

Professor Coleman

English 301

13 December 2010

### **Portfolio Cover Letter**

Dear Portfolio Reader,

After consideration of my development as a writer during the semester, I have decided to include my visual rhetoric paper, Toulmin argument paper, and research paper in my portfolio. The portfolio demonstrates my growth as a rhetorician from my first paper (visual rhetoric) to my final paper (research), showing how my level of organization and ability to support my claims has increased. Upon entering this class, my writing was broad in nature and lacked the specificity required of effective academic writing. I did not know how to support my claims with outside evidence; instead, I often relied on my own personal opinions and beliefs. I soon realized that such a writing style would not work effectively at the university level, and that I needed to structure my papers differently in order to bolster my claims. As you progress through my portfolio, I respectfully ask you to notice how my writing style has evolved from paper to paper (and from draft to draft). In the first drafts of my visual rhetoric paper, my claims are defined very broadly, and I again respectfully ask you to note the contrast between those claims and the specific nature of the claims found in my research paper's final draft.

After this letter, you will find the first assignment that I have included is my visual rhetoric paper. For this essay, I analyzed the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) website.

More specifically, I examined the website's layout, use of color and textual schemes, and pictures of President Barack Obama. I chose to include this paper in my portfolio because I would like to provide a foundation from which my writing developed over the semester. One significant revision I made from my early drafts to my final draft occurred in how I structured the main claims of my paragraphs. For instance, in the third paragraph of my visual rhetoric paper's second draft, I began by discussing the "colors red, white, and blue" and noting that these "are the colors of the United States' flag" (Visual Rhetoric, pg. 2). However, the paragraph ended with me discussing President "Obama's compassionate nature" (pg. 3). Thus, I had started a paragraph on one claim and ended it on an entirely separate claim, creating a discontinuity in my claims and making them difficult for the reader to follow. In contrast, the third paragraph of my paper's final draft maintains continuity in its claims. The paragraph begins with me analyzing the "colors red, white, and blue" and concludes with me describing how a "repetitive use" of these colors occurs throughout the website (pgs. 2-3). The revision of my third paragraph is just one instance of how I worked on the organization of my paper through its four drafts. If I had more time to work on this paper, I would again look at the DNC's website, which is updated daily, to see what changes have been made to it since I wrote my paper. I would then compare the two versions of the website and analyze how the DNC's rhetorical strategy had changed or stayed the same. Furthermore, I would examine how details such as color scheme or the use of pictures had been altered during the time span.

The next essay I have included in my portfolio is my Toulmin argument paper, which shows my progression as a writer through my ability to support my claims. My main argument in the paper is that the Electoral College system needs to be abolished in the U.S. and replaced with a popular vote system, in which the candidate with the most votes becomes the president.

In the early drafts of my paper, I had many unsupported claims, meaning that I would state a fact but not attribute the fact to any source. For example, the introductory paragraph of my paper's second draft contained many of these unsupported claims. One claim mentioned that a state's electoral votes were determined by "its number of U.S. House members plus its two U.S. Senators," while another claim stated that "a candidate must receive at least 270 electoral votes to be declared the winner" (Toulmin, pg. 1). While these facts were common knowledge to me as a political science major, I realized that they were not common knowledge to my audience. As a result, I needed to find a credible source from which I could cite these facts, in order to establish my credibility (ethos) with my audience. Thus, I consulted the online writings of Robert Longley, who works for The New York Times Company. Longley's writings confirmed my earlier statements about the Electoral College, as did my further research, allowing me to cite him in my revised introductory paragraph. In this revised paragraph, I cited Longley, MSNBC's Chris Matthews, and Illinois Senator Richard Durbin to confirm all my claims regarding the Electoral College (pgs. 1-2). The two aforementioned claims, previously unsupported, were now properly supported and cited, as were my further claims in the introductory paragraph about what happens if the election "goes to the U.S. House of Representatives" (pgs. 1-2). With additional time to work on this assignment, I would continue looking for ways to support my claims more effectively. As further supporting evidence, I could contact the offices of various congressmen, in an effort to ask them to share their feelings about the Electoral College.

