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English 250H Portfolio
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In this portfolio, I include a wide variety of writing styles and topics. This includes rhetorical analyses of arguments, one of which used the Toulmin method of analysis; a rhetorical analysis of a visual argument; a group-created, original visual argument; an original research-based argument; and a mediative essay. I sent the visual argument via e-mail, so I will describe it below, along with the debates that we had in class.

My group created a visual argument that protested oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The image mainly incorporated the use of graphics, in the form of cartoons depicting trees, caribou, and oil rigs. The trees are broken and fallen on the ground, the caribou are running away from the oil rigs with terrified looks on their faces, and the oil rigs have terrifying expressions on their faces. Our audience saw the image and immediately, a student said, "Wow...scary." The purpose of our argument was to shock the audience and stress the ruinous effects of oil drilling in the Wildlife Refuge. Gauging by the reaction of our audience, our piece was very effective.

During the semester, we also had a number of spontaneous debates. The first time, my group debated whether illegal immigrants should receive amnesty; my designated side was against granting amnesty. Both sides had interesting arguments involving jobs in America, ease of naturalization, and effects on families in and the economy of America. The second, and last, time we debated, I was in the group that debated whether third parties should appear on the election ballot; my side debated against third parties on the ballot. Although my group did not necessarily believe in our argument, we still used an effective and logical argument. A large part of our argument was the fact that third parties rarely receive more than 4% of the national vote, so they cannot possibly win.

For this portfolio, I revised my research-based argument (Assignment 5) and my mediative essay (Assignment 6). These were the two essays that I either earned the lowest grade on, or felt could be much better with another revision.

At the beginning of English 250H, I still had ideas about writing from high school. I did not feel comfortable with my own writing, and therefore I dreaded writing any papers, for English class or otherwise. However, when I got my first paper back and earned an A-, I realized that I could successfully write a paper; I just had to be careful to make a good outline and take my time writing. As I wrote more papers and received better grades than I ever imagined, I grew more confident in my writing. It did not necessarily come easier to me, but I was slightly more comfortable every time I was presented with a writing assignment.

I was also wary of oral and visual presentations. Electronic communication skills never bothered me, but speaking in front of people put me on edge. The topics of our in-class debates were fascinating, which attracted my interest, and soon I felt that I could contribute a valid argument in front of a group of people if I had to. I presented my group's visual argument to the class effectively and without too much trouble, which helped increase my confidence in myself. This course has definitely forced me to develop my written, oral, visual, and electronic communication skills.

I learned a lot from reviewing my past work for this portfolio. I noticed a subtle difference in my tone of writing from the first to the last paper; I seem more comfortable in my writing by the last paper. English 250H is one of the two classes required for my major. I do not

know what my second English class will be like, but 250H has developed my communication skills. Those skills will be crucial to communication in my career in the future.

SAVING OUR FORESTS

Part 1

Today's world is a very materialistic one, where money counts for everything. "Want to Save the Trees? Try Paying People Not to Chop Them Down", an article by Thomas Kostigen, was recently published in *Discover*, a magazine that contains articles about science, technology, and the future. This article discusses a fresh, new way to combat deforestation and global warming while appealing to the materialistic nature of the world. Kostigen traveled to Indonesia to observe one scene in what he calls the "massive global picture of deforestation" (paragraph 1). He explains the causes and effects of deforestation, and describes a plan that could really work: REDD, or "reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation" (paragraph 7). Kostigen writes with a style that implores his readers to listen and take action, which suggests that he targets those who are passionate about climate change. However, he also wants global companies and governments to take part in REDD, and he mentions a few examples of governments and companies that have started to consider the benefits of REDD.

Kostigen states that deforestation occurs because of the world's need for housing, goods, food, and biofuels. He also explains in paragraph 3 how deforestation causes an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide. In paragraphs 7-12 Kostigen describes REDD, a recent program initiated by the United Nations. In essence, REDD involves "forest owners' earning credits that they can sell" to developed countries, and developed countries, such as the United States, "contributing to a fund that would in turn pay developing countries to keep their forests intact" (paragraph 7). This process could result in billions of dollars for developing countries such as Indonesia. Kostigen hopes that even if REDD does not work as planned, it will "spark more widespread attention, laws, and policies" (paragraph 16) that will further forest conservation.

