dances with Wolves* is different from most Indian genre films? In what ways is it typical? From your own television- and film-viewing experiences, do you agree or disagree with his evaluation? Explain.

5.

Overall, what is Dorris's main point in this piece? To whom is he addressing this message—Hollywood filmmakers or those of us in the audience? Does he seem to be suggesting changes he would like to see or simply explaining problems? Explain your answer.

6.

Should a movie or a television show aim for realism and truth? Explain the reasons for your response by referring to specific films or programs that you have found either highly praiseworthy or extremely lacking in those qualities you admire.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

If you have seen *Dances with Wolves*, write your own critique of this film and the issues it deals with. Refer to several points that Dorris makes in his essay. Do you agree or disagree with him on these points? Support your stance with specific examples from the movie itself and other films related to the early American West.

2.

Search for several other reviews of *Dances with Wolves*, as well as written interviews with Kevin Costner regarding this film. (You might try the *New York Times Index* as a place to begin looking for such reviews.) Write an analysis in which you synthesize these reviews and interviews and the Dorris essay.

3.

Argue that general audiences should or should not trust the evaluation of a film to a movie critic, such as Siskel or Ebert (or Dorris!). Use as your support at least two other specific movies you have seen and subsequent reviews of these films.

DINESH D'SOUZA

The Visigoths in Tweed

Born in Bombay, India, in 1961, Dinesh D'Souza immigrated to the United States in 1978. A staunch supporter of conservative views since his college years, during which he edited The Dartmouth Review, he has served as editor for both Prospect and Policy Review, journals that take a right-wing approach to the examination of culture,

economics, and politics. In 1985, D'Souza published Falwell: Before the Millennium, a defense of the fundamentalist clergyman Jerry Falwell. Currently a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, D'Souza also pursues a career as a public speaker and freelance writer. He has published a book criticizing higher education in America, Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus, and, in addition, his essays have appeared in many publications, including the New York Times, the Boston Globe, the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, and Forbes, the magazine in which this selection first appeared.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What do you hope to gain from your college experience, and what do you think colleges, in general, should aim to do?

2.

Write about something you've read recently that's had a profound effect on you.

"I am a male WASP who attended and succeeded at Choate (preparatory) School, Yale College, Yale Law School, and Princeton Graduate School. Slowly but surely, however, my lifelong habit of looking, listening, feeling, and thinking as honestly as possible has led me to see that white, male-dominated, western European culture is the most destructive phenomenon in the known history of the planet.

"[This Western culture] is deeply hateful of life and committed to death; therefore, it is moving rapidly toward the destruction of itself and most other life forms on earth. And truly it deserves to die. . . . We have to face our own individual and collective responsibility for what is happening—our greed, brutality, indifference, militarism, racism, sexism, blindness. . . . Meanwhile, everything we have put into motion continues to endanger us more every day." This bizarre outpouring, so reminiscent of the "confessions" from victims of Stalin's show trials, appeared in a letter to *Mother Jones* magazine and was written by a graduate of some of our finest schools. But the truth is that the speaker's anguish came not from any balanced assessment but as a consequence of exposure to the propaganda of the new barbarians who have captured the humanities, law, and social science departments of so many of our universities. It should come as no surprise that many sensitive young Americans reject the system that has nurtured them. At Duke University, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, professor Frank Lentricchia in his English course shows the movie *The Godfather* to teach his students that organized crime is "a metaphor for American business as usual."

Yes, a student can still get an excellent education—among the best in the world—in computer technology and the hard sciences at American universities. But liberal arts students, including those attending Ivy League schools, are very likely to be exposed to an attempted brainwashing that deprecates Western learning and exalts a neo-Marxist ideology promoted in the name of multiculturalism. Even students who choose hard sciences must often take required courses in the humanities, where they are almost certain to be inundated with an anti-Western, anticapitalist view of the world.

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Each year American society invests \$160 billion in higher education, more per student than any nation in the world except Denmark. A full 45 percent of this money comes

from the federal, state, and local governments. No one can say we are starving higher education. But what are we getting for our money, at least so far as the liberal arts are concerned?

A fair question? It might seem so, but in university circles it is considered impolite because it presumes that higher education must be accountable to the society that supports it. Many academics think of universities as intellectual enclaves, insulated from the vulgar capitalism of the larger culture.

Yet, since the academics constantly ask for more money, it seems hardly unreasonable to ask what they are doing with it. Honest answers are rarely forthcoming. The general public sometimes gets a whiff of what is going on—as when Stanford alters its core curriculum in the classics of Western civilization—but it knows very little of the systematic and comprehensive change sweeping higher education.

An academic and cultural revolution has overtaken most of our 3,535 colleges and universities. It's a revolution to which most Americans have paid little attention. It is a revolution imposed upon the students by a university elite, not one voted upon or even discussed by the society at large. It amounts, according to University of Wisconsin–Madison Chancellor Donna Shalala, to “a basic transformation of American higher education in the name of multiculturalism and diversity.”

The central thrust of this “basic transformation” involves replacing traditional core curriculums—consisting of the great works of Western culture—with curriculums flavored by minority, female, and Third World authors.

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Here's a sample of the viewpoint represented by the new curriculum. Becky Thompson, a sociology and women's studies professor, in a teaching manual distributed by the American Sociological Association, writes: “I begin my course with the basic feminist principle that in a racist, classist, and sexist society we have all swallowed oppressive ways of being, whether intentionally or not. Specifically, this means that it is not open to debate whether a white student is racist or a male student is sexist. He/she simply is.” Professors at several colleges who have resisted these regnant dogmas about race and gender have found themselves the object of denunciation and even university sanctions. Donald Kagan, dean of Yale College, says: “I was a student during the days of Joseph McCarthy, and there is less freedom now than there was then.”

As in the McCarthy period, a particular group of activists has cowed the authorities and bent them to its will. After activists forcibly occupied his office, President Lattie Coor of the University of Vermont explained how he came to sign a 16-point agreement establishing, among other things, minority faculty hiring quotas. “When it became clear that the minority students with whom I had been discussing these issues wished to pursue negotiations *in the context of occupied offices* . . . I agreed to enter negotiations.” As frequently happens in such cases, Coor's “negotiations” ended in a rapid capitulation by the university authorities.

At Harvard, historian Stephan Thernstrom was harangued by student activists and accused of insensitivity and bigotry. What was his crime? His course included a reading from the journals of slave owners, and his textbook gave a reasonable definition of affirmative action as “preferential treatment” for minorities. At the University of Michigan, renowned demographer Reynolds Farley was assailed in the college press for

criticizing the excesses of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X; yet the administration did not publicly come to his defense.

University leaders argue that the revolution suggested by these examples is necessary because young Americans must be taught to live in and govern a multiracial and multicultural society. Immigration from Asia and Latin America, combined with relatively high minority birth rates, is changing the complexion of America.

Consequently, in the words of University of Michigan President James Duderstadt, universities must “create a model of how a more diverse and pluralistic community can work for our society.”

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No controversy, of course, about benign goals such as pluralism or diversity, but there is plenty of controversy about how these goals are being pursued. Although there is no longer a Western core curriculum at Mount Holyoke or Dartmouth, students at those schools must take a course in non-Western or Third World culture. Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin now insist that every undergraduate enroll in ethnic studies, making this virtually the only compulsory course at those schools.

If American students were truly exposed to the richest elements of other cultures, this could be a broadening and useful experience. A study of Chinese philosophers such as Confucius or Mencius would enrich students’ understanding of how different peoples order their lives, thus giving a greater sense of purpose to their own. Most likely, a taste of Indian poetry such as Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* would increase the interest of materially minded young people in the domain of the spirit. An introduction to Middle Eastern history would prepare the leaders of tomorrow to deal with the mounting challenge of Islamic culture. It would profit students to study the rise of capitalism in the Far East.

But the claims of the academic multiculturalists are largely phony. They pay little attention to the Asian or Latin American classics. Rather, the non-Western or multicultural curriculum reflects a different agenda. At Stanford, for example, Homer, Plato, Dante, Machiavelli, and Locke are increasingly scarce. But often their replacements are not non-Western classics. Instead the students are offered exotic topics such as popular religion and healing in Peru, Rastafarian poetry, and Andean music. What do students learn about the world from the books they are required to read under the new multicultural rubric? At Stanford one of the non-Western works assigned is *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, subtitled “An Indian Woman in Guatemala.”

The book is hardly a non-Western classic. Published in 1983, *I, Rigoberta Menchu* is the story of a young woman who is said to be a representative voice of the indigenous peasantry. Representative of Guatemalan Indian culture? In fact, Rigoberta met the Venezuelan feminist to whom she narrates this story at a socialist conference in Paris, where, presumably, very few of the Third World’s poor travel. Moreover, Rigoberta’s political consciousness includes the adoption of such politically correct causes as feminism, homosexual rights, socialism, and Marxism. By the middle of the book she is discoursing on “bourgeois youths” and “Molotov cocktails,” not the usual terminology of Indian peasants. One chapter is titled “Rigoberta Renounces Marriage and Motherhood,” a norm that her tribe could not have adopted and survived.

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If Rigoberta does not represent the convictions and aspirations of Guatemalan peasants, what is the source of her importance and appeal? The answer is that Rigoberta seems to provide independent Third World corroboration for Western left-wing passions and prejudices. She is a mouthpiece for a sophisticated neo-Marxist critique of Western society, all the more powerful because it seems to issue not from some embittered American academic but from a Third World native. For professors nourished on the political activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, texts such as *I, Rigoberta Menchu* offer a welcome opportunity to attack capitalism and Western society in general in the name of teaching students about the developing world.

We learn in the introduction of *I, Rigoberta Menchu* that Rigoberta is a quadruple victim. As a person of color, she has suffered racism. As a woman, she has endured sexism. She lives in South America, which is—of course—a victim of North American colonialism. She is also an Indian, victimized by Latino culture within Latin America.

One of the most widely used textbooks in so-called multicultural courses is *Multi-Cultural Literacy*, published by Graywolf Press in St. Paul, Minn. The book ignores the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Tale of Genji*, the Upanishads and Vedas, the Koran and Islamic commentaries. It also ignores such brilliant contemporary authors as Jorge Luis Borges, V. S. Naipaul, Octavio Paz, Naguib Mahfouz, and Wole Soyinka. Instead it offers 13 essays of protest, including Michele Wallace's autobiographical "Invisibility Blues" and Paula Gunn Allen's "Who Is Your Mother? The Red Roots of White Feminism."

One student I spoke with at Duke University said he would not study *Paradise Lost* because John Milton was a Eurocentric white male sexist. At the University of Michigan, a young black woman who had converted to Islam refused to believe that the prophet Muhammad owned slaves and practiced polygamy. She said she had taken courses on cultural diversity and the courses hadn't taught her that.

One of the highlights of this debate on the American campus was a passionate statement delivered a few years ago by Stanford undergraduate William King, president of the Black Student Union, who argued the benefits of the new multicultural curriculum before the faculty senate of the university. Under the old system, he said, "I was never taught . . . the fact that Socrates, Herodotus, Pythagoras, and Solon studied in Egypt and acknowledged that much of their knowledge of astronomy, geometry, medicine, and building came from the African civilization in and around Egypt. [I was never taught] that the Hippocratic Oath acknowledges the Greeks' 'father of medicine,' Imhotep, a black Egyptian pharaoh whom they called Aesculapius. . . . I was never informed when it was found that the 'very dark and wooly haired' Moors in Spain preserved, expanded, and reintroduced the classical knowledge that the Greeks had collected, which led to the 'renaissance.' . . . I read the Bible without knowing Saint Augustine looked black like me, that the Ten Commandments were almost direct copies from the 147 Negative Confessions of Egyptian initiates. . . . I didn't learn Toussaint L'Ouverture's defeat of Napoleon in Haiti directly influenced the French Revolution, or that the Iroquois Indians in America had a representative democracy which served as a model for the American system."

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This statement drew wild applause and was widely quoted. The only trouble is that much of it is untrue. There is no evidence that Socrates, Pythagoras, Herodotus, and Solon

studied in Egypt, although Herodotus may have traveled there. Saint Augustine was born in North Africa, but his skin color is unknown, and in any case he could not have been mentioned in the Bible; he was born over 350 years after Christ. Viewing King's speech at my request, Bernard Lewis, an expert on Islamic and Middle Eastern culture at Princeton, described it as "a few scraps of truth amidst a great deal of nonsense." Why does multicultural education, in practice, gravitate toward such myths and half-truths? To find out why, it is necessary to explore the complex web of connections that the academic revolution generates among admissions policies, life on campus, and the curriculum. American universities typically begin with the premise that in a democratic and increasingly diverse society the composition of their classes should reflect the ethnic distribution of the general population. Many schools officially seek "proportional representation," in which the percentage of applicants admitted from various racial groups roughly approximates the ratio of those groups in society at large.

Thus universities routinely admit black, Hispanic, and American Indian candidates over better-qualified white and Asian American applicants. As a result of zealously pursued affirmative action programs, many selective colleges admit minority students who find it extremely difficult to meet demanding academic standards and to compete with the rest of the class. This fact is reflected in the dropout rates of blacks and Hispanics, which are more than 50 percent higher than those of whites and Asians. At Berkeley a study of students admitted on a preferential basis between 1978 and 1982 concluded that nearly 70 percent failed to graduate within five years.

For affirmative action students who stay on campus, a common strategy of dealing with the pressures of university life is to enroll in a distinctive minority organization. Among such organizations at Cornell University are Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Coalition; La Asociacion Latina; National Society of Black Engineers; Society of Minority Hoteliers; Black Students United; and Simba Washanga. 30

Although the university brochures at Cornell and elsewhere continue to praise integration and close interaction among students from different backgrounds, the policies practiced at these schools actually encourage segregation. Stanford, for example, has "ethnic theme houses" such as the African house called Ujaama. And President Donald Kennedy has said that one of his educational objectives is to "support and strengthen ethnic theme houses." Such houses make it easier for some minority students to feel comfortable but help to create a kind of academic apartheid.

The University of Pennsylvania has funded a black yearbook, even though only 6 percent of the student body is black and all other groups appeared in the general yearbook.

Vassar, Dartmouth, and the University of Illinois have allowed separate graduation activities and ceremonies for minority students. California State University at Sacramento has just established an official "college within a college" for blacks.

Overt racism is relatively rare at most campuses, yet minorities are told that bigotry operates in subtle forms such as baleful looks, uncorrected stereo-types, and "institutional racism"—defined as the underrepresentation of blacks and Hispanics among university trustees, administrators, and faculty.

Other groups such as feminists and homosexuals typically get into the game, claiming their own varieties of victim status. As Harvard political scientist Harvey Mansfield bluntly puts it, "White students must admit their guilt so that minority students do not have to admit their incapacity."

Even though universities regularly accede to the political demands of victim groups, their appeasement gestures do not help black and Hispanic students get a genuine liberal arts education. They do the opposite, giving the apologists of the new academic orthodoxy a convenient excuse when students admitted on a preferential basis fail to meet academic standards. At this point student activists and administrators often blame the curriculum. They argue that it reflects a “white male perspective” that systematically depreciates the views and achievements of other cultures, minorities, women, and homosexuals. 35 With this argument, many minority students can now explain why they had such a hard time with Milton in the English department, Publius in political science, and Heisenberg in physics. Those men reflected white male aesthetics, philosophy, and science. Obviously, nonwhite students would fare much better if the university created more black or Latino or Third World courses, the argument goes. This epiphany leads to a spate of demands: Abolish the Western classics, establish new departments such as Afro-American Studies and Women’s Studies, hire minority faculty to offer distinctive black and Hispanic “perspectives.”

Multicultural or non-Western education on campus frequently glamorizes Third World cultures and omits inconvenient facts about them. In fact, several non-Western cultures are caste-based or tribal, and often disregard norms of racial equality. In many of them feminism is virtually nonexistent, as indicated by such practices as dowries, widow-burning, and genital mutilation; and homosexuality is sometimes regarded as a crime or mental disorder requiring punishment. These nasty aspects of the non-Western cultures are rarely mentioned in the new courses. Indeed, Bernard Lewis of Princeton argues that while slavery and the subjugation of women have been practiced by all known civilizations, the West at least has an active and effective movement for the abolition of such evils.

Who is behind this academic revolution, this contrived multiculturalism? The new curriculum directly serves the purposes of a newly ascendant generation of young professors, weaned in the protest culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In a frank comment, Jay Parini, who teaches English at Middlebury College, writes, “After the Vietnam War, a lot of us didn’t just crawl back into our library cubicles. We stepped into academic positions. . . . Now we have tenure, and the work of reshaping the university has begun in earnest.”

The goal that Parini and others like him pursue is the transformation of the college classroom from a place of learning to a laboratory of indoctrination for social change. Not long ago most colleges required that students learn the basics of the physical sciences and mathematics, the rudiments of economics and finance, and the fundamental principles of American history and government. Studies by the National Endowment for the Humanities show that this coherence has disappeared from the curriculum. As a result, most universities are now graduating students who are scientifically and culturally impoverished, if not illiterate.

At the University of Pennsylvania, Houston Baker, one of the most prominent black academics in the country, denounces reading and writing as oppressive technologies and celebrates such examples of oral culture as the rap group N.W.A. (Niggers With Attitudes). One of the group’s songs is about the desirability of killing policemen. Alison Jaggar, who teaches women’s studies at the University of Colorado, denounces the traditional nuclear family as a “cornerstone of women’s oppression” and anticipates

scientific advances enabling men to carry fetuses in their bodies so that child-bearing responsibilities can be shared between the sexes. Duke professor Eve Sedgwick's scholarship is devoted to unmasking what she terms the heterosexual bias in Western culture, a project that she pursues through papers such as "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl" and "How To Bring Your Kids Up Gay."

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Confronted by racial tension and balkanization on campus, university leaders usually announce that, because of a resurgence of bigotry, "more needs to be done." They press for redoubled preferential recruitment of minority students and faculty, funding for a new Third World or Afro-American center, mandatory sensitivity education for whites, and so on. The more the university leaders give in to the demands of minority activists, the more they encourage the very racism they are supposed to be fighting. Surveys indicate that most young people today hold fairly liberal attitudes toward race, evident in their strong support for the civil rights agenda and for interracial dating. However, these liberal attitudes are sorely tried by the demands of the new orthodoxy: Many undergraduates are beginning to rebel against what they perceive as a culture of preferential treatment and double standards actively fostered by university policies.

Can there be a successful rolling back of this revolution, or at least of its excesses? One piece of good news is that blatant forms of racial preference are having an increasingly tough time in the courts, and this has implications for university admissions policies. The Department of Education is more vigilant than it used to be in investigating charges of discrimination against whites and Asian Americans. With help from Washington director Morton Halperin, the American Civil Liberties Union has taken a strong stand against campus censorship. Popular magazines such as *Newsweek* and *New York* have poked fun at "politically correct" speech. At Tufts University, undergraduates embarrassed the administration into backing down on censorship by putting up taped boundaries designating areas of the university to be "free speech zones," "limited speech zones" and "Twilight Zones."

Even some scholars on the political left are now speaking out against such dogmatism and excess. Eugene Genovese, a Marxist historian and one of the nation's most respected scholars of slavery, argues that "too often we find that education has given way to indoctrination. Good scholars are intimidated into silence, and the only diversity that obtains is a diversity of radical positions." More and more professors from across the political spectrum are resisting the politicization and lowering of standards. At Duke, for example, 60 professors, led by political scientist James David Barber, a liberal Democrat, have repudiated the extremism of the victims' revolution. To that end they have joined the National Association of Scholars, a Princeton, N.J.-based group devoted to fairness, excellence and rational debate in universities.

But these scholars need help. Resistance on campus to the academic revolution is outgunned and sorely needs outside reinforcements. Parents, alumni, corporations, foundations, and state legislators are generally not aware that they can be very effective in promoting reform. The best way to encourage reform is to communicate in no uncertain terms to university leadership and, if necessary, to use financial incentives to assure your voice is heard. University leaders do their best to keep outsiders from meddling or even finding out what exactly is going on behind the tall gates, but there is little doubt that they would pay keen attention to the views of the donors on whom they

depend. By threatening to suspend donations if universities continue harmful policies, friends of liberal learning can do a lot. In the case of state-funded schools, citizens and parents can pressure elected representatives to ask questions and demand more accountability from the taxpayer-supported academics.

