SUMMER ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

1. Read and annotate a collection of essays chosen by your teacher. Essays may be found within your Google Classroom.
2. Respond to discussion questions posted to Google Classroom throughout the summer.
3. Read Jon Krakauer’s *Into the Wild* and keep a reading journal.
4. Write a two-page persuasive essay discussing your admiration for Chris McCandless or your disdain for him. In other words, did the central figure of Krakauer’s book make decisions with which you agree?

ASSIGNMENT #1 - Read the essays and Respond to Discussion Questions

**September Discussions:** When we begin class in September, you will be responsible to lead, participate in, and moderate a discussion based on one of essays you will read this summer.

**September Requirements:** Because the essays are PDFs and you may be unable to print, please complete the following tasks as you read. You may use the template provided.

1) Summarize the essay in one paragraph.
2) Record your opinion of the essay with an explanation.
3) Record FIVE passages with annotations. These may be elements you find interesting, examples of rhetorical devices, confusing elements, etc.

**Writing Guidelines:** All of your responses should be contained within one Google Doc. Adhere to the following guidelines:

- Typed, double-spaced responses
- Size 12, Times New Roman font
- Provide title and author of each essay as a heading.
- Essay titles should be placed within quotation marks.
- Refer to specific passages of the essays when you write about them.
- Each response should be about a page long.
- Discuss the essayist’s goals and intentions when crafting your response.
- You may interweave each requirement listed above.

ASSIGNMENT #2 - INTO THE WILD

**THE BOOK:** This book is hard to categorize. It reads like a novel, but according to Jon Krakauer, it is nonfiction. The book also vacillates between the central figure, the author’s personal experience, and other well-known reclusive figures. Regardless of its genre, Krakauer’s writing is important to read.

**AS YOU READ:** Use Post-it notes, a notebook, or take notes in a Google Doc. This is not mandatory, but you should in some way note important passages or sections of the book that make you take pause. One way to do this is to create a chart that delineates each chapter and record one page number that interests, confuses, or intrigues you.

**PERSUASIVE ESSAY:** Although this assignment is titled as a persuasive essay, you do not have to follow a specific format. You really just have to put your voice into a piece of writing and tell your audience, Mr.
DeBarberie, what you think of Chris McCandless. Basically, do you agree or disagree with his decision to live off the land in Alaska?

Do you see why you were asked to read essays for the first part of your summer assignment? Take a queue from some of those works.

Your essay should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Typed, double spaced
- Proper MLA heading
- Size 12, Times New Roman font
- Approximately two pages
- Uploaded to Turnitin and submitted to Google Classroom (By the second day of English class in September)

A Note About Technology

If you use Google Drive/Google Docs, you may access your work nearly anywhere using Google Apps.

If you do not have access to a computer or if your WiFi is down or if you spend your summer vacation in Antarctica to escape the heat, email me and we can work out a solution. Wait, email won’t work in these scenarios. Try this. Visit the school Monday-Thursday, visit your local library, go to a public place with free WiFi, or handwrite your assignments and type them up when school starts. If you have a specific concern, please visit me at RBR. I’m here throughout July and for three weeks in August on certain days.

Grading

Each essay analysis will be worth ten points and the Into the Wild essay will be worth twenty points. Mr. DeBarberie reserves the right to deduct points based on incompleteness, lack of effort, egregious grammatical errors, and inaccuracies present throughout the work a student submits.

However, Mr. DeBarberie also reserves the right to award students for their effort, the completeness of their work, the academic voice students utilize in their writing, and representations of accurate information.

Enjoy these works. Space out these assignments throughout the summer. Each essay should take about fifteen minutes to read and fifteen minutes to analyze. Into the Wild may take much more time to read. Good luck!
Professions for Women

Virginia Woolf

A prolific novelist, critic, and essayist, Virginia Woolf was born in London in 1882. Her novels, particularly *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), are renowned for their penetrating psychological insight. Her novels are known for their use of interior monologue, or stream of consciousness. Woolf is also noted for her nonfiction, especially for such works as *The Common Reader* (1925), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and *Three Guineas* (1938). Having struggled with mental illness for much of her life, she drowned herself in 1941. “Professions for Women,” delivered as a talk in 1931 to the Women’s Service League, was included in *Death of a Moth and Other Essays* (1942).

When your secretary invited me to come here, she told me that your Society is concerned with the employment of women and she suggested that I might tell you something about my own professional experiences. It is true I am a woman; it is true I am employed; but what professional experiences have I had? It is difficult to say. My profession is literature; and in that profession there are fewer experiences for women than in any other, with the exception of the stage—fewer, I mean, that are peculiar to women. For the road was cut many years ago—by Fanny Burney, by Aphra Behn, by Harriet Martineau, by Jane Austen, by George Eliot—many famous women, and many more unknown and forgotten, have been before me, making the path smooth, and regulating my steps. Thus, when I came to write, there were very few material obstacles in my way. Writing was a reputable and harmless occupation. The family peace was not broken by the scratching of a pen. No demand was made upon the family purse. For ten and sixpence one can buy paper enough to write all the plays of Shakespeare—if one has a mind that way. Pianos and models, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, masters and mistresses, are not needed by a writer. The cheapness of writing paper is, of course, the reason why women have succeeded as writers before they have succeeded in the other professions.

But to tell you my story—it is a simple one. You have only got to figure to yourselves a girl in a bedroom with a pen in her hand. She had only to move that pen from left to right—from ten o’clock to one. Then it occurred to her to do what is simple and cheap enough after all—to slip a few of those pages into an envelope, fix a penny stamp in the corner, and drop the envelope into the red box at the corner. It was thus that I became a journalist; and my effort was rewarded on the first day of the following month—a very glorious day it was for me—by a letter from an editor containing a cheque for one pound ten shillings and sixpence. But
to show you how little I deserve to be called a professional woman, how little I know of the struggles and difficulties of such lives, I have to admit that instead of spending that sum upon bread and butter, rent, shoes and stockings, or butcher's bills, I went out and bought a cat—a beautiful cat, a Persian cat, which very soon involved me in bitter disputes with my neighbours.

What could be easier than to write articles and to buy Persian cats with the profits? But wait a moment. Articles have to be about something. Mine, I seem to remember, was about a novel by a famous man. And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. ¹ It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her—you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. The shadow of her wings fell on my page; I heard the rustling of her skirts in the room. Directly, that is to say, I took my pen in my hand to review that novel by a famous man, she slipped behind me and whispered: "My dear, you are a young woman. You are writing about a book that has been written by a man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure." And she made as if to guide my pen. I now record the one act for which I take some credit to myself, though the credit rightly belongs to some excellent ancestors of mine who left me a certain sum of money—shall we say five hundred pounds a year?—so that it was not necessary for me to depend solely on charm for my living. I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be had up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. For, as I found, directly I put pen to paper, you cannot review even a novel without having a mind of your own, without expressing what you think to be the truth about human relations, morality, sex. And all these questions, according to the Angel of the House, cannot be dealt

¹"The Angel in the House" is a nineteenth-century poem about a self-sacrificing heroine; for many, she represented the ideal Victorian woman.—Eds.
with freely and openly by women; they must charm, they must conciliate, they
must—to put it bluntly—tell lies if they are to succeed. Thus, whenever I felt the
shadow of her wing or the radiance of her halo upon my page, I took up the ink-
pot and flung it at her. She died hard. Her fictitious nature was of great assistance
to her. It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality. She was always creeping back
when I thought I had despatched her. Though I flatter myself that I killed her in
the end, the struggle was severe; it took much time that had better have been
spent upon learning Greek grammar; or in roaming the world in search of adven-
tures. But it was a real experience; it was an experience that was found to befall all
women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occu-
pation of a woman writer.