Part 2

Kostigen writes passionately about the hazardous effects of deforestation. He seems convinced that REDD will at least begin a movement to slow deforestation, if not succeed completely. Moreover, he provides three distinct ways that deforestation results in an increase in carbon dioxide: carbon stored in the trees is released when they are cut down; the trees that naturally capture carbon from the atmosphere disappear; and carbon dioxide is released when trees are burned. Kostigen gives three reasons that deforestation is harmful, but only uses six words to propose a solution: "Pay them not to do it" (paragraph 3). This gives readers the feeling that solving the problem is much easier than continuing deforestation.

I found myself warming to Kostigen's opinion and agreeing that REDD sounds like a viable plan. Developing countries would be much more likely to save their forests if there was a monetary compensation involved. Also, companies and governments would take pride in knowing that, by buying credit from developing countries, they were aiding in the fight against deforestation and, ultimately, climate change.

However, Kostigen focuses mainly on climate changes caused by deforestation, and leaves out any other effects of deforestation. Next to climate change, the most prevalent problem caused by deforestation is that of habitat loss and species extinction. In fact, "Although tropical forests cover only about 7 percent of the Earth's dry land, they probably harbor about half of all species on Earth."¹ All species are interrelated, so species extinction from deforestation could affect humans. The inclusion of these environmental impacts would appeal emotionally to many

¹ Lindsey, Rebecca. "Tropical Deforestation." *Earth Observatory*. 30 March 2007. 3 September 2008
<<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Library/Deforestation/>>

people and strengthen Kostigen's argument. People who do not understand or care about climate change but do care about species extinction would pay more attention to the article and, therefore, REDD.

Kostigen makes a strong claim supporting the idea of REDD. He has strong evidence in the article that shows the readers REDD is feasible and very realistic. Before I read Kostigen's article, I knew nothing of a global "project" designed to reduce deforestation; now, after reading the article, I believe that REDD could work wonderfully in our world. After all, REDD "gives credit where credit is due" and in the end, we all win the prize of a healthy environment.

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URBAN SPRAWL: A GROWING PROBLEM

“Chong’s Arguments Against Urban Sprawl” is an article by Michael Chong, a member of Parliament for Wellington-Halton Hills, published in the Canadian newspaper *The Halton Herald*. The article argues against urban sprawl and all its effects on the people of Canada and the environment. Urban sprawl, which involves the destruction of wilderness to make room for the expansion of urban areas, is a serious problem that is becoming very noticeable in today’s world because of the large population growth. Although humans seem to need more and more space, urban sprawl causes much more damage to the local environment than people think. Habitats are destroyed and wildlife becomes endangered or extinct when there is large urban sprawl. Chong brings up a well-reasoned argument inviting his fellow people to take a stand against urban sprawl.

Chong states his claim at the end of the first paragraph. He believes that “[o]ne of the biggest root causes of environmental destruction in Canada is urban sprawl.” The phrase “[o]ne of the biggest...” qualifies his claim, illustrating that urban sprawl is not the largest cause of environmental degradation, but it is still significant. However, Chong says that converting wilderness into farmland is acceptable. He strongly believes that having the natural means to grow food is vital as a country cannot rely on foreign imported food forever. Also, he claims that farmland is “one generation away from wilderness” and, if left alone, will revert “back to its natural state in thirty or forty years.” (paragraph 3) If the people of Canada make wilderness into farmland, the resulting habitat destruction would be very small compared to building a city.

