Dear Reader,

My name is XXXXX. I have a twin brother named XXXXX who attends college at the University of XXXXX. Even though he’s not very far away I still miss him like crazy. I chose a rather different path than he did after high school. Being asked the question “what do you want to do with the rest of your life and where?” freaked me out and honestly still does to this day. Unlike my brother I wasn’t ready to venture so far away form home and as a result ended up here at Prairie State and I honestly couldn’t be happier. From the time I was born my mom raised me with the attitude “nothing is out of your reach” and once I find that one thing that truly inspires me and figure out where that will take me, I plan to hold on to it with all I’ve got and not let go.

For my in-class essay, I chose one that we wrote in response to the New York Times editorial, “The Singer Solution To World Poverty” by Peter Singer. This particular in-class essay stood out to me from the rest because the editorial really played with my emotions the instant I began reading it. My experience with this in-class essay was unique. I felt like compared to the other in-class essay this one was more thorough and just an overall stronger paper. I felt like I had set up a strong argument to critically respond to and typically knew what quotes would help strengthen my argument. If I had been able to revise this paper I would have added more opinion and detail to the paper. With in-class essays it’s hard to get out everything you want to say and I feel if I had time to revise the paper I would of added more details and depth to each paragraph.

My short essay is in response to the controversial issue on whether or not a Muslim community center should be built near the Ground Zero Memorial Site in New York City. I felt very strongly about this topic and hopefully displayed that within my writing. My initial draft for this particular paper lacked serious detail. Through the revision process I not only added a lot more necessary detail but also incorporated significant sources I found to be very beneficial within my argument. The major changes I made for my final draft was I included the criticisms that went against my argument in hopes of further strengthening my argument in the end. One thing I struggled with was the length requirement for this paper. I found it extremely difficult to write a short and simple paper based on this controversial topic. Several times I would go through each page trying desperately to cut the length down but in the end felt like everything was there for a reason, it served great importance to the topic at hand.

My long essay is in response to excerpts from the book “Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy” by Eric G. Wilson. Although I agreed with some of the points the author made about America’s obsession with happiness, I recognized his short comings and based my paper off of that, the true benefits of the drive for happiness. I found this paper rather challenging due to the abundant amount of information and sources we had to incorporate within our paper but also became very inspired with this particular subject. During revision, it was brought to my attention that in attempt to compare and contrast views of our sources with the main authors, I sometimes would use information unattached to my thesis. I attempted to do my best to stay on topic and stick to support that would only strengthen my these although it was difficult at times.

Overall I feel that even though I have written better essays in the past, these 3 essays adequately sample my writing style and ability. Throughout high school I struggled with the ability to form strong thesis statements but through this class I believe I have improved my ability to not only
Cover Letter

form strong thesis statements but to also support them using substantial evidence while also inserting my opinion more openly. I hope you enjoy reading the selections that I have chosen.

Best regards,

XXXXXX
Park 51: A Step in the Right Direction

The dispute over whether or not it is suitable to build a Muslim community center (aka “Park 51,” “Ground Zero Mosque,” and “Cordoba House”) near the World Trade Center site has developed from a small controversy among locals to an international issue provoking protests in New York City and triggering major controversy within American political leaders. Park 51 according to plans will be a community center equipped with a library, a gym, a swimming pool, a basketball court, a 500-seat auditorium, a restaurant, a 9/11 memorial, child care facilities, and a culinary school (“Is it Appropriate?” pg. 1). The community center is scheduled to be located at 45-47 Park Place in New York City. Two imperative people involved in the creation of Park 51 are Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, and Sharif El-Gamal. Rauf is a prospective leader of the Park 51 project along with El-Gamal who purchased The Burlington Coat Factory where Park 51 is scheduled to be located. The project has sparked great controversy among Americans based on the proximity of the desired location to the September 11th memorial site, leading some to believe the idea to be an “insult to the memory of those killed” (“Is it Appropriate?” pg. 2). America is built upon the idea of religious freedom and acceptance; who are we to deny Park 51 the rights of being built wherever it pleases? Although some may say the location of the Park 51 project will interfere with the Ground Zero memorial site, they are misguided. Park 51 should not be held back based on its desired location, intentions, and people who are involved.