Finally, I have included my research paper (written in the Rogerian argument format), which demonstrates my learning in regard to paragraph organization. My main claim in the research paper is that the United States is a global economic hegemon in decline, due to its large national debt and unskilled labor force. One instance of a change in paragraph organization

occurred in the paragraph where I discussed common ground surrounding my topic. In the early drafts of my paper, my section concerning common ground discussed how “both sides view the United States’ global economic stature as at a key crossroads point, due to the financial crisis and subsequent stock market crash of 2008” (Research, pg. 5). Upon revision of my paper, I found that this claim turned out to be a difference, rather than a similarity, between my views and the views of those disagree with me. The “crossroads” which I spoke of was viewed by me as signal of economic decline, while my dissidents viewed it as a sign of continued economic growth. Due to this disparity in view points, I needed to revise my section regarding common ground, and find another point in my argument upon which all sides agreed. In the final draft of my research paper, I revised this section to focus on the shared “belief that the U.S. government should do a better job in its funding of technological research and development” (pg. 6). A careful check of sources from all sides of the argument showed that this belief was indeed common ground, thereby allowing me to correct my earlier organizational mistake. If given more time to work on this essay, I would seek to develop my paper’s section regarding common ground even further because the Rogerian argument format focuses on finding compromise with one’s opponents, not declaring one side victorious over another. Through this additional development, I would be able to understand both sides of my topic in even greater detail, thereby allowing me to more effectively reach out to my dissenters.

As I continue my academic career, I know there are some areas as a writer in which I need to continue honing my skills. One of these areas deals with the organization of my papers, specifically, the nature in which I include both summary and argumentation. Currently, I still struggle with using too much summary in my papers, especially in the Rogerian argument format. As seen by Professor Coleman’s comments on the second draft of my research paper, I

tend to remove myself from the argument and let other people make my claims for me. Instead, I need to assert myself in the argument and make my own, supported claims throughout the course of the paper. If I simply rely on the arguments of others, my readers will be left wondering where I stand on a certain issue, causing me to lose credibility as a writer with my vague and unclear claims. In addition, I need to continue working on my ability to accurately cite my sources, especially in papers which involve a wide variety of them. As you go through my portfolio, you will notice that many of my citations have been altered from draft to draft, due to the fact that I did not use MLA citation correctly in many instances. These citation issues have been fixed with careful revision; however, I must remain vigilant in consistently providing accurate citations to my readers. Citations are very important because they help me establish my credibility (ethos) with the audience. Proper use of citations will help me establish my ethos because my audience will see that I have respect for the work of others. In turn, if I show respect for the work of others, my audience is more likely to respect my own work and ideas. On the other hand, if I fail to use proper citation, it will be much harder to establish my credibility. Thus, even if I use effective methods of argumentation in my writing, my claims will fall short of their marks due to the audience's lack of faith in my credibility. Going forward, I feel confident that I can continue improving my writing skills, which will allow me to grow as a student of rhetoric. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and the enclosed essays.

Sincerely,

Professor Coleman

English 301

13 December 2010

### **DNC's New Website Makes Pitch to Voters**

As seen by the results of the 2008 elections in the United States, highly successful candidates (those that were elected to office) had effective websites and social media profiles, while candidates without websites or social media profiles were relatively unsuccessful (“Election Center 2008”). Spurred by this trend in politics and Barack Obama’s effective use of the Internet to win the presidency, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) undertook an effort to upgrade its website (in the hopes of reaching a more extensive network of voters). The DNC serves as the national wing of the Democratic Party, helping to promote and fundraise for Democratic candidates at national, state, and local levels of government. The DNC’s website, with its large tabs and easy-to-read layout, comes across as clean and easily accessible to all voters, even those who are not very familiar with the Internet. It strikes an All-American chord with its use of color and textual schemes throughout the home page. Furthermore, its focus on pictures of President Obama plays effectively on his broad-based appeal, which invites people of varied backgrounds to join the Democratic Party.

As a major revision in its website, the DNC sought to make it more user-friendly by simplifying its readability and ease of navigation. In this respect, the DNC has achieved its goals because the tab bar along the top of the screen clearly outlines the various aspects of the website