Urban sprawl impacts many different aspects of Canadian life, and Chong gives many reasons to justify this claim. It destroys thousands of acres of habitat every year, and habitat loss poses the serious threat of extinction to the “flora and fauna” (paragraph 2) of Canada. Chong specifically refers to the Great Egret, the Green Snake, and the Jefferson Salamander, all of which are at risk of extinction because of habitat loss. The Great Lakes are also feeling the effects of urban sprawl: water levels in all the lakes are below average or at a record low. Between the lowering water levels and the growing population of Canada, the demand for water is draining Canada’s aquifers and watersheds.

Food is vital to the survival of a people, and oftentimes farmland is required to produce essential crops. Urban sprawl decimates prime farmland, reducing the amount of food that Canada can supply for itself. Chong presents the good point that if foreign food imports cease for any reason, Canada needs to have some foodstuffs set aside for the people so the country does not face starvation. He also reminds readers that urban sprawl creates a “high-carbon infrastructure system” (paragraph 5) that costs Canadian taxpayers impractical amounts of money to maintain. Canadian developers do not have to pay the full cost of development, so taxpayers take up the slack in rising property taxes. While urban sprawl is not “economically sustainable” (paragraph 8), we must also remember that the infrastructure system releases greenhouse gases instead of reducing emissions.

Finally, Chong appeals to the Canadians as people who live on the land. He states that urban sprawl destroys “what is most beautiful and what we cannot ever re-create: the land.” (paragraph 9) As is common in nations worldwide, Canada’s land has shaped the people’s culture, lifestyle, and identity; the people have an intrinsic connection to the land. After all, if one does not have a connection to the land, Chong says, “how can one read and understand Archibald Lampman, Margaret Atwood, Ross Sinclair, Robertson Davies, Michael Ondaatje, or any of the other greats of Canadian literature”? (paragraph 9)

All of the reasons that Chong presents are good reasons because they illustrate the destructive effects of urban sprawl on the local habitat. The situation also applies to many countries around the world, seeing as urban sprawl is required to accommodate a rapidly growing world population, one that has increased by almost one billion people from 1998 to 2008.²

I feel that Chong's reason involving the shrinking Great Lakes is not as relevant to his topic as the other reasons. Urban sprawl indirectly affects lakes: population growth induces urban sprawl, and more water is needed to support more people. The correlation between urban sprawl and falling lake levels is not very clear. However, Chong's comments about expensive carbon-producing infrastructure systems, farmland destruction, and habitat degradation are very relevant to his topic. They all show direct results of urban sprawl on the land and tie the people, local species, and land together to show how they all face problems with urban sprawl. This is effective because urban sprawl causes political and monetary problems as well as environmental problems. The most passionate reason Chong uses to reinforce his claim is the one that appeals to people's emotion and compassion, the very identity of the people of Canada. He first provides a number of logical reasons that urban sprawl is damaging, and then ends with a plea to the emotions of his fellow Canadians.

While discussing the issue of Canadians growing their own food supply, Chong recognizes in paragraph 6 that most of Canada's food is indeed imported from foreign countries and that much of the national farming is unprofitable. However, he states in paragraph 6 that "[n]othing is more vital to our long-term national interest than the ability to produce our own basic food supply." Canadians cannot just assume "the long-term security of [their] imported food supply". (paragraph 7) This is where farming becomes important: if urban sprawl takes over the majority of farmland, there will not be a "backup" supply of food in case there is a problem with imported food. In this way, Chong responds to the claim that Canada does not need to grow its own food.

Urban sprawl is a condition in our world that should be addressed. With a growing population, humans expand their cities and towns far into the wilderness and cause habitat destruction and species extinction. However, those habitats and species are crucial to the biodiversity of the world and the health of the environment. I feel that Chong proposed a very strong rational argument, and also added a compelling appeal to the heart and emotions of the people.

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² "World Population Information." International Data Base. 18 June 2008. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. 15 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/worldpopinfo.html>>.

