Acknowledgements

We are pleased to present the Best Essays Anthology 2020-2021. It is through such an anthology that we are able to honor our finest writers. These pages are the work of students enrolled in the West Valley College’s English department’s English, Literature, and Composition courses. The focus of these courses is mastering several varieties of essays. The WVC privileges and supports good writing; that is why this collection of student essays is so vital. Taken together, they illustrate that students work diligently to understand, master, and hone the skills that enable them to write perceptively and creatively. The panel of judges comprised three English faculty who read and rated the works anonymously.

On the Cover: *Self-Portrait* by Samuel Joseph Brown
best essays

2020 / 2021
Table of Contents

Personal Narrative

Sienna Hopper, “The Men on the Radio”

Textual Analysis

Ariadna Santiago Almanza, “Community and Perseverance Can Move Mountains”
Jessica Hare-Simmons, “Ronald Reagan’s Reflection in Odessa, Texas”

Researched Argument

Arturo Collaso, “A Broken Promise”
Nicholas Lightner, “Across the Mountain”
Tara Venkatesh, “Cool Motive, Still Propaganda”

Literary Analysis

Ciarán Doyle, “What Ways the Heart of a Poet?”
Emily Orendain, “Real Classy”
personal narrative
The theme for this essay was 'the role of language in defining identity.' We had read the struggles of people of color, immigrants, and others whose first language was not English. As someone who had never experienced racial discrimination first-hand, there was no way I could fully capture what it meant to struggle with these identities. I could, however, understand the significance of language and how it held so many ever-changing cultural values.

I wonder how many people will grow up in the 2020s and not know of a time where teens would call each other 'gay' as an insult. We are not entirely out of that phase of society, but we are making significant progress. As I was writing this narrative, I remembered how ignorant I was to the LGBT world when I was younger; I was confused yet fascinated by the culture, and I wanted to know why it was commonplace to talk about the community as if they were cryptids. Just saying the word 'gay' caused people to look at you as if they'd seen a ghost. It's a silly concept in retrospect, but we didn't know any better back then. Today, at least in the U.S., we are able to put pride flags in the windows of stores, paint streets rainbow, and openly fight for equal rights without having to skirt around saying 'gay.'

Though not as prevalent and innovative as the shift in language present among people of color and immigrants, I felt it was important to acknowledge just how much society has changed the connotation of words surrounding the LGBT community. My own connection to this change would not exist if I hadn't been surrounded by members of the community for most of my adolescence. Without it, I don't think I would have been able to come to terms with my own identity.

The Men on the Radio
-Sienna Hopper-

It was but another school morning following the usual routine: a begrudging crawl out of bed; an attempt to eat breakfast without feeling sick; a meticulously planned out, yet lazily-performed get-ready scene in which I tried desperately to retain body heat in the cruel, 7am, February chill; and finally, a rather hurried slide into my mother’s 2001 Toyota Camry—the same one her mother gifted her when I was born. My hands, frigid and numb, hurried to turn on the heat. Mom had to compensate by defogging the windows. Heat caused the fabric adorning the ceiling to release the scents it had captured, filling the car with the aroma of cigarette smoke—a habit my mom had yet to beat. In an attempt to stay awake for the 15-minute ride to school, I turned on the
radio. The first station to play was the usual: 99.7, the KMVQ-FM. It was the go-to station for pop-hits, and it never failed to give me a boost for the day.

Surrounding the school were residential neighborhoods that covered a good portion of the area. As we drove down the main road, having not yet turned off into the smaller streets that appeared to be crammed between homes, the hosts of the radio station started discussing various topics. This was a regular occurrence around the same time each morning, and I had grown used to it. While I would normally rather listen to music for the rest of the trip, I often found myself entertained by the two men on the other side of the radio, and that day was no exception. Mom turned the volume up and laughed at something the men said. “Did you know that they’re gay?” She asked me. I heard that word before, but I was not sure what it meant. There was uncertainty in my chest as I mulled it over in my head. Wasn’t that a bad word? An offensive word? People on TV used that word as a joke. My peers in school used it as an insult. I was broken out of my thoughts by my mom, who easily explained what it means to be ‘gay.’ Was it a bizarre concept? I had never seen two men in love before. How common was it to be gay? Were those radio hosts always gay? Were they married? Questions piled up in my skull until I got to school—which upon arrival and meeting up with my friends, I asked, “Do you guys know about gay people?”

In the years following this car ride, I grew to be more acquainted with the internet. I scoured YouTube and Facebook, took part in the early days of Twitter, was terrified of sites like Reddit and 4Chan—it was an experience that many of my peers shared. As such, we got well-acquainted with internet culture. By the time sixth grade had come around, offensive humor was cool, and ‘gay’ was the new buzzword. I never used it as an insult, nor did I see it as an offensive concept, but I was uncomfortable with the term itself. It was mysterious; you only ever saw celebrities coming out as gay or, on occasion, ‘bi’—which was more socially acceptable. How
do you know if you’re gay? Why do only adults come out as such? My curiosities were shut
down, however, when one of my closest friends messaged me on Skype to confess that he was
bisexual. I didn’t know how to react. Of course, I was okay with it, and I thanked him for
trusting me with this information, but what was I supposed to do with it? Was I supposed to
think differently about him now? Was he attracted to our mutual guy-friends? Was he actually
gay, but found it easier to label himself as bi? However, the next time I saw him at school,
nothing was different. We didn’t talk about his confession much, but we found ourselves
speaking amongst our group of friends about sexuality more often—perhaps going too far with
our suspicions with regards to peers’ sexualities.

It seemed a new era had begun when I hit middle school: Obama was elected for another
term, several more U.S. states legalized same-sex marriage, our friend group disbanded until
there was just three of us left, and the teen-angst kicked into high-gear. The three of us that
remained—including the friend who came out as bisexual—explored a lot of unanswered
questions and new horizons throughout 7th and 8th grade.

Just months after starting 7th grade, the third in our friend trio revealed to the two of us
that he was gay. After an uptake in exposure and many conversations regarding the LGBT, I
wasn’t put off by the confession like I had been in the past. In fact, I was glad to hear it. Neither
of them told their parents as they both had religious and conservative relatives. With their
permission I told my mom, knowing how open she was towards these topics. It was refreshing to
talk to her about it, but I noticed myself having to clear up my own sexuality several times
during these discussions. I wasn’t clearing it up for her—I was clearing it up for myself. I was
straight, after all. I was the supportive heterosexual friend that others looked to for answers,
perspective, and to share their worries with. I took pride in that role—pride that turned into an adoption of a label; I was an ally.

High school was an indescribable experience. I went through it with one friend—the other having left us rather abruptly. In the end, the group consisted of the ally and her gay friend. Suddenly, same-sex marriage was legalized across America; it was ‘cool’ to be gay, lesbian, bisexual—the like. The LGBT community had won despite decades—if not centuries—of discrimination. On the internet, people who used sexuality as an insult were shut down by a horde of supporters. Those who said that homosexuality was unnatural were considered crazy and went against the very words of the man they claim to worship. Society still had a long way to go, but this was a huge jump in progress for equality. The LGBT community had more support and awareness than ever, so why was it that people within that community were shutting each other down?

Trends are stigmatized. If you hop on a trend—whether it be the newest diet, newest fashion, or newest music—you are considered ‘basic’ or ‘attention seeking.’ You are defined by the rules of popularity that society has set up. Trends have turned into traps; they are designed to apply traits to a person in attempts to place others above them. You can’t be quirky or passionate, and you can’t have shared interest in any current goings-on, or else you’ll be seen as desperate. Why did so many celebrities come out as LGBT around the same time? Was it because they wanted the attention? Was it because they finally felt free to tell their secrets? Was it a mix of both? The masses don’t understand it, but introspection goes a long way. Included in the masses was me, an ally, the straight friend. For as long as I can remember, I was taught to respect other people. To allow others the lives they live as long as they were not hurting themselves or anyone else. To treat others the way you want to be treated. Those were the
ideologies I kept with me. I applied them to everyone—including people I didn’t necessarily like. It wasn’t my business what their sexuality was, or what gender they identified as; it is an easy ideology to follow, and it should be simple to treat yourself with the same attitude, but I couldn’t manage that part.

For some people, they know that they are different by the time they hit kindergarten. For others, it takes the beginnings of puberty to realize their differences. Some even struggle to find themselves until late adulthood. No matter when they realize their truths, they are normally accepted by others within their community for being honest and true to themselves. After so many years of being kept in the dark, why were some members of the LGBT community frustrated with newcomers? Why did they become so conservative with the labels they allowed? It didn’t make sense, but who was I to say? I was a straight ally, the heterosexual friend. I couldn’t speak for the LGBT community. Perhaps they were insecure or jealous of how ‘easy’ the newcomers had it. They alienated others to raise themselves up—to paint their struggles as the superior ones. Did that not go against what the community had been fighting for? Well, it angered me, but it wasn’t my right to speak up about it. That is, until it was my right.

Most of the time, it is not the struggles that come before the realization that are the hardest to deal with—but the struggles that come after the realization. Two years into high school, as a sophomore in an online course, I learned that I was not the straight friend. I was not just an ally—I was a part of the LGBT community. At first, I didn’t know where to place myself—except that I didn’t care whether a person was a boy, a girl, neither of the two, or something in between. I didn’t know if it was purely romantic, or if it was sexual. I was isolated from peers in my online school, so everything I learned about myself was through internet videos, movies, television shows, and video games. My disconnect from society—real society,
not the artificial structure the internet portrays—set me down a path of confusion, loneliness, and ultimately depression. For the first time in my life, I saw a person within the LGBT community that I did not believe deserved support. My own community told me that I just wanted attention, that my sexuality wasn’t real, or perhaps that I was biphobic for identifying a certain way. I could not come out to my best friend, the gay kid who stuck by me all these years, because I feared that he would think of me the same way as the ‘others.’ I kept my identity to myself under the guise that ‘it was my business, not theirs.’ I feigned this confidence for a while, telling myself that I’d confess my sexual identity if asked, but I had no reason to tell anyone otherwise.

The day of reckoning came: I was asked about my sexuality by my mom—the same person whom for years I told I was straight. She always reassured me that no matter what gender my brother and I were attracted to, she would support us and love us unconditionally. So, then, why was I afraid of the confession? Was I afraid that my mom would react the same way the community reacted to recently-realized individuals? This was the woman who had confessed to me that she wouldn’t mind spending the rest of her life in a romantic relationship with a woman if she wasn’t with my father; it was silly to doubt her, given how much I had spoken to her about LGBT topics over the years, so I gave in.

“Are you bisexual?” She asked, trying to act nonchalant, but I realized that she was just as nervous as me. She stood in the doorway of the room—the only way out aside from the glass back-door. Her intent was not to corner me. Instead, it was to make me believe this was a spur-of-the-moment question—as if she hadn’t been deliberating on it for some time now. “No, I actually identify as pansexual,” I responded, unconsciously mimicking her low-tone anxiety, “it means I am attracted to people regardless of gender.”
That was mostly the truth. There was more to it than that, but I knew I had to explain it in a way that my mom would easily get. I knew that, despite her liberal views of gender and sexuality, she was not as savvy with the terms more recently explored by millennials and gen-z. After that, she smiled, said a few more things, and we went our separate ways—with me now riding an adrenaline high from what my brain considered a life-or-death, fight-or-flight situation. Then, I realized something: this must have been how my friends felt when they came out to me, only they came out during times where sexuality was even harder to talk about. I understood how those in the community felt regarding newcomers, and why they felt that way. In all respects, I got off easy. However, I knew that I was not any less part of the LGBT community, nor was I any more part of it than others. My mother’s acceptance only reminded me of the views she taught me growing up. I looked inside myself and saw that I wasn’t treating myself the way I want to be treated; I was bullying myself with the words I heard from those within my community; I grew up with the morals to accept others’ differences, but I rejected those morals when they were challenged by the people I trusted.