The illiberal revolution can be reversed only if the people who foot the bills stop being passive observers. Don't just write a check to your alma mater; that's an abrogation of responsibility. Keep abreast of what is going on and don't be afraid to raise your voice and even to close your wallet in protest. Our Western, free-market culture need not provide the rope to hang itself.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Comment on D'Souza's choice for an introduction, and discuss how the tone and purpose might have changed if the author opted to begin this piece with paragraph 5.

2.

Go through this essay and write down the sources D'Souza uses in this argument. How effective do you find these sources? How valid are they?

3.

What is D'Souza's main contention against "multiculturalism" on American campuses, and what, if any, logical fallacies do you detect in this piece?

4.

What reasons might D'Souza have for spending three paragraphs on the book *I, Rigoberta Menchu*?

5.

What parts of this essay do you find most effective? Why?

6.

Alone or working in a small group, carefully isolate and analyze the word choices within several paragraphs. Come to some conclusion as to what effect these word choices have on an audience in general, as well as what these choices reflect about the writer's attitude toward his subject.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Working alone or in a small group, survey the readings required in your college's introductory composition or humanities courses. Based on your information, what conclusions can you draw about the program? Does it, as D'Souza claims, discriminate against classic, white male, Western writings?

2.

Interview several faculty members on your campus to find out their views on teaching "multiculturalism." Compare your findings to D'Souza's assertions in this piece.

3.

What is a "classic"? With one powerful book in mind and using several outside sources, write an essay in which you answer this question.

ROSA EHRENREICH

What Campus Radicals?

Born in 1969, Rosa Ehrenreich is the daughter of liberal feminist writer Barbara Ehrenreich. In 1991, during her senior year at Harvard, Rosa Ehrenreich wrote this essay for Harper's magazine. Following her graduation, she was named a Marshall Scholar and pursued graduate study at Oxford University in England.

Suggestions for Prereading and Journal Writing

1.

What does it mean to be “politically correct” nowadays? How does this trend affect your own life, and how have you changed because of it?

2.

Think back to the literature you have been exposed to in high school and in college thus far. Write down all the non-Western titles and authors you've studied, and come to some conclusion as to how varied your education has been to date.

A national survey of college administrators released last summer found that “political correctness” is not the campus issue it has been portrayed to be by pundits and politicians of the political right. During the 1990–91 academic year, according to the survey's findings, faculty members complained of pressure from students and fellow professors to alter the political and cultural content of their courses at only 5 percent of all colleges. So much for the influence of the radicals, tenured or otherwise.

The survey's findings came as no real surprise to me. The hegemony of the “politically correct” is not a problem at Harvard, where I've just completed my undergraduate education, or at any other campus I visited during my student years. But then none among those who have escalated the P.C. debate in the past year—Dinesh D'Souza and Roger Kimball, George Will and George Bush, *Time* and *New York* magazines—is actually interested in what is happening on the campuses. In all the articles and op-ed pieces published on P.C., multiculturalism, etc., very few student voices have been heard. To be a liberal arts student with progressive politics today is at once to be at the center of a raging national debate and to be completely on the sidelines, watching others far from campus describe you and use you for their own ends.

For instance: During the spring semester of my freshman year at Harvard, Stephan Thernstrom, an American history professor, was criticized by several black students for making “racially insensitive” comments during lectures. The incident made the *Harvard Crimson* for a few days, then blew over after a week or so and was quickly forgotten by most students. It continued a kind of mythic afterlife, however, in the P.C. debate. Here is how it was described last January in a *New York* magazine cover story by John Taylor on, in the author's words, the “moonies in the classroom” propagating the “new fundamentalism”:

“Racist.” “Racist!” “The man is a racist!” *A racist!*”

Such denunciations, hissed in tones of self-righteousness and contempt, vicious and vengeful, furious, smoking with hatred—such denunciations haunted Stephan Thernstrom for weeks. Whenever he walked through the campus that spring, down Harvard's brick paths, under the arched gates, past the fluttering elms, he found it hard not to imagine the pointing fingers, the whispers.

The operative word here is “imagine.” Taylor seriously distorted what actually happened. In February of 1988, several black female students told classmates that they had been disturbed by some “racially insensitive” comments made by Professor Thernstrom. Thernstrom, they said, had spoken approvingly of Jim Crow laws, and had said that black men, harboring feelings of inadequacy, beat their female partners. The students, fearing for their grades should they anger Professor Thernstrom by confronting him with their criticisms—this is not an unusual way for college students to think things through, as anyone who’s been an undergraduate well knows—never discussed the matter with him. They told friends, who told friends, and the *Crimson* soon picked up word of the incident and ran an article.

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Professor Thernstrom, understandably disturbed to learn of the matter in the *Crimson*, wrote a letter protesting that no students had ever approached him directly with such criticisms. He also complained that the students’ vague criticisms about “racial insensitivity” had “launched a witch-hunt” that would have “chilling effect[s] upon freedom of expression.” Suddenly, Professor Thernstrom was to be understood as a victim, falsely smeared with the charge of racism. But no one had ever accused him of any such thing. “I do not charge that [Thernstrom] is a racist,” Wendi Grantham, one of the students who criticized Thernstrom, wrote to the *Crimson* in response to his letter. Grantham believed the professor gave “an incomplete and over-simplistic presentation of the information. . . . I am not judging [his] character; I am simply asking questions about his presentation of the material. . . .” As for the professor’s comment that the criticisms were like a “witch-hunt,” Grantham protested that Thernstrom had “turned the whole situation full circle, proclaimed himself victim, and resorted to childish name-calling and irrational comparisons . . . ‘witch-hunt’ [is] more than a little extreme. . . .” But vehement, even hysterical language is more and more used to demonize students who question and comment. Terms like “authoritarian” and “Hitler youth” have been hurled at students who, like Grantham, dare to express any sort of criticism of the classroom status quo.

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In my four years as a student at Harvard, I found few signs of a new fascism of the left. For that matter, there are few signs of the left at all. The Harvard-Radcliffe Democratic Socialists Club collapsed due to lack of members, as did the left-wing newspaper, the *Subterranean Review*. As to the neoconservative charge that the traditional political left has been supplanted by a feminist-gay-multicultural left: In my senior year the African-American Studies department and the Women’s Studies committee each had so few faculty that the same woman served as chair of both. I got through thirty-two courses at Harvard, majoring in the history and literature of England and America, without ever being required to read a work by a black woman writer, and of my thirty-two professors only two were women. I never even *saw* a black or Hispanic professor. (Fewer than 10 percent of tenured professors at Harvard are women, and fewer than 7 percent are members of minorities.)

Perhaps, as some conservatives have maintained, even a few radical professors can reach hundreds of students, bending their minds and sending them, angry and politicized, out into society upon graduation. To cure such fears, drop by Harvard’s Office of Career Services. Most staffers there spend their days advising those who would be corporate

execs, financial consultants, and investment bankers. Nearly 20 percent of the class of 1990 planned to go to law school. This compares with 10 percent who claimed that they would eventually go into government or one of what Career Services calls the “helping professions.”

President Bush, speaking at the University of Michigan’s commencement exercises last spring, went on about radical extremists on campus. It would be interesting to know how he calculated this rise in radicalism. Two thirds of Harvard students wholeheartedly supported the Gulf War, according to one *Crimson* poll. That’s more support for the war than was found in the country at large. And during my years at Harvard I found that most women on campus, including those who consider themselves politically liberal, would not willingly identify themselves as feminists.

The very notion of “politicization” makes most Harvard students nervous. I discovered this in the fall of 1989, when I was elected president of Harvard’s community service organization, Phillips Brooks House Association. I had been reckless enough to suggest that volunteers would benefit from having some awareness of the social and political issues that affected the communities in which they did their volunteer work. I was promptly attacked in the *Crimson* for trying to inappropriately “politicize” public service. The paper also suggested that under my leadership volunteer training might mimic a “party line” with Brooks House as a “central planning office.” This used to be called red-baiting. (So much for the liberal campus media.)

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Meanwhile—and unremarked upon by D’Souza, et al.—the campus right thrives nationally. Two new right-wing vehicles have popped up on Harvard’s campus in recent years. The Association Against Learning in the Absence of Religion and Morality (AALARM) initially made a splash with its uninhibited gay-bashing. The magazine *Peninsula*, closely tied to AALARM, bears an uncanny editorial resemblance to the notorious *Dartmouth Review*, claims to uphold Truth, and has a bizarre propensity for centerfold spreads of mangled fetuses. And older, more traditional conservative groups have grown stronger and more ideological. The Harvard Republican Club, once a stodgy and relatively inactive group, suffered a rash of purges and resignations as more moderate members were driven out by the far right. It is inactive no more.

There *are* those on the left who are intolerant and who could stand to lighten up a bit—these are the activists whom *progressive* and *liberal* students mockingly called “politically correct” years before the right appropriated the term, with a typical lack of irony. But on the whole, intolerance at Harvard—and, I suspect, elsewhere—is the province mostly of extreme conservatism. Posters put up at Harvard by the Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Students Association are routinely torn down. I don’t recall any Republican Club posters being ripped up or removed.

The day after the bombing started in Iraq, I went to an event advertised as “a nonpartisan rally to support our troops,” sponsored by the Republican Club. After the scheduled speakers—and several other non-scheduled speakers—had finished, I tried to speak. The rally organizers promptly turned off the microphone. I kept speaking, saying that I supported the troops but not the war. I added that I had been disturbed to hear it said by rally organizers—and applauded by the audience—that the time for debate was over. In a democracy, I said, the time for debate is never over.

I would have gone on, but at this point a group of men in the audience felt the need to demonstrate their conviction that there should be no debate. They began to loudly chant “victory” over and over, quite effectively drowning me out. By way of contrast, supporters of the war were listened to in polite silence by the crowd at an anti-war rally the next day.

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In the classroom, too, right-wing political views are heard without disruption. One of Harvard’s largest core courses, taken by nearly half of all undergraduates while I was there, is Social Analysis 10, Principles of Economics. It was taught, during my undergrad years, by two of President Reagan’s top economic advisers, Martin Feldstein and Larry Lindsay. Students did not rise up *en masse* to protest the course’s right-wing political bias; instead, they sat scribbling feverishly in their notebooks: Ec-10 had a notoriously steep grading curve. (No one seemed worried that each year some 750 innocent Harvard students were being lectured to by the engineers of what George Bush, in one of his more forthright moments, once referred to as “voodoo economics.”)

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There are many other politically conservative professors at Harvard whose courses are quite popular—Richard Pipes on Russian history and Samuel P. Huntington on modern democracy, to name two of the most prominent—and in their classrooms, as in all undergrad classrooms I was in, free and open discussion did quite well. I took many classes in which fearless conservatives rushed to take part in entirely civil discussions about the efficacy and justice of affirmative action, about whether books like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Frederick Douglass’s autobiography are “really *literature*,” as opposed to just interesting historical documents, and about whether it’s at all fair or even interesting to condemn Jefferson for owning slaves even as he decried slavery. These are all valid questions, and all sides deserve a hearing—which, in my experience, is exactly what they always got.

And my experience was not unique. Most other Harvard students seemed to agree that there’s no such thing as a cadre of P.C. thought police. Last winter the Republican Club laid huge sheets of poster board across several dining-hall tables and put up a sign asking students to scribble down their responses to the question “Is there free speech at Harvard?” The vast majority of students wrote things like “What’s the big deal? Of course there’s free speech here.” And the lively, cheerful discussion going on among the students gathered around the tables attested to that fact.

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Conservatives like D’Souza and Kimball charge that traditional Western culture courses barely exist anymore at schools like Harvard, because of some mysterious combination of student pressure and the multiculturalist, post-structuralist tendencies of radical professors. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* last year, Caleb Nelson, a former editor of the conservative *Harvard Salient*, complained that in the 1989–90 Harvard course catalogue: No core Literature and Arts course lists any of the great nineteenth-century British novelists among the authors studied, nor does any list such writers as Virgil, Milton, and Dostoevsky. In the core’s history areas even students who . . . took every single course would not focus on any Western history before the Middle Ages, nor would they study the history of the Enlightenment, the Renaissance, the American Civil War, or a host of other topics that one might expect a core to cover.

Nelson's major complaint is that Harvard is not properly educating all of its students. I agree with him here; in Caleb Nelson, Harvard has let us all down by producing a student so poorly educated that he's unable even to read the course catalogue.

I have the 1989–90 catalogue in front of me as I write, and a quick sampling of some of the entries gives us, from the Literature and Arts and the Historical Study sections of the core curriculum, the following courses: Chaucer, Shakespeare, The Bible and Its Interpreters, Classical Greek Literature and 5th-Century Athens, The Rome of Augustus, The British Empire, The Crusades, The Protestant Reformation. Perhaps Chaucer and Shakespeare are somehow, to Caleb Nelson, not “such writers” as Milton and Dostoevsky and the Protestant Reformation is a historically trivial topic.

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Nelson also worries that students will have “no broad look at . . . philosophy”—by which he really means Western philosophy. Yet in the Moral Reasoning section of the core, seven of the ten courses listed have at least four of the following authors on their primary reading lists: Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Locke, Kant, Rousseau, Hume, Mill, Nietzsche, Marx, and Weber. There is one course devoted to a non-Western philosopher: Confucius. The remaining two Moral Reasoning courses focus, respectively, on the writings of “Aristotle . . . [and] Maimonides,” and of “Jesus as presented in the Gospels.”

These courses are far more representative of those taken by most Harvard undergraduates than the titillating and much denounced 1991 English course on Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety—a graduate seminar listed in the course catalogue but ultimately never held. But then, if you are a right-winger looking for something to replace the commies on campus—remember them?—you aren't going to sell books or raise funds or win votes complaining about undergrads studying Confucian Humanism and Moral Community. {{??}}

Many of the loudest complainers about P.C. thought police are those who are doing their best to curb free expression in other areas. It doesn't appear to bother Dinesh D'Souza that the word “abortion” cannot be uttered at a federally funded family clinic. More broadly, the brouhaha about political conformity on campus serves as a perfect smoke screen, masking from Americans—from ourselves—the rigid political conformity *off* campus: the blandness of our political discourse, the chronic silence in Washington on domestic matters, the same faces returned to office each year, the bipartisanship that keeps problems from becoming issues. During the Gulf War, the number of huge yellow bouquets in public places rivaled the number of larger-than-life photos of Saddam Hussein displayed on Iraqi billboards. Patriotically correct. The campuses are no more under siege by radicals than is the society at large. It has been clever of the Kimballs and D'Souzas to write as if it were so. It is always clever of those in ascendance to masquerade as victims. Rebecca Walkowitz, the newly elected president of the *Harvard Crimson*, understands perfectly how this dynamic works. Referring to the 1988 incident involving Professor Thernstrom and several of his black students, Walkowitz has said: “People call the *Crimson* and ask what we ‘did to that man.’ It's important to remember who has the power here, because it's not students. Who would dare criticize a professor for political reasons now? In addition to fearing for your grade, you'd fear being pilloried in the national press.”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Compare the tone of Ehrenreich's opening paragraph to D'Souza's opening (page 524). Based on openings alone, which one do you prefer and why?

2.

What are the main sources that Ehrenreich uses for her support in this piece? How effective do you find these sources? Why?

3.

In your opinion, what are some of Ehrenreich's best counter-arguments to D'Souza's piece?

4.

What is Ehrenreich's main point in this piece? Where do you find it? How effectively is it stated (or implied)?

5.

In general, which author—Ehrenreich or D'Souza—seems most accessible to you, the reader? Why?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

In many ways, Ehrenreich's piece is a direct rebuttal to D'Souza's essay. Let D'Souza have another chance at it, and write an essay in which you take D'Souza's part and counter-argue Ehrenreich's piece.

2.

Who's got the power in college classrooms? Through firsthand observations, record the dynamics in several of the classes you are presently taking and come to some conclusion: Is the learning a result of indoctrination or cooperation?

3.

Read Alfred North Whitehead's highly anthologized essay "On the Aims of Education," and write an essay from his point of view: where would he stand on this issue of multicultural studies?

SUSAN BROWNMILLER

Let's Put Pornography Back in the Closet

Born in 1935, Susan Brownmiller became a feminist activist during the years following her graduation from Cornell University. During her successful career as a journalist, she has served as editor for Albany Report and, in addition, has worked as a researcher for Newsweek and a staff writer for the Village Voice and ABC television. She is the founder of the Women against Pornography organization, as well as the author of Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape (1975); following the publication of this controversial book, Brownmiller was named one of twelve Women of the Year by Time magazine. This selection comes from Take Back the Night (1980), a collection of essays by feminist writers who share the view that pornography encourages violence toward women.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Reflect on the community in which you primarily reside. What are the values, standards, and priorities within this community, and how do they compare to your individual values, standards, and priorities?

2.

Comment on the differences as you see them between art and pornography.

Free speech is one of the great foundations on which our democracy rests. I am old enough to remember the Hollywood Ten, the screenwriters who went to jail in the late 1940s because they refused to testify before a congressional committee about their political affiliations. They tried to use the First Amendment as a defense, but they went to jail because in those days there were few civil liberties lawyers around who cared to champion the First Amendment right to free speech, when the speech concerned the Communist party.

The Hollywood Ten were correct in claiming the First Amendment. Its high purpose is the protection of unpopular ideas and political dissent. In the dark, cold days of the 1950s, few civil libertarians were willing to declare themselves First Amendment absolutists. But in the brighter, though frantic, days of the 1960s, the principle of protecting unpopular political speech was gradually strengthened.

It is fair to say now that the battle has largely been won. Even the American Nazi party has found itself the beneficiary of the dedicated, tireless work of the American Civil Liberties Union. But—and please notice the quotation marks coming up—“To equate the free and robust exchange of ideas and political debate with commercial exploitation of obscene material demeans the grand conception of the First Amendment and its high purposes in the historic struggle for freedom. It is a misuse of the great guarantees of free speech and free press.”

I didn't say that, although I wish I had, for I think the words are thrilling. Chief Justice Warren Burger said it in 1973, in the United States Supreme Court's majority opinion in *Miller v. California*. During the same decades that the right to political free speech was being strengthened in the courts, the nation's obscenity laws also were undergoing extensive revision.

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It's amazing to recall that in 1934 the question of whether James Joyce's *Ulysses* should be banned as pornographic actually went before the Court. The battle to protect *Ulysses* as a work of literature with redeeming social value was won. In later decades, Henry Miller's *Tropic* books, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the *Memoirs of Fanny Hill* also were adjudged not obscene. These decisions have been important to me. As the author of *Against Our Will*, a study of the history of rape that does contain explicit sexual material, I shudder to think how my book would have fared if James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Henry Miller hadn't gone before me.

I am not a fan of *Chatterley* or the *Tropic* books, I should quickly mention. They are not to my literary taste, nor do I think they represent female sexuality with any degree of accuracy. But I would hardly suggest that we ban them. Such a suggestion wouldn't get very far anyway. The battle to protect these books is ancient history. Time does march on, quite methodically. What, then, is unlawfully obscene, and what does the First Amendment have to do with it?

In the Miller case of 1973 (not Henry Miller, by the way, but a porn distributor who sent unsolicited stuff through the mails), the Court came up with new guidelines that it hoped would strengthen obscenity laws by giving more power to the states. What it did in actuality was throw everything into confusion. It set up a three-part test by which materials can be adjudged obscene. The materials are obscene if they depict patently offensive, hard-core sexual conduct; lack serious scientific, literary, artistic, or political value; and appeal to the prurient interest of an average person—as measured by contemporary community standards.

“Patently offensive,” “prurient interest,” and “hard-core” are indeed words to conjure with. “Contemporary community standards” are what we’re trying to redefine. The feminist objection to pornography is not based on prurience, which the dictionary defines as lustful, itching desire. We are not opposed to sex and desire, with or without the itch, and we certainly believe that explicit sexual material has its place in literature, art, science, and education. Here we part company rather swiftly with old-line conservatives who don’t want sex education in the high schools, for example.

No, the feminist objection to pornography is based on our belief that pornography represents hatred of women, that pornography’s intent is to humiliate, degrade, and dehumanize the female body for the purpose of erotic stimulation and pleasure. We are unalterably opposed to the presentation of the female body being stripped, bound, raped, tortured, mutilated, and murdered in the name of commercial entertainment and free speech.