But to continue my story. The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may
say that what remained was a simple and common object—a young woman in a
bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of false-
hood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is "herself"? I mean,
what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know. I do
not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts
and professions open to human skill. That indeed is one of the reasons why I have
come here—out of respect for you, who are in process of showing us by your
experiments what a woman is, who are in process of providing us, by your failures
and successes, with that extremely important piece of information.

But to continue the story of my professional experiences. I made one pound
ten and six by my first review; and I bought a Persian cat with the proceeds. Then
I grew ambitious. A Persian cat is all very well, I said; but a Persian cat is not enough.
I must have a motor car. And it was thus that I became a novelist—for it is a very
strange thing that people will give you a motor car if you will tell them a story. It
is a still stranger thing that there is nothing so delightful in the world as telling
stories. It is far pleasanter than writing reviews of famous novels. And yet, if I am
to obey your secretary and tell you my professional experiences as a novelist, I
must tell you about a very strange experience that befell me as a novelist. And to
understand it you must try first to imagine a novelist’s state of mind. I hope I am
not giving away professional secrets if I say that a novelist’s chief desire is to be as
unconscious as possible. He has to induce in himself a state of perpetual lethargy.
He wants life to proceed with the utmost quiet and regularity. He wants to see the
same faces, to read the same books, to do the same things day after day, month
after month, while he is writing, so that nothing may break the illusion in which he
is living—so that nothing may disturb or disquiet the mysterious nosings about,
feelings round, darts, dashes and sudden discoveries of that very shy and illusive
spirit, the imagination. I suspect that this state is the same both for men and
women. Be that as it may, I want you to imagine me writing a novel in a state of
trance. I want you to figure to yourselves a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which
for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the inkpot. The image that
comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk
in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was
letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world
that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the expe-
rience, the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than
with men. The line raced through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed
away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish
slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and
confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl
was roused from her dream. She was indeed in a state of the most acute and dif-
ficult distress. To speak without figure she had thought of something, something
about the body, about the passions which it was unfitting for her as a woman to
say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men
will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from
her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over.
Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common expe-
rience with women writers—they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of
the other sex. For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these
respects, I doubt that they realize or can control the extreme severity with which
they condemn such freedom in women.

These then were two very genuine experiences of my own. These were two of
the adventures of my professional life. The first—killing the Angel in the House—
I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experi-
ences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet.
The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful—and yet they are very dif-
ficult to define. Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what
obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case
is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome.
Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a
book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. And if
this is so in literature, the freest of all professions for women, how is it in the new
professions which you are now for the first time entering?

Those are the questions that I should like, had I time, to ask you. And indeed,
if I have laid stress upon these professional experiences of mine, it is because I
believe that they are, though in different forms, yours also. Even when the path is
nominally open—when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doc-
tor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe,
looming in her way. To discuss and define them is I think of great value and impor-
tance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved. But besides
this, it is necessary also to discuss the ends and the aims for which we are fighting,
for which we are doing battle with these formidable obstacles. Those aims cannot
be taken for granted; they must be perpetually questioned and examined. The whole
position, as I see it—here in this hall surrounded by women practising for the
first time in history I know not how many different professions—is one of extra-
ordinary interest and importance. You have won rooms of your own in the house
hitherto exclusively owned by men. You are able, though not without great labour and effort, to pay the rent. You are earning your five hundred pounds a year. But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms? These, I think, are questions of the utmost importance and interest. For the first time in history you are able to ask them; for the first time you are able to decide for yourselves what the answers should be. Willingly would I stay and discuss those questions and answers—but not tonight. My time is up; and I must cease.

Questions for Discussion

1. According to Virginia Woolf, what are the two main obstacles to women’s professional identity? Are these still the two main obstacles, or does the contemporary woman face different hurdles? Explain.

2. Research the origin of “The Angel in the House” (para. 3). Why is this an appropriate or effective frame of reference for Woolf?

3. What do you think Woolf means in paragraph 5 when she asserts that “a novelist’s chief desire is to be as unconscious as possible”? Do you agree that someone who writes fiction should be “unconscious”? Why do you think a novelist would want to be “unconscious” or would benefit from being “unconscious”?

4. In paragraphs 5 and 6, Woolf explores the consequences of being unable to tell “the truth” about her own “experiences as a body.” What does she mean? Why does she believe that surmounting this obstacle is more difficult—perhaps impossible at the time she was writing—than “killing the Angel in the House”?

5. In her final paragraph, Woolf apologizes to a certain extent for dwelling on her own experience, and then points out that her “professional experiences . . . are, though in different forms,” also the experiences of her audience. What exactly is she asking of her audience here?

6. In an online essay, Barbara Wahl Ledingham makes the following assertion about the relevance of Woolf’s essay to women in the twenty-first century:

   We must claim and have knowledge of our feminists, our artists, our mothers, our leaders, and our organizers, women like Susan B. Anthony . . . or Margaret Sanger . . . All of these women acted despite persecution. Their sacrifice is responsible for many of the rights we take for granted today, but the biggest challenge is confronting our own Angel in the House, our own inner phantom, the one that keeps us from . . . defining and owning our own lives.

   With a kind of uncanny prescience, Woolf’s words follow us seventy years later, haunting us with their veracity and timelessness. They are a gauge by which to measure not only our exterior accomplishments but also our inner state, and they serve as a warning not to lose consciousness or become apathetic about either realm.
held back the urge to run. Instead, I walked south to The Midway, plunged into its darkness, and remained on The Midway until I reached the foot of my street.

I'd been a fool. I'd been walking the streets grinning good evening at people who were frightened to death of me. I did violence to them by just being. How had I missed this? I kept walking at night, but from then on I paid attention.

11. Staples first wrote this essay in 1986. Do you think the essay is dated? Explain why you do or do not feel that many people in today’s society continue to perceive young African American males as threatening.

The Myth of the Latin Woman

I Just Met a Girl Named Maria

JUDITH ORTIZ COFER

Poet, novelist, and essayist Judith Ortiz Cofer was born in Puerto Rico in 1952 and grew up in New Jersey. She is currently the Regents’ and Franklin Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Georgia. Among her many publications are the young adult novel If I Could Fly (2011), the novel The Meaning of Consuelo (2004), her memoirs Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood (1990) and Woman in Front of the Sun: Becoming a Writer (2000), and her collection of prose and poetry. The Latin Deli (1993). She has won many awards, including the Anisfield-Wolf Award in Race Relations and the Americas Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature; she was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1989. In the following selection, originally published in Glamour in 1992, Cofer examines the impact of stereotyping.

On a bus trip to London from Oxford University where I was earning some graduate credits one summer, a young man, obviously fresh from a pub, spotted me and as if struck by inspiration went down on his knees in the aisle. With both hands over his heart he broke into an Irish tenor’s rendition of “María” from West Side Story.1 My politely amused fellow passengers gave his lovely voice the round of gentle applause it deserved. Though I was not quite as amused, I managed my version of an English smile: no show of teeth, no extreme contortions of the facial muscles—I was at this time of my life practicing reserve and cool. Oh, that British control, how I coveted it. But Maria had followed me to

1West Side Story was a Broadway musical (1957) and then a feature film (1961). Based on Romeo and Juliet, the story deals with the conflicts between two New York City gangs—a Puerto Rican gang and a white ethnic gang. The Puerto Rican actress Rita Moreno, mentioned later in this paragraph, had a major role in the movie.—Eds.
London, reminding me of a prime fact of my life; you can leave the Island, master the English language, and travel as far as you can, but if you are a Latina, especially one like me who so obviously belongs to Rita Moreno's gene pool, the Island travels with you.