(fig. 1). The tab bar, with its black writing against a light gray background, clearly stands out from the rest of the page (with its red, white, and blue colors). This difference in color means the reader's eyes are immediately drawn to the tab bar, which invites readers to (among other things) learn more about the party, volunteer, or make a donation. With the tab bar so noticeable, it becomes more likely that the reader will click on one of the tabs, thus increasing the chances that the person will get involved with the DNC. Adding to the tab bar's effectiveness are the drop-down menus, which appear as one scrolls across the tab bar, showing readers the different pages found within each tab (fig. 1). When one scrolls across each bar, the tab turns red, which allows the reader to easily see the tab's corresponding drop-down menu. This use of the color red keeps the reader's attention focused on the tab, forcing the reader to look at the drop-down menu's choices. The website also helps achieve the DNC's primary goals of getting a person to donate to the party or vote for a Democratic candidate by placing large buttons labeled "Contribute" and "Commit to Vote" on the upper right-hand side of the screen (figs. 2 & 3). These buttons, red and blue in color, respectively, work to pique the reader's interest because they are among the first things on the website that a reader is likely to notice. With these buttons in place, the website is very easy to use because someone interested in contributing or registering to vote can find the appropriate screen with one click of the mouse. Due to the myriad options at the user's fingertips, the DNC's attempts at a clearer and more user-friendly website have succeeded.

Also, the use of color is very important to the DNC's website, specifically, the colors red, white, and blue, which coincidentally (or not so coincidentally) are the colors of the United States' flag. The DNC, in using this color scheme, tries to come across as an All-American political party, in an attempt to refute claims by the Republican National Committee that Democrats don't love America as much as Republicans do (Bevan & McIntyre). The response to

this claim is slickly presented and visually attractive, especially the use of a blue background for the website, with white stars in the foreground seemingly coming towards the reader (fig. 4). Looking at the website immediately made me think of the American flag, giving the implication that the Democratic Party cares very much about this country. Adding to the All-American themes of the website is the prominent mention of the Democratic Party's responses to the Iraq War and the Hurricane Katrina disaster (figs. 5 & 6). For instance, the DNC notes in its mention of the Iraq War that President Obama "speaks from the Oval Office to salute our troops" (fig. 5). This statement, just like the website's background, uses the color blue to make the words stand out to the reader, again tying back to the DNC's focus on using the colors of the American flag to highlight its patriotism. The website also states that five years after the incident, Obama has "a continuing commitment to New Orleans" (fig. 6). Once again, the words are blue in color, this time against a red background, which incorporates two of the United States' primary colors. The repetitive use of color acts as a reinforcement, allowing the reader to constantly keep America's colors at the forefront of his mind as he scrolls down the page. With so many red and blue images present, it's difficult for one not to closely associate the DNC and American patriotism.

In addition to a new user interface and a prominent use of the nation's primary colors, the DNC's website features several pictures of President Barack Obama (figs. 5, 6, 7 & 8), in an effort to play on his personal likability ratings to draw voters to the Democratic Party. Obama's prominence on the website is due in part to the fact that even as his job approval ratings have fallen in the past year, his personal likability numbers among voters have remained relatively stable (Bevan & McIntyre). The photos of Obama portray him as strong and wise, such as when he speaks from the Oval Office about prudently ending combat operations in Iraq, while wearing



a crisp white shirt, dark suit, and navy blue tie (fig. 5). This ensemble can be thought of as quintessentially “presidential” in nature, since I would surmise that most people expect the president to wear a suit and tie while addressing the nation. The suit and tie give Obama an aura of authority and power, lending greater potency to his words because of how professional he looks while delivering them. The website’s message is strengthened by the contrast between Obama in the Oval Office (fig. 5) and the image of him painting a house in New Orleans (fig. 6). While in New Orleans, Obama dons a dark blue polo shirt and sunglasses (fig. 6), showing that the president knows how to conduct himself in both professional and casual situations. This photo adds to his degree of sophistication because he comes across as a multi-faceted leader who is equally comfortable among politicians and middle-class people. His comfort level around the middle class works to portray him as an empathetic president who is in touch with the concerns of common Americans, especially those in the economically and socially ravaged area of New Orleans.

In conclusion, the DNC’s website succeeds in getting its message across with an easy-to-follow layout, effective use of color and textual schemes, and assertive pictures of President Obama in the Oval Office and the community. These pictures project a 21<sup>st</sup>-century kind of party which is in tune with technology, as well the ever-changing American demographic, in which people of varied ages and ethnicities form the electorate (“Election Center 2008”). The party exudes patriotism, as well as compassion and social justice, in an effort to mix traditional Democratic values with new, more centrist ideas. In its attempts to reach this electorate, the DNC is constantly updating its website with pictures of national campaign events, DNC volunteers in the community, and new opportunities for citizens to get involved with the party.

These new outreach efforts by the DNC will contribute to a party more in tune with the needs and feelings of the American people.