In the end, I realized that I could not blame anyone for acting out. I could not blame those in the community, and I could not blame the uninformed or misguided who do not believe that we should even have the right to marry. The morals I grew up with differ from theirs. Our life stories, our struggles, and our views on the world will always differ. That does not mean that I now accept their disrespect and discrimination—nobody should be forced to tolerate and forgive aggressors—but I know that we were all picked from different vines. I grew up in a liberal family with the occasional exposure to a concept that used to be so foreign to the average American. Not everybody can experience that same situation, but everyone can be taught respect. Everyone can learn about the men on the radio, even if they don’t immediately understand them;
society can learn to be more open with what they teach kids in order to prevent them from struggling with their own identities. No matter what community one belongs to, they need to support one another. Battles are not won through segregation. The worth of an individual is not determined by their struggles, their sexuality, or gender—it is determined by how they treat themselves and others.
textual analysis
To this day, I still don’t know how I managed to write one of my best essays at the very beginning of my college experience. This essay is actually the first essay I wrote as a college student and because of that, I still remember the difficulty I had writing it. After months of not writing really anything due to the pandemic cutting my senior year of high school short, I was not expecting my writing skills to be at their peak. I still did want to do my best. At the same time, this topic of how to maintain hope was not that hard to write about especially when I was trying to keep hope alive myself during a pandemic that made us sacrifice so much. It was hard for me to organize my thoughts when I had so much to say on this topic and I remember going back and forth on so many ideas. Needless to say, my rough draft was a complete chaos to look at but I eventually found the most important things I wanted to leave my reader with. I hope whoever ends up reading this and is maybe lacking faith in a better tomorrow can see that not everything is lost. In fact, these are the times where we should have more hope than ever to fight the darkness with light, even if it’s the smallest glimmer.

Community and Perseverance Can Move Mountains
-Ariadna Santiago Almanza-

If someone were to ask you to describe the state of mind that this year offered, I know well that the last word you would think of would be hope. As if we didn’t have enough problems already, a global pandemic and racial discrimination have made it almost impossible to find peace. However, “Hope only makes sense when it doesn’t make sense to be hopeful” (Hawken 59). This quote alone really puts in perspective how much of a miracle it is to have hope. In the book *The Impossible will Take A Little While* by Paul Rogat Loeb, many stories and examples are shared which recognize that in between so much despair and sadness in today’s world, sometimes it seems impossible to envision a better future. Both Paul Hawken and Jonathon Kozol acknowledge this idea by providing examples of hopelessness in their included articles. Nevertheless, they advise us to fight back by joining a community who can positively impact us as well as reminding us to not lose faith and patience when a goal is being pursued.

People might find themselves losing faith because of factors that are outside of their control such as our environment. In the second chapter, “Ordinary Resurrections” by Jonathan Kozol, we get a glimpse of the daily brutal life of those who live in the neighborhood of the
South Bronx in New York. They are faced with the harsh reality of racism from the police as well as everyday killings and crimes without a break in sight. The children from the same neighborhood go to the same school and are aware of the violence that goes on. At such a young age it is painful to see such cruelty to the point that they call them “the ordinary dyings,” most of which get little notice from outside the area” (Kozol 38). It’s not normal to experience so much violence at such a young age. All the crime and death that is happening around them is totally out of their hands. They are only kids trying to have a happy childhood in a neighborhood that only invites tragedy. When the environment around you doesn’t reflect possibility and opportunity, all the hopes and dreams that one might have can’t reach full bloom with such little sunlight given to them.

Another external factor that facilitates the feeling of helplessness is not being able to control the decisions of others, making it harder to believe that real change can be possible. In chapter four, “You Are Brilliant and the Earth Is Hiring,” Paul Hawken presents us with a list of world problems that seem to be impossible to fix or ever solve. Even though the instructions to have a healthy Earth seem obvious and straightforward to follow, “Important rules like don’t poison the water, soil, or air, don’t let the earth get overcrowded, and don’t touch the thermostat have been broken” (Hawken 54). These “rules” were broken a long time ago unfortunately. Those before us chose “…To destroy earth in real time rather than renew, restore, and sustain it” (Hawken 57). Now we are dealing with the consequences of those careless decisions and having to fix all the damage that the generation before made. This of course is frustrating because most of these problems we didn’t ask for, and yet we are the ones responsible for picking up their mess. Unfortunately, we can’t control the decisions of those who choose to stomp on the last sign
of life in this desert called life. Trying to change that fact will only put another burden on our backs that is unnecessary.

Despite the cruelty that the world can offer, a sense of comfort can be acquired through simply being part of a community that shows better things can happen. As we see in chapter two, the bond between the children and adults such as the teachers and those of the church is strong and healing for both the kids and the adults. Kozol loves to go back to see this community even with the surrounding sad conditions because it makes him “...Feel renewed in spirit by the generosity and understanding of the children and the love and courage of the grown-ups at the church” (41). Seeing the loving and caring nature of the adults towards the children gives him hope. Even when the children are exposed to horrible life circumstances, the adults always try to make them feel loved. In a way, building a community like theirs offers an escape from reality which fights against all the negativity that happens outside of it. This goes to show that even a little light can overcome the darkness. Each one of us can find that community where we feel the most at home and that alone can make all the difference. In general, exposure to the more positive things makes you realize that there are better things to look forward to. Even a little bit of kindness can outweigh the cruelty.

Furthermore, blocking out the negativity and making space for those aspirations beneath us is never easy. However, taking part in organizations makes advancements and makes real change happen. Hawken reminds us of that exactly by emphasizing that for every complex issue this world has, there are hundreds of organizations and movements. Establishments are proof of hope being alive and “place social and environmental justice at the top of their strategic goals” (Hawken 57). This principle applies to efforts to improve the environment by joining “ordinary people willing to confront despair, power and incalculable odds in order to restore some
semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world” (Hawken 55). It is truly beautiful to see strangers coming together to execute a plan for change and that share the same vision. Complex problems require plenty of work and cannot be handled alone. Although it might take awhile to reach the goals at hand, together even baby steps can be big ones. With more minds working to solve the same problem, progress can be made and that alone inspires more positivity.

Despite the difficulties that come with making a difference, there has to be some kind of grit and persistence within the same community of people involved in the process to make things happen. There are a multitude of people out there that care about the same cause and want to find a solution. Hawken states, “It is called the world of non-profits, civil society, schools…” (57). When there is a shared vision with other people, it becomes easier to stay determined. Being able to look around within these organizations allows hope to remain alive because one realizes they are not alone in this fight. Kozol saw this first hand with the children and how the women in charge of them were ready to “...Defend and honor the epiphanies they weave around the unacceptability of grief” (41). The women strongly believe that it is important to preserve that natural innocence the kids have. If they would simply give up on that cause and not try to give the kids a safe space, all hope would be completely lost. Through the kids, we see the simplicity of living with their innocence still intact thanks to being stubborn and finding at least a little bit of happiness as kids. Although they are not completely unaware of the cruelty that happens around them, they refuse to let all the sadness break them at such a young age.

Throughout history we have seen some dark times and needless to say we are currently in one right now. It makes more sense than ever right now to be driven by hope that soon this pain will pass and better things will come. Making change happen in the first place is really hard and scary for everyone. However, if we don’t take the initiative sooner than later, who else will?
Through both Hawken’s and Kozol’s articles we can see that it is easy to lose focus on the positive things when everything out of our control goes against us. In these chaotic times, it is crucial to remember that we are not alone in anything and there are other people with the same problem trying to find a solution. A group of people joined together by courage to fight the odds can go a long way. Forming that sense of community around you is important to remind ourselves that we’re not the only ones who crave something better. Teamwork only inspires more people that change is attainable regardless of the circumstances at hand. Along with that, perseverance is key to keeping hope alive. Giving in and deciding to simply surrender will only create more despair. In times where everything good seems to be lost we have to remind ourselves that light is even more of a miracle when it is shining through the deepest night.

Works Cited


This was probably one of the hardest essays I’ve had to write for college. While reading *Friday Night Lights*, I was continuously struck by what a tough high school experience that must have been, both for the average student and even (or maybe especially) for the highly regarded members of the Permian Panthers Football Team. When the prompts were assigned, this one jumped out as the most complex prompt (that I initially decided against tackling), but also the one that seemed most worth writing about; the further I got into outlining and then writing the essay it became obvious this essay prompt wasn’t just about Ronald Reagan's influence on one town or one football team in the 1980s. It was about how Ronald Reagan, and indeed that football team, still continued to influence America today. *Friday Night Lights* did a wonderful job of humanizing the experiences of the students at Odessa High, and being able to trace those experiences back to the presidential policies and attitudes that had laid the foundation gave me insight into how that foundation is still present in America today. I hope that insight will allow me to be part of changing that foundation for the future. On the surface, it is a book about football; much like Odessa itself, however, football is representative of greater issues that we must tackle in life.

**Ronald Reagan’s Reflection in Odessa, Texas**  
-Jessica Hare-Simmons-

Ronald Reagan’s presidential term simultaneously managed to embody both the best and worst qualities of the 1980s. Depending on the viewpoint, Reagan is seen as either traditional or outdated, fiercely independent or politically uncaring; policies that worked well for a certain demographic were just as likely to harm those that were not in the favored group. H.G. Bissinger writes in *Friday Night Lights*, the town of “Odessa […] evoked the kind of America that Ronald Reagan always seemed to have in mind during his presidency” (33). By this, Bissinger means that the small-town values and independence that were such a point of pride for Odessans were reflective of the goals of many of Reagan’s presidential policies. This assertion is persuasive because many of the local practices of Odessa’s football team and town structure as a whole both mirrored core tenants of Reagan’s beliefs and had similar outcomes of Reagan’s decisions for the country; lines were often drawn between the different race, class and gender groups, and both Reagan and the town of Odessa struggled to achieve policies that equally enfranchised everyone.
Reagan’s allure to small towns like Odessa began before he was even elected. While campaigning, Reagan “used a friendly, honest, upbeat speaking style to convince voters that he could turn America toward a more promising, more confident direction [and tapped into] frustration with what people saw as decades of decline” (1980s Yearbook 16). Regardless of what Reagan was saying, Odessan’s liked it because he sounded honest, not because he was. Bissinger writes,

[The people in Odessa] absolutely worshipped Ronald Reagan, not because of the type of America that Reagan actually created for them but because of the type of America that he so vividly imagined. [...] He created an image of a country that was still as good [...] as it had been in the fifties. (202-203)

In other words, Odessans were largely swayed by Reagan’s goals and conservative principles instead of any positive, impactful action he may have had on their lives. Bissinger’s assertion is strongly supported by the fact that in reality, “the economy of Midland-Odessa had fallen apart during the Reagan-Bush administration” (203) as evidenced by the 20 percent unemployment rate, and the housing and financial crash that struck the area in the mid-80s (204). This was an excellent example of how, despite Reagan’s promises to enrich the lives of small towns, his policies actually had the opposite effect, and that went largely unnoticed by his supporters. This would be a recurring theme for the town of Odessa and its citizens.