HABITAT DESTRUCTION

The serious issue of habitat loss by deforestation comes to life in an editorial cartoon created by Kevin Woodcock, a British cartoonist. Dr. J. Floor Anthoni incorporated this cartoon in his 2001 website explaining habitat destruction and its effects. Although the website is from 2001, habitat loss is still extremely prevalent today and causes species extinction all over the world. The cartoon shows a “forest” of tree stumps with birdhouses built on the stumps. In the background, a clear-cutter is shown cutting down full-grown trees with a chainsaw, and there are no words anywhere in the cartoon. Woodcock clearly wants the audience to see that tree-cutters are not putting forth enough effort to restore the natural environment after they clear forests.

I feel that this cartoon aims to alert people to the deforestation occurring around the world. Woodcock also calls to his audience’s attention the clear-cutters’ efforts—or lack thereof—to restore the forests that they demolish. According to an online University of Michigan article from 2006 on global deforestation, “[f]orest restoration may seek to restore the system to a near-natural or completely natural state, or to restore many aspects of the structure and function of an undisturbed forest. The latter is usually referred to as rehabilitation, to emphasize that the desired endpoint is not necessarily that of pre-settlement conditions.” The clear-cutters do an exceptional job of felling trees, but lack at restoring the “structure and function” of the original forest.

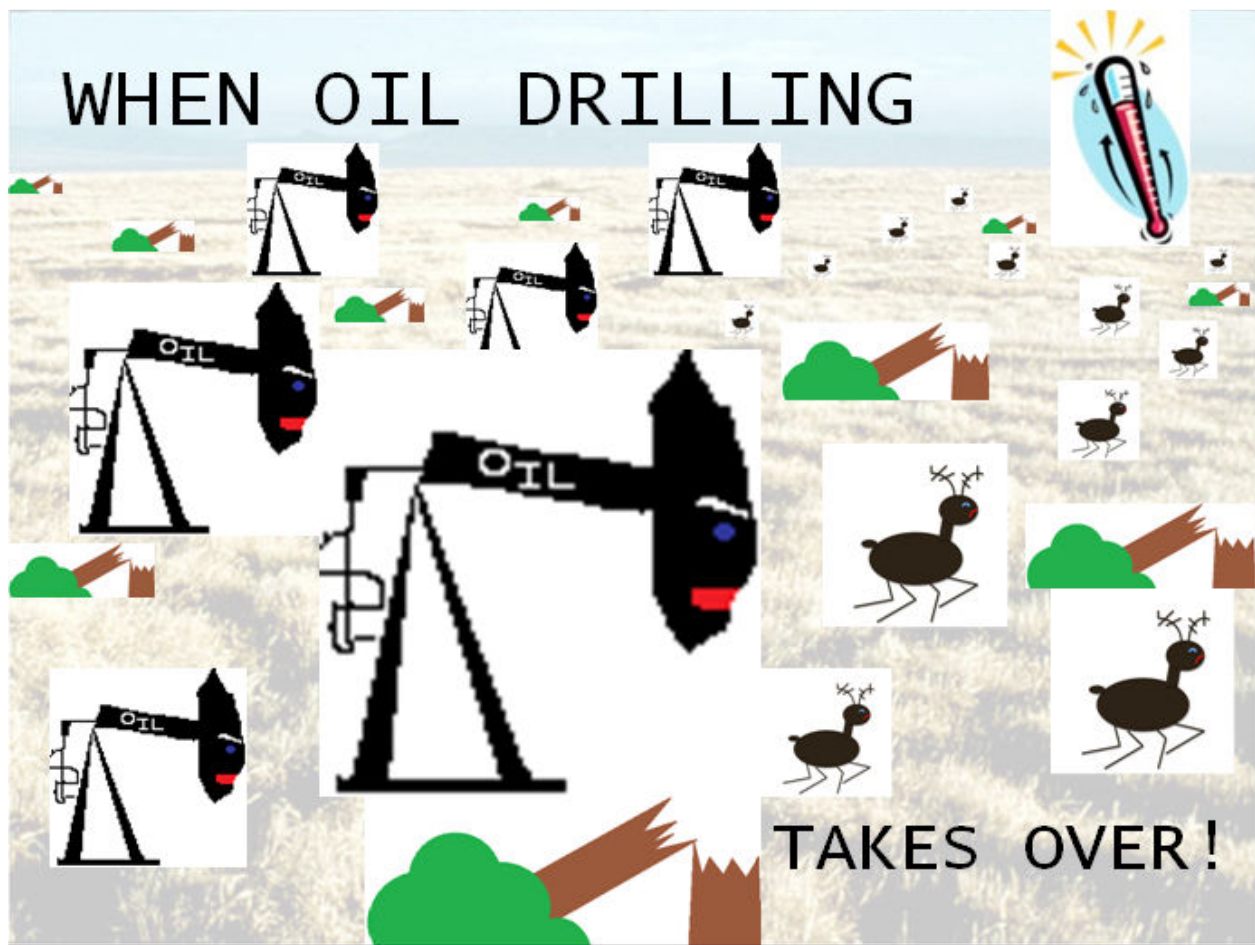
The target audience of this cartoon is all readers, because habitat destruction and deforestation are such well-known issues in today’s world. Woodcock especially focuses on people who have only a general idea of the topic, because they can be easily influenced to think that restoration and rehabilitation efforts are not quite up to standard. The cartoon effectively shows its audience that even though people think that deforesters always plant trees to replace the ones they cut down, this is generally not the case. They do not restore the original environment; they provide only the bare essentials for different species’ existence. As a matter of fact, this cartoon shows only birds receiving new homes. What happens to all the other animals who call the forest home? Clear-cutters put aside the needs of the species in the forest in order to cut down trees for a profit, and therefore destroy many animal and plant species.