### Works Cited

- “Barack Obama on Facebook.” Figure 7. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- Bevan, Tom and McIntyre, John, eds. *Real Clear Politics*. RCP, 6 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- Blue background of DNC website. Figure 4. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- “Commit to Vote” button. Figure 3. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- “Contribute” button. Figure 2. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- “Election Center 2008.” CNN.com. Cable News Network, 2008. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- “Five Years Later, a Continuing Commitment to New Orleans.” Figure 6. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- “President Obama Salutes the Troops.” Figure 5. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.
- “Tab Bar.” Figure 1. Democratic National Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org. Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.

“Weekly Presidential Address.” Figure 8. Democratic National

Committee Services Corporation. “The Democratic Party.” Democrats.org.

Democratic National Committee, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 Sept. 2010.

Professor Coleman

English 301

13 December 2010

### **It's Time to Get Rid of the Electoral College**

As another political election season gets into full swing with Democrats and Republicans clamoring for our votes, let us step back and reflect on the way we select the people who represent us in Washington, D.C. and in state capitols around the country. With these mid-term Congressional elections, the candidate with the greatest number of votes will be declared the winner and assume political office. This is one of the paramount ideals of democracy around the world: the candidate with the greatest number of popular votes should be the winner of the election. Working from this basic principle of democracy (which has its roots in ancient Athens), it is all the more perplexing that the method by which the United States selects its president does not reflect this principle. Instead, the United States uses a complicated system called the Electoral College, in which each state is assigned a certain number of electoral votes (Longley, "How the Electoral College Elects the President"). This figure is determined by adding the state's number of U.S. House members to its two U.S. Senators; the sum of these two components is the state's number of electoral votes ("How the Electoral College Elects the President"). The winning candidate in each state receives the state's full allotment of electoral votes, which means that state's electors vote at the official presidential nominating session, a procedure that occurs in the middle of December ("How the Electoral College Elects the President"). A candidate must receive at least 270 electoral votes to be declared the winner

("How the Electoral College Elects the President"). If no candidate reaches that threshold, then the election goes to the U.S. House of Representatives, with each of the body's 435 members casting one vote apiece ("How the Electoral College Elects the President"). Are you confused yet? If so, you need not worry because research over the years by various organizations has shown that large numbers of Americans are unaware how this nation actually selects its president (Matthews, "Election 2004 Preview"). Along with being very confusing and difficult to understand, the Electoral College over the years has produced many strange election outcomes, which I will address later on. Henceforth, it is not surprising that the Electoral College has been the subject of the highest number of proposed Constitutional amendments in our nation's history, as noted by Senator Richard J. Durbin (Democrat-Illinois) in his Senate floor speech on the issue (19). Thus, my proposal is that we as a nation abolish the Electoral College. It is system which has produced minority presidents, made the national electoral vote unreflective of the national popular vote, and given swing states undue influence in the electoral process.

Four times in our nation's history, a minority president has occurred under the Electoral College system. The term refers to a candidate who lost the national popular vote, yet became president by winning the electoral vote. Most recently, this occurred in the 2000 presidential election when George W. Bush won the electoral vote, despite losing the popular by over 540,000 votes to Al Gore (Longley, "Has It Ever Happened?"). It seems counterintuitive to the foundations of democracy and this country that the president would be someone who did not have a majority of the votes in an election; one of democracy's core principles is majority rule, in which the person with a majority of the votes wins the election; yet, this is not always the case in presidential elections. In his Senate speech on November 1, 2000, a mere six days before the presidential election, Senator Durbin noted, "Given the tight presidential race this year, we have

the possibility that the winning candidate for President might not win the popular vote in our country” (17). He also added that the election of a minority president was a “serious and persistent flaw in our current system” (17). As would be seen in the months following the battle between Bush and Gore, the election of a minority president has the power to tear the country apart, with riots in cities across the nation and public fistfights between Democrats and Republicans becoming the norm in late 2000 (Brokaw, “Election 2000”). At Bush’s inauguration in January 2001, his limousine was pelted with eggs as thousands of protestors held signs reading “Hail to the Thief” and “President Al Gore” (Brokaw, “A Presidential Inauguration”). Defenders of the Electoral College, such as Senator Arthur L. Vandenburg (Republican-Michigan), have argued that abolishing the system will lead to the perpetual election of minority presidents since multiple parties will arise and splinter the national vote in several directions (189). WSU Political Science professor Dr. Andrew Appleton disagrees with this assertion, noting that “the American political system is inherently built to create two major parties” (lecture). Furthermore, Dr. Appleton agrees with my argument that this two-party system means the national vote would be split only between Republicans and Democrats if the Electoral College were abolished; therefore, a majority president, not a minority president, would always be produced (lecture).