Odessa’s mirroring of Reagan’s principles was evident in the town structure itself. When Reagan took office, “the White House began a vigorous program of government spending cuts. [...] Hit hard were such programs as aid to cities, food stamps, welfare and school lunches. [...] Ronald Reagan’s election to the U.S. presidency led to an all-out assault on affirmative action policies” (Gines 370). This meant that while there had been centuries of government interference
in disallowing non-white citizens to live freely and thrive, there would be no federally regulated intervention to try to remedy that, or to assist any at-risk citizens in succeeding. Reagan’s presidency and policies harkened back to what he viewed as a better time, a time when (mostly white) Americans worked hard without handouts and were, in their own opinion at least, justly rewarded for that work. Reagan did not believe that the federal government should intervene, and this attitude was locally reflected in the way that Odessa’s various neighborhoods had continued to exist. The fifties heyday that Reagan and Odessans yearned to go back to had still had legal ordinances on the books that barred interracial sexual relations and “warned that the city’s ‘Negro’ population should never be given any opportunity to ‘invade the white residential areas’” (Bissinger 99). This meant that African Americans were routinely blocked from obtaining mortgages, purchasing houses in historically white neighborhoods and were still forced to use segregated libraries and football stadiums. While subsequent federal rulings had made that illegal, in practice not much had actually changed in Odessa (Bissinger 99). The black and Hispanic residents of Odessa were still much more likely to live in neighborhoods that were unofficially still segregated, and even those who managed to move out of the traditionally minority neighborhoods couldn’t escape the color of their skin. Brian Chavez, the Permian Panthers’ tight end, and his dad Tony were a prime example of that; “[Tony Chavez] and his family had assimilated as well as any Hispanic family in town had, but there were still signs of subtle racism and not so subtle racism. […] The love for Reagan, the rise of the religious right with what [Tony] felt to be its thinly disguised hatred for blacks and Hispanics” (Bissinger 193). This meant Tony could become an educated, high-paid lawyer and move his family into a large house on the other side of the tracks, and his son could become not only a key player on the Permian Panthers but the top student at Permian, but nothing could make them white.
Another main racial policy the Reagan administration targeted was extremely close to Odessa’s heart. Reagan was against “busing minority students into previously all or predominately white schools” (Gines 371). Odessans, particularly the white ones that made up Permian High School students, alumni and their families, were well aware that any change to the current layout affected not only their student demographic and real estate prices, but the potential pool of student athletes that would make up their beloved football team. Years after desegregation had been court mandated at a federal level, the makeup of Permian High School was still largely white, with the handful of minority students and their families largely accepted only due to their contribution to the football team, like Brian Chavez. Odessa High, one of the original high schools, had once had a good reputation as a dominant football school until an influx of Hispanic families moved to Odessa for work and the school found itself at 47% Hispanic enrollment (Bissinger 175). By that time Permian High School had been built on the east side of town and there was a mass exodus of white families for the other side of the tracks (Bissinger 173). While whites at Odessa High found themselves in the minority, Permian High School had maintained 69% white enrollment because of the way the district lines were drawn. Many of the black students who went to Permian were only “there because of the odd way the boundary lines between the two schools had been drawn” (Bissinger 175). That boundary, according to school board member Vicki Gomez, had been “intentionally gerrymandered for the football team” (Bissinger 170); in true Reagan fashion, the residents of Odessa had found a way to work the system to their advantage. There would be no one stepping in to enforce true desegregation, and if the odd way the boundary lines were drawn happened to give Permian an advantage in the potential pool of student athletes then those that benefited from it didn’t
understand why everyone was crying like it was their fault (Bissinger 178). It was just one more example of what a lot of Odessans saw as the true American way, as long as it benefitted them.

While Permian High may have gerrymandered district lines to make sure they had their choice of black student athletes, those same non-white students were still subject to the racism that had pervaded every facet of the ever-sought-after glory days of the past. Once again there would be no administration oversight to make sure that the disenfranchised were viewed or treated fairly. After spending some time in Odessa, Bissinger noted “It wasn’t necessary to live in Odessa for long to realize that the Permian football team wasn’t just a high school team but a sacrosanct white institution” (112). The Mojo Myth, Bissinger writes, “was the virtually exclusive preserve of white fans and white kids” (110). Bissinger’s observation demonstrated that the racism that Brian Chavez’s dad Tony viewed as traditionally conservative was alive and well, even in the late 80s. Racial slurs were still thrown around unapologetically, with white residents making no secret of the fact that they viewed blacks and other racial groups in a ranked system of inferiority well below themselves. The beloved boys on the Permian football team were theirs, yes, but they were always one injury or mistake away from being relegated back to that lowly status (Bissinger 97-99). Again, this was indicative of the no handouts mentality that Reagan and his supporters held so dear.

No one was a better example of the ingrained racism of the past than Boobie Miles. In the beginning of his time as a Panther, Boobie was known as the next Great Black Hope of the Permian football team, and even that compliment was qualified because of his race. When Boobie was healthy and winning games for Permian High School, players and residents grumbled about the preferential treatment they thought he received. Once he was injured during a game, some white residents delighted in suggesting that “Boobie Miles, without the ability to
carry a football in his hand, might as well get a broom and start […] learning how to sweep the corners of storerooms (Bissinger 73). Bissinger noted that while blacks in town worried about what would happen to Boobie without football, whites compared Boobie to an animal, then took the comparison one step further and suggested shooting him if he no longer held value to them as a football player (73). Reagan’s old school attitude of no preferential treatment was alive and well, even though Boobie was not a professional player but a teenage high school student who had been injured in the line of duty as a Permian Panther. Even one of Boobie’s coaches, when asked “what would Boobie be without football,” reduced him to “A big ol’ dumb n[*****]” (Bissinger 73). The language repeatedly used showed that it didn’t just point at his inability to play football but relegated him to an entirely different social position based wholly on his skin color.

The town’s treatment of Boobie went deeper than Boobie as a person or even as a player, encompassing long held racial stereotypes that had been engrained in American views for decades. Dave Zirin writes in “Rumble Young Man, Rumble”, in early American sports, “blacks were cast as too lazy and too undisciplined to ever be taken seriously as athletes” (55), and this perception was repeated frequently by white Permian fans. They talked of Boobie as “selfish and undisciplined and utterly undedicated to the great cause of Mojo” even as Boobie was pushing himself to play with a still damaged knee (Bissinger 216). This sentiment, repeated even as Boobie was putting his injured knee at risk of being permanently damaged, was indicative of the traditionally conservative racism that Tony Chavez had previously pointed out, and was a sentiment that was as American as apple pie even into the late 1980s. It had been an integral, accepted part of the traditional time period that Reagan and Odessan’s longed to go back to.
While Reagan dismantled social welfare policies and affirmative action policies like busing, he took a similar hands-off approach to other social groups issues. In “Reagan’s ‘Gender Gap’ Strategy and the Limitations of Free-Market Feminism”, Marisa Chappell writes

The Reagan administration’s free-market feminism adopted the feminist movement’s rhetoric of equal opportunity and choice while denying the need for federal intervention to promote gender equality. This rhetorical commitment to formal fairness […] was a far cry from the position of even the most mainstream feminist organizations, which insisted on the need for active government intervention to achieve meaningful equality. (117)

This meant that like Reagan’s racial and welfare policies, there would be no federal intervention for women who wanted to move out of the traditional genders roles they had traditionally been in for centuries, much like there was minimal administrative assistance for the Pepettes of Permian High to step out of their roles as female support for the football players. The Pepettes were there to cheer, to provide weekly treats (preferably homemade over store bought) and to make the signs honoring each Permian player that would be displayed proudly in their front yard, at the Pepettes own time and expense. There often wasn’t even a sense of gratitude; it was expected that the girls would go above and beyond to support the players. In the pages of one Pepette’s scrapbook commemorating the season, she referred to them as “loyal and happy subjects serving their chosen panther” (Bissinger 47-48). This honor however sometimes came at an even greater price than just the Pepettes time and effort. Despite the fact that Bridgette Vandeventer, the most popular of the Pepettes, had plenty of goals for her life and career, she ended up going to junior college after graduation because she “had been advised by a teacher at Permian not to take the SAT exam until after the football season because of her myriad duties as a cheerleader” (Bissinger 152). That meant for Vandeventer, not only did the institution not help her escape the
confines of societies expectations, many of those in place at Permian actively reinforced them. Much like Reagan’s belief in free-market feminism, Permian High School would remain uninvolved in enforcing or even encouraging any kind of gender equality for their female students.

Those who celebrate Reagan, both at the time of his presidency and in modern times, often seem to have been among the small percentage that was on the beneficial end of his policies. Repeated disenfranchisement of minority racial and gender groups put a spotlight on the many similarities between Reagan and Odessa and served to highlight the way that both failed the majority of their citizens that arguably needed help most. Since his presidency, Ronald Reagan has proven to be a near perfect reflection of the self-absorbed mentality of the 1980s, and Odessa a near perfect reflection of Reagan and those beliefs.

Works Cited

“1980s Yearbook.” Canvas, English 01A, Lenore Harris. West Valley College, Fall 2020.


researched argument
When thinking of specific topics to do my research paper on, one prominent topic that kept coming to mind was DACA. Writing essays was something I always struggled with because I always knew what I want to say but never know how to put it in words. For some reason, this paper was different; I had a rush of ideas for this paper fill my head, but this time I struggled with the idea of being vulnerable and sharing a part of me I was always scared to share. Being an immigrant, I was always taught to conceal my legal status because my family always feared being caught and being deported, so I was very hesitant in choosing this topic because I knew the only way to show the importance of this topic was to share my story. Eventually, I decided to share my story and to be a voice to many other people like me who are afraid but have hopes and dreams of creating a future for themselves and their families. DACA is a fantastic program that gives many people opportunities to work and receive higher learning education. As of now, DACA is once again in limbo, but one thing that cannot be taken away from us is our ability to dream and fight for our future.