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These images, which are standard pornographic fare, have nothing to do with the hallowed right of political dissent. They have everything to do with the creation of a cultural climate in which a rapist feels he is merely giving in to a normal urge and a woman is encouraged to believe that sexual masochism is healthy, liberated fun. Justice Potter Stewart once said about hard-core pornography, “You know it when you see it,” and that certainly used to be true. In the good old days, pornography looked awful. It was cheap and sleazy, and there was no mistaking it for art.

Nowadays, since the porn industry has become a multimillion dollar business, visual technology has been employed in its service. Pornographic movies are skillfully filmed and edited, pornographic still shots using the newest tenets of good design artfully grace the covers of *Hustler*, *Penthouse*, and *Playboy*, and the public—and the courts—are sadly confused.

The Supreme Court neglected to define “hard-core” in the Miller decision. This was a mistake. If “hard-core” refers only to explicit sexual intercourse, then that isn’t good enough. When women or children or men—no matter how artfully—are shown tortured or terrorized in the service of sex, that’s obscene. And “patently offensive,” I would hope, to our “contemporary community standards.”

Justice William O. Douglas wrote in his dissent to the Miller case that no one is “compelled to look.” This is hardly true. To buy a paper at the corner newsstand is to subject oneself to a forcible immersion in pornography, to be demeaned by an array of dehumanized, chopped-up parts of the female anatomy, packaged like cuts of meat at the supermarket. I happen to like my body and I work hard at the gym to keep it in good shape, but I am embarrassed for my body and for the bodies of all women when I see the fragmented parts of us so frivolously, and so flagrantly, displayed.

Some constitutional theorists (Justice Douglas was one) have maintained that any obscenity law is a serious abridgement of free speech. Others (and Justice Earl Warren was one) have maintained that the First Amendment was never intended to protect obscenity. We live quite compatibly with a host of free-speech abridgements. There are restraints against false and misleading advertising or statements—shouting “fire” without cause in a crowded movie theater, etc.—that do not threaten, but strengthen, our societal values. Restrictions on the public display of pornography belong in this category.

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The distinction between permission to publish and permission to display publicly is an essential one and one which I think consonant with First Amendment principles. Justice Burger’s words which I quoted above support this without question. We are not saying “Smash the presses” or “Ban the bad ones,” but simply “Get the stuff out of our sight.” Let the legislatures decide—using realistic and humane contemporary community standards—what can be displayed and what cannot. The courts, after all, will be the final arbiters.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

From the first line alone, what do you predict Brownmiller’s point on pornography might be? When does the point start to shift? When, in this essay, does Brownmiller come out and state her point emphatically?

2.

Why do you think Brownmiller takes such a “backdoor” approach to this argument? What other approaches could Brownmiller have chosen, and how might an audience react to these other choices?

3.

How would you characterize Brownmiller’s primary appeal here? Is she appealing to the audience’s reason, morals, or emotions? Support your stance with several examples.

4.

Would Brownmiller be satisfied if lewd magazines, such as *Hustler*, were removed from the shelves and placed in a room for adults only? Why or why not?

5.

In your opinion, do the free-speech abridgements mentioned in this article also pertain to pornography? Why or why not?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Research a recent court case involving the First Amendment. Write a report in which you explain what was at stake and the outcome of this particular incident.

2.

Working alone or in a small group, survey the men and women on your campus in order to discover if opinions on what is considered pornography differ according to gender.

SUSAN JACOBY

Notes from a Free-Speech Junkie

Born in 1946, Susan Jacoby lived in the former Soviet Union from 1969 to 1971, and during these years she began her writing career. When she returned to the United States,

she described her experiences in the U.S.S.R. in three books: Moscow Conversations (1972), The Friendship Barrier (1972), and Inside Soviet Schools (1974). Jacoby has worked as an education reporter for the Washington Post and, in addition, has published many essays related to feminist issues, some of which are collected in her anthology The Possible She (1979). This selection first appeared in the "Hers" column of the New York Times on January 26, 1978.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Where would you rather live: in a country where porno magazines are plentiful or in a country where magazines don't exist?

2.

Who do you think is most offended by pornographic materials: men or women? Why do you think this is?

It is no news that many women are defecting from the ranks of civil libertarians on the issue of obscenity. The conviction of Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler* magazine—before his metamorphosis into a born-again Christian—was greeted with unabashed feminist approval. Harry Reems, the unknown actor who was convicted by a Memphis jury for conspiring to distribute the movie *Deep Throat*, has carried on his legal battles with almost no support from women who ordinarily regard themselves as supporters of the First Amendment. Feminist writers and scholars have even discussed the possibility of making common cause against pornography with adversaries of the women's movement—including opponents of the equal rights amendment and "right to life" forces.

All of this is deeply disturbing to a woman writer who believes, as I always have and still do, in an absolute interpretation of the First Amendment. Nothing in Larry Flynt's garbage convinces me that the late Justice Hugo L. Black was wrong in his opinion that "the federal government is without any power whatsoever under the Constitution to put any type of burden on free speech and expression of ideas of any kind (as distinguished from conduct)." Many women I like and respect tell me I am wrong; I cannot remember having become involved in so many heated discussions of a public issue since the end of the Vietnam War. A feminist writer described my views as those of a "First Amendment junkie."

Many feminist arguments for controls on pornography carry the implicit conviction that porn books, magazines, and movies pose a greater threat to women than similarly repulsive exercises of free speech pose to other offended groups. This conviction has, of course, been shared by everyone—regardless of race, creed, or sex—who has ever argued in favor of abridging the First Amendment. It is the argument used by some Jews who have withdrawn their support from the American Civil Liberties Union because it has defended the right of American Nazis to march through a community inhabited by survivors of Hitler's concentration camps.

If feminists want to argue that the protection of the Constitution should not be extended to *any* particularly odious or threatening form of speech, they have a reasonable argument (although I don't agree with it). But it is ridiculous to suggest that the porn shops on 42nd

Street are more disgusting to women than a march of neo-Nazis is to survivors of the extermination camps.

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The arguments over pornography also blur the vital distinction between expression of ideas and conduct. When I say I believe unreservedly in the First Amendment, someone always comes back at me with the issue of “kiddie porn.” But kiddie porn is not a First Amendment issue. It is an issue of the abuse of power—the power adults have over children—and not of obscenity. Parents and promoters have no more right to use their children to make porn movies than they do to send them to work in coal mines. The responsible adults should be prosecuted, just as adults who use children for back-breaking farm labor should be prosecuted.

Susan Brownmiller, in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, has described pornography as “the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda.” I think this is a fair description of some types of pornography, especially of the brutish subspecies that equates sex with death and portrays women primarily as objects of violence.

The equation of sex and violence, personified by some glossy rock record album covers as well as by *Hustler*, has fed the illusion that censorship of pornography can be conducted on a more rational basis than other types of censorship. Are all pictures of naked women obscene? Clearly not, says a friend. A Renoir nude is art, she says, and *Hustler* is trash. “Any reasonable person” knows that.

But what about something between art and trash—something, say, along the lines of *Playboy* or *Penthouse* magazines? I asked five women for their reactions to one picture in *Penthouse* and got responses that ranged from “lovely” and “sensuous” to “revolting” and “demeaning.” Feminists, like every-one else, seldom have rational reasons for their preferences in erotica. Like members of juries, they tend to disagree when confronted with something that falls short of 100 percent vulgarity.

In any case, feminists will not be the arbiters of good taste if it becomes easier to harass, prosecute, and convict people on obscenity charges. Most of the people who want to censor girlie magazines are equally opposed to open discussion of issues that are of vital concern to women: rape, abortion, menstruation, contraception, lesbianism—in fact, the entire range of sexual experience from a woman’s viewpoint.

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Feminist writers and editors and filmmakers have limited financial resources: Confronted by a determined prosecutor, Hugh Hefner will fare better than Susan Brownmiller. Would the Memphis jurors who convicted Harry Reems for his role in *Deep Throat* be inclined to take a more positive view of paintings of the female genitalia done by sensitive feminist artists? *Ms.* magazine has printed color reproductions of some of those art works; *Ms.* is already banned from a number of high school libraries because someone considers it threatening and/or obscene.

Feminists who want to censor what they regard as harmful pornography have essentially the same motivation as other would-be censors: They want to use the power of the state to accomplish what they have been unable to achieve in the marketplace of ideas and images. The impulse to censor places no faith in the possibilities of democratic persuasion.

It isn't easy to persuade certain men that they have better uses for \$1.95 each month than to spend it on a copy of *Hustler*? Well, then, give the men no choice in the matter.

I believe there is also a connection between the impulse toward censorship on the part of people who used to consider themselves civil libertarians and a more general desire to shift responsibility from individuals to institutions. When I saw the movie *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, I was stunned by its series of visual images equating sex and violence, coupled with what seems to me the mindless message (a distortion of the fine Judith Rossner novel) that casual sex equals death. When I came out of the movie, I was even more shocked to see parents standing in line with children between the ages of ten and fourteen.

I simply don't know why a parent would take a child to see such a movie, any more than I understand why people feel they can't turn off a television set their child is watching. Whenever I say that, my friends tell me I don't know how it is because I don't have children. True, but I do have parents. When I was a child, they did turn off the TV. They didn't expect the Federal Communications Commission to do their job for them.

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I am a First Amendment junkie. You can't OD on the First Amendment, because free speech is its own best antidote.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Compare the opening paragraphs and tone of Jacoby's piece with those of Susan Brownmiller's piece. What common tools have both writers employed? What writing choices differ?

2.

On what issues does Jacoby side with Brownmiller? What is the turning point for their basic disagreement?

3.

What do you make of Jacoby's survey in paragraph 8? How reliable or valid is it, in your opinion?

4.

Examine the reasoning Jacoby uses in paragraphs 9–10 and comment on how effective you find her approach in this section to be.

5.

In general, is Jacoby saying that as a woman she feels comfortable with pornographic material? What, exactly, is her point? (Use your own words here.)

6.

In the end, who or what does Jacoby believe should be responsible for the choices we make in life? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Research a recent case of censorship, on either a local, state, or national level. What was the material being censored, who brought the suit, and what was the final outcome in this case?

2.

Research the historical trends in censorship in the schools and come to some conclusions as to what the “community standards” were in these cases.

MARGARET ATWOOD

True Trash

*Born in Ottawa in 1939, Margaret Atwood is one of Canada's foremost writers. She has received many awards and fellowships, including Canada's Molson Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1981. Atwood has won international acclaim for her critical writing and fiction and has published many novels, including *Surfacing* (1972), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which has been made into a film, and *The Robber Bride* (1993). In addition, she has written more than fifteen books of poetry, including *Procedures for Underground* (1970) and *True Stories* (1981).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Write about an incident you know of in which truth was undoubtedly stranger than fiction.

2.

Have a little fun and throw caution to the wind—write the beginnings to a steamy, dime-store summer romance.

The waitresses are basking in the sun like a herd of skinned seals, their pinky-brown bodies shining with oil. They have their bathing suits on because it's the afternoon. In the early dawn and the dusk they sometimes go skinny-dipping, which makes this itchy crouching in the mosquito-infested bushes across from their small private dock a great deal more worthwhile.

Donny has the binoculars, which are not his own but Monty's. Monty's dad gave them to him for bird-watching but Monty isn't interested in birds. He's found a better use for the binoculars: he rents them out to the other boys, five minutes maximum, a nickel a look or else a chocolate bar from the tuck shop, though he prefers the money. He doesn't eat the chocolate bars; he resells them, black market, for twice their original price; but the total supply on the island is limited, so he can get away with it.

Donny has already seen everything worth seeing, but he lingers on with the binoculars anyway, despite the hoarse whispers and the proddings from those next in line. He wants to get his money's worth.

“Would you look at that,” he says, in what he hopes is a tantalizing voice. “Slobber, slobber.” There's a stick poking into his stomach, right on a fresh mosquito bite, but he can't move it without taking one hand off the binoculars. He knows about flank attacks.

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“Lessee,” says Ritchie, tugging at his elbow.

“Piss off,” says Donny. He shifts the binoculars, taking in a slippery bared haunch, a red-polka-dotted breast, a long falling strand of bleach-blond hair: Ronette the tartiest, Ronette the most forbidden. When there are lectures from the masters at St. Jude's during the winter about the dangers of consorting with the town girls, it's those like Ronette they have in mind: the ones who stand in line at the town's only movie theater, chewing gum and wearing their boyfriends' leather jackets, their ruminating mouths glistening and

deep red like mashed-up raspberries. If you whistle at them or even look, they stare right through you.

Ronette has everything but the stare. Unlike the others, she has been known to smile. Every day Donny and his friends make bets over whether they will get her at their table. When she leans over to clear the plates, they try to look down the front of her sedate but V-necked uniform. They angle towards her, breathing her in: she smells of hair spray, nail polish, something artificial and too sweet. Cheap, Donny's mother would say. It's an enticing word. Most of the things in his life are expensive, and not very interesting. Ronette changes position on the dock. Now she's lying on her stomach, chin propped on her hands, her breasts pulled down by gravity. She has a real cleavage, not like some of them. But he can see her collar-bone and some chest ribs, above the top of her suit. Despite the breasts, she's skinny, scrawny; she has little stick arms and a thin, sucked-in face. She has a missing side tooth, you can see it when she smiles, and this bothers him. He knows he's supposed to feel lust for her, but this is not what he feels. The waitresses know they're being looked at: they can see the bushes jiggling. The boys are only twelve or thirteen, fourteen at most, small fry. If it was counselors, the waitresses would giggle more, preen more, arch their backs. Or some of them would. As it is, they go on with their afternoon break as if no one is there. They rub oil on one another's backs, toast themselves evenly, turning lazily this way and that and causing Ritchie, who now has the binoculars, to groan in a way that is supposed to madden the other boys, and does. Small punches are dealt out, mutterings of "Jerk" and "Asshole." "Drool, drool," says Ritchie, grinning from ear to ear.

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The waitresses are reading out loud. They are taking turns: their voices float across the water, punctuated by occasional snorts and barks of laughter. Donny would like to know what they're reading with such absorption, such relish, but it would be dangerous for him to admit it. It's their bodies that count. Who cares what they read?

"Time's up, shitface," he whispers to Ritchie.

"Shitface yourself," says Ritchie. The bushes thrash.

What the waitresses are reading is a *True Romance* magazine. Tricia has a whole stash of them, stowed under her mattress, and Sandy and Pat have each contributed a couple of others. Every one of these magazines has a woman on the cover, with her dress pulled down over one shoulder or a cigarette in her mouth or some other evidence of a messy life. Usually these women are in tears. Their colors are odd: sleazy, dirt-permeated, like the hand-tinted photos in the five-and-ten. Knee-between-the-legs colors. They have none of the cheerful primaries and clean, toothy smiles of the movie magazines: these are not success stories. True Trash, Hilary calls them. Joanne calls them Moan-o-dramas. Right now it's Joanne reading. She reads in a serious, histrionic voice, like someone on the radio; she'd been in a play, at school. *Our Town*. She's got her sunglasses perched on the end of her nose, like a teacher. For extra hilarity she's thrown in a fake English accent.

15

The story is about a girl who lives with her divorced mother in a cramped, run-down apartment above a shoe store. Her name is Marleen. She has a part-time job in the store, after school and on Saturdays, and two of the shoe clerks are chasing around after her.

One is dependable and boring and wants them to get married. The other one, whose name is Dirk, rides a motorcycle and has a knowing, audacious grin that turns Marleen's knees to jelly. The mother slaves over Marleen's wardrobe, on her sewing machine—she makes a meager living doing dressmaking for rich ladies who sneer at her, so the wardrobe comes out all right—and she nags Marleen about choosing the right man and not making a terrible mistake, the way she did. The girl herself has planned to go to trade school and learn hospital management, but lack of money makes this impossible. She is in her last year of high school and her grades are slipping, because she is discouraged and also she can't decide between the two shoe clerks. Now the mother is on her case about the slipping grades as well.

"Oh God," says Hilary. She is doing her nails, with a metal file rather than an emery board. She disapproves of emery boards. "Someone please give her a double Scotch." "Maybe she should murder the mother, collect the insurance, and get the hell out of there," says Sandy.

"Have you heard one word about any insurance?" says Joanne, peering over the tops of her glasses.

"You could put some in," says Pat.

20

"Maybe she should try out both of them, to see which one's the best," says Liz brazenly.

"We know which one's the best," says Tricia. "Listen, with a name like *Dirk!* How can you miss?"

"They're both creeps," says Stephanie.

"If she does that, she'll be a Fallen Woman, capital F, capital W," says Joanne. "She'd have to Repent, capital R."

The others hoot. Repentance! The girls in the stories make such fools of themselves.

They are so weak. They fall helplessly in love with the wrong men, they give in, they are jilted. Then they cry.

25

"Wait," says Joanne. "Here comes the big night." She reads on, breathily. "*My mother had gone out to deliver a cocktail dress to one of her customers. I was all alone in our shabby apartment.*"

"Pant, pant," says Liz.

"No, that comes later. *I was all alone in our shabby apartment. The evening was hot and stifling. I knew I should be studying, but I could not concentrate. I took a shower to cool off. Then, on impulse, I decided to try on the graduation formal my mother had spent so many late-night hours making for me.*"

"That's right, pour on the guilt," says Hilary with satisfaction. "If it was me I'd axe the mother."

"*It was a dream of pink—*"

30

"A dream of pink what?" says Tricia.

"A dream of pink, period, and shut up." *I looked at myself in the full-length mirror in my mother's tiny bedroom. The dress was just right for me. It fitted my ripe but slender body to perfection. I looked different in it, older, beautiful, like a girl used to every luxury. Like a princess. I smiled at myself. I was transformed.*

“I had just undone the hooks at the back, meaning to take the dress off and hang it up again, when I heard footsteps on the stairs. Too late I remembered that I’d forgotten to lock the door on the inside, after my mother’s departure. I rushed to the door, holding up my dress—it could be a burglar, or worse! But instead it was Dirk.”

“Dirk the jerk,” says Alex, from underneath her towel.

“Go back to sleep,” says Liz.

35

Joanne drops her voice, does a drawl. *“‘Thought I’d come up and keep you company,’ he said mischievously. ‘I saw your mom go out.’ He knew I was alone! I was blushing and shivering. I could hear the blood pounding in my veins. I couldn’t speak. Every instinct warned me against him—every instinct but those of my body, and my heart.”*

“So what else is there?” says Sandy. “You can’t have a mental instinct.”

“You want to read this?” says Joanne. “Then shush. *I held the frothy pink lace in front of me like a shield. ‘Hey, you look great in that,’ Dirk said. His voice was rough and tender. ‘But you’d look even greater out of it.’ I was frightened of him. His eyes were burning, determined. He looked like an animal stalking its prey.”*

“Pretty steamy,” says Hilary.

“What kind of animal?” says Sandy.

40

“A weasel,” says Stephanie.

“A skunk,” says Tricia.

“Shh,” says Liz.

“I backed away from him,” Joanne reads. “I had never seen him look that way before. Now I was pressed against the wall and he was crushing me in his arms. I felt the dress slipping down . . .”

“So much for all that sewing,” says Pat.

45

“. . . and his hand was on my breast, his hard mouth was seeking mine. I knew he was the wrong man for me but I could no longer resist. My whole body was crying out to his.”

“What did it say?”

“It said, *Hey, body, over here!*”

“Shh.”

“I felt myself lifted. He was carrying me to the sofa. Then I felt the length of his hard, sinewy body pressing against mine. Feebly I tried to push his hands away, but I didn’t really want to. And then—dot dot dot—we were One, capital O, exclamation mark.”

50

There is a moment of silence. Then the waitresses laugh. Their laughter is outraged, disbelieving. *One*. Just like that. There has to be more to it.

“The dress is a wreck,” says Joanne in her ordinary voice. “Now the mother comes home.”

“Not today, she doesn’t,” says Hilary briskly. “We’ve only got ten more minutes. I’m going for a swim, get some of this oil off me.” She stands up, clips back her honey-blond hair, stretches her tanned athlete’s body, and does a perfect swan-dive off the end of the dock.