The desired location of the Park 51 project generates great controversy based on the nearness of the location to the September 11th memorial site. Some believe the location to be insensitive and disrespectful and argue that the mosque will only add salt to the wounds of those who lost loved ones to the September 11th tragedy. Newt Gingrich, former Republican Speaker of the House, argues that the World Trade Center site should remain hallowed and free from the hostile presence of a nearby mosque: “We have not been able to rebuild the World Trade Center in nine years. Now we are being
told a 13 story, $100 million megamosque will be built within a year overlooking the site of the most devastating surprise attack in American history” (“Gingrich Statement” para 7). Gingrich sees the Park 51 project as an upset that will be forever overlooking Ground Zero. However, a Muslim mosque already exists near Ground Zero as well as many other establishments that appear to many as inappropriate. Park 51, as planned, will be situated about two blocks from the World Trade Center site. The New York Dolls strip club, the Pussycat Lounge strip club, and an Off-Track Betting facility are all placed within four blocks of the World Trade Center site. Gingrich believes the mosque to be too close for comfort to the memorial site what is there to say about the strip clubs and casinos? Aren’t they seen as inappropriate and unsympathetic?

Those who believe Park 51 to be disrespectful and to bring shame on the Ground Zero memorial are mistaken. Americans of Christian and Jewish faith were not the only ones who suffered from September 11th. Sixty Muslims were killed in the 9/11 attacks and for us as Americans to look upon that tragic day and point a finger of blame to those who have done nothing wrong is unjust (“Is it Appropriate?” pg. 2). As previously stated there will be a September 11th memorial within the Muslim community center and there was a Muslim prayer room located on the 17th floor of the South World Trade Center Tower. Many who criticize the construction of the Mosque seem to over look the fact that this community center is not meant to be disrespectful or insulting to those who lost loved ones to that tragic day in September. Park 51 is meant to bring people of all religions together and to remember those who were lost in that tragic day.

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, the prospective leader of the Park 51 project, proposes to use Park 51 as a spot where moderate Muslims voices are enlarged to reprimand terrorism and strive for peaceful relationships with New Yorkers (“Is it Appropriate?” pg. 3). Sharif El-Gamal, the developer of Park 51 who purchased the Burlington Coat Factory, has several investors, one of whom is his businessman Hisham Elzanaly. Elzanaly who has donated money to charity that is affiliated with Hamas (“Is it
Appropriate?” pg. 5). Some people see this as suspicious due to the fact that Hamas is a organization that the U.S. labels as terrorist group. llamas seek their own Palestinian state from Israel, and are democratically elected. What people seem to overlook with the llamas organization is that they are also a charitable institution who donate money to many charitable organizations within the United States.

Some other criticisms of Rauf and El-Gamal are that the Imam is a radical Islamist who has refused to call Hamas a terrorist organization and El-Gamal as a suspicious member of the project due to his affiliation with llamas. Bobby Ghosh, author of the Time editorial “The Moderate Imam Behind the Ground Zero Mosque,” believes this to acquisition to be false: “And yet Park 51’s man movers, Imam Abdul Rauf and his wife Daisy Khan, are actually the kind of Muslim leaders right-wing commentators fantasize about: modernists and moderates who openly condemn the death cult of al-Qaeda and it’s adherents - ironically, just the kind of “peaceful Muslims” whom Sarah Palm, in her now infamous tweet, asked to “refudiate” the mosque. Rauf is a Sufi, which is Islam’s most mystical and accommodating denomination” (“The Imam Behind Ground Zero” para 4). Rauf and the other members involved in the Park 51 project are moderate. They are reasonable and are trustworthy by all means. Not all Muslims are terrorists or associated with violence and hostility. You can’t assume that just because someone is Muslim that they are linked to violence, just like you can’t assume all Catholics are pedophiles.

The intentions behind the creation and development of Park 51 is not to be seen as some sort of mockery or to symbolize Muslim victory. Some look towards the title “Cordoba House” as an insulting term. Gingrich states that “Cordoba, Spain the capital of Muslim conquerors who symbolized their victory over the Christian Spaniards by transforming a church there into the world’s third-largest mosque complex” (“Gingrich Statement” para 2). However, Cordoba House was chosen as a potential title might I add due to the fact that it represented Cordoba, Spain, A middle Age city where Muslims, Christians, and Jews co-existed peacefully during a well-known period of cultural enrichment. The
project was later renamed Park 51 to put emphasis on the community center aspect of the project rather than focusing on just religion. All in all the Park 51 project’s intentions are pure, all people are welcome to the mosque which in my opinion will better the city with its abundant features such as a library, swimming pool, child care facilities and not to mention 9/11 memorial. I also believe the project will better the city not only physically but emotionally as Rauf states as a way to strive for “peaceful and harmonious relationships” with one another (“Is it Appropriate?” pg. 3). Harmony is key and what better than a community center to bring everyone together in a place that needs tranquility the most.