A Broken Promise
-Arturo Collaso-

When I was four years old, my mom made the courageous decision to leave our life behind in Mexico and move to the United States in hopes of giving my sister and me a better future. When I first arrived in the U.S., more specifically San Jose, I felt like I was home because I barely remembered my life in Mexico. As I grew up, I began to feel like I didn't belong because of how people talked about immigrants, how we were portrayed, and how certain media represented immigrants. We were always considered threatening, violent, dumb, and criminals, but all my family and I wanted was a chance to live a life like the ones we saw on TV. We craved the type of life where we could own our own house and be successful through achieving better education, and as I grew, that seemed like much less of a possibility. Throughout elementary, middle school, and high school, I always hid my immigration status because of the fear of getting caught and being sent back to Mexico. Hiding this secret was the most challenging thing to do in school because we were often asked how we had spent our vacations. Most kids would say they had traveled around the world and visited family, but that was not the case for me. I would always lie
and say I went on trips so that I wouldn't stand out and my secret could be kept safe. It wasn't until 2012, when former President Barack Obama announced DACA, that I began to feel somewhat safe and welcomed. My sister was fourteen years old, and I was about nine or ten years old when DACA was announced, so my sister had a better chance than me of obtaining DACA since she was almost sixteen, and in that year, DACA was all my sister, and I could think about. Through DACA, I was able to see the future my mom always hoped for and dreamed for my sister and me. Eventually, my sister finally was able to apply for DACA and thankfully was accepted into the program. I remember how proud and excited she was to work eventually, and in a way, I was happy and jealous of her because that's all I wanted too. Before I knew, it was sixteen, and I was just about less than a month into my sophomore year in high school when my mom gave me the fantastic news that she was going to submit my application for DACA. I was thrilled and could barely concentrate on my classes; I began to imagine the endless possibilities I would receive because of DACA. Unfortunately, things took a turn for the worse when President Donald Trump announced that DACA was being terminated, and no new applications were being accepted. I was crushed and felt defeated. My mom soon called me and told me that they did not let her apply because of the president's announcement. A rush of emotions filled my body, and I could see my future slip right through my fingers, and there was nothing I could do. The announcement of DACA’s termination made me feel hopeless for the future and, honestly, made me lose motivation to continue in school because I would be studying for a degree that I wouldn't even be able to use here. I was quite upset for a few months, but I finally decided that I couldn't just sit and mope; I had to create change for my family and me and the thousands of other dreamers like me. The following day, a few other students and I who were on DACA or were going to apply for DACA decided to make an event during lunch to inform others about the
importance and impact of DACA on the lives of young adult immigrants. This event that my friends and I created not only demonstrated the immense support we had in our school, but it also made us realize that our fight was far from over and that although DACA could be taken away, no one could stop us from dreaming and fighting for what belief is right. Terminating DACA isn’t something we should consider lightly as it affects the lives of young adults and the economy in a way that benefits from DACA and “Dreamers.” Removing DACA would leave “DREAMers” with basically no future; they would be vulnerable for deportation and wouldn't be able to legally work within the U.S. Having no clear legal avenue for "DREAMers" to exist in and contribute to our society has adverse long-term effects on all of us. Because some people believe that DACA is unconstitutional, and others, who are misinformed, believe that DACA is an easy way for immigrants to gain citizenship, some U.S. government's facets want to eliminate the program. DACA must become law, and one that is safe from future partisan politics; it would solve the uncertainty for DREAMers, but making the program set in stone won't fix the misinformation.

In June of 2012, former President Barack Obama announced an immigration reform program that came to be known as DACA; this program would change many young adult immigrants' lives by allowing them to come out of “the shadows” of fear and create a future for themselves. While discussing the program DACA, Caitlin Patler et al. cite in their article “From undocumented to DACAmented,” that “In June 2012, President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program for eligible undocumented youth. Under this program, eligible youth can apply for a two-year reprieve from deportation that includes work authorization” (10). This program was a win for immigrant youth. DACA recipients, known as “DREAMers,” were finally able to change the lives of their family and themselves by being able
to work legally and live without the fear of deportation. As Audrey Singer and Nicole Prchal Svajlenka state in their article, “Immigration Facts: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),” they state that “Some 900,000 individuals were estimated to be immediately eligible for deferred action at the date of the announcement” (1). While many were excited to finally be given this opportunity, they did not know precisely what it was they were going to have to do to apply for DACA. For example, it did come with quite a hefty application price and very particular requirements. Caitlin Patler et al. correctly break down the cost of DACA by stating, “Applying for DACA comes with a price tag of $465, including an $85 fee for biometrics and $380 for a work authorization document” (11). Patler et al. also list the regulations an applicant must have in order to apply for DACA; they state that an applicant must:

--Have come to the United States before your sixteenth birthday.

--Have lived continuously in the U.S. since either June 15, 2007 (if you are applying for DACA under the pre-expansion guidelines) or January 1, 2010 (if you apply under expanded DACA). NOTE: USCIS is not yet accepting applications from people who do not qualify under the pre-expansion guidelines but who may qualify under expanded DACA.

--Have been present in the U.S. on June 15, 2012, and on every day since August 15, 2012.

--Not have a lawful immigration status on June 15, 2012. To meet this requirement, (1) you must have entered the U.S. without papers before June 15, 2012, or, if you entered lawfully, your lawful immigration status must have expired before June 15, 2012; and (2) you must not have a lawful immigration status at the time of your application.
--Be at least 15 years old. If you are currently in deportation proceedings, have a voluntary departure order, or have a deportation order, and are not in immigration detention, you may request DACA even if you are not yet 15 years old.

--Have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, be an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or U.S. armed forces, or “be in school” on the date that you submit your DACA application.

--Have not been convicted of a felony offense, a significant misdemeanor offense or three or more misdemeanor offenses.

--Not pose a threat to national security or public safety. (8)

DACA’s price might be too high for some applicants, and the regulations might be stringent, but the benefits of DACA are worth the price. Many young adults can finally live in the U.S. without worrying if they will be deported, if their college degree will be useful, and or if they will have a future in the U.S. While DACA was a win for many young adult immigrants, the fear they had lost for a while seemed to come back when President Donald Trump targeted DACA during his campaign in 2016. President Trump mentioned several times that he wanted to end DACA because it was unlawful; his words soon sparked controversy among his supporters regarding what DACA is and what it indeed does. Under the Trump administration, DACA has been put on hold, and isn’t accepting new applications and is only allowing applicants who previously had DACA to renew their applications. If DACA were to be ended, many “DREAMers” lives and futures would be drastically affected. “Dreamers” would lose everything they had worked so hard to gain and could possibly be sent to a country they have no memory of.
The termination of DACA would not only affect over eight hundred thousand DREAMers but would leave them with little to no future and unable to contribute to society. If DACA were to be terminated, numerous recipients would be vulnerable to deportation, which would drastically change their future and all the hard work they put in their jobs and education. Many DACA recipients take advantage of the educational opportunities they get from DACA to achieve higher learning and obtain college degrees. Their dedication to receive higher education would only help the economy as they would have more skilled workers to assist in the world. Danielle Kurtzleben perfectly voices this claim in her article “Are DACA Recipients Stealing Jobs Away From Other Americans?” by stating that, “And if it's true that H-1B recipients and DACA recipients are comparable, many economists would say that those highly skilled workers would benefit the rest of the nations' workers in the long term” (Kurtzleben 2). DACA recipients are able to access higher learning opportunities, and through these opportunities, they are able to help create more innovation in the world and higher overall economic productivity, which the U.S. would only benefit from. Secondly, under DACA, DREAMers were able to contribute to society, as they could work and pay their taxes just like the average American and were able to make a living for themselves. A fact sheet provided by Define American states that, “DACA recipients contribute $1.2 billion annually in federal, state, and local tax revenue. That revenue would disappear if DACA were repealed” (“Daca Fact Sheet”). DACA recipients are doing their part by paying taxes and contributing to society. Still, if DACA were to be taken away, the U.S. would suffer from these taxes lost and would actually be spending much more money trying to support immigrants through other forms of government aid. Yet many Americans who are against DACA believe “DREAMers” are bad, that they take advantage of the U.S., and take jobs away from “real” Americans. In reality, DACA recipients are actually helping the economy, as
stated by Kurtzleben when she fact checks U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions' announcement to end DACA. Kurtzleben responds to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions' comment on how DACA recipients are stealing jobs away from Americans by saying, “On a large scale or in the long run, there is no reason to think DACA recipients have a major deleterious effect on American workers' employment chances. What's more, some economists believe DACA is actually a boost to the economy” (Kurtzleben 2). DACA recipients, as mentioned above, are in no way stealing jobs from Americans. In fact, it is possible to state that DACA recipients are doing the jobs that Americans don't want to do because they want to be able to provide for their family, themselves and be active members of society. Also, ending DACA would affect DACA recipients and have a drastic effect on the economy. In Chad Stone’s article, “Ending DACA Program for Young Undocumented Immigrants Makes No Economic Sense,” he states that “Brookings Institution researchers estimate that the cost to arrest and deport an undocumented individual is $12,500, and that the cost across all DACA participants would be larger than the entire current Immigration and Customs Enforcement budget of $5 billion” (Stone 5). Ending DACA would not help the U.S.; in fact, it would hurt the U.S. even more. Not only would the country be losing skilled workers that would help them innovate, but it would cost the country more to end the program and send recipients back to their country of origin than it would keep the program alive. If DACA were to be taken away, there would be no way for DACA recipients to contribute to society. Without DACA, countless young adult immigrants are left with no future for themselves and incapable of contributing to society, which is one issue Americans have with immigrants. The problem with DACA is not only that Americans believe they are losing opportunities to DREAMers, but also that many believe DACA is unconstitutional. Since its inception, DACA has faced fierce opposition primarily from those who believe it is
unconstitutional and anti-immigrant groups. In Jan Ting’s article “President Obama’s “Deferred Action” Program for Illegal Aliens Is Plainly Unconstitutional,” one of his arguments is that the program exceeds the constitutional bounds of prosecutorial discretion. Ting states that:

In the first place, claiming that the president’s deferred-action program is simply the lawful exercise of “prosecutorial discretion” turns the concept of “prosecutorial discretion” on its head. The president proposes, not only to refrain from detaining and expelling millions of illegal aliens, but also to award them a three-year shield from prosecution along with work and travel privileges that Congress has by statute reserved to a much smaller number of law-abiding aliens. (4)

Ting’s argument expresses that DACA is not only going against the constitution, but it is also vetoing “Illegal aliens” from being deported. While DACA does protect DREAMers from being deported, that is all it does, and that is what someone Americans don’t understand, which creates misinformation. Numerous Americans who are against DACA are against it because they believe it is an easy way for DREAMers to obtain citizenship. Still, DACA does not whatsoever allow recipients to obtain citizenship. Ting also argues that the former president Obama’s claim of “Prosecutorial Discretion” is plainly specious. Ting simply argues that DACA recipients have it so good, and it is unfair because they aren’t real Americans. Ting states that “…ICE officer Chris Crane explained that, contrary to the claim that “deferred action” was freeing up resources to focus on detaining criminals, DACA was being used to prevent ICE officers from inspecting and detaining jailed illegal aliens” (Ting 9). First and Foremost, DACA specifically points out that no recipient will be able to apply for the program if he and she has been convicted of a felony offense, a significant misdemeanor offense or three or more misdemeanor offenses. DACA is not protecting and keeping criminals in the U.S. Instead, it allows those who want to improve their
future and help the U.S. by allowing them to work legally. Furthermore, stating that people on DACA “have never had it so good” is entirely false as many DACA recipients still pay outrageous fees, face criticism and hate from people who are against DACA, live in fear of the program being ended, but are still expected to try to live everyday life.