“Who’s got the soap?” says Stephanie.

Ronette has not said anything during the story. When the others have laughed, she has only smiled. She's smiling now. Hers is an off-center smile, puzzled, a little apologetic.

55
"Yeah, but," she says to Joanne, "why is it funny?"

The waitresses stand at their stations around the dining hall, hands clasped in front of them, heads bowed. Their royal-blue uniforms come down almost to the tops of their white socks, worn with white bucks or white-and-black saddle shoes or white sneakers. Over their uniforms they wear plain white aprons. The rustic log sleeping cabins at Camp Adanaqui don't have electric lights, the toilets are outhouses, the boys wash their own clothes, not even in sinks but in the lake; but there are waitresses, with uniforms and aprons. Roughing it builds a boy's character, but only certain kinds of roughing it. Mr. B. is saying grace. He owns the camp, and is a master at St. Jude's as well, during the winters. He has a leathery, handsome face, the gray, tailored hair of a Bay Street lawyer, and the eyes of a hawk: he sees all, but pounces only sometimes. Today he's wearing a white V-necked tennis sweater. He could be drinking a gin and tonic, but is not. Behind him on the wall, above his head, there's a weathered plank with a motto painted on it in black Gothic lettering: *As the Twig Is Bent*. A piece of bleached driftwood ornaments each end of the plank, and beneath it are two crossed paddles and a gigantic pike's head in profile, its mouth open to show its needle teeth, its one glass eye fixed in a ferocious maniac's glare.

To Mr. B.'s left is the end window, and beyond it is Georgian Bay, blue as amnesia, stretching to infinity. Rising out of it like the backs of whales, like rounded knees, like the calves and thighs of enormous floating women, are several islands of pink rock, scraped and rounded and fissured by glaciers and lapping water and endless weather, a few jack pines clinging to the larger ones, their twisted roots digging into the cracks. It was through these archipelagos that the waitresses were ferried here, twenty miles out from shore, by the same cumbersome mahogany inboard launch that brings the mail and the groceries and everything else to the island. Brings, and takes away. But the waitresses will not be shipped back to the mainland until the end of summer: it's too far for a day off, and they would never be allowed to stay away overnight. So here they are, for the duration. They are the only women on the island, except for Mrs. B. and Miss Fisk, the dietitian. But those two are old and don't count.

60

There are nine waitresses. There are always nine. Only the names and faces change, thinks Donny, who has been going to this camp ever since he was eight. When he was eight he paid no attention to the waitresses except when he felt homesick. Then he would think of excuses to go past the kitchen window when they were washing the dishes. There they would be, safely aproned, safely behind glass: nine mothers. He does not think of them as mothers anymore.

Ronette is doing his table tonight. From between his half-closed eyelids Donny watches her thin averted face. He can see one earring, a little gold hoop. It goes right through her ear. Only Italians and cheap girls have pierced ears, says his mother. It would hurt to have a hole put through your ear. It would take bravery. He wonders what the inside of Ronette's room looks like, what other cheap, intriguing things she's got in there. About someone like Hilary he doesn't have to wonder, because he already knows: the clean

bedspread, the rows of shoes in their shoe-trees, the comb and brush and manicure set laid out on the dresser like implements in a surgery.

Behind Ronette's bowed head there's the skin of a rattlesnake, a big one, nailed to the wall. That's what you have to watch out for around here: rattlesnakes. Also poison ivy, thunderstorms, and drowning. A whole war canoe full of kids drowned last year, but they were from another camp. There's been some talk of making everyone wear sissy life-jackets; the mothers want it. Donny would like a rattlesnake skin of his own, to nail up over his bed; but even if he caught the snake himself, strangled it with his bare hands, bit its head off, he'd never be allowed to keep the skin.

Mr. B. winds up the grace and sits down, and the campers begin again their three-times-daily ritual of bread-grabbing, face-stuffing, under-the-table kicking, whispered cursing. Ronette comes from the kitchen with a platter: macaroni and cheese. "There you go, boys," she says, with her good-natured, lopsided smile.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," says Darce the counselor, with fraudulent charm. Darce has a reputation as a make-out artist; Donny knows he's after Ronette. This makes him feel sad. Sad, and too young. He would like to get out of his own body for a while; he'd like to be somebody else.

65

The waitresses are doing the dishes. Two to scrape, one to wash, one to rinse in the scalding-hot rinsing sink, three to dry. The other two sweep the floors and wipe off the tables. Later, the number of dryers will vary because of days off—they'll choose to take their days off in twos, so they can double-date with the counselors—but today all are here. It's early in the season, things are still fluid, the territories are not yet staked out. While they work they sing. They're missing the ocean of music in which they float during the winter. Pat and Liz have both brought their portables, though you can't pick up much radio out here, it's too far from shore. There's a record player in the counselors' rec hall, but the records are out of date. Patti Page, *The Singing Rage*. "How Much Is That Doggie in the Window." "The Tennessee Waltz." Who waltzes anymore?

"Wake up, little Susie," trills Sandy. The Everly Brothers are popular this summer; or they were, on the mainland, when they left.

"What're we gonna tell your mama, what're we gonna tell your pa," sing the others.

Joanne can improvise the alto harmony, which makes everything sound less screechy. Hilary, Stephanie, and Alex don't sing this one. They go to a private school, all girls, and are better at rounds, like "Fire's Burning" and "White Coral Bells." They are good at tennis though, and sailing, skills that have passed the others by.

70

It's odd that Hilary and the other two are here at all, waitressing at Camp Adanaqui; it's not as if they need the money. (Not like me, thinks Joanne, who haunts the mail desk every noon to see if she got her scholarship.) But it's the doing of their mothers.

According to Alex, the three mothers banded together and jumped Mrs. B. at a charity function, and twisted her arm. Naturally Mrs. B. would attend the same functions as the mothers: they've seen her, sunglasses pushed up on her forehead, a tall drink in her hand, entertaining on the veranda of Mr. B.'s white hilltop house, which is well away from the camp proper. They've seen the guests, in their spotless, well-pressed sailing clothes.

They've heard the laughter, the voices, husky and casual. *Oh, God don't tell me.* Like Hilary.

"We were kidnapped," says Alex. "They thought it was time we met some boys." Joanne can see it for Alex, who is chubby and awkward, and for Stephanie, who is built like a boy and walks like one; but Hilary? Hilary is classic. Hilary is like a shampoo ad. Hilary is perfect. She ought to be sought after. Oddly, here she is not. Ronette is scraping, and drops a plate. "Shoot," she says. "What a stunned broad." Nobody bawls her out or even teases her as they would anyone else. She is a favorite with them, though it's hard to put your finger on why. It isn't just that she's easygoing: so is Liz, so is Pat. She has some mysterious, extra status. For instance, everyone else has a nickname: Hilary is Hil, Stephanie is Steph, Alex is Al, Joanne is Jo, Tricia is Trish, Sandy is San. Pat and Liz, who cannot be contracted any further, have become Pet and Lizard. Only Ronette has been accorded the dignity of her full, improbable name. In some ways she is more grown-up than the rest of them. But it isn't because she knows more things. She knows fewer things; she often has trouble making her way through the vocabularies of the others, especially the offhand slang of the private-school trio. "I don't get that" is what she says, and the others take a delight in explaining, as if she's a foreigner, a cherished visitor from some other country. She goes to movies and watches television like the rest of them but she has few opinions about what she has seen. The most she will say is "Crap" or "He's not bad." Though friendly, she is cautious about expressing approval in words. "Fair" is her best compliment. When the others talk about what they've read or what subjects they will take next year at university, she is silent.

75

But she knows other things, hidden things. Secrets. And these other things are older, and on some level more important. More fundamental. Closer to the bone. Or so thinks Joanne, who has a bad habit of novelizing.

Outside the window Darce and Perry stroll by, herding a group of campers. Joanne recognizes a few of them: Donny, Monty. It's hard to remember the campers by name. They're just a crowd of indistinguishable, usually grimy young boys who have to be fed three times a day, whose crusts and crumbs and rinds have to be cleaned up afterwards. The counselors call them Grubbies. But some stand out. Donny is tall for his age, all elbows and spindly knees, with huge deep-blue eyes; even when he's swearing—they all swear during meals, furtively but also loudly enough so that the waitresses can hear them—it's more like a meditation, or more like a question, as if he's trying the words out, tasting them. Monty on the other hand is like a miniature forty-five-year-old: his shoulders already have a businessman's slump, his paunch is fully formed. He walks with a pompous little strut. Joanne thinks he's hilarious.

Right now he's carrying a broom with five rolls of toilet paper threaded onto the handle. All the boys are: they're on Bog Duty, sweeping out the outhouses, replacing the paper. Joanne wonders what they do with the used sanitary napkins in the brown paper bag in the waitresses' private outhouse. She can imagine the remarks.

80

"Company . . . halt!" shouts Darce. The group shambles to a stop in front of the window. "Present . . . arms!" The brooms are raised, the ends of the toilet-paper rolls fluttering in the breeze like flags. The girls laugh and wave.

Monty's salute is half-hearted: this is well beneath his dignity. He may rent out his binoculars—that story is all over camp, by now—but he has no interest in using them himself. He has made that known. *Not on these girls*, he says, implying higher tastes. Darce himself gives a comic salute, then marches his bunch away. The singing in the kitchen has stopped; the topic among the waitresses is now the counselors. Darce is the best, the most admired, the most desirable. His teeth are the whitest, his hair the blondest, his grin the sexiest. In the counselors' rec hall, where they go every night after the dishes are done, after they've changed out of their blue uniforms into their jeans and pullovers, after the campers have been inserted into their beds for the night, he has flirted with each one of them in turn. So who was he really saluting?

"It was me," says Pat, joking. "Don't I wish."

"Dream on," says Liz.

85

"It was Hil," says Stephanie loyally. But Joanne knows it wasn't. It wasn't her, either. It was Ronette. They all suspect it. None of them says it.

"Perry likes Jo," says Sandy.

"Does not," says Joanne. She has given out that she has a boyfriend already and is therefore exempt from these contests. Half of this is true: she has a boyfriend. This summer he has a job as a salad chef on the Canadian National, running back and forth across the continent. She pictures him standing at the back of the train, on the caboose, smoking a cigarette between bouts of salad-making, watching the country slide away behind him. He writes her letters, in blue ball-point pen, on lined paper. *My first night on the Prairies*, he writes. *It's magnificent—all that land and sky. The sunsets are unbelievable.* Then there's a line across the page and a new date, and he gets to the Rockies. Joanne resents it a little that he raves on about places she's never been. It seems to her a kind of male showing-off: he's footloose. He closes with *Wish you were here* and several X's and O's. This seems too formal, like a letter to your mother. Like a peck on the cheek.

She put the first letter under her pillow, but woke up with blue smears on her face and the pillowcase both. Now she keeps the letters in her suitcase under the bed. She's having trouble remembering what he looks like. An image flits past, his face close up, at night, in the front seat of his father's car. The rustle of cloth. The smell of smoke.

Miss Fisk bumbles into the kitchen. She's short, plump, flustered; what she wears, always, is a hairnet over her gray bun, worn wool slippers—there's something wrong with her toes—and a faded blue knee-length sweater-coat, no matter how hot it is. She thinks of this summer job as her vacation. Occasionally she can be seen bobbing in the water in a droopy-chested bathing suit and a white rubber cap with the earflaps up. She never gets her head wet, so why she wears the cap is anyone's guess.

90

"Well, girls. Almost done?" She never calls the waitresses by name. To their faces they are *girls*, behind their backs *My girls*. They are her excuse for everything that goes wrong: *One of the girls must have done it.* She also functions as a sort of chaperon: her cabin is on the pathway that leads to theirs, and she has radar ears, like a bat.

I will never be that old, thinks Joanne. I will die before I'm thirty. She knows this absolutely. It's a tragic but satisfactory thought. If necessary, if some wasting disease

refuses to carry her off, she'll do it herself, with pills. She is not at all unhappy but she intends to be, later. It seems required.

This is no country for old men, she recites to herself. One of the poems she memorized, though it wasn't on the final exam. Change that to old women.

When they're all in their pajamas, ready for bed, Joanne offers to read them the rest of the True Trash story. But everyone is too tired, so she reads it herself, with her flashlight, after the one feeble bulb has been switched off. She has a compulsion about getting to the ends of things. Sometimes she reads books backwards.

Needless to say, Marleen gets knocked up and Dirk takes off on his motorcycle when he finds out. *I'm not the settling-down type, baby. See ya round.* Vroom. The mother practically has a nervous breakdown, because she made the same mistake when young and blew her chances and now look at her. Marleen cries and regrets, and even prays. But luckily the other shoe clerk, the boring one, still wants to marry her. So that's what happens. The mother forgives her, and Marleen herself learns the true value of quiet devotion. Her life isn't exciting maybe, but it's a good life, in the trailer park, the three of them. The baby is adorable. They buy a dog. It's an Irish setter, and chases sticks in the twilight while the baby laughs. This is how the story ends, with the dog.

95

Joanne stuffs the magazine down between her narrow little bed and the wall. She's almost crying. She will never have a dog like that, or a baby either. She doesn't want them, and anyway how would she have time, considering everything she has to get done? She has a long, though vague, agenda. Nevertheless she feels deprived.

Between two oval hills of pink granite there's a small crescent of beach. The boys, wearing their bathing suits (as they never do on canoe trips but only around the camp where they might be seen by girls), are doing their laundry, standing up to their knees and swabbing their wet T-shirts and underpants with yellow bars of Sunlight soap. This only happens when they run out of clothes, or when the stench of dirty socks in the cabin becomes too overpowering. Darce the counselor is supervising, stretched out on a rock, taking the sun on his already tanned torso and smoking a fag. It's forbidden to smoke in front of the campers but he knows this bunch won't tell. To be on the safe side he's furtive about it, holding the cigarette down close to the rock and sneaking quick puffs. Something hits Donny in the side of the head. It's Ritchie's wet underpants, squashed into a ball. Donny throws them back and soon there's an underpants war. Monty refuses to join in, so he becomes the common target. "Sod off!" he yells.

"Cut it out, you pinheads," Darce says. But he isn't really paying attention: he's seen something else, a flash of blue uniform, up among the trees. The waitresses aren't supposed to be over here on this side of the island. They're supposed to be on their own dock, having their afternoon break.

Darce is up among the trees now, one arm braced against a trunk. A conversation is going on; there are murmurs. Donny knows it's Ronette, he can tell by the shape, by the color of the hair. And here he is, with his wash-board ribs exposed, his hairless chest, throwing underpants around like a kid. He's disgusted with himself.

100

Monty, outnumbered but not wanting to admit defeat, says he needs to take a crap and disappears along the path to the outhouse. By now Darce is nowhere in sight. Donny captures Monty's laundry, which is already finished and wrung out and spread neatly on the hot rock to dry. He starts tossing it up into a jack pine, piece by piece. The others, delighted, help him. By the time Monty gets back, the tree is festooned with Monty's underpants and the other boys are innocently rinsing.

They're on one of the pink granite islands, the four of them: Joanne and Ronette, Perry and Darce. It's a double date. The two canoes have been pulled half out of the water and roped to the obligatory jack pines, the fire has done its main burning and is dying down to coals. The western sky is still peach-toned and luminous, the soft ripe juicy moon is rising, the evening air is warm and sweet, the waves wash gently against the rocks. It's the Summer Issue, thinks Joanne. *Lazy Daze. Tanning Tips. Shipboard Romance.*

Joanne is toasting a marshmallow. She has a special way of doing it: she holds it close to the coals but not so close that it catches fire, just close enough so that it swells up like a pillow and browns gently. Then she pulls off the toasted skin and eats it, and toasts the white inside part the same way, and peeling it down to the core. She licks marshmallow goo off her fingers and stares pensively into the shifting red glow of the coal bed. All of this is a way of ignoring or pretending to ignore what is really going on.

There ought to be a teardrop, painted and static, on her cheek. There ought to be a caption: *Heartbreak*. On the spread-out groundsheet right behind her, his knee touching her back, is Perry, cheesed off with her because she won't neck with him. Off behind the rocks, out of the dim circle of firelight, are Ronette and Darce. It's the third week in July and by now they're a couple, everyone knows it. In the rec hall she wears his sweatshirt with the St. Jude's crest; she smiles more these days, and even laughs when the other girls tease her about him. During this teasing Hilary does not join in. Ronette's face seems rounder, healthier, its angles smoothed out as if by a hand. She is less watchful, less diffident. She ought to have a caption too, thinks Joanne. *Was I Too Easy?*

There are rustlings from the darkness, small murmurings, breathing noises. It's like a movie theater on Saturday night. Group grope. *The young in one another's arms.*

Possibly, thinks Joanne, they will disturb a rattlesnake.

105

Perry puts a hand, tentatively, on her shoulder. "Want me to toast you a marshmallow?" she says to him politely. The frosty freeze. Perry is no consolation prize. He merely irritates her, with his peeling sunburnt skin and begging spaniel's eyes. Her so-called real boyfriend is no help either, whizzing on his train tracks back and forth across the prairies, writing his by-now infrequent inky letters, the image of his face all but obliterated, as if it's been soaked in water.

Nor is it Darce she wants, not really. What she wants is what Ronette has: the power to give herself up, without reservation and without commentary. It's that languor, that leaning back. Voluptuous mindlessness. Everything Joanne herself does is surrounded by quotation marks.

"Marshmallows. Geez," says Perry, in a doleful, cheated voice. All that paddling, and what for? Why the hell did she come along, if not to make out?

Joanne feels guilty of a lapse of manners. Would it hurt so much to kiss him?

Yes. It would.

110

Donny and Monty are on a canoe trip, somewhere within the tangled bush of the mainland. Camp Adanaqui is known for its tripping. For five days they and the others, twelve boys in all, have been paddling across lake after lake, hauling the gear over wave-rounded boulders or through the suck and stench of the moose-meadows at the portage entrances, grunting uphill with the packs and canoes, slapping the mosquitoes off their legs. Monty has blisters, on both his feet and his hands. Donny isn't too sad about that. He himself has a festering sliver. Maybe he will get blood-poisoning, become delirious, collapse and die on a portage, among the rocks and pine needles. That will serve someone right. Someone ought to be made to pay for the pain he's feeling. The counselors are Darce and Perry. During the days they crack the whip; at night they relax, backs against a rock or tree, smoking and supervising while the boys light the fire, carry the water, cook the Kraft Dinners. They both have smooth large muscles which ripple under their tans, they both—by now—have stubbly beards. When everyone goes swimming Donny sneaks covert, envious looks at their groins. They make him feel spindly, and infantile in his own desires.

Right now it's night. Perry and Darce are still up, talking in low voices, poking the embers of the dying fire. The boys are supposed to be asleep. There are tents in case of rain, but nobody's suggested putting them up since the day before yesterday. The smell of grime and sweaty feet and wood smoke is getting too potent at close quarters; the sleeping bags are high as cheese. It's better to be outside, rolled up in the bag, a groundsheet handy in case of a deluge, head under a turned-over canoe.

Monty is the only one who has voted for a tent. The bugs are getting to him; he says he's allergic. He hates canoe trips and makes no secret of it. When he's older, he says, and can finally get his hands on the family boodle, he's going to buy the place from Mr. B. and close it down. "Generations of boys unborn will thank me," he says. "They'll give me a medal." Sometimes Donny almost likes him. He's so blatant about wanting to be filthy rich. No hypocrisy about him, not like some of the other millionaire offshoots, who pretend they want to be scientists or something else that's not paid much.

Now Monty is twisting around, scratching his bites. "Hey Finley," he whispers.

115

"Go to sleep," says Donny.

"I bet they've got a flask."

"What?"

"I bet they're drinking. I smelled it on Perry's breath yesterday."

"So?" says Donny.

120

"So," says Monty. "It's against the rules. Maybe we can get something out of them."

Donny has to hand it to him. He certainly knows the angles. At the very least they might be able to share the wealth.

The two of them inch out of their sleeping bags and circle around behind the fire, keeping low. Their practice while spying on the waitresses stands them in good stead. They crouch behind a bushy spruce, watching for lifted elbows or the outlines of bottles, their ears straining.