America was built upon the message of religious freedom. You cant judge a group of people by the sins of others. As Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York stated in his Ground Zero speech, “The World Trade Center Site will forever hold a special place in our City, in our hearts. But we would be untrue to the best part of ourselves - and who were are as New Yorkers and Americans - if we said ‘no’ to a mosque in Lower Manhattan” (para 10). In the face of tragedy, the best cure is to come together as one to try and overcome the heartbreak life heaves our way. Park 51 has cleared all hurdles. Let it be built.
Works Cited


Ghosh, By Bobby. “Feisal Abdul Rauf, the Imam Behind the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ -- Printout -- TIME.”


“Is It Appropriate to Build a Muslim Community Center (aka the “Ground Zero Mosque”) near the World Trade Center Site?” WTC Muslim Center ProCon.org. 18 Oct. 2010.
In Peter Singer's New York Times editorial, “The Singer Solution to World Poverty,” Singer argues that “whatever money you’re spending on luxuries, not necessities, should be given away” to organizations such as Unicef or Oxfam America to save children’s lives. Although I strongly agree with Singer that money should go where it is most needed, to help those children in need, I also feel like Singer is pulling at our heart-strings a bit to vigorously. It’s one thing to be very enthusiastic with persuading people to donate to a wonderful cause but Singer takes his persuasion to a whole new level of guilt by using tragic analogies, appealing to our pathos, and questioning our morality.

Throughout Singer’s editorial, he uses analogies to truly persuade us into donating to children in need. He even goes as far as to pair us up with German soldiers who looked the other way when Nazi monstrosity was being carried out. Singer calls this the “follow-the-crowd ethics” and that we should not “excuse them because others were behaving no better” (120). Putting us in the same category as German Soldiers is a bit extreme. We have done nothing morally wrong and for him to guilt us into thinking we are no better than the Germans who looked the other way and left millions dead is absurd.

Singer also gives us a scenario about a guy named Bob who chose to save his beloved car from being destroyed by a train over a unexpecting child walking on the tracks. We as the audience, immediately feel for this scenario and criticize Bob for choosing a material object over a child in need. However, Singer just doesn’t leave it at that. He makes the statement that “readers seem to be acting at least as badly as Bob was acting, and in the light of this conclusion he trusts that many readers will reach for the phone and donate that 200$. Perhaps you should do it before reading further” (130). For Singer to once again put us in the same category as someone who would rather save their automobile over a child is ridiculous. Not everyone would act the same way Bob would and for Singer to make the statement that we are just as bad as Bob and that he thinks we should just donate now before reading on is taking his
persuasion way too far. Instead of getting us motivated and enthusiastic to make a change in our life and donate to a helpful cause, Singer creates a feeling of guiltiness and pressure to do the right thing immediately.

Along with Singers use of analogies to appeal to our emotions, Singer uses methods such as throwing phone numbers at his readers and telling his audience exactly how much is takes to save a child and questioning us about not donating. Singer shows his true commitment to helping children in need and goes to far lengths to persuade his readers but he doesn’t take into consideration that times have changed economically. Yes, I agree with Singer that giving to charity is a wonderful thing to do but pressuring people and throwing numbers and calculations in their face is not the way to do it. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to meet Singer’s standards. Not everyone has 200 dollars to spare. I think it’s great that Singer has given one fifth of his earnings to help those in need but for him to assume that everyone else is capable of the same thing or at least donating 200 dollars to help a child, he’s mistaken.

Singer also tugs at his readers heart-strings by questioning their morality. Throughout his editorial Singer raises many moral questions for his readers. For example, right after Singer gave his audience the phone numbers to Unicef and Oxfam America he questions the audiences morality by asking “Now you too, have the information you need to save a child’s life. How should you judge yourself if you don’t do it?” (99). By Singer questioning us as his readers and raising many moral dilemmas, he causes us to question our actions and makes us feel obligated to ask ourselves why which in result causes a strong sense of guilt. Singer even makes the statement that “If we don’t do it (donate), then we should at least know that we are failing to live a morally decent life--not because it is good to wallow in guilt but because knowing where we should be going is the first step toward heading in that direction” (209). Even though Singer says it is not good to wallow in guilt, he is contradicting himself by telling us if we don’t donate we are living a morally indecent life.
Peter Singer truly shows us how significant donating to charities really is by his calculations and by his own actions as a devoted donator, However he takes his persuasion a bit too far when he hits his readers with a strong sense of guilt by him putting us in morally indecent dilemmas and throwing us in tragic analogies.
WORKS CITED