I understood the cartoon as ironic; at first glance, the author seems to imply that cutting down trees is perfectly acceptable because birdhouses are planted in their place. The natural habitat is destroyed, but the birds of the forest still have a basic home in which to live. However, once the reader looks more closely at the cartoon, he or she can see that the birdhouses are not sufficient as habitats compared to the natural forest ecosystem. The birdhouses stand predominantly at the front of the cartoon, as the focus of the picture, to capture the reader’s attention and illustrate the effects of deforestation and habitat destruction. The regular trees stand to the side and in the background, which gives the impression that they are not as important. This is also ironic, seeing as real trees are vital in the production of the oxygen we breathe.

When I first saw Woodcock’s cartoon, I disregarded it because it was only a picture, but then I realized that this particular picture does not need words to communicate its message. It clearly says deforesters are not doing enough to restore the forests they cut down. This cartoon could be very influential if it reaches an audience that does not know much about habitat loss: it could inspire them to take action in the environmental movement against habitat destruction.

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My group created a visual argument that protested oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The image mainly incorporated the use of graphics, in the form of cartoons depicting trees, caribou, and oil rigs. The trees are broken and fallen on the ground, the caribou are running away from the oil rigs with terrified looks on their faces, and the oil rigs have frightening expressions on their faces. The purpose of our argument was to shock the audience and stress the ruinous effects of oil drilling in the Wildlife Refuge. Gauging by the reactions of shock and awe from our audience, our piece was very effective.

LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Imagine this: bulldozers growl and grind through a local field, while the whine of chainsaws echoes from a nearby grove of trees. The trees crash to the ground, only to be cut up for firewood or sent to a sawmill, and the remaining ground is cleared of stumps and plowed. The tall grasses and brush in the field are demolished, leaving behind churned-up soil. Any birds or other small creatures that lived in the freshly cut trees have long since flown or run away in terror as their homes fell. The moles, mice, and other animals that lived in the field were either killed or forced to abandon the area in search of a new home. Soon to come on this land: a subdivision consisting of huge, two- or three-story houses with pristine front lawns and the occasional small, decorative tree placed by the main door.

The scene painted above is becoming more and more common today; people want more space, more houses, more roads, more big buildings, more cities all over the world. However, what the population does not consider is that construction destroys natural habitat, or “the place or environment where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary). While humans may think nothing of this habitat destruction, it is actually the number one cause of extinction worldwide (Dudley 17) and influences many other species, including humans, that are not endangered or threatened. Habitat loss causes loss of biodiversity, which adversely affects the health and economy of human life. We as humans need to take more measures to preserve Earth’s habitats and biodiversity.