One way to alleviate DREAMers and the stress they face every election year and solve much uncertainty is by making DACA a permanent law that is safe from future partisan politics. Making DACA a law would help alleviate the uncertainty Americans have about DACA and allow DREAMers to live their lives without fearing DACA being terminated every election. The last time DACA was secure was back in 2017. Ever since the Trump administration took office, DACA has been a very controversial and vulnerable program. For instance, the Trump administration first began to question DACA in September of 2015, before he was even in office, as stated in an article called, “A timeline of DACA offers Trump has rejected.” In the timeline it is indicated that, “September 5, 2017: Trump announced an end to the DACA program, which protected young undocumented immigrants who came to the US as children from deportation. President Barack Obama instituted the work permits and protections in 2012” (“A timeline of DACA offers Trump has rejected”). Since Trump’s campaign in 2016, he had been targeting DACA, and in only about nine months did he officially begin his plan to end DACA, which brought an immense amount of fear to DREAMers. Later on in his presidency, when he tried to end the program completely, the Federal court put a hold on his plan, as stated on the timeline by CNN wire, “January 9: Federal court puts hold on Trump's plan to end DACA, ordering renewals of permits to continue but no new applications” (“A timeline of DACA offers Trump has rejected”). While the federal court did do a great thing by stopping Trump from entirely ending the program, they also stopped all new applicants from applying, which left them with no stable
future they could rely on. This battle of uncertainty has been going on for too long, and it's time that a law was put in place to solve all this fear that comes with a change in administration each election cycle. By making DACA a federal law, it would solve not only issues for DREAMers but would also help alleviate the controversy around DACA’s lawfulness. DREAMers in no way are trying to take opportunities away from Americans. Most want to be able to contribute and be active members of society so that they aren't thought of as people who use the government which is often how immigrants are perceived.

What makes DACA and DREAMers so important is that we just want to have that American dream that every American dreams about. Through DACA, DREAMers are allowed to make that dream a reality. DREAMers are not only immigrants; we are hard-working Americans, who weren't born in the U.S., but were brought here at an extremely young age, and the U.S. is the only home we know. I have no memory of my life in Mexico. Like many DREAMers, our very first memories are of our life in America. People need to understand that the U.S is the only home DREAMers know, and if they are sent back to their country, they are basically being sent to nothing because their entire life is in the U.S. The issue with DACA is much larger than DACA; the real problem is the fear of others that people have, but we aren't “others.” We are hard-working, dedicated, and educated Americans who want to help the U.S and whom the U.S needs.

Works Cited

“Daca Fact Sheet.” Define American, diversity.iupui.edu/170825-DACA-Facts.pdf.


Highway 17 has always to me been an uneasy drive, and I know that it's the same way for many others. Even as an adult in control of the wheel, I can't help but be nervous on the way to Santa Cruz. Writing this essay for Professor Davis's English 1A class helped me understand what exactly goes into making this specific road dangerous. The research I made has genuinely made the drives a lot easier, understanding the actual dangers and being more cautious. The best outcome I can hope for is that people who read this understand the risks and reasons for accidents on Highway 17.

Across the Mountain
-Nicholas Lightner-

Santa Cruz is where most teenagers go to have fun and hang out in the South Bay. The Boardwalk, beaches, classic skateparks, and much more are various reasons why teens spend so much time in Santa Cruz. While Santa Cruz is a popular hangout spot with so many things to do, there is a big problem that goes along with it. Getting to Santa Cruz is a nightmare, requiring driving on Highway 17 going over the Santa Cruz mountains. Taking about an hour-long from San Jose (maybe more depending on the day and time), the drive to the coast is far from fun, being a dangerous and annoying experience. Many different factors and elements contribute to making Highway 17 a safety risk for driving, including sharp turns, slippery roads, and quick change in speed. The problems of highway safety are apparent, yet the most significant way to help prevent injury and death on this road is behind the methods and training of obtaining a license.

In California, a citizen can drive without a parent and can even drive with a group of friends at the age of seventeen. When obtaining a license at sixteen, a driver must wait twelve months until driving with other passengers. Kennerly from CQ Researcher claims, “88 percent of drivers ages 19 to 24 acknowledged engaging in risky behavior such as texting while driving, running red lights, or speeding during the previous month.” This statistic is terrifying as a teen driver but essential to show because it not only shows that teen drivers are at a high reckless
driving rate, but it offers a parallel on Highway 17 since lots of the drivers are teens on the
dangerous mountain. It’s pretty clear now that with a combination of hazardous road conditions
and inexperienced teen drivers, Highway 17 is a recipe for driving disasters. Unless there is a
significant reform in obtaining a California license, the rate of accidents and fatalities will
skyrocket on Highway 17.

The wet roads, roaming wildlife, and sharp turns are 3 of many variables that make
Highway 17 hard to navigate. Being aware of your surroundings on this highway is a must, and
recognizing other drivers’ behavior is also necessary. I know this personally because, as an
experiment, I drove to Santa Cruz on the fifth of December this year. As I nervously drove the
mountain, I made two significant observations. First, while there weren’t many drivers on the
road, there was some traffic. There was gridlock with no accident at the cause; it just seemed like
a natural traffic jam. For a split second, I thought that the traffic issue could be changed, which
would prevent many drivers from changing speeds rapidly. This is impossible to do, though,
because as the population grows, so does traffic, especially on such a narrow road on the
mountain. Researchers at UCLA describe traffic by saying, “as the economy improves, more
people drive to work, more people buy cars and gas, and we see an increase in travel to all kinds
of places.” This research analysis makes total sense with traffic on Highway 17 as well, since the
Bay Area is a significant economy of the world, of course, more people will be on the road. The
second observation I noted was that there are very few lights shining on the road. Luckily I was
going during the day, but even then, the trees made the sun’s lighting awkward in many parts of
the drive. I couldn’t even imagine how dark that drive is at night. The lighting was an important
observation to note because researchers from the organization ResearchGate demonstrate that,
“in a meta-analysis by Elvik [8], road lighting was concluded to reduce fatal accidents by 65%,
accidents with injuries by 30%, and collisions with only property damage by 15%.” These statistics show that lighting is crucial for road safety; it would only make sense that this should be implemented on Highway 17, as there is minimal lighting and makes the drive much more nerve-wracking. While this does seem like an easy solution, it requires money, and the allocation of funds is quite complicated.

California roads are notorious for being plain awful. California drivers hate the uneven roads, and the main cities across the state are riddled with potholes. Fixing these roads seem easy, but it’s genuinely not due to the allocation of funds by the state, and it goes for the same with the highways. The highways are paid for by the federal government, meaning any work or maintenance has to be approved first. How the roads are funded is interesting to explain because Moore from the Reason Foundation says, “For every mile of road it controls, California spends $47,000 on administrative costs. Only three states spend more on office costs.” $47,000 may seem like not much, but it’s the fact that it sets a precedent. The federal government likes to fund projects based on a reflection of state funds. When the state is spending more money at office costs than more others, in the federal government’s view a misallocation of funds, they won’t step in for projects. This is a straightforward way to explain why there are still no lights on Highway 17; if the state doesn’t even fix the potholes and regular roads, the government won’t even attempt to step in on the federal highways; it’s a reflection fund. Funding makes it challenging to change the highway itself, but there is a more manageable approach to making the road safer.

Automobile collisions happen daily at a ridiculously high rate. Whether it occurs on a side street, a highway, a bridge, or wherever, it’s always happening. To say that all these collisions all around the world are due to poor road conditions isn’t realistic, as human error is a
massive contribution to why collisions happen. The Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology makes a critical case, where the authors say, “In-depth analyses of crashes show that human error is a major contributing factor in most crashes.” This is true for highway 17 as well; not all crashes are due to the factors that make the road dangerous; it’s the mentality of being oblivious to these conditions. Teens love not to follow the rules; it’s in our nature, even when it’s dangerous while driving. It’s hard to prevent teens from breaking the rules or anyone for that matter. The best solution is to make at least the system of obtaining a driver’s license better, to implement a system that teaches drivers how to navigate the windy and rough mountain.

Obtaining a license in California is truly not difficult. It’s a little more difficult for teens to do so, but in the end, it’s just the long process that makes it appear like a challenging task. Speaking for me, which I live in the Bay Area, I learned nothing about driving a mountain properly. That’s equivalent to getting a license in Colorado and not knowing how to drive in the snow safely. Mountains and hills cover California, especially in the Bay Area, where Oakland and San Francisco are just big hills, and the only way to get to Santa Cruz is to climb a mountain. Not learning about how to drive a mountain safely is relatively ridiculous. The best way to curb accidents on Highway 17 is to implement teaching in the DMV on how to drive mountains and hills safely. Specifically, how to drive inclines, declines, sharp curves, and recognizing the change of speed. This goal isn’t that hard to accomplish, as the best way is to add a section in the drivers’ education manual on mountain safety and to add some questions on the drivers’ test. It’s way easier than changing the road itself, due to the less money put in and less of an inconvenience. It won’t completely stop accidents, of course, but it will be educational to teens or any adults for that matter who take Highway 17s danger with a grain of salt.
While Highway 17 is one of the most dangerous roads in California, it isn’t the only hazardous road. Driving isn’t a task to be taken lightly, one second, everything could be fine, and the next, everything will be awful. That’s the reason that changing the process of obtaining a license wouldn’t just make Highway 17 safer but would make driving in California safer as well. The reformed process would set a precedent because changing and upgrading the road to bring down statistics is only part of the solution and will change that mentality that the cities, states, and the federal government in America have had for a while. It’s in the Department of Motor Vehicles court to make a change, and it’s in our hands as a society driving these roads to push change. If we all take this issue seriously, we will live a life where it’s not so scary going to the beach anymore.

Works Cited


library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre2017021700.

Moore, Adrian. “California’s Highways Improve, But Problems Remain” *Reason Foundation*, 28
September. 2016, https://reason.org/commentary/californias-highways-improve-but-
problems-remain/

This essay was written for Professor Davis’ English 1A class in November of 2020, a few months after the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests had died down. After George Floyd’s murder sparked global protests and an increased awareness of this country’s long history of police violence and systemic racism, I started taking a closer look at the media I consumed, to see how my favorite shows and movies were influenced by this history. I believe that media isn’t created in a vacuum— even when they don’t intend it, content will always reflect the creator’s beliefs and the biases of the environment it was created in. I realized that cop shows and police procedurals, like one of my favorite shows, Brooklyn Nine-Nine were a prime example of this environmental influence. Though its showrunners may not have set out to make a pro-cop show, it’s still a premise that implicitly supports the police.

I didn’t write this essay to “cancel” Brooklyn Nine-Nine, or to suggest that all cops shows are unequivocally bad. Instead, I hope that after reading my essay you take a moment to critically examine your favorite pieces of media and think about what they are saying about the institutions they portray, and how those portrayals actually affect your views.

Cool Motive, Still Propaganda
-Tara Venkatesh-

Criminal Minds, CSI, Chicago PD, 911, Brooklyn Nine-Nine— the police procedural is an incredibly popular and pervasive television show format. However, this hasn’t always been the case – the cop shows and movies of the early twentieth century featured incompetent, bumbling officers who couldn’t even catch a cartoon dog, as in the animated short Police Dog (Grady). These depictions mirrored the public perception of the police at the time: findings from an inquiry into the workings of several New York police forces in the 1890s found that the department had extorted millions of dollars from the public; and revealed corruption, bribery and officer misconduct at nearly every rung of the ladder (Grady). As police departments were reformed, they instituted military style training programs that, as shown by sociologist Julian Go, “used the kinds of tactics and weapons that had been deployed against Native Americans in the West and against colonized peoples in other parts of the world, including Cuba, Puerto Rico, and
the Philippines” (Lepore). This approach to the use of force continues to inform the way police officers interact with civilians, especially civilians of color, well into the twenty-first century.