As you begin reading Eric G. Wilson’s “Against Happiness” you are immediately brought to the attention that we as Americans, according to Wilson, are overly obsessed with happiness. We try and control everything about our lives to fit our obsession, from what we watch on television to how “well” we sleep at night, all the way to gaining control over our daily moods. We become “pill happy” or as Wilson would call it a “inauthentic high,” “I for one am afraid that our American culture’s overemphasis on happiness at the expense of sadness might be dangerous, a wanton forgetting of an essential part of a full life” (6). Wilson values sadness and believes without it we would be living unhealthy and unrealistic lives. He then argues that this very obsession with happiness could be the end to all creativity: “What are we to make of this American obsession with happiness, an obsession that could well lead to a sudden extinction of the creative impulse..” (5). Wilson believes that people are at their absolute best when they feeling melancholia. Without sorrow we would not know of joy and true creativity. Wilson does make the distinction between depression and melancholia stating that both forms are “chronic sadness and ongoing unease however, depression causes apathy in the face of this unease while melancholia generates a deep feeling in regard to anxiety and a longing to create new ways of being.” (8). Wilson makes a significant point in saying we should not be so focused on trying to eradicate melancholia altogether. However, he fails to take into consideration the true advantages that the drive for happiness entails such as inventiveness and living a more positive and healthier life. Although I do agree with Wilson’s argument that sadness helps us deal with life’s struggles, he begins to lose his credibility when he argues that people are most creative when they are melancholia.
True creativity comes from within, in comes from our inner thoughts and feelings. Yes, depression can spark a form of creativity but Wilson seems to overlook the possibility that some of the greatest works of art can come from different emotions such as happiness rather than just melancholia.

Wilson wrongly tries to link being a creative genius along with being manic depressive or being in a state of chronic melancholia. Artist Vincent Van Gogh, poet Edgar Allen Poe, and actor Jim Carrey are all examples of imaginative geniuses that suffer or suffered from depression. Bill Gates one of the most wealthy and most creative people in the world, along with Opera Winfrey, another artistic genius who doesn’t seem to be suffering from manic depression or be considered at all “crazy.” Peter Kramer in his New York Times editorial “There’s Nothing Deep About Depression” argues that depression is a disease that needs to be eradicated. Kramer doesn’t see any connection between depression and creativity: “Beset by great evil, a person can be wise, observant and disillusioned and yet not depressed” (9). He believes depression “diminishes the self’ and “freedom from depression would make the world safe for high neurotics, virtuosi of empathy, emotional bungee jumpers. It would make the world safe for van Gogh” (9). Kramer emphasizes that the elimination of depression would open our minds to a whole new way of seeing things. We could see art in a whole new manner and look past what we could identify as depressing and look at things for the good they hold. In other words, one does not have to be depressed or experiencing extreme sadness to be considered as possessing true creativity. Creativity like I said earlier, comes from within, It has nothing to do with being in a deep state of sadness. Yes, emotions hold a key place in creativity but being sad isn’t the only creative emotion out there. You don’t have to be troubled or mournful to spark creativity, it’s within you no matter what mood you are in.

As far as moods go, Wilson argues a point similar to what Robert Wright formulates in his times editorial “Viewpoint: Dancing to Evolution’s Tune,” that being happy all the time is simply unrealistic. Wright argues that being continuously happy makes us biologically unfit and it’s better in terms of natural selection for us to not always be happy: “ Happiness, though designed to materialize under
lots of circumstances, is also designed to evaporate. If the bliss that comes from copulating never ended, then an animal would copulate only once in a lifetime. Among natural selection’s mottoes is, “Stay hungry.” That is, Don’t stay happy” (para 7). Although I agree with Wilson and Wright that chronic happiness isn’t always within our reach, I feel as though Wilson overlooks the fact that being in a chronic melancholy state of mind all the time is hazardous to our health which is why so many Americans choose to strive for chronic happiness over melancholia. In Robert Wright’s editorial, he goes on to compare happiness with benefiting our health by describing our happiness with the neurochemicals that are released within us when we are pursuing food and when we are reproducing (para 4). Wright claims that these genes that are responsible for releasing the chemicals that cause us to feel pleasure and happiness have outlasted the genes that do just the opposite because humans prefer happiness and pleasure over feeling glum or mournful. Wright also demonstrates that happiness benefits our health by comparing it to succeeding in a job and helping your children: “Helping your offspring thrive is a natural joy booster. So is excelling at work... impressing people could be good for your genes” (para 6).