This is sometimes a very good thing—it may win you that extra minute of someone's attention. But with some people, the same things can make you an island—not so much a tropical paradise as an Alcatraz, a place nobody wants to visit. As a Puerto Rican girl growing up in the United States and wanting like most children to "belong," I resented the stereotype that my Hispanic appearance called forth from many people I met.

Our family lived in a large urban center in New Jersey during the sixties, where life was designed as a microcosm of my parents' casas on the island. We spoke in Spanish, we ate Puerto Rican food bought at the bodega, and we practiced strict Catholicism complete with Saturday confession and Sunday mass at a church where our parents were accommodated into a one-hour Spanish mass slot, performed by a Chinese priest trained as a missionary for Latin America.

As a girl I was kept under strict surveillance, since virtue and modesty were, by cultural equation, the same as family honor. As a teenager I was instructed on how to behave as a proper señorita. But it was a conflicting message girls got, since the Puerto Rican mothers also encouraged their daughters to look and act like women and to dress in clothes our Anglo friends and their mothers found too "mature" for our age. It was, and is, cultural, yet I often felt humiliated when I appeared at an American friend's party wearing a dress more suitable to a semi-formal than to a playroom birthday celebration. At Puerto Rican festivities, neither the music nor the colors we wore could be too loud. I still experience a vague sense of letdown when I'm invited to a "party" and it turns out to be a marathon conversation in hushed tones rather than a fiesta with salsa, laughter, and dancing—the kind of celebration I remember from my childhood.

I remember Career Day in our high school, when teachers told us to come dressed as if for a job interview. It quickly became obvious that to the barrio girls, "dressing up" sometimes meant wearing ornate jewelry and clothing that would be more appropriate (by mainstream standards) for the company Christmas party than as daily office attire. That morning I had agonized in front of my closet, trying to figure out what a "career girl" would wear because, essentially, except for Marlo Thomas on TV, I had no models on which to base my decision. I knew how to dress for school: at the Catholic school I attended we all wore uniforms; I knew how to dress for Sunday mass, and I knew what dresses to wear for parties at my relatives' homes. Though I do not recall the precise details of my Career Day outfit, it must have been a composite of the above choices. But I remember a comment my friend (an Italian-American) made in later years that coalesced my impressions of that day. She said that at the business school she was attending the Puerto Rican girls always stood out for wearing "everything at once." She meant, of course, too much jewelry, too many accessories. On that day at school, we were simply
made the negative models by the nuns who were themselves not credible fashion experts to any of us. But it was painfully obvious to me that to the others, in their tailored skirts and silk blouses, we must have seemed “hopeless” and “vulgar.” Though I now know that most adolescents feel out of step much of the time, I also know that for the Puerto Rican girls of my generation that sense was intensified. The way our teachers and classmates looked at us that day in school was just a taste of the culture clash that awaited us in the real world, where prospective employers and men on the street would often misinterpret our tight skirts and jingling bracelets as a come-on.

Mixed cultural signals have perpetuated certain stereotypes—for example, that of the Hispanic woman as the “Hot Tamale” or sexual firebrand. It is a one-dimensional view that the media have found easy to promote. In their special vocabulary, advertisers have designated “sizzling” and “smoldering” as the adjectives of choice for describing not only the foods but also the women of Latin America. From conversations in my house I recall hearing about the harassment that Puerto Rican women endured in factories where the “boss men” talked to them as if sexual innuendo was all they understood and, worse, often gave them the choice of submitting to advances or being fired.

It is custom, however, not chromosomes, that leads us to choose scarlet over pale pink. As young girls, we were influenced in our decisions about clothes and colors by the women—older sisters and mothers who had grown up on a tropical island where the natural environment was a riot of primary colors, where shining your skin was one way to keep cool as well as to look sexy. Most important of all, on the island, women perhaps felt freer to dress and move more provocatively, since, in most cases, they were protected by the traditions, mores, and laws of a Spanish/Catholic system of morality and machismo whose main rule was: You may look at my sister, but if you touch her I will kill you. The extended family and church structure could provide a young woman with a circle of safety in her small pueblo on the island; if a man “wronged” a girl, everyone would close in to save her family honor.

This is what I have gleaned from my discussions as an adult with older Puerto Rican women. They have told me about dressing in their best party clothes on Saturday nights and going to the town’s plaza to promenade with their girlfriends in front of the boys they liked. The males were thus given an opportunity to admire the women and to express their admiration in the form of pirepos: erotically charged street poems they composed on the spot. I have been subjected to a few pirepos while visiting the Island, and they can be outrageous, although custom dictates that they must never cross into obscenity. This ritual, as I understand it, also entails a show of studied indifference on the woman’s part; if she is “decent,” she must not acknowledge the man’s impassioned words. So I do understand how things can be lost in translation. When a Puerto Rican girl dressed in her idea of what is attractive meets a man from the mainstream culture who has been trained to react to certain types of clothing as a sexual signal, a clash is likely to take place. The line
I first heard based on this aspect of the myth happened when the boy who took me to my first formal dance leaned over to plant a sloppy overeager kiss painfully on my mouth, and when I didn't respond with sufficient passion said in a resentful tone: "I thought you Latin girls were supposed to mature early"—my first instance of being thought of as a fruit or vegetable—I was supposed to ripen, not just grow into womanhood like other girls.

It is surprising to some of my professional friends that some people, including those who should know better, still put others “in their place.” Though rarer, these incidents are still commonplace in my life. It happened to me most recently during a stay at a very classy metropolitan hotel favored by young professional couples for their weddings. Late one evening after the theater, as I walked toward my room with my new colleague (a woman with whom I was coordinating an arts program), a middle-aged man in a tuxedo, a young girl in satin and lace on his arm, stepped directly into our path. With his champagne glass extended toward me, he exclaimed, “Evita!”

Our way blocked, my companion and I listened as the man half-recited, half-bellowed “Don't Cry for Me, Argentina.” When he finished, the young girl said: “How about a round of applause for my daddy?” We complied, hoping this would bring the silly spectacle to a close. I was becoming aware that our little group was attracting the attention of the other guests. “Daddy” must have perceived this too, and he once more barred the way as we tried to walk past him. He began to shouting a ditty to the tune of “La Bamba”—except the lyrics were about a girl named Maria whose exploits all rhymed with her name and gonorrhea. The girl kept saying “Oh, Daddy” and looking at me with pleading eyes. She wanted me to laugh along with the others. My companion and I stood silently waiting for the man to end his offensive song. When he finished, I looked not at him but at his daughter. I advised her calmly never to ask her father what he had done in the army. Then I walked between them and to my room. My friend complimented me on my cool handling of the situation. I confessed to her that I really had wanted to push the jerk into the swimming pool. I knew that this same man—probably a corporate executive, well educated, even worldly by most standards—would not have been likely to regale a white woman with a dirty song in public. He would perhaps have checked his impulse by assuming that she could be somebody's wife or mother, or at least somebody who might take offense. But to him, I was just an Evita or a Maria: merely a character in his cartoon-populated universe.

Because of my education and my proficiency with the English language, I have acquired many mechanisms for dealing with the anger I experience. This was not true for my parents, nor is it true for the many Latin women working at menial jobs who must put up with stereotypes about our ethnic group such as: "They make good domestics." This is another facet of the myth of the Latin woman in the United States. Its origin is simple to deduce. Work as domestics, waitressing, and factory jobs are all that's available to women with little English and few skills. The myth of the Hispanic menial has been sustained by the same media phenomenon that
made “Mammy” from Gone with the Wind America’s idea of the black woman for generations: María, the housemaid or counter girl, is now indelibly etched into the national psyche. The big and the little screens have presented us with the picture of the funny Hispanic maid, mispronouncing words and cooking up a spicy storm in a shiny California kitchen.