As mentioned before, habitat is the natural environment where some species live and grow. Destroying this habitat, therefore, is destroying the home of an animal or plant that depends on that environment to survive. Often, our intense and repeated patterns of resource use destroy habitats. Those species who cannot adapt quickly enough will die. Already, “more than 50% of the wildlife habitat has been destroyed in 49 out of 61 Old World tropical countries In tropical Asia, fully 65% of the wildlife habitat has been lost, with particularly high rates of destruction reported for Bangladesh (94%), Hong Kong (97%), Sri Lanka (83%), Vietnam (80%), and India (80%)” (Primack 115-118). As different species become extinct, biodiversity decreases. According to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, biodiversity is “biological diversity in an environment as indicated by numbers of different species of plants and animals.” A large biodiversity is healthy for our environment because it ensures a variety of predators and prey in an ecosystem (for balance), and provides humans with a wealth of natural resources that we use to survive.

Because of biodiversity, we have hundreds of plant-based medicines. The commercial value of plant-based medicines “topped \$40 billion a year in the late 1980s” (Novacek 23) in developed countries alone, and scientists expect that there are approximately 20 undiscovered plants in tropical forests that could be made into anticancer drugs. Plant-based food products, such as coffee and chocolate, rely on the wild species that regularly contribute resistant genes to the plants that provide coffee and cocoa beans. Think also of the environmental effects that biodiversity has: the atmosphere constantly cycles water and air so that they are clean; plants exist in soils to protect them from erosion. Biodiversity provides a wonderful source of entertainment for tourists who pay hundreds of billions of dollars to see the biodiversity of an area.

The loss of biodiversity affects species both directly and indirectly. For example, if a company decided to drain a wetland, a local species of bird may be faced with extinction and there may be an increased chance of flooding downstream. Humans worry more about the

increased flood risk, because the waters flood their homes and might make some roads impassable. What humans do not realize is that the extinct bird is more important than they thought. If there is a sudden, unfavorable turn of events in the local ecosystem, that bird species may be the species that could help alleviate the adverse effects. Without the bird species, however, the ecosystem can suffer and cease to provide humans with the natural resources they depend on from the area (Bennett).

The question now is this: what can we do about this biodiversity crisis? Statistics and descriptions catch the public's attention, but in order to make a difference there must be some way to slow, or even stop, habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity. Many countries, both developed and developing, are willing to discuss international conservation efforts in order to alleviate biodiversity loss. Developing countries often lack the money or sufficient personnel to carry out conservation practices, so developed countries should offer money or reduce the debt owed by the developing countries. This way the developing countries would not exploit their natural resources to pay for conservation practices or debts. Conservation groups from developed countries can offer their services in developing countries. In addition, companies and factories need new cost-benefit analyses that take into account environmental and ecological effects. Environmental impact statements (EIS), required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 for all projects undertaken by federal agencies, force federal agencies to "consider the probable environmental effects of projects and programs under their control" ("Environmental Impact Statements"). Environmental impact statements allow agencies to observe their positive or negative effects on the environment, and change accordingly. They should be made more readily available so that the public can see the efforts that companies are making—or not making—to be economically friendly.

Finally, countries create protected areas where governments or conservation groups manage the local ecosystem and preserve or restore habitat. Protected areas are an easy way to conserve biodiversity and habitat. Often, protected areas consist of State or National Parks in which humans can enjoy the aesthetic benefits of biodiversity, so both the habitat and the human population benefit. Unfortunately, a problem exists with the idea of protected areas. As of 1989, protected areas only covered 4,846,300 square kilometers of land worldwide, which is only 3.2% of available landmass on the Earth (Primack 305). In 2000, only 4% of the United States (420,874 square kilometers) was designated wilderness, two-thirds of which lies in Alaska (Novacek 155). These numbers are shockingly low for a world that so often stresses the importance of an environmentally friendly or "green" world. Conservation groups and governments need to create more protected areas so that species can thrive in the natural habitats and humans will not have to worry about losing biodiversity.