However he and Wilson do make the argument that happiness is not meant to be everlasting. Wright makes the point that food and sex are supposed to be addictive they bring you pleasure but leave you wanting more but nowadays people’s desire for joy can be fulfilled in a instant. Whether it be drugs, alcohol or junk food people are constantly looking for that quick fix of fake happiness. Even though I agree with Wilson and Wright that happiness is not meant to be a permanent state of being, I believe people strive for that chronic happiness because it leaves them feeling not only emotionally superior but leaves them feeling healthier as well. People would much rather aim for happiness because it is much healthier for their bodies to experience happiness as opposed to chronic melancholia.

Not only is happiness healthy but Positive Psychology could be potentially a good thing for not only our own benefit but for our countries benefit as well. Wilson portrays the intentions of the positive psychology field unfairly and immediately puts it down as fake living rather than look at it as
improvement to overcome the obstacles life brings. Martin Seligman in “Positive Psychology Progress” defined positive psychology as the way to make normal life more fulfilling and satisfying, a way of enriching and keeping us happy through the use of medication, self help programs, and books and psychological programs aimed at making happiness a day to day goal we are able achieve (1).

Christopher Peterson in his article “Is Optimism Undermining America?” believes that optimism helped guide in the field of positive psychology by demonstrating the importance of “positive” constructs above-and-beyond the absence of “negative” constructs (para 2). Peterson believes the world is to be challenging enough, and without having hope or looking for the good within the bad we are dismissing one of the world’s most wonderful resources, optimism (para 11). While Wilson see’s the “American dream as a nightmare” (9), Peterson see’s the American dreams as having hope. I agree with Peterson’s claim that the world is already to challenging as it is to go through it without having hope, without hope what do we have? After crises such as the oil spill and September 11th, if everybody believed we had hit rock bottom and no good could come after a crises like that we would be stuck in a chronic sadness all the time. Life unfortunately brings unexpected disasters but we need to overcome those disasters by overcoming pessimism. We need not to dwell the on bad and look forward for the good that may come.

Peterson also brings up the fact that those who are against positive psychology argue the people who believe thinking positively will rid of us life’s downfalls are in denial and that positive thinking may be responsible for economic dilemma’s (para 3). Peterson emphasizes the idea that being optimistic is healthier for us than dwelling on the bad that comes our way but Peterson also emphasizes along with Wright that there is always the reality that no matter how positive we live, happiness isn’t permanent, it comes and it goes (Peterson, para 8).

Another flaw in Wilson’s argument is that he seems to overlook the evidence that many Americans are in fact depressed. Wilson disregards the Pew Research Center poll that shows almost 85% of Americans believe themselves to be happy, he claims that there is no real way to measure happiness
(5). However, the Pew’s poll demonstrates that only 34% of the people surveyed considered themselves to be very happy and since the poll was conducted in 1972, the numbers have decreased tremendously (“Are We Happy Yet?” pg. 1). Wilson holds this strong idea that America is happy, but his argument reveals a huge flaw when Barbara Ehrenreich, author of the book “Bright Sided,” demonstrates just how unhappy Americans really are.

Ehrenreich does this by presenting data that shows America as rated around 150 nations in the happy meter (para 7). Barry Schwartz of the Times Higher Education article “Are you (a) depressed or (b) depressed?” backs up Ehrenreich’s focus on just how depressed America is by giving us scientific data as well. “In America, the number of people describing themselves as “very happy” has declined 5 per cent in the past 30 years, which means that about 14 million fewer people report being very happy today than in 1974 (Schwartz para 5). And, as a recent study published in The Journal of the American Medical Association indicates, the rate of clinical depression has more than tripled over the past two generations” (Schwartz, para 5). How Wilson can look past those statistics is beyond me.

Although I do believe Eric G. Wilson makes some valid points throughout his writing in “Against Happiness,” I do however become disconnected with Wilson when he comes up with exaggerated reasoning for when melancholia should stay for good. I become detached with Wilson when he states that people are at their finest creatively when glum, fails to recognize the reasons why Americans strive for happiness and completely disregards the data that shows many Americans consider themselves depressed. There is in fact no joy without sorrow Wilson, but why do we strive for that joy?
WORKS CITED PAGE