This media-engendered image of the Latina in the United States has been documented by feminist Hispanic scholars, who claim that such portrayals are partially responsible for the denial of opportunities for upward mobility among Latinas in the professions. I have a Chicana friend working on a Ph.D. in philosophy at a major university. She says her doctor still shakes his head in puzzlement at all the “big words” she uses. Since I do not wear my diplomas around my neck for all to see, I too have on occasion been sent to that “kitchen,” where some think I obviously belong.

One such incident that has stayed with me, though I recognize it as a minor offense, happened on the day of my first public poetry reading. It took place in Miami in a boat-restaurant where we were having lunch before the event. I was nervous and excited as I walked in with my notebook in my hand. An older woman motioned me to her table. Thinking (foolish me) that she wanted me to autograph a copy of my brand-new slender volume of verse, I went over. She ordered a cup of coffee from me, assuming that I was the waitress. Easy enough to mistake my poems for menus, I suppose. I know that it wasn’t an intentional act of cruelty, yet of all the good things that happened that day, I remember that scene most clearly, because it reminded me of what I had to overcome before anyone would take me seriously. In retrospect I understand that my anger gave my reading fire, that I have almost always taken doubts in my abilities as a challenge—and that the result is, most times, a feeling of satisfaction at having won a convert when I see the cold, appraising eyes warm to my words, the body language change, the smile that indicates that I have opened some avenue for communication. That day I read to that woman and her lowered eyes told me that she was embarrassed at her little faux pas, and when I asked her to look up at me, it was my victory, and she graciously allowed me to punish her with my full attention. We shook hands at the end of the reading, and I never saw her again. She has probably forgotten the whole thing but maybe not.

Yet I am one of the lucky ones. My parents made it possible for me to acquire a stronger footing in the mainstream culture by giving me the chance at an education. And books and art have saved me from the harsher forms of ethnic and racial prejudice that many of my Hispanic compañeras have had to endure. I travel a lot around the United States, reading from my books of poetry and my novel, and the reception I most often receive is one of positive interest by people who want to know more about my culture. There are, however, thousands of Latinas without the privilege of an education or the entrance into society that I have. For them life is a struggle against the misconceptions perpetuated by the myth of the Latina as whore, domestic, or criminal. We cannot change this by legislating the way people
look at us. The transformation, as I see it, has to occur at a much more individual level. My personal goal in my public life is to try to replace the old pervasive stereotypes and myths about Latinas with a much more interesting set of realities. Every time I give a reading, I hope the stories I tell, the dreams and fears I examine in my work, can achieve some universal truth which will get my audience past the particulars of my skin color, my accent, or my clothes.

I once wrote a poem in which I called us Latinas “God’s brown daughters.” This poem is really a prayer of sorts, offered upward, but also, through the human-to-human channel of art, outward. It is a prayer for communication, and for respect. In it, Latin women pray “in Spanish to an Anglo God / With a Jewish heritage,” and they are “fervently hoping / that if not omnipotent / at least He be bilingual.”

Exploring the Text

1. What is the effect of Judith Ortiz Cofer’s opening paragraph? Does her anger draw you in or distance you?
2. Note the times when Cofer explains rather than denies the basis for stereotyping. For instance, rather than deny that Latinas prefer vivid colors, she explains that this preference reflects the bright landscape of their homelands. Does this strategy work, or do you think Cofer is playing to the stereotype?
3. Note the sections of the essay that refer to personal experience. Does Cofer’s use of personal experience weaken her argument or make it more effective? Explain. Would the essay be more effective with less—or more—personal experience? Explain your view.
4. What do Cofer’s experiences on the bus, in the hotel, and at the poetry reading have in common? Could she have omitted any of them from her essay? Do you find her behavior toward the man in the “very classy metropolitan hotel” (para. 9) unnecessarily cruel? Explain.
5. How does Cofer broaden the argument from her personal experience to larger concerns, including other stereotypes (or stereotypes of other communities)?
6. Cofer ends by quoting one of her own poems. Is this effective? Why or why not?
7. Who do you think is Cofer’s audience for this essay? Does it include the woman at the poetry reading who asks Cofer for a cup of coffee?
8. According to Cofer, “Mixed cultural signals have perpetuated certain stereotypes—for example, that of the Hispanic woman as the ‘Hot Tamale’ or sexual firebrand. It is a one-dimensional view that the media have found easy to promote. In their special vocabulary, advertisers have designated ‘sizzling’ and ‘smoldering’ as the adjectives of choice for describing not only the foods but also the women of Latin America” (para. 6). Does this assertion—that the media promotes stereotypes—apply today? In answering, consider Cofer’s example of Latin American women, or choose another group, such as African Americans, older people, or people from the Middle East.
can't get used to any of it: the mixed seating, the music, the recitation of prayers in English, even the word temple instead of shul.

Recently, I have begun thinking about making the kitchen in my next apartment kosher. My daughter, who is ten, has wanted us to become more religious for a while now; this summer, she asked me to arrange extra Hebrew lessons for her. I'm sure that some of her interest has been spurred by her desire to daven and bench along with her first cousins (all nineteen of them), who are being brought up in observant households. But I also think some of it has to do with her own proclivities, just as my discomfort with Orthodoxy had to do with mine. Although part of me balks at the idea of having a child who hankers after a tradition I have spent half a lifetime throwing away, another part feels something resembling pride. When I mentioned these developments to an older friend of mine, an avowedly atheistic Jew from a Camp Kindervelt sort of background, she reacted with undisguised horror, as though I had declared my intention to join a deranged militant sect in Nebraska. "You're not serious," she said. I shrugged the subject off, slightly embarrassed.

I still have time to scrap my plan to keep kosher — to review the situation in all its unappealing aspects — but I'm not waiting for one of those transcendent, "Aha!" moments to strike, bringing with it a vision of the eternal. I'm not that kind of person, nor is my religion that kind of religion. Judaism is nothing if not down to earth in its approach, and sets more store by behavior than by belief. It's either a weakness in me or a strength — I haven't decided — that I still haven't figured out where I stand on such consequential a matter as the quality of my Jewish life. But if I should happen to die before I've made up my mind, I'm counting on my family to give me an Orthodox burial.

DAVID MICHAELIS

Provincetown
FROM THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

TWO WEEKS AGO, I heard my phone twittering in the dusk. It was Alec Wilkinson, calling from Truro to ask if I would introduce him at his reading at the Provincetown Art Association on August 8. I told him I wanted a night to think it over, but I could already feel the gritty sand-scored floorboards of the Art Association under my feet. This is what I thought: It's time I went back to P-town.

In Boston, 5:30 a.m. The gulls shrieking over Boston Harbor. Before leaving A Street, I read my grandfather Ordway Tead's essay about Provincetown, "Remembrance of Things Past." His father, the Reverend Edward Sampson Tead, a Congregational minister from Somerville, Massachusetts, had taken the family each July to Provincetown, where my great-grandfather served as the summer preacher in the local parish. Each year on July 1, my grandfather and his brother Phillips would be up at 5:30 in the morning, shivering with excitement about taking the steamer from Boston to the Cape.