But what they hear isn't about booze. Instead it's about Ronette. Darce is talking about her as if she's a piece of meat. From what he's implying, she lets him do anything he wants. "Summer sausage" is what he calls her. This is an expression Donny has never heard before, and ordinarily he would think it was hilarious. Monty sniggers under his breath and pokes Donny in the ribs with his elbow. Does he know how much it hurts, is he rubbing it in? *Donny loves Ronette*. The ultimate grade six insult, to be accused of loving someone. Donny feels as if it's he himself who's been smeared with words, who's had his face rubbed in them. He knows Monty will repeat this conversation to the other boys. He will say Darce has been porking Ronette. Right now Donny detests this word, with its conjuring of two heaving pigs, or two dead but animate uncooked Sunday roasts; although just yesterday he used it himself, and found it funny enough.

125

He can hardly charge out of the bushes and punch Darce in the nose. Not only would he look ridiculous, he'd get flattened.

He does the only thing he can think of. Next morning, when they're breaking camp, he pinches Monty's binoculars and sinks them in the lake.

Monty guesses, and accuses him. Some sort of pride keeps Donny from denying it.

Neither can he say why he did it. When they get back to the island there's an unpleasant conversation with Mr. B. in the dining hall. Or not a conversation: Mr. B. talks, Donny is silent. He does not look at Mr. B. but at the pike's head on the wall, with its goggling voyeur's eye.

The next time the mahogany inboard goes back into town, Donny is in it. His parents are not pleased.

It's the end of summer. The campers have already left, though some of the counselors and all of the waitresses are still here. Tomorrow they'll go down to the main dock, climb into the slow launch, thread their way among the pink islands, heading towards winter.

130

It's Joanne's half-day off so she isn't in the dining hall, washing the dishes with the others. She's in the cabin, packing up. Her duffle bag is finished, propped like an enormous canvas wiener against her bed; now she's doing her small suitcase. Her paycheck is already tucked inside: two hundred dollars, which is a lot of money.

Ronette comes into the cabin, still in her uniform, shutting the screen door quietly behind her. She sits down on Joanne's bed and lights a cigarette. Joanne is standing there with her folded-up flannelette pajamas, alert: something's going on. Lately, Ronette has returned to her previous taciturn self; her smiles have become rare. In the counselors' rec hall, Darce is again playing the field. He's been circling around Hilary, who's pretending—out of consideration for Ronette—not to notice. Maybe, now, Joanne will get to hear what caused the big split. So far Ronette has not said anything about it.

Ronette looks up at Joanne, through her long yellow bangs. Looking up like that makes her seem younger, despite the red lipstick. "I'm in trouble," she says.

"What sort of trouble?" says Joanne.

Ronette smiles sadly, blows out smoke. Now she looks old. "You know. Trouble."

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“Oh,” says Joanne. She sits down beside Ronette, hugging the flannelette pajamas. She feels cold. It must be Darce. *Caught in that sensual music*. Now he will have to marry her. Or something. “What’re you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” says Ronette. “Don’t tell, okay? Don’t tell the others.”

“Aren’t you going to tell *him*?” says Joanne. She can’t imagine doing that, herself. She can’t imagine any of it.

“Tell who?” Ronette says.

“Darce.”

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Ronette blows out more smoke. “Darce,” she says. “Mr. Chickenshit. It’s not *his*.”

Joanne is astounded, and relieved. But also annoyed with herself: what’s gone past her, what has she missed? “It’s not? Then whose is it?”

But Ronette has apparently changed her mind about confiding. “That’s for me to know and you to find out,” she says, with a small attempt at a laugh.

“Well,” says Joanne. Her hands are clammy, as if it’s her that’s in trouble. She wants to be helpful, but has no idea how. “Maybe you could—I don’t know.” She doesn’t know. An abortion? That is a dark and mysterious word, connected with the States. You have to go away. It costs a lot of money. A home for unwed mothers, followed by adoption? Loss washes through her. She foresees Ronette, bloated beyond recognition, as if she’s drowned—a sacrifice, captured by her own body, offered up to it. Truncated in some way, disgraced. Unfree. There is something nun-like about this condition. She is in awe. “I guess you could get rid of it, one way or another,” she says; which is not at all what she feels. *Whatever is begotten, born, and dies*.

“Are you kidding?” says Ronette, with something like contempt. “Hell, not me.” She throws her cigarette on the floor, grinds it out with her heel. “I’m keeping it. Don’t worry, my mom will help me out.”

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“Yeah,” says Joanne. Now she has caught her breath; now she’s beginning to wonder why Ronette has dumped all this on her, especially since she isn’t willing to tell the whole thing. She’s beginning to feel cheated, imposed upon. So who’s the guy, so which one of them? She shuffles through the faces of the counselors, trying to remember hints, traces of guilt, but finds nothing.

“Anyways,” says Ronette, “I won’t have to go back to school. Thank the Lord for small mercies, like they say.”

Joanne hears bravado, and desolation. She reaches out a hand, gives Ronette’s arm a small squeeze. “Good luck,” she says. It comes out sounding like something you’d say before a race or an exam, or a war. It sounds stupid. Ronette grins. The gap in her teeth shows, at the side. “Same to you,” she says.

{{{??}}}

Eleven years later Donny is walking along Yorkville Avenue, in Toronto, in the summer heat. He’s no longer Donny. At some point, which even he can’t remember exactly, he has changed into Don. He’s wearing sandals, and a white Indian-style shirt over his cut-off jeans. He has longish hair and a beard. The beard has come out yellow, whereas the hair is brown. He likes the effect: WASP Jesus or Hollywood Viking, depending on his mood. He has a string of wooden beads around his neck.

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This is how he dresses on Saturdays, to go to Yorkville; to go there and just hang around, with the crowds of others who are doing the same. Sometimes he gets high, on the pot that circulates as freely as cigarettes did once. He thinks he should be enjoying this experience more than he actually does. During the rest of the week he has a job in his father's law office. He can get away with the beard there, just barely, as long as he balances it with a suit. (But even the older guys are growing their sideburns and wearing colored shirts, and using words like "creative" more than they used to.) He doesn't tell the people he meets in Yorkville about this job, just as he doesn't tell the law office about his friends' acid trips. He's leading a double life. It feels precarious, and brave. Suddenly, across the street, he sees Joanne. He hasn't even thought about her for a long time, but it's her all right. She isn't wearing the tie-dyed or flowing-shift uniform of the Yorkville girls; instead she's dressed in a brisk, businesslike white mini-skirt, with matching suit-jacket top. She's swinging a briefcase, striding along as if she has a purpose. This makes her stand out: the accepted walk here is a saunter. Donny wonders whether he should run across the street, intercept her, reveal what he thinks of as his true but secret identity. Now all he can see is her back. In a minute she'll be gone.

"Joanne," he calls. She doesn't hear him. He dodges between cars, catches up to her, touches her elbow. "Don Finley," he says. He's conscious of himself standing there, grinning like a fool. Luckily and a little disappointingly, she recognizes him at once.

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"Donny!" she says. "My God, you've grown!"

"I'm taller than you," he says, like a kid, an idiot.

"You were then," she says, smiling. "I mean you've grown *up*."

"So have you," says Donny, and they find themselves laughing, almost like equals. Three years, four years between them. It was a large difference, then. Now it's nothing.

So, thinks Joanne, Donny is no longer Donny. That must mean Ritchie is now Richard. As for Monty, he has become initials only, and a millionaire. True, he inherited some of it, but he's used it to advantage; Joanne has tuned in on his exploits now and then, in the business papers. And he got married to Hilary, three years ago. Imagine that. She saw that in the paper too.

160

They go for coffee and sit drinking it at one of the new, daring, outside tables, under a large, brightly painted wooden parrot. There's an intimacy between them, as if they are old friends. Donny asks Joanne what she's doing. "I live by my wits," she says. "I freelance." At the moment she's writing ad copy. Her face is thinner, she's lost that adolescent roundness; her once nondescript hair has been shaped into a stylish cap. Good enough legs too. You have to have good legs to wear a mini. So many women look stumpy in them, hams in cloth, their legs bulging out the bottom like loaves of white bread. Joanne's legs are out of sight under the table, but Donny finds himself dwelling on them as he never did when they were clearly visible, all the way up, on the waitresses' dock. He'd skimmed over those legs then, skimmed over Joanne altogether. It was Ronette who had held his attention. He is more of a connoisseur, by now.

"We used to spy on you," he says. "We used to watch you skinny-dipping." In fact they'd never managed to see much. The girls had held their towels around their bodies until the

last minute, and anyway it was dusk. There would be a blur of white, some shrieking and splashing. The great thing would have been pubic hair. Several boys claimed sightings, but Donny had felt they were lying. Or was that just envy?

“Did you?” says Joanne absently. Then, “I know. We could see the bushes waving around. We thought it was so cute.”

Donny feels himself blushing. He’s glad he has the beard; it conceals things. “It wasn’t cute,” he says. “Actually we were pretty vicious.” He’s remembering the word *pork*. “Do you ever see the others?”

“Not anymore,” says Joanne. “I used to see a few of them, at university. Hilary and Alex. Pat sometimes.”

165

“What about Ronette?” he says, which is the only thing he really wants to ask.

“I used to see Darce,” says Joanne, as if she hasn’t heard him.

Used to see is an exaggeration. She saw him once.

It was in the winter, a February. He phoned her, at *The Varsity* office: that was how he knew where to find her, he’d seen her name in the campus paper. By that time Joanne scarcely remembered him. The summer she’d been a waitress was three years, light-years, away. The railroad-chef boyfriend was long gone; nobody so innocent had replaced him. She no longer wore white bucks, no longer sang songs. She wore turtlenecks and drank beer and a lot of coffee, and wrote cynical exposés of such things as the campus dining facilities. She’d given up the idea of dying young, however. By this time it seemed overly romantic.

What Darce wanted was to go out with her. Specifically, he wanted her to go to a fraternity party with him. Joanne was so taken aback that she said yes, even though fraternities were in political disfavor among the people she traveled with now. It was something she would have to do on the sly, and she did. She had to borrow a dress from her roommate, however. The thing was a semi-formal, and she had not deigned to go to a semi-formal since high school.

170

She had last seen Darce with sun-bleached hair and a deep glowing tan. Now, in his winter skin, he looked wan and malnourished. Also, he no longer flirted with everyone. He didn’t even flirt with Joanne. Instead he introduced her to a few other couples, danced her perfunctorily around the floor, and proceeded to get very drunk on a mixture of grape juice and straight alcohol that the fraternity brothers called Purple Jesus. He told her he’d been engaged to Hilary for over six months, but she’d just ditched him. She wouldn’t even say why. He said he’d asked Joanne out because she was the kind of girl you could talk to, he knew she would understand. After that he threw up a lot of Purple Jesus, first onto her dress, then—when she’d led him outside, to the veranda—onto a snowdrift. The color scheme was amazing.

Joanne got some coffee into him and hitched a lift back to the residence, where she had to climb up the icy fire escape and in at a window because it was after hours.

Joanne was hurt. All she was for him was a big flapping ear. Also she was irritated. The dress she’d borrowed was pale blue, and the Purple Jesus would not come out with just water. Darce called the next day to apologize—St. Jude’s at least taught manners, of a

sort—and Joanne stuck him with the cleaning bill. Even so there was a faint residual stain.

While they were dancing, before he started to slur and reel, she said, “Do you ever hear from Ronette?” She still had the narrative habit, she still wanted to know the ends of stories. But he’d looked at her in complete bewilderment.

“Who?” he said. It wasn’t a put-down, he really didn’t remember. She found this blank in his memory offensive. She herself might forget a name, a face even. But a body? A body that had been so close to your own, that had generated those murmurings, those rustlings in the darkness, that aching pain—it was an affront to bodies, her own included.

175

After the interview with Mr. B. and the stuffed pike’s head, Donny walks down to the small beach where they do their laundry. The rest of his cabin is out sailing, but he’s free now of camp routine, he’s been discharged. A dishonorable discharge. After seven summers of being under orders here he can do what he wants. He has no idea what this might be.

He sits on a bulge of pink rock, feet on the sand. A lizard goes across the rock, near his hand, not fast. It hasn’t spotted him. Its tail is blue and will come off if grabbed. Skinks, they’re called. Once he would have taken joy from this knowledge. The waves wash in, wash out, the familiar heartbeat. He closes his eyes and hears only a machine. Possibly he is very angry, or sad. He hardly knows.

Ronette is there without warning. She must have come down the path behind him, through the trees. She’s still in her uniform, although it isn’t close to dinner. It’s only late afternoon, when the waitresses usually leave their dock to go and change.

Ronette sits down beside him, takes out her cigarettes from some hidden pocket under her apron. “Want a cig?” she says.

Donny takes one and says “Thank you.” Not *thanks*, not wordlessly like leather-jacketed men in movies, but “Thank you,” like a good boy from St. Jude’s, like a suck. He lets her light it. What else can he do? She’s got the matches. Gingerly he inhales. He doesn’t smoke much really, and is afraid of coughing.

180

“I heard they kicked you out,” Ronette says. “That’s really tough.”

“It’s okay,” says Donny. “I don’t care.” He can’t tell her why, how noble he’s been. He hopes he won’t cry.

“I heard you tossed Monty’s binoculars,” she says. “In the lake.”

Donny can only nod. He glances at her. She’s smiling; he can see the heartbreaking space at the side of her mouth: the missing tooth. She thinks he’s funny.

“Well, I’m with you,” she says. “He’s a little creep.”

185

“It wasn’t because of him,” says Donny, overcome by the need to confess, or to be taken seriously. “It was because of Darce.” He turns, and for the first time looks her straight in the eyes. They are so green. Now his hands are shaking. He drops the cigarette into the sand. They’ll find the butt tomorrow, after he’s gone. After he’s gone, leaving Ronette behind, at the mercy of other people’s words. “It was because of you. What they were saying about you. Darce was.”

Ronette isn’t smiling anymore. “Such as what?” she says.

“Never mind,” says Donny. “You don’t want to know.”

“I know anyhow,” Ronette says. “That shit.” She sounds resigned rather than angry. She stands up, puts both her hands behind her back. It takes Donny a moment to realize she’s untying her apron. When she’s got it off she takes him by the hand, pulls gently. He allows himself to be led around the hill of rock, out of sight of anything but the water. She sits down, lies down, smiles as she reaches up, arranges his hands. Her blue uniform unbuttons down the front. Donny can’t believe this is happening, to him, in full daylight. It’s like sleepwalking, it’s like running too fast, it’s like nothing else.

“Want another coffee?” Joanne says. She nods to the waitress. Donny hasn’t heard her.
190

“She was really nice to me,” he is saying. “Ronette. You know, when Mr. B. turfed me out. That meant a lot to me at the time.” He’s feeling guilty, because he never wrote her. He didn’t know where she lived, but he didn’t take any steps to find out. Also, he couldn’t keep himself from thinking: *They’re right. She’s a slut.* Part of him had been profoundly shocked by what she’d done. He hadn’t been ready for it.

Joanne is looking at him with her mouth slightly open, as if he’s a talking dog, a talking stone. He fingers his beard nervously, wondering what he’s said wrong, or given away.

Joanne has just seen the end of the story, or one end of one story. Or at least a missing piece. So that’s why Ronette wouldn’t tell: it was Donny. She’d been protecting him; or maybe she’d been protecting herself. A fourteen-year-old boy. Ludicrous.

Ludicrous then, possible now. You can do anything now and it won’t cause a shock. Just a shrug. Everything is *cool*. A line has been drawn and on the other side of it is the past, both darker and more brightly intense than the present.

She looks across the line and sees the nine waitresses in their bathing suits, in the clear blazing sunlight, laughing on the dock, herself among them; and off in the shadowy rustling bushes of the shoreline, sex lurking dangerously. It had been dangerous, then. It had been sin. Forbidden, secret, sullyng. *Sick with desire*. Three dots had expressed it perfectly, because there had been no ordinary words for it.

195

On the other hand there had been marriage, which meant wifely checked aprons, playpens, a sugary safety.

But nothing has turned out that way. Sex has been domesticated, stripped of the promised mystery, added to the category of the merely expected. It’s just what is done, mundane as hockey. It’s celibacy these days that would raise eyebrows.

And what has become of Ronette, after all, left behind in the past, dappled by its chiaroscuro, stained and haloed by it, stuck with other people’s adjectives? What is she doing, now that everyone else is following in her footsteps? More practically: did she have the baby, or not? Keep it or not? Donny, sitting sweetly across the table from her, is in all probability the father of a ten-year-old child, and he knows nothing about it at all. Should she tell him? The melodrama tempts her, the idea of a revelation, a sensation, a neat ending.

But it would not be an ending, it would only be the beginning of something else. In any case, the story itself seems to her outmoded. It’s an archaic story, a folk-tale, a mosaic artifact. It’s a story that would never happen now.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

What elements did you most enjoy in this short story: the characters, the setting, the conflict, the language, the symbolism? Explain.

2.

Which, if any, of the characters could you most identify with? Explain.

3.

In a short story, traditionally only one character serves as the main character. In this piece, whom do you see as the main character and why?

4.

Compare or contrast Ronette with the other girls in the story and Donny with the other boys.

5.

Comment on the organization in this piece and how it affects the story as a whole.

6.

What was your reaction to the end of the story? Were you in shock? Did you laugh? What part does Joanne serve in this whole story?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Analyze Atwood's use of animal imagery and metaphors and comment on their contribution to the story.

2.

Locate a copy of a "True Romance" type of magazine and write a critique of the publication.

3.

If you enjoyed this piece, read another work by Margaret Atwood and write about your reaction to it.

CHITRA DIVAKARUNI

Indian Movie, New Jersey

Born in Calcutta, India, Chitra Divakaruni immigrated to the United States, where she earned a Ph.D. in British literature from the University of California, Berkeley. She teaches writing at Foothill College, near San Francisco, and has published Multitudes (1993), a collection of multicultural readings; Arranged Marriages (1995), a collection of short stories; and three books of poetry, including Black Candle. In all of her writings, Divakaruni demonstrates her interest in the cultural mix of contemporary America, particularly in the conflicts and conjunctions that are part of the process of adjustment faced by recent immigrants.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Explore the types of movies you generally enjoy the most and the reasons you might have for watching these movies.

2.

India: What images come to mind when you think of this country?

Not like the white filmstars, all rib
and gaunt cheekbone, the Indian sex-goddess
smiles plumply from behind a flowery
branch. Below her brief red skirt, her thighs

5

are satisfying-solid, redeeming
as tree trunks. She swings her hips
and the men-viewers whistle. The lover-hero
dances in to a song, his lip-sync
a little off, but no matter, we

10

know the words already and sing along.

It is safe here, the day
golden and cool so no one sweats,
roses on every bush and the Dal Lake
clean again.

15

The sex-goddess switches
to thickened English to emphasize
a joke. We laugh and clap. Here
we need not be embarrassed by words
dropping like lead pellets into foreign ears.

20

The flickering movie-light
wipes from our faces years of America, sons
who want mohawks and refuse to run
the family store, daughters who date
on the sly.

25

When at the end the hero
dies for his friend who also
loves the sex-goddess and now can marry her,
we weep, understanding. Even the men
clear their throats to say, "What *qurbani!*

30

What *dosti!*" After, we mill around
unwilling to leave, exchange greetings
and good news: a new gold chain, a trip
to India. We do not speak
of motel raids, cancelled permits, stones

35

thrown through glass windows, daughters and sons
raped by Dotbusters.

In this dim foyer,

we can pull around us the faint, comforting smell
of incense and *pakor*s, can arrange
40

our children's marriages with hometown boys and girls,
open a franchise, win a million
in the mail. We can retire
in India, a yellow two-storeyed house
with wrought-iron gates, our own
45

Ambassador car. Or at least
move to a rich white suburb, Summerfield
or Fort Lee, with neighbors that will
talk to us. Here while the film-songs still echo
in the corridors and restrooms, we can trust
50

in movie truths: sacrifice, success, love and luck,
the America that was supposed to be.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

In the first stanza, what images, phrases, or words are the most colorful, the most vivid? What are the connotations behind these images, and what's the general feeling you, the reader, get from this first part alone?

2.

What is it you hear, see, smell, or feel in the next stanza? How does this compare with your reaction to the first part?

3.

What connections does stanza 3 make between the first two stanzas? What new information is introduced?

4.