However, this shift to a more cohesive, militarized force was not what cemented the modern “hero cop.” This dubious honor belonged to 1951’s *Dragnet*, a TV show that framed itself as showing the “authentic truth of what it’s like to be a police officer” (Grady). *Dragnet* was made in direct cooperation with the LAPD, whose Public Information Division would proof each episode script before release and discard the parts they didn’t like (Grady). While this ensured the show’s procedural accuracy, it also led to a severe bias in the narratives about the police the show created — *Dragnet* creators deliberately left out the racially motivated arrests and acts of brutality committed by the LAPD, choosing instead to portray the cops as heroes who could do no wrong (Grady). The popularity of the show led to police departments across the country involving themselves in the production of TV shows, a practice that is still used in the making of procedurals today. One such show is *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, a 2013 sitcom set in the NYPD’s 99th precinct. The show is told from the perspective of several detectives, and has enjoyed widespread acclaim.

*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is a particularly potent piece of police propaganda because it frames itself as ‘progressive media’. Firstly, the show is a hallmark of diversity. It prominently features multiple characters of color and has several people of color on the writing staff (Associated Press). These characters are given the same deep, heartfelt storylines as their white counterparts, and though jokes and plot points related to their race are made, the characters of color are never reduced to a single point of their identity. *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* also features multiple LGBTQIA+
characters on its main cast, as well as several LGBTQIA+ writers and actors. The show features both a gay character (Andre Brougher’s Captain Holt) and a bisexual character (Stephanie Beatriz’s Rosa Diaz) who each experience meaningful plotlines and character arcs past the point of their queerness. This is especially meaningful as they are both people of color, and LGBTQIA+ representation is often limited to white characters and often excludes bisexual people (Nyren). Secondly, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* often critiques the police system from which it operates. It features scenes where the characters mount ad campaigns asking what they can fix (“Boyle’s Hunch”) and an episode on racial profiling, where the Sergeant Terry Jeffords, a Black character, is racially profiled and harassed by a cop in his own neighborhood. The episode features Jeffords, played by Terry Crews, trying to explain to the other cop why what he did was bad, and talking with Captain Holt, the show’s other main Black character, about the effects of reporting such an incident (“Moo Moo”). Beyond this, the show also features several instances of characters discovering corruption within the NYPD, such as in season four episode “Crime and Punishment,” where several main characters are framed for robbery by a higher ranking corrupt cop. This critique of the institutions empowered by the show serves to make progressive viewers more comfortable with what they’re watching: even if a viewer is uncomfortable with the police force or the NYPD, this self awareness makes it feel like everyone is in on the joke. Along with being a draw for minority and minority-allied viewers, the diversity of the show also makes it more palatable for the progressive audience. It makes one feel like what they’re watching has a greater social merit — it’s not just a funny sitcom, it’s a show that uplifts the voices of queer people and people of color. By giving the viewers a way to shallowly examine and then discard the presented issues of the NYPD, the show’s progressive veneer elegantly shrouds the message being sent about the nature of the police force.
*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is police propaganda because it perpetuates the narrative built by the police. As with most police procedurals, it has a heavy focus on crime and violence, with episodes often centering around the process of finding and arresting criminals. The detectives, by virtue of their position as the main point of view characters, are always successful at their jobs. They are heroes on the front lines, ready to risk their lives in the pursuit of justice. By doing this, the show creates the perception that the police are not only highly effective at their jobs, but are also thoroughly justified in their vast use of resources because they play a vital role in the safety of the community. This belief is upheld despite the fact that calls for violent crimes in many major police departments make up only 1% of total calls for service (Asher, Horitz).

Furthermore, by framing the act of policing as the enforcing of justice wherein the police are the “good guys,” the people being arrested and held by the police are automatically considered guilty, with no regard for the justice system. This effect can be seen in data from a 2019 survey from the Pew Research Centre, which found that “84% of all U.S. adults say police officers protect people from crime “all or most” or “some of the time.”” (Gecewicz and Lee).

Additionally, because the show is told from the perspective of the cops, it automatically portrays all the actions taken by the cops in a positive light, even if when viewed objectively in the real world, their actions would provoke outrage. For example, in a season five episode, two main characters, Jake Peralta and Captain Holt, deliberately attempt to cajole and harass a Black man into confessing to murder. They create a hostile environment, badger and scream at him, and attempt to trick him into confessing. However, because the show portrays these events comically, and because the man does, in the end, confess to having committed the crime, the viewer walks away thinking that nothing is amiss. These narrative elements combine to inform viewers’ opinions of real world cops, and primes them to view their actions positively.
The presentation and narrative elements of the show ultimately end up influencing the way police reform is perceived by the public. Because the narrative of the “hero cop” pushed by *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and shows like it leads to people viewing real world cops favorably, they are more likely to favor reform over abolition when it comes to deep-seeded issues in police forces across the nation. As previously mentioned, the show has done several episodes covering racial profiling and corruption within the police, wherein it pits the good cops against the few bad cops. However, their critique of the police is always grounded within a police narrative, and so perpetuates the idea that police officers who commit acts of brutality and racially profile innocent civilians are simply “bad apples” instead of being representative of a systemic problem. Additionally, because its focuses on interpersonal conflicts and rarely involves oversight committees or branches of the judicial system, the task of remedying the show’s fictional corruption falls once more to the main characters: the cops. This reinforces the idea that the police reform themselves from the inside, and are still able to effectively serve the public regardless of their issues. This narrative is directly beneficial to the police, as it allows them to continue operating without true change to their practices.

Though *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is hailed as a paragon of diversity and progressive values, we need to rethink the way the show and shows like it serve the system they are set in. Policing in America has been rooted in racism and anti-immigrant sentiments since its inception; what started as slave patrols eventually evolved through time, growing in power, resources and militarization until it came to resemble the police system we have today (Lepore). It is a system that has led to the massively disproportionate arrest and incarceration of people of color in this country, especially young Black men (Lepore). Despite this statistic and widespread news coverage of acts of police brutality, 62% of Americans still believe that police officers treat
racial minorities fairly at least some of the time (Gecewicz and Lee). This belief is heavily influenced by the information about the police people are exposed to, meaning that if they are constantly consuming shows that portray the police and their actions in a relatively positive light, they will continue to view them in a positive manner. Cop shows, and especially shows that shroud themselves in liberalism like *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* are inherently and intrinsically pro-cop and therefore anti- Black Lives Matter, and if one supports the Black Lives Matter Movement, they cannot keep supporting these shows.

Works Cited


“The Box” *Brooklyn Nine Nine* season 5: episode 14, created by Michael Shur, Dan Goor, David Miner, directed by Claire Scanlon, NBC 2017.
literary analysis
The Industrial Revolution brought about changes to the very fabric of society not seen since the Agricultural Revolution over ten thousand years previous. As the German social, political, and economic theorist Karl Marx was formulating his Conflict Theory and accurately predicting class revolution, poets like Heinrich Heine and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were using their art to highlight the many injustices they observed in society. With very different styles and intentions, all three captured the age in ways now mainly forgotten.

What Ways the Heart of a Poet?
-Ciarán Doyle-

Heinrich Heine was eighteen and Elizabeth Barrett Browning nine when Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. The former from Düsseldorf, in what is now Germany, the latter from Durham, England, both grew up in a world overshadowed by the French and American Revolutions and Napoleon’s reign. The catalyst for this political revolution was the Industrial Revolution, which was to bring breathtaking change to the European way of life, dividing the population between what Karl Marx called the proletariat—those who worked for a wage—and the bourgeoisie—those who controlled the means of production. Though solidly from the middle-class bourgeoisie, Heine and Barrett Browning were each drawn to the plight of the exploited workers and the poor, and looked to affect change in order to improve the lot of those victimized by the wrongs in society brought on by industrialization. On the eve of the revolutions of 1848, each was motivated to pen poems inspired by the exploitation they witnessed. Barrett Browning wrote “The Cry of the Children” in protest of the exploitation of child labor in England, while Heine wrote “The Silesian Weavers” as his singular interpretation of the implications for Germany of the Weavers’ Revolt in Prussia. As Romantic poets, each invoked emotion and passion over logic and reason in their work; but, while Barrett Browning looked to change the system from within, with Heine, the change he envisaged involved violent revolution, a position he would distance himself from in later life.
The poets wrote their works at a pivotal point in social evolution, as the Industrial and Democratic Revolutions brought sweeping, irreversible change to the globe. A world that had previously been defined by scarcity and whose entire energy was contained in the muscles of man and draft animals, suddenly discovered near infinite capacity through the power of steam and the ingenuity of human invention. Countries newly thought of as nations started to look to the concept of economic growth to increase living standards and to support exploding populations. An inexorable exodus from the land to the city for access to jobs and consumer goods started its irreversible journey. Along with the economic and scientific changes came major social and political disruption, as traditional work patterns and social positions adapted to the new economic norms. From these changes a growth in demands for democracy emerged, with the newly termed and fast-expanding working-class ever more willing to assert their rights.

In England, an estimated population of 7.1 million in 1780 grew to nearly 17 million by 1851, as Thomas Malthus's predictions on population growth, that were to inspire the works of Charles Darwin, came to pass (Morgan 425). In 1785 this rapidly expanding nation had imported 11 million pounds of raw cotton; by 1850 that has risen to 588 million pounds (Puchner 323). This explosion in imports helped drive the rise in industrial production in Europe and slavery back in the land of King Cotton in the newly independent United States of America. As the Scottish historian Christopher Harvie summarized the times, “only around 1830 were people conscious of substantial and permanent industrial change; it took another twenty years to convince even the middle class that it had all been for the better”—people struggled to make sense of the seismic shifts taking place in society.

One who was quick to accurately articulate these changes was the German social, political and economic theorist, Karl Marx. In collaboration with his fellow countryman and
financial supporter, Friedrich Engels, on February 21, 1848 Marx published *The Communist Manifesto*. In the document, Marx articulates the compression of class structure, from the “feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, [and] serfs” of the Middle Ages, to a simple class struggle between the proletariat—industrial wage-laborers—and the owners of the means of production—the bourgeoisie (Marx 219). According to Marx, the Industrial Revolution resulted in the bourgeoisie amassing total power, while the proletariat became as disposable as a machine in a workshop, living “… merely to increase capital, and is allowed to live only in so far as the interest of the ruling class requires it” (236). The bourgeoisie, to Marx, “… is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world who he has called up by his spells”—through its greed, the ruling class has set up a world where it has lost control, with social revolution the inevitable outcome (225). *The Communist Manifesto* accurately articulates how industrialization has exploited the workers, with government reform legislation slow to address the obvious abuses of the workers. These workers constitute a population more concentrated, through their congregation in cities, more politically active, through the Chartist movement and trades unions, and more aware of their ability to affect change, through their exposure to the French and American revolutions. Without the government reforms needed to reign in the excesses of the capitalists and address the suffering of the working-class, Marx saw it as inevitable the proletariat would act. Marx's predictions appear prescient: within two days of publishing the *Manifesto*, revolution began to break out in Europe, eventually engulfing France, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Italy, Denmark, and Romania (Puchner 329).