Habitat destruction is not the sole cause of biodiversity loss; global warming and the introduction of exotic species play large roles in the loss of biodiversity. The number one impact on biodiversity, however, is habitat destruction, so we need to make an effort to alleviate the devastating effects that habitat loss has on biodiversity. If only we could attempt to understand and change our resource use, we could attain our conservation and restoration goals. Until then, humans must do all that we can to conserve the Earth's natural resources, habitats, and incredible biodiversity.

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GUN CONTROL

Gun control has a history dating back to 1791, when the Second Amendment of the Constitution was ratified. However, more recently, the debate over gun control has escalated into a much more public issue to which many citizens can relate. After all, stories about incidents involving guns appear frequently today in newspapers and on television or the radio. One could say that the debate started with the passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968, which banned ownership of guns by certain groups of people and regulated the sale of guns. Since then, two main groups have gradually appeared: people who oppose strict federal regulations on guns, and people who favor those federal regulations.

The Second Amendment to the Constitution states, “a well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”³ Because the “militia” is composed of ordinary citizens that may take up arms when the country needs, all Americans should be constitutionally able to own a gun. This is one of the beliefs that proponents of gun ownership, including the National Rifle Association (NRA), hold. They feel that most people—excluding certain groups of people, such as criminals—should be able to buy a gun with little trouble and without a waiting period. Also, they think that limiting gun ownership would restrict law-abiding citizens from protecting themselves from criminals and violent crime, and that people need to be able to protect themselves and their families. An article from the National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action actually reports that in 2007, gun ownership was at an all-time high, while violent crime was approaching a 30-year low. Since 1991, the violent crime rate has decreased 38 percent.⁴

Supporters of restricting gun ownership argue exactly the opposite; they feel that if more people were to have guns, there would be more violent crime incidents and more accidents involving guns, especially among children and teens. More people in the United States die in a gun-related occurrence than in any other country, and gun attacks are five times more likely to cause death than attacks involving a knife.⁵ Those people who want more restricting laws have good reason to do so, because they want to protect themselves and the people they know from harm. On both sides of this issue, people feel that their ideas are the ones that will keep them from harm. Unfortunately, their ideas differ so greatly (gun ownership versus no ownership) that the issue is hotly debated today.

Between very limited gun control and very restricted gun control, there must be some medium that can somewhat appease both sides. More laws can be constructed that ban individuals that have a criminal background, mentally unstable individuals, or minors from buying a gun. Already, a background check is required for all individuals who wish to buy a gun; this comes from the Brady Law, passed in 1994, which allows law enforcement officials to check the qualifications of the buyer. This way, law-abiding citizens can own a gun for hunting or for self-defense reasons, while criminals would have a nearly impossible chance of legally receiving a gun. Laws should also ban the sale of military-style and assault weapons, but still allow other guns, including pistols and handguns, to be sold. Assault weapons are easily abused because they are often automatic or semiautomatic, but pistols and handguns are normally used more responsibly when sold to the law-abiding citizens. Even though a majority of states give

³ "The United States Constitution." [U.S. Constitution Online](#).

⁴ "More Guns, Less Crime (Again) in 2007." [National Rifle Association of America](#).

⁵ "Gun Control." [Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia](#).

their citizens the right to carry a gun, guns are not tolerated in certain areas such as school grounds, so children are often protected in this way.

Although there are great differences of opinion between the two sides of the gun control debate, there are certain laws and regulations that can be made by taking a few ideas from each side. No particular side will be completely satisfied, but in a compromise each party must give a little. By making a law that compromises the ideas of each side, gun control can be regulated without being overwhelming to gun-owning citizens. Many people own guns and use them for important things, such as hunting for food or even self-defense. Taking guns away from gun owners could force them to change their lifestyles by varying degrees. In a debate as important as this one, it is necessary to develop an arrangement on which both sides can agree.

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