Another problem with the Electoral College is that it consistently creates very large differences between the electoral vote and the national popular vote. It seems natural that since the electoral vote and the popular vote work in tandem to elect the president, a candidate’s percentage of the popular vote should correspond to his percentage of the electoral vote. One does not have to look back farther than November 2008 to see that this principle is not applied in presidential elections. In 2008, Barack Obama received approximately 53% of the popular vote,

yet earned 365 electoral votes, or 68% of the electoral vote (CNN, "Election Center 2008"). Conversely, John McCain received 46% of the popular vote, yet only earned 32% of the electoral vote ("Election Center 2008"). As Senator Durbin notes in his speech, "Since 1824, when the popular vote first began to be recorded along with the electoral vote, winners of presidential elections have averaged 51 percent of the popular vote as compared to an average of 71 percent of the electoral vote" (21). While there is no denying that the Electoral College produces these wide mathematical disparities, debate occurs regarding whether these disparities constitute a real problem with the system. Those who do not view this as a problem, such as *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, say that the electoral vote and popular vote should be viewed as "two separate entities;" thus, it "should not be of concern" that a candidate's percentage of the electoral vote differs greatly from his percentage of the popular vote (Matthews, "Election 2004 Preview"). In addition, Brooks argues that the electoral vote is what ultimately elects the president, so the outcome of the popular vote should be considered secondary and virtually irrelevant ("Election 2004 Preview"). While I do see the points made by Mr. Brooks, and agree with the statement that the Electoral College is what ultimately elects the president, it's incorrect to totally disregard the popular vote as irrelevant, and treat the electoral vote and popular vote as separate entities. After all, as noted by Dr. Appleton, it's the popular vote in each state which determines the candidate who will receive the state's allotment of electoral votes (lecture). Thus, the popular vote is what directly affects the electoral vote, making the two entities very interrelated. If the two entities are so intertwined, then they should be reflective of each other, in such a way that a candidate's percentage of the popular vote should equal his percentage of the electoral vote.



An additional shortcoming of the Electoral College is that it gives too much influence to so-called “swing” states. These swing states are not consistently Republican or Democratic, instead they “swing” back and forth between the parties from election to election (Williams, “Election 2008”). Political analysts, such as NBC’s Chuck Todd, assert that the nation contains approximately eight to twelve of these swing states (“Election 2008”). Presidential candidates are keenly aware that swing states decide the election, leading them to spend a lot of time in these states during the run-up to Election Day. In turn, these swing states cause the candidates to ignore the large majority of states. For the most part, the candidate who wins a majority of the swing states will become president (“Election 2008”). The idea that a mere handful of states will decide the presidency seems entirely un-American, since this nation is based on the idea of equality, thus, no state(s) should exert undue influence over other states. Benjamin Bolinger, a political science researcher at Vanderbilt University, notes this conundrum by stating, “When the votes of some citizens count more than those of others, America has failed to honor its commitment to equal representation” (180). These ideas of equality can be found in the nation’s oldest documents, such as *The Declaration of Independence*, which states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” (Preamble). However, some analysts, such as MSNBC’s Pat Buchanan, have argued that having swing states decide the election is not a major concern because it would be logistically impossible for candidates to reach out to voters all across the country (Matthews, “Election 2004 Preview”). This argument, while valid at first glance, forgets the point that candidates are aided by campaign committees and technology in every corner of the country, which means that all voters are reachable, no matter where in the United States they live. It’s not a stretch then for candidates to get their messages out across the

country, meaning that the election can be put in the hands of voters in all states, as opposed to voters in only swing states.

Since the Electoral College produces minority presidents, makes the electoral vote unreflective of the popular vote, and puts the election's fate in the hands of a few swing states, it's time for the Constitution to be amended so the Electoral College can be eliminated. Senator Durbin sums this idea up best when he asserts, "The Electoral College is an antiquated institution that has outlived its purpose" (17). I agree wholeheartedly with Senator Durbin's assessment of our current electoral system, and feel that the Electoral College is best replaced by a popular vote system, in which the candidate with the greatest number of popular votes is declared the winner. For this change to occur, the civic involvement of the nation will be required, thus, it's vital for concerned citizens to call their representatives and senators in Congress to urge them to adopt such a resolution. In short, the power for change lies in your hands.