The Revolutions of 1848 were still in the future as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, née Barrett, began her career as a poet and thinker of prodigious ability. Physically frail but intellectually precocious, emboldened by “…a passionate enthusiasm for her Christian faith…,”
Barrett Browning was born into a solidly middle-class English family, from where she was to become one of the best known poets of her generation (“Elizabeth”). Despite the outward appearance of conformity to the norms of her class and her country, Barrett Browning was politically curious, and possessed within herself an independent streak and the steel needed to assert her views beyond those typical of her background and gender. She is remembered most today for the opening lines of her “Sonnet 43,” published in 1846 in Sonnets from the Portuguese. The volume of poems are dedicated to Robert Browning, the man she was to elope with in that same year and have a son with. So vexed with her actions, her tyrannical father, Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett, apparently never spoke to her again (“Elizabeth”). “Sonnet 43” has come to stand to many as the most perfect articulation of the love one person can have for another:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace. (1-4)

As capable as she was of describing true love, the poet was equally able to deploy her immense talent to highlight what she saw as failings in her own society. Barrett Browning cultivated a life-long interest in politics and social issues, holding views often more liberal than those of her father or brothers. In 1837, she wrote her friend, Mary Russell Mitford, that she had been called “… ‘Quixotic & impracticable’ by her father and brothers for going ‘so much beyond them into republican depths’…” (Stone 624). These views included the unfairness of the Corn Laws, the injustice of slavery, and the social wrong of the exploitation of child labor, all of which she used as themes in her poetry. As part of her 1844 collection, Poems, Barrett Browning
included “The Cry of the Human,” written in opposition to the Corn Laws. The laws were designed to benefit the rich landed class by discouraging the importation of cheap grain through protective tariffs, but had the effect of artificially increasing the cost of bread for the poor. The poet leaves no-one in doubt of her opposition to the laws:

The rich preach “rights” and future days,  
And hear no angel scoffing,—  
The poor die mute—with starving gaze  
On corn-ships in the offing. (50–53)

A few years later, when approached by the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society to contribute to one of their fund-raising events, Barrett Browning penned the anti-slavery poem “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point” (Stone 638). Again, the author employs her vast poetic talent in support of a social cause, highlighting the emotion of the wrong by giving voice to a slave. Lines like “O pilgrims, I have gasped and run / All night long from the whips of one / Who in your names works sin and woe!” take on even more poignancy coming from one whose father derived much of his income from plantations in Jamaica that relied on the labor of African slaves (12-14, “Elizabeth”). To Elizabeth Barrett Browning, poetry was as capable a medium through which to highlight deplorable social issues as it was to give voice to perfect love.

Barrett Browning’s most famous work on social deprivation is captured in a poem highlighting the exploitation of child labor. In 1842 the “Report of the Royal Commission on Children’s Employment in Mines and Factories” was published (Henry 542). Partly written by Barrett Browning’s friend, the poet Richard Hengist Horne, the report “…told of the systematic exploitation and degradation of British child workers…” (542). Moved by what she read in the report and heard firsthand from Hengist Horne, Barrett Browning wrote “The Cry of the
Children.” The work was published in Blackwood’s Magazine in 1843 and later included in Barrett Browning’s volume *Poems* (542). Her high profile contribution joined the many voices calling for reform in this area.

In her poem, Barrett Browning presents an England forged by the Industrial Revolution, where the norms of nature and God are turned on their heads, and children, exploited for their labor, look to thoughts of premature death as the only relief available from the misery and suffering that defines their life on earth. Unprotected by their mothers, at odds with the natural course of their life-paths, abandoned by God and their country, only the poet’s pleas speak for them. It’s a world where children should have at least the same opportunities for joy as animals and plants:

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;

The young birds are chirping in the nest;

The young fawns are playing with the shadows;

The young flowers are blowing toward the west—(5-8)

Instead they are caught in a world created by the Industrial Revolution, where children mine coal underground or monotonously turn driveshafts in the factories above:

[“] For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,

Through the coal-dark, underground—

Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron

In the factories, round and round[“]. (73-76)

It’s a world where every waking hour is dictated by the turn, turn, turn of machinery:

[“] Till our hearts turn—our heads, with pulses burning,

And the walls turn in their places
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling—

Turns the long light that droppeth down the wall—

Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling—

All are turning, all the day, and we with all!—

And all day, the iron wheels are droning;

And sometimes we could pray,

‘O ye wheels,’ (breaking out in a mad moaning)

’S’Stop! be silent for to-day!’” (79-88)

Theirs is the life intended for the old, where a grave is viewed as a comfort. It’s a world where, even if they had the opportunity to play, they would forsake it for the opportunity to rest—“If we cared for any meadows, it were merely / To drop down in them and sleep” (67-68). It’s a world where the capitalists and those who benefit from an England altered by the Industrial Revolution are deaf to the plight of the exploited—“When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us / Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word!” (107-108). It’s a world where God has abandoned the children—“Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him, / Hears our weeping any more?”; where He is nothing more than a sculpted figure to them, “… speechless as a stone”; where, in the imagination of the children, “…up in Heaven, / Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find!”—where even the Heavens are but machines to the children (111-112; 126; 129-130) . It’s a world where their country has abandoned them in her pursuit of dominance of world trade, a country of which the children ask: “Will you stand, to move the world, on a child’s heart— / Stifle down with the mailed heel its palpitation, / And thread onward to your throne amid the mart?” (154-156). Barrett Browning retains for the final couplet a warning—“But the child’s sob curseth deeper in the silence / Than the strong man in his wrath!”—a country that is willing to
overlook the exploitation of its young will suffer a terrible fate.

Though she does not veil her disappointment and disgust for her country, the poet does not seek to distance herself from her land of birth—it’s very much her England she writes about. Even as she ironically calls out how this exploitation takes place “In the country of the free,” it is still “…our happy Fatherland”; even as she addresses her fellow countrymen, they are “…my brothers” (12; 24; 1). Through her poem, Barrett Browning wishes to call out the abuses taking place in England, hoping that it will turn away from these excesses and return to being a country worthy of the same high-minded accolades the poet mocks England with in her poem—that it will reform, before it’s too late.

Heinrich Heine holds out no such intentions of reform. To him, his country is destined for revolution, and it’s to a time beyond that phase that he attaches himself as he writes “The Silesian Weavers.” Born into a middle-class German family and brought up in a Düsseldorf ruled by Napoleon’s France, Heine moved to Paris after its July Revolution of 1830 (“Heinrich”). As interested in political affairs as Barrett Browning, Heine was much more willing to embrace revolution as a legitimate action than was his English fellow poet. The historian Gareth Steadman Jones, in his introduction to The Communist Manifesto, presents a rather bleak world view on behalf of Heine, noting that the poet “reported from Paris [in 1841] that communists possessed a simple and universal language comprehensible to all, whose basic elements were ‘hunger’, ‘envy’ and ‘death’” (Marx 32). Heine was a distant cousin of Karl Marx, and their lives were to intertwine over the years. Marx published Heine’s revolutionary poem “The Silesian Weavers” on the front page of his newspaper Vorwärts in 1844. Heine was to return the favor, providing inspiration to Marx for some of the prose in his celebrated work, The Communist Manifesto (“Heinrich”; Marx 269).
It’s in the poem “The Silesian Weavers” that Heine communicates his revolutionary instincts. The Weavers’ Revolt took place in Silesia, a province of Prussia, in 1844. The action of the workers had emboldened Marx in his belief in the power of the proletariat to change the new world order. Marx viewed the uprising as very much in keeping with his political theories of class struggle, including the weavers’ “… consciousness of the nature of the proletariat…”—in their actions, the weavers were fully aware of the class struggle in which they were engaging (Levin 540). Writing soon after the uprising which inspired his poem, Heine evokes the same industrial language deployed by Barrett Browning in “The Cry of the Children.” The English poet’s “turning” metaphor finds a parallel with the turning of the spinning wheel in Heine’s poem; but, whereas Barrett Browning uses the turning of machines as a metaphor for the Industrial Revolution, Heine uses his turning as a metaphor for revolution and the overthrow of the state. The German poet invokes images of the workers’ suffering—“their gloom-enveloped eyes are tearless,”—but his is not a poem of the hardship of the people, it’s a warning of the downfall of Germany (1).

Heine’s poem captures the rejection of the state, parodying the threefold pledge Prussian soldiers took— to God, king and Fatherland—through “A threefold curse be within it endowed / We’re weaving, we’re weaving!” (4-5). First is a curse on God, “To whom we flocked in vain and cried, / Who mocked us and poxed us and cast us aside” (8-9). Next is a curse on the king of Prussia, “Who was not moved even by our grief / who wrenched the last coin from our hand of need, / And shot us, screaming like dogs in the street!” (11-13). Finally, a curse on the “…lying father-nation…” itself, “Where thrive only shame and degradation, / Where every flower’s plucked ere it’s bloom / And worms thrive in the dank rot and gloom” (1; 17-19). The “Germany” whose “funeral shroud” is woven in the first stanza, is reduced to “Old Germany” in
the last, with the shroud having had woven in it that “threefold curse” on God, king and
Fatherland (3, 24). Whereas Barrett Browning deploys obvious sentimentality in “The Cry of the
Children” as she connects the reader to the deplorable conditions the children have to endure,
Heine crafts his poem to focus on the coming revolution, rejecting the temptation to elicit
sympathy for the conditions of the weavers, choosing instead to portray them as revolutionaries.
There is nothing of merit in the Germany of his poem. Echoing his cousin’s sentiment about the
Weavers’ Revolt, Heine sees nothing but the destruction of his country in its future.

Over time, though, Heine’s views of revolutionary ardor subsided, being replaced by a
more sober assessment of what was likely to come of a Communist revolution. Writing years
later about Marx and his fellow revolutionaries, the poet felt it likely “…with their raw fists they
will batter all marble images of my beloved world of art, they will ruin all those fantastic
anecdotes that the poets loved so much, they will chop down my Laurel forests and plant
potatoes…”—the aging Heine realizes the revolution he championed in his poem earlier in his
life would inevitably lead to the destruction of the art so precious to him, leaving the world a
vacuous, functional nothingness (Roth). Looking back over the age of Communism in the Soviet
Union, East Germany, and the Eastern Bloc in the twentieth century, Heine’s prediction appears
eerily accurate.

Heinrich Heine and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were both born into a world more and
more shaped by the forces of the Industrial Revolution and the radical social changes it brought
about. Both lived at close quarters to the Europe of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie Karl Marx
captured so vividly and accurately in *The Communist Manifesto*. Both shared a passion for
politics and social justice, and used their majestic poetic talents to highlight the wrongs they saw
in the world. Heine stood outside his nation of birth and looked to embolden the revolution he
imagined imminent, while Barrett Browning lobbied for social change from within her beloved England. Ultimately, both poets arrived at the view that gradual change was possible without the need for the radical revolution Karl Marx considered inevitable.

Works Cited


This was an assignment written for my English 1B course in my first semester at West Valley. The prompt of this essay was to analyze the play Pygmalion through a specific lens of literary criticism, in my case the Marxist perspective. I enjoy learning about the complexities of Victorian era, and this was an opportunity to explore social issues of the period. At the time of writing this I did not actually deem it to be one of my better essays, but at the behest of my professor I submitted it for review.