Examine the sensory images and colors in the last stanza. What is new here? What is repetitive? As a whole, what point is the poem trying to make?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Freewrite about a movie you've recently seen that affected you in some way—either it made you laugh, cry, think, feel, or all of the above. Then write a poem in which you show, without telling, the essence of this movie. Expect this poem to go through several revisions until you're satisfied with it.

2.

Interview someone who is a recent immigrant to America from an Asian Third World country, and write an essay in which you explain the dreams and struggles that this person encountered.

TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS:

MEDIA MESSAGES

1. Take one specific culture to which you belong—female adolescent, middle-aged male, Hispanic female, middle-aged waitress, male athlete, African American businessman, and so on—and trace the portrayal of this specific culture through TV, magazine ads, and current movies today. Draw conclusions about how true this portrayal is, in terms of your own experience and what you've learned.

2. Write a dialogue in which you attempt to bridge the gap between any two authors or characters in this chapter.

3. Choose any three pieces from this chapter and analyze the cultural values inherent in them.

4. Compare and contrast the opening strategies used by three of the essayists in this chapter. What conclusions can you draw about what a good introduction ought to do in order to be effective?

5. Choose the one piece in this chapter that had the greatest impact on you. Evaluate both the reading and your response as a reader in order to come to some conclusions about the responsibilities of an author to his or her audience and the responsibility of a reader to a written piece.

6. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Assume and synthesize the roles of three characters or authors in this chapter as you attempt to answer this biblical question.

7. Besides firsthand experience, how else do we come to know the world around us? Refer to several pieces in this chapter as well as your own experience in order to effectively answer this question.

8. From this chapter, nominate one person as your hero and explain why, from the list of possible candidates, you chose this person.

9. Write an essay on one piece in this chapter that made you change your way of thinking, one that altered your previous assumption on a topic. Analyze why this piece of writing had such an effect on you, and explain how you have changed as a result.

10. Marshall McLuhan wrote that "the medium is the message." Analyze how one specific medium—such as television, magazine advertising, radio, movies—impacts and affects the messages we receive. Use any appropriate sources from this chapter for support.

11. Write an original short story or poem in which the media play a major part in the conflict.

12. Read Ray Bradbury's famous novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, and thread one theme you find in this book with themes from several other sources from this chapter.

13. As a semester project, make a video that connects in some way to several pieces and themes you've encountered in this chapter.

¹Among the studies and reports on stereotypical portrayals are: Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film (1900–1942)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); United States Civil Rights Commission, "Window Dressing: Women and Minorities in Television" (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1977); Marilyn Diane Fife, "Black Image in American TV: The First Two Decades," *The Black Scholar* (Nov. 1974), pp. 7–15. Even empirical research that finds that negative black characters are proportionately not greater than negative white characters still conclude that the net effect of portrayal is more negative for blacks. See, for instance, J. L. Hinton et al., "Tokenism and Improving Imagery for Blacks in TV Drama and Comedy: 1973," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 18 (Fall 1974), pp. 423–432.

²Some of these stereotypes are mentioned in the works cited above and also in Robert Toll, *Black Up: The Minstrel Show in 19th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); H. L. Gates, Jr., "Portraits in Black: From Amos 'n' Andy to Coonskin," *Harper's* (June 1976), pp. 16–19; and Melbourne S. Cummings, "The Changing Image of the Black Family on Television," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 22 (Fall 1988), pp. 75–85.

³See, for instance, "Forum: Symposium on 'Roots,'" *The Black Scholar* (May 1977), pp. 36–42 and Philip Vandor, "On the Meaning of 'Roots,'" *Journal of Communication*, 4 (Fall 1977), pp. 64–69.

⁴That episode was about a case of reverse-discrimination: Dee is denied a place on her school's cheerleading squad in favor of a less deserving white rival, who is chosen to meet racial quotas.

⁵Participants at a panel of the 1989 Popular Culture Association Conference commented after the presentation of this paper that the sitcoms *Fish* and *Good Times* also have episodes on identity crisis that follow the pattern here.

⁶This writer does not assume that the program producers were aware of Cross's model and actually intended to reflect it in the plots.

⁷One support for this conjecture is a finding that blacks who watch a lot of entertainment programs tend to have lower self-esteem while whites who watch at comparable levels do not: Alexis S. Tan and Gerdean Tan, "Television Use and Self-Esteem: Ethnic Studies in Black and White," *Journal of Communication*, 29 (Winter 1979), pp. 129–135.

President Clinton named Shalala to be Secretary of Health and Human Services in 1993.

Senator Joseph McCarthy (1909–1957) led Congress to investigate what he believed to be Communist-inspired activities on college campuses and elsewhere during the 1950s.

In 1992, after the publication of this article, Rigoberta Menchu won the Nobel Peace Prize.

29 *qurbani*: Sacrifice. 30 *dosti*: Friendship. 39 *pakor*s: Indian food.

NEIL POSTMAN

Of Luddites, Learning, and Life

Social critic Neil Postman began his career as an elementary school teacher. Since then he has written twenty books exploring the purposes of education and the role of technology and the media in contemporary life. Among his recent books are The Disappearance of Childhood (1994), Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology (1993), The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School (1996), and Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future (1999). Postman is currently the chair of the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What is your view of this age of technology? Does it excite you? Depress you? Scare you? How much does it matter?

2.

What would you say is the most important factor in determining whether a child's education is a success?

3.

What one item or appliance today do you most depend upon? Freewrite about what it would be like to go through an entire week without this item.

Luddites

I think it is a fair guess to say that my role in the pages of *TECHNOS* is to serve as the resident Luddite. If this is so, then there are two things you need to know. The first is that I do not regard my association with Luddism as, in any way, a disgrace. As perhaps readers will know, the Luddite movement flourished in England between 1811 and 1818 as a response to the furious growth of machines and factories. Notwithstanding the excesses of their zeal, the Luddites seemed to be the only group in England that could foresee the catastrophic effects of the factory system, especially on children. They did not want their children to be deprived of an education—indeed, of childhood itself—for the purpose of their being used to fuel the machines of industry. As William Blake put it, they did not want their children to labor in the “dark Satanic Mills.”

It is true that the Luddites busted up some textile machinery from which their unsavory reputation originates, but when did we decide to mock or despise people who try to protect their children and preserve their way of life?

The second thing you need to know is that despite the respect I have for them, I am not at all a Luddite. I have, for example, no hostility toward new technologies and certainly no wish to destroy them, especially those technologies, like computers, that have captured the imagination of educators. Of course, I am not enthusiastic about them, either. I am indifferent to them. And the reason I am indifferent to them is that, in my view, they have nothing whatever to do with the fundamental problems we have to solve in schooling our young. If I do harbor any hostility toward these machines, it is only because they are distractions. They divert the intelligence and energy of talented people from addressing the issues we need most to confront.

Let me begin, then, to make my case by telling you about a conversation I had with an automobile salesman who was trying to get me to buy a new Honda Accord. He pointed out that the car was equipped with cruise control, for which there was an additional charge. As is my custom in thinking about the value of technology, I asked him, “What is the problem to which cruise control is the answer?” The question startled him, but he recovered enough to say, “It is the problem of keeping your foot on the gas.” I told him I had been driving for 35 years and had never found that to be a problem. He then told me about the electric windows. “What is the problem,” I asked, “to which electric windows are the answer?” He was ready for me this time. With a confident smile, he said, “You don't have to wind the windows up and down with your arm.” I told him that this, too, had never been a problem, and that, in fact, I rather valued the exercise it gave me.

I bought the car anyway, because, as it turns out, you cannot get a Honda Accord without cruise control and electric windows—which brings up the first point I should like to mention. It is that, contrary to conventional wisdom, new technologies do not, by and large, *increase* people's options but do just the opposite. For all practical purposes, you cannot go to Europe anymore by boat, which I can report is a thrilling and civilized way to go. Now you have to take an airplane. You cannot work for a newspaper unless you use a word processor, which eliminates me, since I do all of my composing with a pen and yellow pad and do not wish to change. You cannot buy records anymore; you must use CDs. I can go on with a thousand examples which demonstrate the point that new technologies drive old technologies out of business; which is to say that there is an imperialistic thrust to technology, a strong tendency to get everyone to conform to the requirements of what is new. Now, this is not always a bad thing, although sometimes it is very bad. I bring it up to call attention to the fact that what we too easily call "progress" is always problematic. The word comes trippingly to the tongue, but when you examine what it means, you discover that technology is always a Faustian bargain. It giveth and it taketh away. And we would all be clearer about what we are getting into if there were less cheerleading about, let us say, the use of computers in the classroom and more sober analysis of what may be its costs intellectually and socially.

A second point my Honda story illuminates is that new technologies may not always solve significant problems or any problem at all. But because the technologies are *there*, we often invent problems to justify our using them. Or sometimes we even pretend we are solving one problem when, in fact, the reason for building and employing a new technology is altogether different. There are two expensive examples I can think of on this point. The first concerns the construction of the superconducting supercollider in Texas. It was justified by no less a person than Stephen Hawking, who told us that the research the supercollider would permit would give us entry to the mind of God. Since Hawking is an avowed atheist, he cannot possibly believe this; but even if he were not, it is equally sure he does not believe it. Nonetheless, it was good public relations. A Christian nation would be likely to go for it (though its Congress, after a \$2 billion investment, did not), since the mysterious ways of the Lord have always been a serious problem for most of us. This is not to say that there aren't some interesting problems in cosmology that the supercollider might have solved. But since the people who would have been required to pay for this machine did not have any background or interest in these problems, it was best to talk about the mind of God.

The second example is the information superhighway that President Clinton and especially Vice President Gore are so ardently promoting. I have not yet heard a satisfactory answer to the question "What is the problem to which this \$50 billion investment is the solution?" I suspect that an honest answer would be something like this: "There *is* no social or intellectual problem, but we can stimulate the economy by investing in new technologies." That is not at all a bad answer, but it is not the answer the vice president has given. He is trying to sell the idea by claiming that it solves the problem of giving more people greater access to more information faster, including providing them with 500 TV channels (or even a thousand).

Learning

This leads me directly to the question of schools and technology. In reading Lewis Perelman's book, *School's Out*, and the work of those who are passionate about the educational value of new technologies, I find that their enthusiasm is almost wholly centered on the fact that these technologies will give our students greater access to more information faster, more conveniently, and in more various forms than has ever been possible. That is their answer to the question "What is the problem to which the new technologies are the solution?" I would suggest a modification of the question by putting it this way: "What *was* the 19th-century problem to which these technologies are an irrelevant solution?" By putting it this way, I mean to say that the problem of getting information to people fast and in various forms was the main technological thrust of the 19th century, beginning with the invention of telegraphy and photography in the 1840s. It would be hard not to notice that the problem was solved and is therefore no longer something that any of us needs to work at, least of all, become worked up about. If anyone argues that technology can give people access to more information outside of the classroom than could possibly be given inside the classroom, then I would say that has been the case for almost 100 years. What else is new?

In other words, the information-giving function of the schools was rendered obsolete a long time ago. For some reason, more than a few technophiles (like Perelman) have just noticed this and are, in some cases, driven to favor eliminating our schools altogether. They err in this, I think, for a couple of reasons. One is that their notion of what schools are for is rather limited. Schools are not now and in fact have never been *largely* about getting information to children. That has been on the schools' agenda, of course, but has always been way down on the list.

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One of the principal functions of school is to teach children how to behave in groups. The reason for this is that you cannot have a democratic, indeed, civilized, community life unless people have learned how to participate in a disciplined way as part of a group. School has never been about individualized learning. It has always been about how to learn and how to behave as part of a community. And, of course, one of the ways this is done is through the communication of what is known as social values. If you will read the first chapter of Robert Fulghum's *All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, you will find an elegant summary of the important business of schools. The summary includes the following: Share everything, play fair, don't hit people, put things back where you found them, clean up your own mess, wash your hands before you eat, and, of course, flush. The only thing wrong with Fulghum's book is that no one has learned all these things, along with an affection for one's country, at kindergarten's end. We have ample evidence that it takes many years of teaching these values in school before they have been accepted and internalized. Some would say that this function of schooling is the most difficult task educators must achieve. If it is not, then the function of providing the young with narratives that help them to find purpose and meaning in learning and life surely is.

By a narrative I mean a story of human history that gives meaning to the past, explains the present, and provides guidance for the future. If there is a single problem that plagues American education at the moment, it is that our children no longer believe, as they once did, in some of the powerful and exhilarating narratives that were the underpinning of the school enterprise. I refer to such narratives as the story of our origins in which America is

brought forth out of revolution, not merely as an experiment in governance but as part of God's own plan—the story of America as a moral light unto the world. Another great narrative tells of America as a melting pot where the teeming masses, from anywhere, yearning to be free, can find peace and sustenance. Still another narrative—sometimes referred to as the Protestant Ethic—tells of how hard work is one of the pathways to a fulfilled life. There are many other such narratives on which the whole enterprise of education in this country has rested. If teachers, children, and their parents no longer believe in these narratives, then schools become houses of detention rather than attention.

Life

What I am driving at is that the great problems of education are of a social and moral nature and have nothing to do with dazzling new technologies. In fact, the new technologies so loudly trumpeted in TECHNOS and in other venues are themselves not a solution to anything, but a problem to be solved. The fact is that our children, like the rest of us, are now suffering from information glut, not information scarcity. In America there are 260,000 billboards, 17,000 newspapers, 12,000 periodicals, 27,000 video outlets for renting tapes, 400 million television sets, and well over 400 million radios, not including those in automobiles. There are 40,000 new book titles published every year, and every day in America 41 million photographs are taken. And, just for the record (thanks to the computer), over 60 billion pieces of advertising junk mail come into our mailboxes every year. Everything from telegraphy and photography in the 19th century to the silicon chip in the 20th has amplified the din of information. From millions of sources all over the globe, through every possible channel and medium—light waves, air waves, ticker tapes, computer banks, telephone wires, television cables, satellites, and printing presses—information pours in. Behind it in every imaginable form of storage—on paper, on video and audio tape, on disks, film, and silicon chips—is an even greater volume of information waiting to be retrieved. Information has become a form of garbage. It comes indiscriminately, directed at no one in particular, disconnected from usefulness. We are swamped by information, have no control over it, and don't know what to do with it. And in the face of all of this, there are some who believe it is time to abandon schools. Well, if anyone is wondering whether or not the schools of the future have any use, here is something for them to contemplate. The role of the school is to help students learn how to ignore and discard information so that they can achieve a sense of coherence in their lives; to help students cultivate a sense of social responsibility; to help students think critically, historically, and humanely; to help students understand the ways in which technology shapes their consciousness; to help students learn that their own needs sometimes are subordinate to the needs of the group. I could go on for another three pages in this vein without any reference to how machinery can give students access to information. Instead, let me summarize in two ways what I mean. First, I'll cite a remark made repeatedly by my friend Alan Kay, who is sometimes called "the father of the personal computer." Alan likes to remind us that any problems the schools cannot solve without machines, they cannot solve with them. Second, and with this I shall come to a close: If a nuclear holocaust should occur some place in the world, it will not happen because of insufficient information; if children are starving in Somalia, it's not because of insufficient information; if crime terrorizes our cities, marriages are breaking up, mental disorders are increasing, and children are being abused, none of this happens because of a

lack of information. These things happen because we lack something else. It is the “something else” that is now the business of schools.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

If Postman were giving this reading as a lecture or a talk, how do you think he would be received by his audience? Explain by using specific examples from the text.

2.

Postman claims that he is “indifferent” to technology. What in this piece, though, might make you question the truth of this statement?

3.

Think of as many “new” things technology has brought us that have not solved any problems. What ones have, in fact, solved problems? What were the problems?

4.

In your own words, explain what Postman’s point is about computers in the schools.

5.

Postman writes that “one of the principal functions of school is to teach children how to behave in groups.” To what extent do you agree with this statement?

6.

Why does Postman believe that schools need to go back to narratives? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.

Write an essay in which you argue for the value of computers in school.

2.

Write an essay in which you argue that something “new” has in fact replaced something that was better.

3.

Read critiques and reviews of one of the books Postman mentions in this piece, and write a summary and analysis of your own findings. If time permits, you may choose to read the book itself and write your own review.

BETSY CARPENTER

More People, More Pollution

Betsy Carpenter is a staff writer for U.S. News & World Report, specializing in science. She has also been an editor for Science magazine, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

How concerned are you with the problem of overpopulation?

2.

Who or what do you think is most responsible for pollution today? Explain.

Overpopulation typically brings to mind images of starving children in impoverished Third World countries, smoldering rainforests, crowded slums and barren, eroded hillsides.

It all seems a long way from affluent, industrialized America. Yet even close to home, a mounting environmental bill is coming due that is a direct consequence of population growth. Consider Presly Creek, a small Virginia inlet off the Chesapeake Bay. At first glance, it looks pristine. But, in fact, it is buckling under the strain of the 15 million people (up from 8 million in 1950) who now live in the 64,000-square-mile Chesapeake Bay watershed: Polluted runoff from roads, lawns and farms has turned the water a murky green and decimated underwater sea-grass meadows. The oyster reefs are gone, as are the sturgeon, American wigeon and redhead ducks. Even the creek's curves have been resculpted as silt from plowed fields and construction sites has filled in its coves. As the population has swelled in the past few decades, places like Presly Creek have become commonplace. While not stinking, burning or dead, they have been irrevocably degraded, and human numbers are largely to blame. "One person's impact isn't a very big deal, but multiply it by 15 million and it adds up," says Michael Hirschfield of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in Annapolis, Md. New technology has blunted some of the impact of people on the environment. But experts contend that human ingenuity may only have postponed the day of reckoning. As the longstanding efforts to revive the bay suggest, technology is better at cleaning up industrial messes than at solving the intractable problems caused by millions of people going about their everyday activities.

The Enemy Is Us

Many Americans still hold big industry responsible for the nation's environmental woes. Increasingly, however, people are the source of problems such as air and water pollution and the decline of many species of plants and animals. The Chesapeake watershed stretches from Cooperstown, N.Y., to southern Virginia and includes Richmond, Va., Washington and Baltimore. Much of what enters the rivers, creeks and streams lacing these lands ends up in the bay: outfall of sewage treatment plants, toxic runoff from city streets, waste oil dumped down storm sewers and car exhaust washed out of the sky by rain showers.

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As the population of the watershed has grown, so has the environmental impact of each of those additional people. People today drive more, use more energy and take up more land than ever before. Total emissions of nitrogen-oxide gases from vehicles have almost doubled from 1 to almost 2 pounds per person per week between 1952 and 1986. The pollutant is produced by cars and power plants and is implicated in many of the bay's problems. Watershed inhabitants use four times as much land to build homes as they did 40 years ago.

Hoe and Ax

Although human impact on the bay has accelerated sharply in recent decades, it began centuries ago during an earlier population boom, says Stephen Potter of the Smithsonian Institution. The first European colonists arrived at Jamestown, Va., in 1607, but for a century they left little imprint on the land. Most clung to the shoreline in small outposts, attacking the wilderness behind them with ax- and hoe-based agriculture that was borrowed from the Indians and minimized soil erosion.

But the arrival of thousands more European settlers—coupled with the rise of slavery and the introduction of the plow—changed everything. Soil erosion became a widespread problem. By the early 1800s, many smaller ports were so clogged with silt that they had to be abandoned. Sediment not only reshapes coastlines, it also clouds the water and smothers fish spawning grounds. And while farmers were changing the coastline, fishermen devastated certain fish and oyster populations. Studies of fish bones and shells found in colonial garbage dumps reveal that by the mid-1700s, watermen had so depleted inshore oyster bars that they had to pluck oysters from the bay's deeper channels with long-handled tongs. By the mid-1800s, fishermen had exhausted sheephead and drum in certain parts of the bay.

But the environmental consequences of this first population surge pale beside the impacts of the recent explosion. For Robert Costanza, director of the Maryland International Institute for Ecological Economics at the University of Maryland in Solomons, the bay's fundamental problem is best summarized by a simple comparison: Today, for every cubic mile of water in this rich estuary, there are 800,000 people living in the watershed; the Baltic Sea, by contrast, has 16,000 persons per cubic mile of water and the Mediterranean Sea just 350.