Big blue dome over Boston, sun rising behind the steeples of Southie. Down the Southeast Expressway. At the bottom of Quincy comes the big fork: go right for Route 95, Providence, and New York City; go left for Pilgrim's Highway, Cape Cod, and the Islands. The road to New York brings back the whole sense of exile I've lived with ever since we sold the house in Provincetown to pay Mom's estate taxes — that whole epoch in the eighties when it seemed as if we had been banished. But now, for a moment, the old pattern of life seems once more vouchsafed for me: I turn with a great rush of feeling onto Pilgrim's Highway. I'm going home. I'm driving down to the Cape.
Now I know why my grandmother stopped his flow of words. Instead of a while docket it requires. How can it be? as the window in the town.

...and after the meal I was eager for the words. Instead of a while docket it requires. How can it be?
Sometimes the recollection this now philosophical, when I first read the word. From the time I was a young child, I've been interested in philosophy. Particularly in the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes. These philosophers have had a profound impact on my understanding of the world and my beliefs.

When I was a young girl, my parents would often take me to the library. There, I would spend hours engrossed in the books that filled the shelves. The library was a magical place for me, a place where I could lose myself in the stories and ideas of the writers who had come before me.

As I grew older, my interest in philosophy grew as well. I began to read more widely, exploring the works of contemporary philosophers and thinkers. I found that philosophy was a way of challenging my assumptions and understanding the world in new ways.

In my work as a writer, I often draw upon the ideas and principles of philosophy to create stories that explore the human condition. I believe that philosophy is a vital part of our lives, helping us to understand ourselves and the world around us.

David Michaels
had these dreams, right after we sold the house in ’82, Mom got very angry. She was baffled, outraged, shaking with fury: “What do you mean, WE DON’T OWN THE HOUSE? Of course we do, Dave! It’s our house, Grandma and Grandpa’s house, and now it’s your house. Don’t be silly.” She would get so carried away, there was only one thing to do to defuse her: tell her she was dead. In real life, when Mom was in the hospital, dying of cancer, no one broke this news to her. No one ever said: Diana, you’re dying. You are going to be dead soon. Is your will in order (it was not), have you taken all the necessary steps? We all acted as if strong-willed Mom would survive. In my recurring dream, when I told her the news that she was dead, Mom would always take it with a smile and a wave, just as she had taken her disease in life. Then she would turn from me, turn away from the window, and start up the stairs. And I always knew that she was going back to the dead because her feet weren’t touching the stairs and I could see her heels floating upward.

The side of the house looks exactly the same. The shingles are gray and weathered. Not a single window on the east end of the house looks altered. The seaside deck has the same railing and the same bulkhead. This sounds like a pretty sober description — as if I’m standing there on Commercial Street looking at my old house with a cool, dry eye. In fact, all I really give the house is a glance — before suddenly noticing that the lawn and privet hedges facing the street are gone, replaced by a parking lot with gravel spills. Several cars are parked in this mini-lot, although none with Pittsburgh license plates. The house has also been christened by its new owners. To us it had always been simply “619.” But now it has a name, and there it is in purple letters: Levitation. Just as I am turning away, a woman walks out the front door onto the porch. I turn fast.

Completely undone, I float on down Commercial. David Mayo has built a big house beside ours, filling in what was always a vacant seaside lot. Someone else has squeezed an awful house — big and boxy, with a flat-top roof — between Mayo’s and the old Mervyn Jules place: two houses where before there was none. Up the street, a fancy hotel with pink umbrellas and white tables has replaced Rosy, the raffish seventies hangout where we met for nightcaps. I pass the small white gate that led through the rosehip-fragrant path to the Tennis Club. And Howie Schneider’s house, and Susan Sinaiko’s. And the Ship’s Bell sign, and the glass tele-

phone booth that used to be in front of the sign. And here is Number One Conway Street — Anna Lewis’s house.

I walk up to the gate and stand there without deciding to do anything. The lawn chairs under the trees in the front yard look cool and welcoming. There’s some laundry hanging on the line. Flowers border the white picket fence. Inside the small shingled house, the TV chatters. I can hear Anna eating lunch alone in front of the television. I’m not sure what to do, whether to continue on into town or whether to seek refuge here. I’ve actually never set foot inside Anna’s house. All our conversations took place at 619 Commercial or at the gate where I am standing now.

The front door is open, the screen door secure. I call out Anna’s name in a small, choked voice. “Yes?” she replies, and I would know that rough, mannish voice anywhere. But when she comes to the door, she does not know me. Her flashing gaze looks right through me. “Anna,” I say, “it’s David.” In a low, nearly inaudible voice, she says, “Oh my gawd.” Then, without hesitation, “Come in, come in, dear.”

There are four chairs in Anna Lewis’s living room, and they tell the story of her life. Her mother, Wilhelmina Enos, sat in one. Her husband, Manuel J. “Mannie” Lewis, sat in another. Anna sat in a third. The fourth was her father’s. He died when Anna was twelve, and now that chair is for company. We cover a lot of ground quickly, starting with the changes at 619 Commercial. As Anna talks her eyes seem always to stray to the horizon, sweeping back and forth. But in fact you can’t see the sea from Anna’s living room. I guess if you’ve lived in P-town all your life, as Anna has, that line of sea and sky is probably imprinted on your brain. Anna remembers what the East End was like when Eugene O’Neill and John Dos Passos were her neighbors. When she worked on the old Hilliard’s Wharf. When she used to open the house for the Sternes and the Teads. And when she closed it up for Mom, for the last time, that last October. After she spoke with Mom on the phone and heard the sound in her voice, she went home and cried and said, “Oh, Diana, this is it.” After a while, we come back to the present. “Well,” she says, “if you’re going to see town, you’d better go now, or you may never get there.”

Back on Commercial Street. It’s like having some hallucinogen reactivated in my brain. This again — Provincetown, ten years later.
Oh my God, there’s the Cape Codder sign. And the Silvas’, which is for sale. Tillie’s is all boarded up. The icehouse has become ICE HOUSE CONDOMINIUMS. But Long Point Gallery still looks the same, as does the Patrician Shop, and the playground outside it, where, once, as a six-or seven-year-old boy, I thought I’d lost Mom, and so, quite solemnly, lay down in the sand to die, and cried and cried in deepest despair, until Mom returned from wherever she’d gone and picked me up in disbelief.

Involuntarily, I keep looking for the town that was here when I first knew P-town — the tough, tolerant, blue-collar P-town. It seems finally to have sold out to the tourist trade. Arnold of Arnold’s TV and appliance store gets a better return on his property by renting it out to a T-shirt merchant; same for Duarte’s Motors and a dozen other old businesses in town center. The Fo’c’sle, the joint I always thought of as the darkest, meanest bar in the world — hangout for local toughs, burnouts, fishermen, and visiting Hell’s Angels — has become a tame tourist bar, all watered down. Then again, there was always a layering of P-towns — the P-town of the day-trippers and tourists, of the gays and cross-dressers, of the artists and writers, of the summering shrinks, of the hippies and conservationists, of the year-round off-Cape transplants and drifters, and of the dancing policeman, who still leaps and pirouettes, choreographing traffic at the heart of town. The P-town I’m looking for, the dark, smiling P-town of the Portuguese, was always a little hidden by clamminess anyway.