Real Classy
-Emily Orendain-

Victorian London is the setting for many a play, book, and movie, and is oft used as a prime example of drastically different social classes. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, class lines were strictly divided by not only clothing but also cleanliness, etiquette, and even the accents people had. It was an era of rules and manners, but that was all that really divided anyone. Two people living within a block of each other could sound almost as if they were speaking two completely different languages, such was the gap between learned, proper English and the dialect of the poor, so much so that playwright George Bernard Shaw described his “desperate attempt to represent [the] dialect without a phonetic alphabet...as unintelligible outside London” (Shaw 1.9) You could go from browsing palace gardens to the “Thieves and prostitutes inhabitants of Chadwick Street” on a four-minute walk around the corner (Booth). Classes were not separated by any physical space, but rather by to whom one was born and whether they had money or affluence.

So is it any wonder that a person’s identity and value was intrinsically tied to their social standing? Because class was the only thing keeping people apart, highborn people cast massive importance on it, and it remains one of the most spoken of aspects of the UK in this era. Shaw’s
1912 play *Pygmalion* depicts the journey of a poor flower girl named Eliza, who assumes the false identity of a duchess through the phonetic teachings of Professor Higgins, a well-to-do man who prides himself on being able to pass off foreigners and commoners as hightborn English natives. Over the course of the play, she is transformed from a common girl to an elegant lady for the sake of fooling the rich masses-- and to satisfy Higgins’s curiosity on whether or not he can do it. The concept of class is essentially the entire driving force behind this show, and the way Eliza’s identity is tied to her standing reveals two truths: that social standing has severe and lasting effects on how people perceive themselves and those around them, and that the class divide is as much a farce as the plan to pass Eliza off as a noblewoman.

In Marxist literary theory, the concept of class is reduced to two main categories: the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. The bourgeoisie is the wealthy 1% who control the means of production and create the socioeconomic systems that keep the proletariat, which contains everyone else since there is no middle class, inferior. This way of thinking emerged in light of the industrial revolution, where urbanization of the economy and the emphasis on productivity skyrocketed faster than labor laws and government systems could regulate them. The proletariat is locked in a class struggle in which they are exploited, not only physically with labor, but also mentally. The need for factory workers meant that rather than tradesmen and specialized workers, people became expendable parts of an assembly line, something referred to as “de-skilled” (Barry 157). The lack of individuality, stimulation, and safety on the job created an endless cycle for the proletariat-- to drown in monotonous work that they hate but must continue to do in order to survive, without the benefit of being able to improve.

Under the Marxist theory, there is a concept known as “alienation” that directly deals with the effects something like this can have on a person’s relationship with their own identity.
Becoming deskilled means that your value as a person is placed not in you as an individual but rather in how productive you are. This disconnect leads to a sort of purgatory in which “workers are bereft of their full humanity and are thought of as 'hands' or 'the labour force'... People, in a word, become things” (Barry 157). Alienation, in short, is when one ceases to see themselves as a person deserving of rights and instead becomes a hopeless cog of the industrial machine. The Marxist theory posits that it causes “estrangement from the self” in workers, such that their very identities are reduced to their jobs.

In Pygmalion, Eliza becomes intimately familiar with the effects of alienation as she realizes her shiny new education has set her up for a life she feels unconnected to. Although it was her to demand speech lessons from Higgins, by the time she’s finished her education with him she feels adrift. In an argument near the end of act IV, Eliza tries to articulate why the professor’s dismissal of her success as a “silly notion” and a “bore” (Shaw 4.58) cause her such frustration:

LIZA. [crushed by superior strength and weight] What’s to become of me? What’s to become of me?

HIGGINS. How the devil do I know what’s to become of you? What does it matter what becomes of you?

LIZA. You don’t care. I know you don’t care. You wouldn’t care if I was dead. I’m nothing to you—not so much as them slippers. (4.60)

In her perspective, she is only just realizing that her value to him ended when her ability to provide him with entertainment wore out. Higgins, in his role as the stand-in for the bourgeoisie, is completely unable to sympathize with her. He sees no problem, no reason why she should be distraught when he’s been so generous as to teach her how to behave like a duchess.
HIGGINS. [impatiently] Well, don’t you thank God it’s all over? Now you are free and can do what you like.

LIZA. [pulling herself together in desperation] What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What’s to become of me? (4.61)

Under the lens of Marxist criticism, her time as his student equates to becoming “de-skilled,” as she is actively un-learning who she was before in favor of a skillset that is really only useful for this one situation, a single short-lived farce that changes her life irrevocably-- because now she has become so tied to this new personality he’s crafted for her that she has nowhere to go. A scene from the movie adaptation of the play depicts her returning to the courtyard where she used to sell flowers, where she is treated like a rich girl by the peddlers there, people who used to be on her level, and she finds she can no longer relate to them (Pygmalion). Much in the way a worker’s value is connected to their ability to be productive, Eliza’s value became her ability to learn phonetics quickly. Now that the bet is over and she has nothing left to learn, she is as expendable as a simple packer on a factory line.

Eliza’s identity struggle of who she is, now that Higgins has made a lady of her, drives the conflict to the end. The entire reason she wanted to learn to speak better English was so she could work in a fancier flower shop rather than peddle on the street. Now, though, that isn’t even a possibility for her. Much like a woman of high standing, she is now contained by a different set of rules that mean she can’t work for herself. Her only option, in her eyes, is to marry. Eliza laments her position, declaring: “I sold flowers. I didn’t sell myself. Now you’ve made a lady of me I’m not fit to sell anything else. I wish you’d left me where you found me” (4.61). A rich girl and a poor girl both have restrictions on what they can do, wear, and say, and through Eliza’s plight it is clear that she prefers the freedom of poverty to the stuffiness of the elite. As described
in *Condition of the Working Class in England*, by Friedrich Engels, “The bourgeois, enslaved by social conditions and the prejudices involved in them, trembles, blesses, and crosses himself before everything which really paves the way for progress; the proletarian has open eyes for it, and studies it with pleasure and success” (Engels).

Under Marxist theory, the bourgeoisie uses their control of the means of production to commodify certain things and determine what’s valuable, be it a certain set of words or a certain brand of whisky, that can set apart whether or not one is elite. In the context of Victorian London, and apparent as the main example in *Pygmalion*, the “valuable” and “desired” trait is manners, more specifically a “proper” way of speaking. The way one speaks is intrinsically tied to their social class, as those who are poorer will have less access to education, and therefore a less conventional, by-the-book way of speaking than those who were able to afford private tutors or college level lessons. This divide was particularly cavernous in English society, as the accents of surrounding countries that the imperialist nation took over (i.e. Ireland, Scotland, Wales, etc.) were lumped into the sum of “uneducated,” “uncouth” voices, creating an entire secondary vernacular for the lower class. George Shaw himself “was born in Dublin, the son of a civil servant. His education was irregular, due to his dislike of any organized training” (George Bernard Shaw – Biographical). Being an Irish immigrant in late 19th century London, he more than likely experienced extreme prejudice for his accent. While he was a prolific writer with “keen dialectic interest and verbal wit,” and already massively successful by the late 1890s (George Bernard Shaw – Biographical), his personal experience with the commodification of proper speech gives him a unique insight into the concept of phonetics in correlation with status.

In his play, the upper-class characters treat lower-class speech patterns like a sort of exotic quirk. In her first meeting with actual socialites, an accidental interaction in which
Higgins meant to show Eliza off to his mother without checking first if she was expecting company, Eliza slips up and uses colloquial terms that the rich people don’t understand. She tells a few personal stories, such as how she believes her aunt was murdered, that reveal how unprepared she is for the droning polite society talk of weather and health. Higgins passes it off as “the new small talk,” and they are so removed from the culture of the proletariat that they accept that as fact (Shaw 3.49). One of the guests, a young heiress named Clara, remarks that the slang is “so quaint, and gives such a smart emphasis to things that are not in them- selves very witty. I find the new small talk delightful and quite innocent,” which is a polite society way to say it sounds childish and blunt (3.51). Clara may well have been sincere in her compliment, but the use of the words “quaint” and “innocent” create a tone of mild condescension, like that one would use to humor a toddler who wants to show off his artwork. It is clear that all of the high-society guests are unable to pick up on the scheme, despite her rather obvious mistakes, however; Freddie, the young man who became enamored with Eliza, even remarks on how well she does the small talk (3.50). It is here, where she succeeds even as she’s failing horribly, that the theme of identity is again connected with speech. All of these guests are secure in their positions. They have all been born rich, with the expectations that come with that lifestyle, and thus have never had to even consider how “the other half lives.” By making it so nobody picked up on her differences besides a few comments about the “new small talk,” Shaw has argued that the bourgeoisie is blind to the plight of the proletariat; they are so absorbed in their own view, so used to the system that benefits them, that they are unable to recognize the imposter in their midst.

Something interesting to note is, Shaw doesn’t depict the bourgeoisie as malicious in their exploitation of the lower class— rather, he makes fun of the class divide altogether and
makes several overtures about how everyone is a person on the same level. Higgins didn’t set out
to ruin her life, he just thought it would be interesting to test his skills and see if he could teach
her. Higgins and Colonel Pickering, the other party in the bet to see if their plot would succeed,
are the main vehicles through which Shaw expresses this concept. Higgins as a character is both
the representative of the bourgeoisie and the largest critic of the class system. He is the force that
educates Eliza and acts as her controller, and yet seems to reject the very idea that there is merit
in class. At one point, he argues to a group of other upper-crust people:

    HIGGINS. You see, we’re all savages, more or less. We’re supposed to be civilized and
cultured—to know all about poetry and philosophy and art and science, and so on; but
how many of us know even the meanings of these names? [To Miss Hill] What do
you know of poetry? [To Mrs. Hill] What do you know of science? [Indicating
Freddy] What does he know of art or science or anything else? What the devil do you
imagine I know of philosophy? (3.47)

In this quote, he points out that their social position makes them no more cultured than anybody
else. Despite being a representation of the bourgeoisie in the context of Eliza’s character, “we’re
all savages" is the most blatant expression of social equality in the play. Pickering is much less
unconventional in his views, but as he bounces off of Higgins he occasionally hits similar beats.
After she’s successfully fooled the socialites at the ball, he says “I was quite frightened once or
twice because Eliza was doing it so well. You see, lots of the real people can’t do it at all: they’re
such fools that they think style comes by nature to people in their position; and so they never
learn” (4.58). Here he posits the same thing as Higgins did earlier: being high class means
nothing in terms of how high culture one is. Both of their statements draw attention to the
attitude of the bourgeoisie, how they think themselves better than other people for no reason, and
thus don’t seek to improve themselves. From a Marxist standpoint, this is an unusual stance to take, as most Marxist texts focus far more heavily on the plight of the proletariat. It seems that Shaw is making fun of them, and of how much they stake on one’s circumstances of birth.

Identity is tied to class in innumerable ways, but the most important ones are the way people see others and the way people see themselves. Eliza became a victim of alienation when her lessons stripped her of who she used to be. It was the bourgeoisie who Shaw criticized in the end, too simple-minded and stuck in their ways to realize that even they don’t know what really makes them so special. People’s perceptions in this time period were so focused on who they thought you were based on clothes or actions, and Marxist literary theory helps parse out why it matters.

Works Cited
Barry, Peter. “Marxist Theory”. Beginning Criticism. English 1B: English Composition, Fall 2020, West Valley College, wvm.instructure.com


Pygmalion. Dir. Anthony Asquith. Adapted by Ian Dalrymple. MGM, 1938.