The Chesapeake has been brought to its knees by two pollutants in particular, nitrogen and phosphorus, which are released nearly every time people turn around. Besides auto exhaust and power-plant emissions, the sources of nitrogen include animal manure and chemical fertilizer runoff from fields and lawns and prodigious quantities of sewage. Some 2 million watershed residents use septic tanks, which discharge nitrogen into ground water. Conventional sewage treatment plants spew a nitrogen-rich outfall into rivers and produce huge quantities of nitrogen- and phosphorus-laden sludge; the sludge is often spread onto fields as fertilizer, which washes into rivers and streams.

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Nitrogen and phosphorus trigger a far-reaching biological chain reaction in the bay, fueling the explosive growth of tiny plankton that, along with sediment flowing from fields and construction sites, choke off sunlight to other plants, notably aquatic sea grasses. The acreage of sea-grass beds has plunged, prompting in turn a sharp decline in the diversity of bay waterfowl, according to Tom Horton and William M. Eichbaum, authors of *Turning the Tide: Saving the Chesapeake Bay*. Populations of 17 of 20 varieties of duck have dropped in recent decades; redhead ducks and American wigeon have almost vanished. The overall waterfowl population has dropped by only 10 to 20 percent, however: Canada and snow geese have adapted to the sea-grass declines by feeding in grain fields and now account for 65 percent of total waterfowl, up from 20 percent in the 1950s.

The ecological reverberations of man-made nutrients extend to the bay's deepest channels. When the plankton die, they drop to the bottom and decompose in a process that consumes oxygen, exacerbating a natural oxygen shortage in parts of the bay. Now, in the summer months, large stretches of the estuary do not have enough oxygen to support aquatic life. Population pressure also has spurred land development in the watershed that has hampered the bay's natural ability to rebound from environmental blows. Undeveloped lands buffer human impacts in a number of ways. Forests act like sponges, moderating water flow and cushioning the impact of floods and droughts. Wetlands purify water by trapping sediment and filtering out nutrients. But undeveloped

land is disappearing: Keeping pace with population trends, in Maryland the amount of developed land jumped by 38 percent between 1973 and 1990.

The plundering of the bay's oyster beds also has shut down a natural water purification system. To feed, oysters, clams and other bivalves filter water through their gills, removing plankton and sediment from as many as 50 gallons of water a day. Scientists estimate that in early colonial times there were so many oysters in the estuary that the mollusks could filter a volume of water equal to the entire bay in a matter of days. But overharvesting has slashed the oyster population to about 1 percent of its original total. Oyster harvests are down to 2 million pounds annually from a high of 118 million pounds in the 1880s. Today, it takes the bay's oysters a year or more to filter a bay's worth of water.

Rules and Technology Help

Despite the clear link between a burgeoning population and environmental degradation, more people do not automatically bring more pollution. In the past few decades, government regulations and pollution-cutting technologies have helped keep the bay alive. By the late 1980s, for instance, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and D.C. banned the use of phosphate laundry detergents, which helped cut phosphorus discharges from sewage treatment plants by 30 to 50 percent.

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Progress has been hindered, however, by the fact that many new rules are either voluntary or poorly enforced. During the 1970s, the bay states enacted laws to control sediment runoff from construction sites with measures ranging from settling ponds to barriers of straw bales and cloth. But a 1990 survey of sites found that only one fourth had adequate erosion controls.

Technology has also mitigated population's impact, though as George Moffett argues in his recently published *Critical Masses: The Global Population Challenge*, growth ultimately swamps the benefits of technology. Pollution-control devices have made cars dramatically cleaner, for example, but those gains have been overwhelmed by the increase in the number of miles driven.

As the world gains another 5 billion people, preventing Presly Creek and thousands of places like it from degrading further will require a change in consumption patterns, argues Allen Hammond of the World Resources Institute. Americans, he says, need to build a more sustainable society—developing land more carefully, farming more wisely and restructuring industry to be more efficient. Some maintain that Americans are not prepared for such a fundamental shift, but Hammond is more optimistic: “Attitudes can change quickly. Look how fast the Berlin Wall came down.”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Explain the overall tone of this piece, the audience to whom it might be directed, and how the audience might respond to this piece.

2.

Summarize three paragraphs in this piece so that a fifth grader may be able to grasp the content and message within each one.

3.

What does Carpenter claim had the single greatest impact on the environment and why?

4.

What reasons does Carpenter give for why there has been so little progress in controlling pollution? What other factors can you think of that might also contribute to this lack of progress?

5.

React to the conclusion here. Do you find it satisfactory? Why or why not?

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.

Research the history of your own hometown. In what ways has it improved? What are the problems that it now faces? How might they be solved?

2.

Read Rachel Carson's noted book, *Silent Spring*. Write an essay that would encourage students today to read this book.

3.

Focus on one problem in either your hometown or your school. Write a piece in which you examine the causes of the problem, the effects this problem is having on the population, and possible solutions for the problem.

VICTORIA L. MACKI, M.D.

We Have No Real Choice about Death

Victoria Macki has a family practice in Ellensburg, Washington. This selection first appeared as a letter to the editor in the Newberry News, a weekly in Newberry, Michigan.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Under what conditions would you consider assisted suicide? Or would you not ever consider it? Why or why not.

2.

Define "mercy."

To the Editor:

Over the past months and years, I have become increasingly troubled by what I perceive as a cavalier attitude toward life, and by a lack of public discourse on the subject.

Recently, the media circus of the Jack Kevorkian trial has, I feel, obscured the central issue.

This issue is not the "right to die." Any sober reflection on the subject would bring everyone to the conclusion that death is not anything we have a real choice about—we all will die. It is a "right" with which we are endowed at our birth, and a necessity, and a certainty.

The issue is whether or not we should, as a society, condone and applaud and legalize the deliberate and knowing taking of a life. How do we decide? The issue is more than legal, it is moral to its core, and moral issues must have a referent to authority.

Who says that taking a life is wrong? (Notice that I did not say “illegal,” but wrong.) Who makes that determination? How is the determination made? Must we struggle with these decisions on our own, based solely on our own insight and experience? Does anyone have a right to declare a life-and-death decision either wrong or right?

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From my perspective, only the Giver of Life has the authority to take it again. I freely admit that my perspective is a Christian one and that my referent is the moral authority of God who gave life and alone has the authority and right to take it in His time.

Perhaps more than most people my age, I have seen death up close and personal. It is a rare month when I do not have to preside over the end of someone’s life, often at the end of a long, lingering illness. I have seen individuals choose to end their own lives, also. I have seen struggle, distress, and also peace. Sometimes death seems an intruder, cutting some down in their prime. Sometimes death seems like a welcome friend. But never have I felt that it was my duty or privilege to push death along.

I draw a clear distinction between facing the inevitability of futile treatment and withdrawing the same, and deliberately pushing some along the path. There are times that no amount of “life support” will work, when there is no life left to support. There are times when “letting nature take its course,” and keeping one’s meddling hands off, rather than continuing treatment that may be painful and useless, is the right choice. I cannot equate the giving of comfort care to a dying person (rather than aggressive, high-tech care in the face of futility) with euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Many centuries ago, a radical physician articulated a set of principles that have come down to the medical profession as “The Hippocratic Oath.” When Hippocrates and his followers vowed that “I will keep [the sick] from harm and injustice. I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect,” they were breaking with the accepted local value system. In ancient Rome and Greece, suicide, and assisted suicide, were seen as virtuous and acceptable. These guys, doctors, said, “No.” They also, incidentally, vowed to induce no abortions. Today most medical school graduating classes are no longer required to take the Hippocratic Oath. (I wasn’t.) Does anyone wonder why?

The Netherlands, about 20 years ago, removed the penalty for “assisting” suicide. What has happened in that country since then should be instructive, and alarming. According to a 1992 Dutch government survey, in 8,100 cases of doctors’ prescribing lethal overdoses of medication, 61% of the patients had not consented to their own death, and in 45% the doctors didn’t even consult family members. The Dutch legal system is now at work trying to come up with policies to govern the mercy killing of newborns.

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Does this have a familiar ring? It is just the road taken by Germany in the 1930s when, following Nietzschean philosophy (as expressed in National Socialism policy), it was determined that there was such a thing as “a life unworthy to be lived,” and that social policy and government agencies should expend effort to “mercifully” liquidate such lives. Long before the Jews and ethnic minorities were shipped en masse to concentration and death camps, the social experiment had been done on Germany’s own mentally retarded and mentally ill—mercifully overdosed in their “state hospitals,” without the permission of either the (incompetent) unworthy lives, but also without bothering the families. It was

easy. It was a relief to not have to be bothered with the “unproductive” needy. It worked. And came the Holocaust.

Lest people consider me unnecessarily alarmist, I ask them to thoughtfully investigate these matters. Do you want your physician to become your executioner? Do you want legal safeguards in place to protect the helpless, the weak, the distressed, and the ill—even the terminally ill?

I firmly believe that the reason most people rather blithely assent to the notion of the acceptability of “assisted suicide” is that they have a deep fear of pain and abandonment. They project a future, terrible illness that incapacitates, humiliates, and pains them, and they say that they “would rather be dead.” Is it not the doctor’s duty and privilege to alleviate pain, provide comfort, and “be there” for their dying patients? If people knew that they could trust their caregivers for such loving and tender care, would they wish to hasten their death? On the issue of dependence and humiliation of having bodily functions decrease, where is the line?

If one considers the “quality” rather than the fact of life to be paramount, how would you respond to the decision of who determines quality? I recently learned of a 26-year-old woman who was euthanatized in the Netherlands by her physician, at her request, because she felt her life had no more meaning. She had developed arthritis in her toes and could no longer dance ballet, which she had been doing since childhood. The doctor felt that she was competent and he had no right to deny her request, so she killed herself because she could no longer twirl on her toes. And her doctor gave her the means.

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So is life precious in its essence or in its utility? If life is precious in its essence, we should not and must not condone assisted suicide. If it is only precious because of some utilitarian standard, no matter how high or how low the bar is set, who determines the standard? And what protection, then, would there be for the old, the infirm, the helpless? There is a vast difference between prolonging the dying process and hastening it. People should be clear with their families and doctors about what care they will and will not accept in the treatment of disease. Mental and physical pain should be alleviated out of mercy as much as possible. But please, don’t ask me to kill you.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Explain, in your own words, what Macki believes to be the central point of conflict in the issue of assisted suicides.

2.

What are Macki’s main arguments against assisted suicide? How effective do you find them to be?

3.

At what point in her argument does Macki acknowledge the opposing point of view? What is her response to this viewpoint?

4.

In making her case, Macki uses the example of the Holocaust and a dancer. How effective do you find these examples to be? How fair are they?

5.

Using evidence from the text, explain why you would—or would not—want Macki to be your physician.

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.

Research how another deals with assisted suicide and compare it to what Macki presents here.

2.

Argue for the other side of this issue. Write an essay in which you support someone like Jack Kevorkian who maintains that euthanasia is, indeed, a compassionate and merciful act.

3.

Survey students on your campus to see where they stand on this issue. Write a report, perhaps for your school newspaper, that presents your findings.

AMY HARMON

Bigots on the Net

Amy Harmon (born in 1968 in New York City) graduated from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She has been a reporter and staff writer for the Los Angeles Times and is currently a reporter for the New York Times, specializing in online media. This selection originally appeared in the Los Angeles Times on December 14, 1994.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What are your feelings about the issues of free speech and the Internet?

2.

Is censorship something you believe in or something you'd fight all the way? Or, are you somewhere in between? Explain.

Alarmed by the growing presence of hate groups in cyberspace, the Simon Wiesenthal Center¹

Tuesday sent a letter to the Prodigy online computer service protesting the “continued use of Prodigy by bigots to promote their agendas of hate.”

The Los Angeles–based center said it has tracked increasing activity over the last few months by more than fifty hate groups using online services and the popular Internet global computer network. “More and more of these groups are embracing and utilizing the information superhighway,” said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the center. “The slurs are the same but the venue is different.”

The center called on commercial online services to keep hate groups out and proposed that the government play a similar policing role on the amorphous Internet. Of particular concern, Cooper said, is that young people could be exposed to white supremacy in an environment unmediated by teachers, parents, or librarians. Much of the activity takes place on open electronic forums accessible to anyone with an Internet account or a subscription to a commercial service.

About twenty million computer users are connected to the Internet, and another five million use commercial online services, including more than two million on Prodigy.

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But civil libertarians—and white supremacists themselves—say that cyberspace, like any other medium of expression, must remain open to free speech. And in an uncharted territory where the rules of engagement are still unformed, the center's offensive is sure to sharpen the ongoing debate over electronic censorship.

"It's a genuinely difficult problem," says Marc Rotenberg, director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, an online civil liberties organization. "And there are no paradigms to turn to."

It's a problem that is quickly becoming relevant to a lot more people. All sorts of enterprises, from businesses to charity organizations, have been rushing to get hooked up to computer networks, which offer fast, convenient communication at increasingly lower prices.

But for white supremacist groups like the National Alliance and the American Renaissance, cyberspace offers benefits that are proportionately far greater.

Marginalized by traditional media and short on funds, hate groups have been learning to use low-cost online communications to gain recruits and spread propaganda across state and even national boundaries, giving them access to a far wider audience than they have historically been able to reach.

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Valerie Fields, for example, a West Los Angeles resident and political junkie, signs on to her Prodigy account a few times a week to read the discussion of local politics. Last month, she clicked her way into the "News" forum to find an anti-Latino diatribe that closed with a plug for a \$20 subscription to the newsletter of Louisville, Kentucky-based American Renaissance.

"Around the election the messages about [Proposition] 187² got pretty nasty," Fields said. "But then I saw this one that seemed to be from an organized white supremacist group, and that really freaked me out."

The message Fields saw, and several others, including one that referred to *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a "Jewish hoax" prompted the Wiesenthal Center to ask Prodigy to strengthen its guidelines to delete such messages from its boards.

"We're having a discussion with them," Prodigy spokesman Brian Ek said Tuesday afternoon. "Our feeling is we already have a good system in place. But we have more than 1.7 million notes on the board at any given time, and we can't read them all."

Prodigy was the focus of controversy involving antisemitic comments in 1991, and worked with the Anti-Defamation League at the time to craft a policy that forbids "blatant expressions of hatred" on its boards. All messages are also run through a computer that scans for obscenities before they are posted. But Cooper says the service should look more carefully at messages that target groups rather than individuals.

15

Prodigy is not the only online service to be utilized by hate groups.

Kevin Strom, who produces a weekly radio show for the National Alliance, and has been active online, said he was recently blocked from the "Political" and "Issues" forums on CompuServe.

“Apparently somebody complained that our articles were bashing ethnic minorities,” Strom says. “So the system operator decided we didn’t deserve freedom of speech.” Strom says the articles he posted on the forums were among those which users transferred most frequently to their home computers. One titled “The Wisdom of Henry Ford,” which reviewed the book *The International Jew*, was downloaded 120 times one week, he said.

CompuServe leaves the decision of what to screen out to the individual “sysops” who are hired to moderate the service’s discussion forums. Says Georgia Griffith, the Politics sysop: “We don’t block users for what they believe or say, but how they say it. The First Amendment allows people to publish what they choose, but we are not obliged to publish it for them.”

20

The legal issue of who is ultimately responsible for what does get “published” online is a thorny one that has yet to be entirely resolved.

A federal judge ruled in 1991 that CompuServe was like a bookstore owner who could not be held accountable for the contents of books on his shelves—a precedent the online services support.

But activists say there are ethical issues at stake, which public opinion can help to enforce—at least in the private sector.

The Internet, a web of several hundred computer networks not owned by any one enterprise, is a more difficult proposition. Cooper wrote a letter to Federal Communications Chairman Reed E. Hundt last summer suggesting that it “may be time for the FCC to place a cop on the Superhighway of Information.”

But such an effort would involve significant technical difficulties, and would also likely encounter vehement opposition from civil liberties groups who want to preserve the Internet as a democratic forum.

25

Because of its anarchic structure, the Internet has generally been viewed as a “common carrier” much like the telephone company, which cannot be held liable for what passes over its lines.

“That would be a very dangerous path to go down,” says EPIC’s Rotenberg. “It would lead to an extraordinary amount of censorship and control that would be very inappropriate.”

Discussion groups geared toward white supremacist propaganda on the Internet have labels such as “skinheads,” “revisionism” and “vigilantes.” The Institute for Historical Review recently set up a site on the World Wide Web portion of the Internet where some of its literature can be obtained for free. A document called “Frequently Asked Questions about National Socialism” is available at several sites.

The computer commands used on the Internet also allow users to access information anonymously, which far-right activists say helps many to overcome the inhibitions they might have about signing up.

The National Alliance rents space on a computer at Netcom Online Communication Services, one of the largest Internet access providers in California, where texts of its radio programs are available. It has also posted flyers on the Internet promoting its radio show, urging readers to send “minority parasites packing to fend for themselves” and condemning community development funding as support for black “breeding colonies.”

“We’ve seen a huge growth in use of the Internet by our people,” says Alliance Chairman William Pierce. “The major media in this country are very biased against our political point of view. They present us with ridicule or in a very distorted way. The information superhighway is much more free of censorship. It’s possible for a dedicated individual to get his message out to thousands and thousands of people.”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What do you think is the author’s main purpose here, to inform or to persuade? Support your answer with specific evidence from the text.
2.
What are the sources on which Harmon relies most in this piece? How credible do you consider them to be? Explain.
3.
What other information might Harmon include that might be helpful for the reader? Where would you include this information?
4.
Harmon includes present-day businesses that are likened to the Internet. What are these comparisons, and how effective do you find them to be?
5.
What does Harmon achieve by ending with a quote by the National Alliance?

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.
Research any recent cases that involve the issue of free speech and the Internet. Write an essay in which you report your findings.
2.
Write an argumentative essay on the topic of censorship in other areas: schools, libraries, television, pornography, radio, T-shirts, parades, and so on.
3.
Conduct your own investigation into a particular “hate” site on the Internet and report on your findings.

BRIAN KAUFMAN

Can Technology Make Us Colorblind?

Brian Kaufman (born in 1952 in Cleveland, Ohio) played lead guitar in a metal band, did stand-up comedy, worked as a bartender, and owned two restaurants before he returned to Colorado State College in Fort Collins to resume his college education. In addition to going to school full-time, working as a cook, and helping his wife, Judith, raise their three children, he wrote a column called “The Fringe Middle” for The Collegian, the campus newspaper. This selection was his column in the January 30, 1998, edition.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

- 1.

Describe your experience with or reaction to Internet chat rooms.

2.

Finding love in a chat room—what do you think are the chances? And what does this say about people today?

My wife plays in computer chat rooms. Recently, she told me about a twenty-nine-year-old artist, single, who turned out to be a forty-five-year-old married salesman. I had a hard time mustering the proper amount of sympathetic outrage. “You don’t ever really know who you’re talking to,” she complained.

Exactly. The Internet lets us go beyond ordinary role-play, to the extent that we can ignore the limitations of who and what we are. Chat rooms are a testing ground for the lives you’ve never led. Men can go online as women and discover what it’s like to be (virtually) drooled on by every slob with whom they come in contact. Women can go online as men and find out how clever they have to be—as in trained-dog-through-hoops clever—in order to attract attention.

Most chat programs have picture access, but the user decides what snapshot to scan.

Heavy people can be thin, angry people can put on a smile, and old people can be young again. Nor is the potential for identity-liberation limited to chat-room conversation.

Time magazine estimates that within the decade, over half of the jobs in the United States will be done at home. With so many people doing their primary commercial work over a keyboard and monitor, we have a chance to do something no other culture has done.

Simply put, we can go colorblind.

5

In his landmark “I Have a Dream” speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wished for a day when children will “live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

Thanks to technology and a changing workplace, that day no longer seems impossible.

Without a visual label, how can we continue to discriminate on a consistent basis? If we don’t know what the people at the other end of the terminal look like, how can we judge them on the basis of their appearance?

Yet at the moment when technology offers a chance at an old dream, we seem to wish to separate and alienate. Most people (you know, Toyota’s “everyday people”) don’t believe in what used to be called “melting pot” equality. In the 90s, personal identities are based on differences, and similarities are viewed with suspicion, as if every shared moment is a potential shackle.