On the front side of the “front street,” as my grandfather called Commercial, Lands End Marine, the great nautical and fishing tackle emporium of my boyhood, is still open for business, and I am glad to see it. In the heat of the sidewalk, I pass by the screen doors, inhaling the cool, sweet perfume of vulcanized rubber, hemp, tar, creosote, varnishes. The uncanny sensation comes over me once more: I feel as if I were discontinued, like a car that’s still on the road but for which there are no longer parts. I feel as if my soul never left, but my mind and body no longer belong. My brain is telling me that I’m here, I’m back. It’s me again — back in P-town! And yet it’s not me exactly, neither the prelapsarian me nor the me I’ve become in exile. In flashes, it’s so easy, so seductive, to see myself here again. If I had a son, a boy at my side, I’m sure I would project all my feelings onto him. It would be the natural thing. The boy would become the boy I no longer am. He would ensure the continuity of these seaside summers. I could give up all this guilt I feel about losing the house, breaking the chain. But I don’t have children. I am neither son nor father. I am a freak of nature, a pilgrim, a time traveler.

I turn toward MacMillan Wharf, skirting the lines, the swirling midday crowds, and start out onto the pier. Suddenly I’m glad that I’ve made my pilgrimage on a dazzling day in high summer. My head is spinning in the bright clean air, the salty smell of the sea, and the mingling aromas of frankfurters, deep-fried clams, warmed-up asphalt, and fudge. The tide is high. The deep green water fills in under the tall barnacled pilings. The Boston boat has just tied up and the day-trippers are streaming landward off the pier. I continue seaward, insanely relieved to find that there are still boys diving for money — the immemorial racket of challenging tourists to “chuck a nickel ov-ah!” They are not the boys (including the harbormaster’s son) who swamped Jackson’s dinghy and flung it off the end of the wharf the summer we tried to poach coins in these Portuguese diving waters. But the tide is high, the harbor is deep, the Boston boat is in, and it’s the same racket and they are the same boys. Huddling in their wet cutoff trunks on the pier’s wooden lip, shivering, hair slicked back, brown bodies glistening, they peer through the sun-sparkle, studying the green water for the silvery lie of coins in the sandy bottom. The debate is still the same: whether that’s a quarter down there in the sand or just a dime. And they still complain when someone tosses pennies; and they still stand authoritatively, like little pirates, on the cleats and fastened lines of the boats; and they still answer the eternal tourist’s question — “How deep is it down there?” — with the eternal boy’s deep-voiced answer: “Deep.”

The fish-packing warehouse is gone from the end of the pier, and what was once a world of shadows and ice-filled wooden crates and wet, cool, fish-smelling passageways is now ablaze with sunshine. I stand there, astounded. For ten years I have been walking past fish markets in New York, Halifax, Vineyard Haven, County Cork, Porto Ercole, Sag Harbor. Once, outside the Rosedale Fish Market on Lexington Avenue, as I ran to catch the crosstown bus on 79th Street, I stopped dead in my tracks. From the open door came the cold, clean market smell, and I solemnly told myself: Yes,
that's P-town. That's what the wharf smelled like, back behind the harbormaster's office, back where my brother and I, no more than seven or eight years old, with Mom standing by, fished for tinker mackerel with hand lines and silver jigs. For ten years I have comforted myself with the lie that other places are this place. But now I smell it, the real thing, and there is nothing like it. There is no place like this in the world, and I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go next.

I get as far as the post office, then turn back toward the East End. I feel as if I'm dying again. I'm either going crazy or just exciting my overexcitable appetite for loss. No wonder I was so moved by visiting the Etruscan tombs in Tarquinia. Maybe next summer I should visit Sioux burial grounds.

I'm dumb with hunger. I haven't eaten since the bran muffin at the bridge, hours ago. But when I come upon the Penny Patch, the candy store of my childhood, I think I'm ready to be gratified. Electric fans are blowing a warm, fudgy aroma out onto Commercial Street. I enter the shop and take a basket. It feels wonderfully inviting and familiar in my ungainly hand, this little wicker basket for penny candies. And I have money—boy, do I have a lot of pocket money. What an allowance. I move forward into the velvety warm Wonka world of candy. The floor-to-ceiling shelves are a riot of fireballs, root beer barrels, jawbreakers, licorice twists, jelly beans, Boston Baked Beans, chocolate babies, anise drops, Tootsie Rolls, Bit-O-Honeys, Mary Janes, white rock candy. Everything looks exactly the same. Everything is the same: the same squares of fudge, the same dumb boxes of saltwater taffy, the same trompe l'oeil "beach pebbles" Grandma sent me in camp. Suddenly I don't want to eat any of it. I'm ragingly, foamingly hungry. I haven't a clue what I'm doing in here. I can't eat fudge for lunch. I'm thirty-three years old. What am I thinking? Atomic Fire Balls? Rainbow Jaw Breakers? I've got to get back to 1991. Nauseous, sick of myself, I put down my empty basket and walk out of the Penny Patch.

The craziest thing is that I'm all memoried out and I have not yet even set foot on the beach or in the bay. On my way back from town, I cut across the Episcopal church's parking lot opposite vanished Tillie's. I sit down on the break wall, take off my sneakers and socks, and leap to the sand. I take a step. My God, I say aloud, it's the sand. What I mean is: I never knew before that even the sand here has a particular texture, a springiness, which, for me, is sand. All these years away on other beaches, I've been misled. I bend over and peer at the smooth, coarse, yellow, orange, brown, blond, and black particles under my toes. So much of memory is invention, but this I know: this is sand.

The tide is going out. I walk in the shallow, receding water, floored by the sense of recognition. The water is so clear and lovely. Every crab seems known to me, every waving shank of sea grass, even the rufous color of certain spots on the beach, such as the stretch outside Gary Silva's old house and over by the Rossmores'. I keep thinking I must be going out of my mind.

The closer I get to the beach side of 619, the weirder I feel. All along this home stretch, people are sitting on their decks, sunning, reading. I can hear the rattle of a spray-paint can; someone is stenciling a chest of drawers. The decks and houses are as familiar as my toenails, but the sunbathers are strangers. This is the summer community I grew up in, and this is a summer day, and the only person I recognize is Norman Mailer, whom anyone would recognize. I've never felt more alien anywhere in all my life. The tide is sloughing out under my knees, so I walk farther out, past the jetty, farther and farther away from shore. I notice that the Big Rock, the tall chunky slab of granite at the end of our jetty, about which I have literally dozens of memories, all keyed to the different heights of the tides, has fallen onto its side. The Big Rock is where we scattered our dog's ashes in 1980, my mother and brother and I. Each of us took some peppery white dust from the strange small container. Pooey's death was the practice death; his ashes, practice throws. Grandma went next. Then Mom.

Ironically, after gorging myself on every fish hook and sinker in town, I now can't bring myself to look directly at any of the details around 619. The overall shapes — rock, jetty, beach, house — are all I can manage. It's like being at a party when an old lover walks in the room. The more intimate you've been with the object of your desire, the greater its power, ultimately, to alienate. Now that I am here, all I know is I need to get into the water. I don't even need to swim. I just want to lie in the outgoing water. I've worn my bathing suit under my shorts, so changing isn't a problem. Even so, I've got to find somewhere to leave my shorts and shirt and sneak-
ers. And just as I’m puzzling this over, wondering if I have the guts to leave my stuff up on the beach (Mom’s voice in my ear: “Can’t those day-trippers read the sign: PRIVATE BEACH/NO TRESPASSING?”), I see Susan Packard. She’s directly ahead, in the same stretch of thigh-deep water where I’m sloshing around. It’s Susan, all right. She looks exactly the same. The girl next door. She’s wearing a two-piece bathing suit, and she’s running out into the receding water. Her whole body is pitched forward, her hair in flight, and I have an urge to rush up, throw my arms around her, and thank her. As with the sand, the water, the jetties, the crabs, I’m astonished to the point of gratitude to rediscover my knowledge of this particular girl’s particular way of running out of her house and into the water. It locates me.

I approach Susan, both of us knee-deep in the water, and I can see that she remembers me but does not quite know who I am. To identify myself, I point to my house. I don’t know why I don’t speak first or say my name — I just point like a six-year-old at my house. Susan shrinks a little when she understands. She jumps up in the water. Her gleaming brown hair tosses around her shoulders, her eyes burst with light. Then something intrudes a little on her openness. Maybe I’m not what I seem to be. Maybe I’m — who knows, an apparition, a monster? Anyway, there is this moment of suspense. It’s hard to describe, but for a moment we are held on a point of time that seems to contain the possibility of all other points of time. Suspended there together, our feet in the blue water, our heads in the blue sky, there seems an infinity of potential. Love, pity, sorrow — anything might happen now between Susan Packard and me.

Susan, it turns out, is a schoolteacher in California. She’s back visiting her mother, and she seems as struck all over again by P-town as I am. Her memories, which she discusses freely, are all sensuous memories. She invites me up onto the Packard dock, back into the life beside the sea. Her mother, Anne, weathered, warm, smiling, welcomes me instantly. Anne is a painter whose work my mother used to collect. Susan’s older sister, Cynthia, a painter as well, introduces me to her husband and their older child, a small, naked boy about the age I was when my brother and I made a fort in the pilings under this house in the summer of ’62. Also: the same age and color as my mother in the many sepia-toned pictures showing little nude Diana sitting on the pilings below this deck in the summers of ’32 and ’33.

We sit on the raw-wood deck, and it’s a little awkward at first because my enthusiasm is drawn and sustained by things the Packards hardly notice. I exclaim over the Big Rock at the end of the jetty, and they look at this landmark, whose fallen state they now take wholly for granted, and Susan says, “Oh, yeah, that must have happened gradually.” From Anne I learn that the two men to whom Choate, Hall & Stewart sold our house in 1982 were an S&M couple who kept the shades at 619 drawn all day, emerging only at night to display the hardware of domination: heavy leather, whips, and, once, even a leash and studded collar. The newest owners of 619, according to Anne, are friendly, neighborly people, the Leavitts — hence levitation.

It’s hard not to let my eye stray over to the house. Unwillingly, I suspend disbelief, allow myself to look. I’m fascinated by the changes. The outdoor shower, moved from the front to the side of the house; the voluminous new bay windows; the new kitchen. Mainly, I can’t get over the studio: originally Maurice Sterne’s paint-splattered studio, later my brother’s and my bedroom, which my grandfather, in coat and tie, used as his daytime study, and in which I later wrote my first two books. When I finally allow myself a good look at the boxy studio, cantilevered out over the deck, I’m aghast to find it exactly the same. Even the window frames appear untouched. Through the large asymmetrical bay window on the side, I can see into my room. My God, there is the wall above my bed, the matchboard wall, the tongue-and-groove boards. It’s like coming out of surgery and seeing your own skin. No matter what they’ve done to it, you must now live with it. For the first time, this indispensible thing, this vital substance, which is you, is no longer in your custody.

The more I look, the more accustomed I get to this unaccustomed state of being outside, looking in. The trick, of course, is to be willing to see things as they are — to recognize this house for what it is — not to picture it as I would have it be. At any moment I could take a breath and feel my way back inside the old dead skin. I could be in there, looking out. I could be sleeping in that room tonight, breathing in the sea and the salt on the damp night air. I could hear high water lapping on the sand. I could get up to take a
leak and see the moon path on the incoming tide. I can tell you everything about night in that room.

While I am sitting with the Packards, Mrs. Leavitt of 619 Commercial walks from her beach, climbs the stairs to her deck, and steps into a basin of water, removing the sand from her feet before entering the house. Mrs. Leavitt does not resemble my mother, yet she looks so much like Diana doing this — this small orthodox ablution, so characteristic of summer and of the religion my mother and her parents made of summers in that house — that it sets me spiraling again. Even the basin of water is set on the holy altar at the head of the stairs.

I watch Mrs. Leavitt walk into the house in her bathing suit, and I think, How did I lose Diana Tead Michaelis? I mean, really, how? At the end of life there is the mystery of death. This keeps the undertakers in business and the survivors occupied for a couple of months or a couple of years or even a lifetime. Professional mourner is not a bad job when you consider some of the alternatives. But then comes a day, like this one, when you ask the question: Why isn’t she here? And the answer, for a change, is not just death. For once you don’t just settle for the mystery of it, or the appalling pain of it, or even the fact of it, expressed in the sad and simple statement “She died.” On a day like this it feels as though some other force must be at work — not cancer, not stupidity, not evil — some other power, but my vision is not yet developed enough to see it. How else, on this eye-watering day in high summer, can I account for my dead mother, the lost house by the sea, the lost summers? How can I account for my grief, which ten years later is the only thing in my life that could be called permanent? You hear widows and widowers say: I thought about him/her every day for the rest of my life. But wait a minute: I’m a son, not a widower.

I leave my things at the Packards’ and walk out onto the flats, looped on light. I walk out to where the tide has disappeared into green-black grasses and sandy pools with washboard bottoms. The farther out I go, the more I feel that I am approaching the center of things. Under my feet, the small cradling world of the tide pools. Above my head, a wide world, a sphere of light, that seems to give back knowledge of ourselves. My eye fixes on a lone sail, suspended out near the horizon. The sail hardly seems to move. It seems trimmed to the great serenity outside of things, skirting space and time, these dimensions I am stuck in to the end of my life. This has haunted me for ten years, this spot in the center of things, this loss of center. Now that I am here, I am not so much restored to sight as given new eyes. My childhood was presided over by ailing, alcoholic grandparents, obsolete careerists who, before it slipped from their grasp, opened for my brother and me their useful world, their trustworthy heaven. Ordway and Clara’s Emersonian message, bequeathed to us through Mom, was “The world is yours. . . . Every spirit builds itself a house; and beyond its house a world; and beyond its world a heaven. Know then, that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect. What we are, that only can we see. All that Adam had, all that Caesar could, you have and can do.”

The world was mine. Now I stand in the shallow pools, under the deep sky. I lie down in the water. Immediately I cry, I howl, I rage. I think I see. It’s no good asking God why this was taken away from us, this paradise. Or scheming to get it back. It’s no good living in banishment, in the small exile world of bitterness and resentment and self-hatred. This is the unhealable place. No house, no home, no Boston law firm can repair this one. This is the place of no flesh, of white dust dissolving in the green water. This is the place where I at last go free.
When I am through with school and have a job, I want my wife to quit working and remain at home so that my wife can more fully and completely take care of a wife's duties.

My God, who wouldn't want a wife?

Exploring the Text

1. How does the opening paragraph set the tone for the entire essay? Note details such as the form and progression of sentences, the use of capitalization, and the qualifying phrases.
2. What is the effect of Judy Brady repeating the sentence (or clause) “I want a wife” again and again? What is the effect of Brady's use of pronouns in referring to herself and “her” wife?
3. What is the overall structure of her argument? Consider breaking this essay into a straightforward syllogism or analyzing it using the Toulmin model presented in Chapter 3.
4. How would you describe the progression of the paragraphs? Does Brady go from most to least or from least to most, or does she follow another organizational principle? Why is her choice effective?
6. Although Brady never uses the term sexism (or feminism), what gender inequities does she catalog in this essay?
7. Even though this essay was published in 1971, when the feminist movement was a strong political force, it has remained popular for decades. Why? Some of the details seem dated, such as the references to a typewriter and ashtrays. Do you think that the situation Brady describes is still relevant? Or is the essay mainly a historical document that is a reminder of times past?
8. How might you apply the same rhetorical strategies that Brady uses in this essay to another one entitled “I Want a Husband”?