Even the form our language takes becomes a separatist’s battleground. For example, one side of the ebonics controversy¹

is the contention that ebonics is a legitimate, rule-driven language in its own right and, as such, is a legitimate primary language and genuine voice for black America. (This line of reasoning is discrete from a second argument that educational approaches that attend properly to vernacular dialects, comparing and contrasting rather than ignoring the vernacular, are more successful in teaching commercial English.)

I respect these arguments, but in the context of our new technology, I can’t help wondering if ebonics amounts to a lingual uniform. Does our sense of self depend on providing language clues to our genetic heritage through the one medium that shields visual clues? We have a common language of commerce and a technology with the

potential for a certain kind of equality. Must we sacrifice this opportunity in the name of personal identity through collective identifications?

10

I am not arguing that ebonics is the sole impediment to freedom on the information highway. I am arguing that it is a symptom of an America that has splintered, perhaps irreparably.

It may be that we no longer share King's dream of transforming "the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood." Perhaps I am being nostalgic for a romantic vision with no relevance to today's world. King's importance may lie in the symbol, not the substance, of his discourse.

Or maybe the change is already under way, like it or not. Watch any politician speak on television. His or her cadence is cued by a TelePrompTer. The width of the screen dictates sentence breaks.

The fact is that technology alters communication. Perhaps the computer and its blind-eye monitor have already become too large a part of our lives to avoid the influence. In the near future, the way we do business may drag us, kicking and screaming, into King's dream.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

What is the overall point of this piece? What is your reaction to this message?

2.

React to the author's reference to Martin Luther King, Jr., in this piece. What effect might it have on the audience? What does it imply?

3.

What is the author's point about language and identity? How valid do you think this point is? Is it well supported?

4.

What proof does the author offer for his contention that as far as race relations go America has "splintered"?

5.

Ultimately, what influence does the computer have over us, according to the author?

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.

If you are a chat room advocate, write a piece in which you explain the reasons why you engage in this form of communication.

2.

Write an extended metaphor for America besides "a melting pot."

3.

Research the conversations in a chat room by entering into one and noting the interactions that take place there. Write an essay in which you report your findings, along with your own analysis. According to this observation, what conclusions do you draw about people and chat rooms?

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Of Headless Mice . . . and Men

Charles Krauthammer studied political science and economics at McGill University and Oxford University and then went on to Harvard Medical School for an M.D. He practiced psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital until 1978, when he went to Washington to serve as a science advisor to President Jimmy Carter. In 1980 he became a writer and editor for the New Republic and in 1985 began a weekly column for the Washington Post and a monthly column for Time magazine. He has won the National Magazine Award for essays (1984) and the Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary (1987). In 1998, the Washingtonian magazine named him as one of the fifty most influential journalists in the national press corps. This selection was first published in Time on January 19, 1998.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

If you could clone yourself, would you? Why or why not?

2.

What about technology or science concerns you the most?

Last year Dolly the cloned sheep was received with wonder, titters and some vague apprehension. Last week the announcement by a Chicago physicist that he is assembling a team to produce the first human clone occasioned yet another wave of Brave New World anxiety. But the scariest news of all—and largely overlooked—comes from two obscure labs, at the University of Texas and at the University of Bath. During the past four years, one group created headless mice; the other, headless tadpoles.

For sheer Frankenstein wattage, the purposeful creation of these animal monsters has no equal. Take the mice. Researchers found the gene that tells the embryo to produce the head. They deleted it. They did this in a thousand mice embryos, four of which were born. I use the term loosely. Having no way to breathe, the mice died instantly.

Why then create them? The Texas researchers want to learn how genes determine embryo development. But you don't have to be a genius to see the true utility of manufacturing headless creatures: for their organs—fully formed, perfectly useful, ripe for plundering. Why should you be panicked? Because humans are next. "It would almost certainly be possible to produce human bodies without a forebrain," Princeton biologist Lee Silver told the London *Sunday Times*. "These human bodies without any semblance of consciousness would not be considered persons, and thus it would be perfectly legal to keep them 'alive' as a future source of organs."

5

"Alive." Never have a pair of quotation marks loomed so ominously. Take the mouse-frog technology, apply it to humans, combine it with cloning, and you become a god: with a single cell taken from, say, your finger, you produce a headless replica of yourself, a mutant twin, arguably lifeless, that becomes your own personal, precisely tissue-matched organ farm.

There are, of course, technical hurdles along the way. Suppressing the equivalent "head" gene in man. Incubating tiny infant organs to grow into larger ones that adults could use. And creating artificial wombs (as per Aldous Huxley),¹

given that it might be difficult to recruit sane women to carry headless fetuses to their birth/death.

It won't be long, however, before these technical barriers are breached. The ethical barriers are already cracking. Lewis Wolpert, professor of biology at University College, London, finds producing headless humans "personally distasteful" but, given the shortage of organs, does not think distaste is sufficient reason not to go ahead with something that would save lives. And Professor Silver not only sees "nothing wrong, philosophically or rationally," with producing headless humans for organ harvesting, he wants to convince a skeptical public that it is perfectly O.K.

When prominent scientists are prepared to acquiesce in—or indeed encourage—the deliberate creation of deformed and dying quasi-human life, you know we are facing a bioethical abyss. Human beings are ends, not means. There is no grosser corruption of biotechnology than creating a human mutant and disemboweling it at our pleasure for spare parts.

The prospect of headless human clones should put the whole debate about "normal" cloning in a new light. Normal cloning is less a treatment for infertility than a treatment for vanity. It is a way to produce an exact genetic replica of yourself that will walk the earth years after you're gone.

10

But there is a problem with a clone. It is not really you. It is but a twin, a perfect John Doe Jr., but still a junior. With its own independent consciousness, it is, alas, just a facsimile of you.

The headless clone solves the facsimile problem. It is a gateway to the ultimate vanity: immortality. If you create a real clone, you cannot transfer your consciousness into it to truly live on. But if you create a headless clone of just your body, you have created a ready source of replacement parts to keep you—your consciousness—going indefinitely. Which is why one form of cloning will inevitably lead to the other. Cloning is the technology of narcissism, and nothing satisfies narcissism like immortality. Headlessness will be cloning's crowning achievement.

The time to put a stop to this is now. Dolly moved President Clinton to create a commission that recommended a temporary ban on human cloning. But with physicist Richard Seed threatening to clone humans, and with headless animals already here, we are past the time for toothless commissions and meaningless bans.

Clinton banned federal funding of human-cloning research, of which there is none anyway. He then proposed a five-year ban on cloning. This is not enough. Congress should ban human cloning now. Totally. And regarding one particular form, it should be draconian: the deliberate creation of headless humans must be made a crime, indeed a capital crime. If we flinch in the face of this high-tech barbarity, we'll deserve to live in the hell it heralds.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Carefully go back through the first three paragraphs. Which words are "loaded," that is, carry with them heavy implications?

2.

Most writers are cautioned against using the same word twice in a given piece of writing. Why then, does Krauthammer use the word “headless” repeatedly? What effect is gained by his doing this?

3.

What is Krauthammer’s main objection as far as cloning is concerned? Do you share this concern with him? Why or why not?

4.

What exactly is “narcissism” and how does this term relate to “immortality”? What is Krauthammer’s point here about today’s scientists as well as humans?

5.

Krauthammer would like to go so far as to prosecute anyone who works in the field of cloning. What do you think of his proposal?

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.

Research the historical scientific proceedings that led up to the actual cloning of Dolly, the sheep. From your research, what problems were scientists attempting to solve? What discoveries were they trying to make?

2.

Write an essay in which you argue for the benefits of cloning. However, don’t rely only on your own opinion here. Research what other experts have to say before you write this piece.

3.

Write an essay about another scientific discovery that has alarmed people. What are the main concerns within this topic, and how is science proceeding?

RAY BRADBURY

There Will Come Soft Rains

Novelist, short-story writer, essayist, playwright, screenwriter, and poet Ray Bradbury (born in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois) published his first story when he was eighteen. After graduating from high school, he sold newspapers on Los Angeles street corners for four years and wrote in his spare time. In 1943, he began writing full time, and two years later one of his stories was selected for 1945’s Best American Short Stories. In 1950, the year this selection was first published (in Collier’s magazine), he published The Martian Chronicles and established his reputation as a science fiction writer. Among his best-known books are Fahrenheit 451 (1953), Dandelion Wine (1957), The Illustrated Man (1951), and Something Wicked This Way Comes (1962)—all of which have been made into movies.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Imagine what a typical day will be like in a typical home fifty years from now. Give as many details as you can about this day.

2.

If you could design a robot to do any one thing for you so you would no longer have to attend to it, what would you have your robot do? Explain why.

In the living room the voice-clock sang, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!* as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. *Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!*

In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunny-side up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

“Today is August 4, 2026,” said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, “in the city of Allendale, California.” It repeated the date three times for memory’s sake. “Today is Mr. Featherstone’s birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita’s marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills.”

Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.

5

Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: “Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today . . .” And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.

Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.

At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled and the toast was like stone. An aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea. The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.

Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, *time to clean.*

Out of warrens in the wall, tiny robot mice darted. The rooms were acrawl with the small cleaning animals, all rubber and metal. They thudded against chairs, whirling their mustached runners, kneading the rug nap, sucking gently at hidden dust. Then, like mysterious invaders, they popped into their burrows. Their pink electric eyes faded. The house was clean.

10

Ten o'clock. The sun came out from behind the rain. The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles.

Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted windowpanes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer.

The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden with falling light. Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, “Who goes there? What’s the password?” and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia.

15

It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird, startled, flew off! No, not even a bird must touch the house! The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs. But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly.

Twelve noon.

A dog whined, shivering, on the front porch.

The front door recognized the dog voice and opened. The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house, tracking mud. Behind it whirred angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.

20

For not a leaf fragment blew under the door but what the wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out. The offending dust, hair, or paper, seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows. There, down tubes which fed into the cellar, it was dropped into the sighing vent of an incinerator which sat like evil Baal in a dark corner. The dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.

It sniffed the air and scratched the kitchen door. Behind the door, the stove was making pancakes which filled the house with a rich baked odor and the scent of maple syrup. The dog frothed at the mouth, lying at the door, sniffing, its eyes turned to fire. It ran wildly in circles, biting at its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died. It lay in the parlor for an hour.

Two o'clock, sang a voice.

25

Delicately sensing decay at last, the regiments of mice hummed out as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.

Two-fifteen.

The dog was gone.

In the cellar, the incinerator glowed suddenly and a whirl of sparks leaped up the chimney.

Two thirty-five.

30

Bridge tables sprouted from patio walls. Playing cards fluttered onto pads in a shower of pips. Martinis manifested on an oaken bench with egg-salad sandwiches. Music played. But the tables were silent and the cards untouched.

At four o'clock the tables folded like great butterflies back through the paneled walls.

Four-thirty.

The nursery walls glowed.

35

Animals took shape: yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers cavorting in crystal substance. The walls were glass. They looked out upon color and fantasy. Hidden films clocked through well-oiled sprockets, and the walls lived. The nursery floor was woven to resemble a crisp, cereal meadow. Over this ran aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue wavered among the sharp aromas of animal spoor! There was the sound like a great matted yellow hive of bees within a dark bellows, the lazy bumble of a purring lion. And there was the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain, like other hoofs, falling upon the summer-starched grass. Now the walls dissolved into distances of parched weed, mile on mile, and warm endless sky. The animals drew away into thorn brakes and water holes. It was the children's hour.

Five o'clock. The bath filled with clear hot water.

Six, seven, eight o'clock. The dinner dishes manipulated like magic tricks, and in the study a *click*. In the metal stand opposite the hearth where a fire now blazed up warmly, a cigar popped out, half an inch of soft gray ash on it, smoking, waiting.

Nine o'clock. The beds warmed their hidden circuits, for nights were cool here.

40

Nine-five. A voice spoke from the study ceiling:

"Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?"

The house was silent.

The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random."

Quiet music rose to back the voice. "Sara Teasdale. As I recall, your favorite. . . .

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,

And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,

And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire,

Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one

Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,

If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn

Would scarcely know that we were gone.

The fire burned on the stone hearth and the cigar fell away into a mound of quiet ash on its tray. The empty chairs faced each other between the silent walls, and the music played.

45

At ten o'clock the house began to die.

The wind blew. A falling tree bough crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!

"Fire!" screamed a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot water from the ceilings. But the solvent spread on the linoleum, licking, eating, under the kitchen door, while the voices took it up in chorus: "Fire, fire, fire!"

The house tried to save itself. Doors sprang tightly shut, but the windows were broken by the heat and the wind blew and sucked upon the fire.

The house gave ground as the fire in ten billion angry sparks moved with flaming ease from room to room and then up the stairs. While scurrying water rats squeaked from the walls, pistoled their water, and ran for more. And the wall sprays let down showers of mechanical rain.

50

But too late. Somewhere, sighing, a pump shrugged to a stop. The quenching rain ceased. The reserve water supply which had filled baths and washed dishes for many quiet days was gone.

The fire crackled up the stairs. It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings. Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, changed the colors of drapes!

And then, reinforcements.

From attic trapdoors, blind robot faces peered down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical.

55

The fire backed off, as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake. Now there were twenty snakes whipping over the floor, killing the fire with a clear cold venom of green froth.

But the fire was clever. It had sent flame outside the house, up through the attic to the pumps there. An explosion! The attic brain which directed the pumps was shattered into bronze shrapnel on the beams.

The fire rushed back into every closet and felt of the clothes hung there.

The house shuddered, oak bone on bone, its bared skeleton cringing from the heat, its wire, its nerves revealed as if a surgeon had torn the skin off to let the red veins and capillaries quiver in the scalded air. Help, help! Fire! Run, run! Heat snapped mirrors like the first brittle winter ice. And the voices wailed, Fire, fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme, a dozen voices, high, low, like children dying in a forest, alone, alone. And the voices fading as the wires popped their sheathings like hot chestnuts. One, two, three, four, five voices died.

In the nursery the jungle burned. Blue lions roared, purple giraffes bounded off. The panthers ran in circles, changing color, and ten million animals, running before the fire, vanished off toward a distant steaming river. . . .

60

Ten more voices died. In the last instant under the fire avalanche, other choruses, oblivious, could be heard announcing the time, playing music, cutting the lawn by remote-control mower, or setting an umbrella frantically out and in, the slamming and opening front door, a thousand things happening, like a clock shop when each clock strikes the hour insanely before or after the other, a scene of maniac confusion, yet unity; singing, screaming, a few last cleaning mice darting bravely out to carry the horrid ashes away! And one voice, with sublime disregard for the situation, read poetry aloud in the fiery study, until all the film spools burned, until all the wires withered and the circuits cracked.

The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke.

In the kitchen, an instant before the rain of fire and timber, the stove could be seen making breakfasts at a psychopathic rate, ten dozen eggs, six loaves of toast, twenty dozen bacon strips, which, eaten by fire, started the stove working again, hysterically hissing!

The crash. The attic smashing into kitchen and parlor. The parlor into cellar, cellar into sub-cellar. Deep freeze, armchair, film tapes, circuits, beds, and all like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.

Smoke and silence. A great quantity of smoke.

65

Dawn showed faintly in the east. Among the ruins, one wall stood alone. Within the wall, a last voice said, over and over again and again, even as the sun rose to shine upon the heaped rubble and steam:

“Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is . . .”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

What is your reaction to this piece? Is it pure fiction, too far-fetched, or absolutely possible and frightening if you think about it?

2.

What question remains unanswered in this piece. What is your answer?

3.

What purpose do the paintings and the art serve in this piece? What might be the author's point in including them?

4.

How does Bradbury achieve great life and passion within this piece? Jot down a list of your favorite words and phrases from two or three paragraphs.

5.

Why did Bradbury write this piece? What does he want to happen to his audience, do you think?

6.

How does the poem within the story tell the story within this story?

7.

Fill in the last word in the ellipsis at the end of this piece.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

Research the life and writings of Ray Bradbury. Aim to discover his philosophies on writing as well as his philosophies on life.

2.

Write your own fictional piece describing the aftereffects of any natural or human tragedy. Like Bradbury, aim to engage your readers with clear details and dynamic writing through carefully chosen verbs and images.

3.

Write an essay in which you issue a warning to this generation about what you consider to be an inherent danger in society. Instead of writing a soft and kind piece, though, model Bradbury's passion by writing explicitly and with great clarity.

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

maybe we'll see . . .

*After years of hard living and working at a variety of jobs, from dishwasher to postal worker, Charles Bukowski (1920–1994) became a professional writer at the age of thirty-five. He began writing for underground newspapers in Los Angeles and gradually became known for his tough, direct masculine poems and short stories. After his first book of poetry, *Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail*, was published in 1959, he wrote over forty others. Like his poetry, most of his short stories and his novels were also somewhat autobiographical and dealt with sex, violence, and the absurdities of life. In 1987, he wrote the screenplay for the movie *Barfly*, starring Mickey Rourke and Faye Dunaway; in 1989, he wrote a novel, *Hollywood*, based on his experiences with the making of that film. His last novel, *Pulp*, a parody of the hard-boiled detective novel, was published after he died of leukemia in 1994.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Freewrite about one question you wish you knew the answer to.

2.

Imagine you have the power to see something, either in past, present, or future, that people today cannot see. What is it you choose to see, and what do you discover?

sometime soon

they are going to shoot a telescope
from the shuttle platform out there
and the boys and girls are going to see
ten percent more outer space,

things

they have never seen before.

I am for this.

our inventiveness

our poking around

is pleasurable.

it makes a peanut butter and

jelly sandwich taste

better.

it is having such things to do

which keeps us

from doing things

to ourselves.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What is your reaction to this supposedly simple poem? What is it about, from what you gather?
 2.
To whom does “they” refer in the second line of the poem? To whom does it refer in line 7?
 3.
Write down all the words in this poem that are vague. Why would the poet chose to include such vague words?
 4.
What is the only sensory image within this poem? In what ways does this image contrast to the other images in the poem?
 5.
Why does the poem use the word “things” three times? In what way does “things” relate to what might be the poet’s main message?
 6.
Why does the poet choose to use such simple, ordinary language in this piece?
- Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking*

1.
Write your own poem about an ethical dilemma that technology has placed upon us.
 2.
Write an essay directed to future teachers in which you explain, as a future parent, what it is that you would like your children to see—about themselves, their families, and their world.
 3.
Read several other poems by Charles Bukowski and analyze the effect these poems have on you in comparison to this poem.
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TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS: TECHNOLOGY AND ETHICS

1. Read either George Orwell’s *1984* or Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, and thread one major theme you find in this book with several other sources from this chapter.
2. What will America be like 100 years from now? By using three sources from this chapter, write an essay that is quite serious and formal about what predictions you make for the future.
3. Write an essay in which you argue either for or against this statement: “Fifty years from now, life in America will be better than it is today.” Rely on several sources in this chapter for your support.
4. Conduct a panel discussion with three people in this chapter in which you discuss the extent to which the average American has power over his or her own life. As moderator of this discussion, you must end by drawing conclusions about how free Americans today really are.
5. By examining the theories and philosophies contained in any three sources in this chapter, how would you fill in the following blank: “Happiness is. . . .” Write an essay in which you explain how you arrived at your answer.

6. Imagine you are running for an important public office in this country, and the majority of your voters have expressed their fears of technology and the way their lives have been changed. Write a speech in which you manage to assuage their fears and get their votes.

¹*Simon Wiesenthal Center*: This organization, founded in 1978, promotes education for social justice issues related to the World War II Holocaust and persecution of Jews.

²*Proposition 187*: This California referendum issue proposed denying services such as medical care and schooling to illegal immigrants.

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¹*Ebonics*: A term used to describe African American dialect. This term gained national attention and raised controversy in 1996 when the school board in Oakland, California, voted to permit the use of Ebonics as a “bridge language” to help those who spoke this dialect to more readily understand classes that were currently taught in standard English.

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¹*Aldous Huxley*: British author (1894–1963). One of Huxley’s best-known works, the novel *Brave New World* (1932), describes a dystopian society in which human embryos are conceived and nurtured in test tubes until their birth. Their genetic makeup is entirely controlled by the scientists who oversee the process.

Briefly describe several ethical dilemmas related to new technologies that are suggested by either or both of these photographs.