Just Walk on By

A Black Man Ponders His Power
to Alter Public Space

Brent Staples

An author and editorial writer for the New York Times, Brent Staples (b. 1951) grew up in Pennsylvania in a family of nine children. He received his BA from Widener University and his PhD in psychology from the University of Chicago. His memoir, Parallel Time: Growing Up in Black and White (1994), won the Anisfield-Wolf Book
A woman — white, well dressed, probably in her early twenties. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section of Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her, there seemed to be a discreet, uninflammatory distance between us. Not so. She cast back a worried glance. To her, the youngish black man — a broad six feet two inches with a beard and billowing hair, both hands shoved into the pockets of a bulky military jacket — seemed menacingly close. After a few more quick glimpses, she picked up her pace and was soon running in earnest. Within seconds she disappeared into a cross street.

That was more than a decade ago. I was twenty-two years old, a graduate student newly arrived at the University of Chicago. It was in the echo of that terrified woman’s footfalls that I first began to know the unwieldy inheritance I’d come into — the ability to alter public space in ugly ways. It was clear that she thought herself the quarry of a mugger, a rapist, or worse. Suffering a bout of insomnia, however, I was stalking sleep, not defenseless wayfarers. As a softy who is scarcely able to take a knife to a raw chicken — let alone hold it to a person’s throat — I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once. Her flight made me feel like an accomplice in tyranny. It also made it clear that I was indistinguishable from the muggers who occasionally seeped into the area from the surrounding ghetto. That first encounter, and those that followed, signified that a vast, unnerving gulf lay between nighttime pedestrians — particularly women — and me. And I soon gathered that being perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself. I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation, or crowd some frightened, armed person in a foyer somewhere, or make an errant move after being pulled over by a policeman. Where fear and weapons meet — and they often do in urban America — there is always the possibility of death.

In that first year, my first away from my hometown, I was to become thoroughly familiar with the language of fear. At dark, shadowy intersections in Chicago, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit the thunk, thunk, thunk of the driver — black, white, male, or female — hammering down the door locks. On less traveled streets after dark, I grew accustomed to but never comfortable with people who crossed to the other side of the street rather than pass me. Then there were the standard unpleasanties with police, doormen, bouncers, cab-drivers, and others whose business is to screen out troublesome individuals before there is any nastiness.

I moved to New York nearly two years ago and I have remained an avid night walker. In central Manhattan, the near-constant crowd cover minimizes tense one-on-one street encounters. Elsewhere — visiting friends in Soho, where sidewalks are narrow and tightly spaced buildings shut out the sky — things can get very taut indeed.
Black men have a firm place in New York mugging literature. Norman Podhoretz in his famed (or infamous) 1963 essay, “My Negro Problem—And Ours,” recalls growing up in terror of black males; they “were tougher than we were, more ruthless,” he writes—and as an adult on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, he continues, he cannot constrain his nervousness when he meets black men on certain streets. Similarly, a decade later, the essayist and novelist Edward Hoagland extols a New York where once “Negro bitterness bore down mainly on other Negroes.” Where some see mere panhandlers, Hoagland sees “a mugger who is clearly screwing up his nerve to do more than just ask for money.” But Hoagland has “the New Yorker’s quick-hunch posture for broken-field maneuvering,” and the bad guy swerves away.

I often witness that “hunch posture,” from women after dark on the warren-like streets of Brooklyn where I live. They seem to set their faces on neutral and, with their purse straps strung across their chests bandolier style, they forge ahead as though bracing themselves against being tackled. I understand, of course, that the danger they perceive is not a hallucination. Women are particularly vulnerable to street violence, and young black males are drastically overrepresented among the perpetrators of that violence. Yet these truths are no solace against the kind of alienation that comes of being ever the suspect, against being set apart, a fearsome entity with whom pedestrians avoid making eye contact.

It is not altogether clear to me how I reached the ripe old age of twenty-two without being conscious of the lethality nighttime pedestrians attributed to me. Perhaps it was because in Chester, Pennsylvania, the small, angry industrial town where I came of age in the 1960s, I was scarcely noticeable against a backdrop of gang warfare, street knifings, and murders. I grew up one of the good boys, had perhaps a half-dozen fistfights. In retrospect, my shyness of combat has clear sources.

Many things go into the making of a young thug. One of those things is the consummation of the male romance with the power to intimidate. An infant discovers that random flailings send the baby bottle flying out of the crib and crashing to the floor. Delighted, the joyous babe repeats those motions again and again, seeking to duplicate the feat. Just so, I recall the points at which some of my boyhood friends were finally seduced by the perception of themselves as tough guys. When a mark cowered and surrendered his money without resistance, myth and reality merged—and paid off. It is, after all, only manly to embrace the power to frighten and intimidate. We, as men, are not supposed to give an inch of our lane on the highway; we are to seize the fighter’s edge in work and in play and even in love; we are to be valiant in the face of hostile forces.

Unfortunately, poor and powerless young men seem to take all this nonsense literally. As a boy, I saw countless tough guys locked away; I have since buried several, too. They were babies, really—a teenage cousin, a brother of twenty-two, a childhood friend in his midtwenties—all gone down in episodes of bravado played out in the streets. I came to doubt the virtues of intimidation early on. I chose, perhaps even unconsciously, to remain a shadow—timid, but a survivor.
The fearlessness mistakenly attributed to me in public places often has a perilous flavor. The most frightening of these confusions occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I worked as a journalist in Chicago. One day, rushing into the office of a magazine I was writing for with a deadline story in hand, I was mistaken for a burglar. The office manager called security and, with an ad hoc posse, pursued me through the labyrinthine halls, nearly to my editor's door. I had no way of proving who I was. I could only move briskly toward the company of someone who knew me.

Another time I was on assignment for a local paper and killing time before an interview. I entered a jewelry store on the city's affluent Near North Side. The proprietor excused herself and returned with an enormous red Doberman pinscher straining at the end of a leash. She stood, the dog extended toward me, silent to my questions, her eyes bulging nearly out of her head. I took a cursory look around, nodded, and bade her good night. Relatively speaking, however, I never fared as badly as another black male journalist. He went to nearby Waukegan, Illinois, a couple of summers ago to work on a story about a murderer who was born there. Mistaking the reporter for the killer, police hauled him from his car at gunpoint and but for his press credentials would probably have tried to book him. Such episodes are not uncommon. Black men trade tales like this all the time.

In "My Negro Problem—And Ours," Podhoretz writes that the hatred he feels for blacks makes itself known to him through a variety of avenues—one being his discomfort with that "special brand of paranoid touchiness" to which he says blacks are prone. No doubt he is speaking here of black men. In time, I learned to smother the rage I felt at so often being taken for a criminal. Not to do so would surely have led to madness—via that special "paranoid touchiness" that so annoyed Podhoretz at the time he wrote the essay.

I began to take precautions to make myself less threatening. I move about with care, particularly late in the evening. I give a wide berth to nervous people on subway platforms during the wee hours, particularly when I have exchanged business clothes for jeans. If I happen to be entering a building behind some people who appear skittish, I may walk by, letting them clear the lobby before I return, so as not to seem to be following them. I have been calm and extremely congenial on those rare occasions when I've been pulled over by the police.

And on late-evening constitutionals along streets less traveled by, I employ what has proved to be an excellent tension-reducing measure: I whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and the more popular classical composers. Even steely New Yorkers hunching toward nighttime destinations seem to relax, and occasionally they even join in the tune. Virtually everybody seems to sense that a mugger wouldn't be warbling bright, sunny selections from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. It is my equivalent of the cowbell that hikers wear when they know they are in bear country.