### Works Cited

- Appleton, Andrew. "Political Systems Around the World." Washington State University, Pullman. 6 Apr. 2010. Lecture.
- Bolinger, Benjamin. "Point: Abolishing the Electoral College." *International Social Science Review* 82.3/4 (2007): 179-182. Web. 25 Sept. 2010.
- CNN Election 2008 staff. "Election Center 2008." CNN.com. Cable News Network, 2008. Web. 24 Oct. 2010.
- Durbin, Richard J. "Should the current Electoral College System be Preserved?" *Congressional Digest* 80.1 (2001): 17, 19, 21, 23, 25. Web. 25 Sept. 2010.
- "Election 2000." Dir. Brett Holey. *NBC Nightly News*. Perf. Tom Brokaw. NBC. New York City, 5 Dec. 2000. Television.
- "Election 2004 Preview." Dir. Chris Matthews. *Hardball with Chris Matthews*. Perf. Chris Matthews. MSNBC. Washington, D.C., 29 Oct. 2004. Television.
- "Election 2008." Dir. Brett Holey. *NBC Nightly News*. Perf. Brian Williams. NBC. New York City, 4 Nov. 2008. Television.
- Jefferson, Thomas. Declaration of Independence. 4 July 1776. MS. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.
- Longley, Robert. "The Electoral College System." About.com. The New York Times Company, 2010. Web. 24 Oct. 2010.
- "A Presidential Inauguration." Dir. Brett Holey. *NBC Nightly News*. Perf. Tom Brokaw. NBC. New York City, 20 Jan. 2001. Television.
- Vandenburg, Arthur L. "The Question of Abolishing the Electoral College." *Congressional Digest* 23.6/7 (1944): 188-192. Web. 25 Sept. 2010.

Professor Coleman

English 301

13 December 2010

### **Is the United States a Global Economic Hegemon in Decline?**

In September of 2008, global financial markets around the globe were sent into a state of economic freefall; within a few days, markets lost thousands of points in total share volume (Williams, "A Financial Crisis in America"). These total share volumes, which are the number of shares bought and sold in a specific period of time, act as measures of the market's overall strength/weakness ("A Financial Crisis in America"). Thus, the higher the total share volume, the stronger the market, and vice versa. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which is measured at the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street, went from a total volume of approximately 10,000 shares to a volume of around 6,500 shares within a matter of days, a drop unheard of since the Great Depression ("A Financial Crisis in America"). With this sudden global financial meltdown, economies all around the world felt its stinging impact. The United States, as the world's largest economy with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of around \$14 trillion, took a dramatic hit as millions of Americans lost their jobs, savings, and homes within a few short months ("A Financial Crisis in America"). According to a November 2010 report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor & Statistics, the United States' debt has now reached approximately \$13.7 trillion, and the national unemployment rate has soared to 9.8% (U.S. Department of Labor). With the U.S. in such a financial crisis, many leading economic analysts have wondered whether the United States is headed for a prolonged and irreversible drop in its global economic

dominance. For instance, a few days after the financial meltdown, NBC News Wall Street analyst Maria Bartiromo wondered aloud: “An important question is...has the United States lost its global economic standing? Have we lost our power around the world?” (“A Financial Crisis in America”). According to Washington State University Political Science professor Dr. Michael Infranco, “The U.S. is currently at an economic crossroads...it will either retain its position as a global economic giant, or its power will diminish and other nations such as China, Brazil, and India will surpass a slowing American economy” (lecture). How will the American economy fare in an increasingly globalized world? Can the United States retain its position as the world’s largest economy? While the answers to these and other related questions are at times difficult to forecast, they are answers which will affect the trajectory of American economic might in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Critics who reject my belief in American economic decline point to globalization as a reason why the U.S. will continue its economic dominance around the world. Globalization can be thought of as the increasingly competitive world economic market, in which many nations vie for economic superiority (Friedman, [www.Friedman.com](http://www.Friedman.com)). In addition, globalization has created a world in which regional communities and their economies have become globally connected through new technology, trade, and transportation ([www.Friedman.com](http://www.Friedman.com)). Thomas Friedman, a columnist for *The New York Times* and author of the best-selling novels *The World is Flat* and *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* (which both focus on globalization), supports the idea that globalization bodes well for continued American global economic hegemony ([www.Friedman.com](http://www.Friedman.com)).

Friedman casts economic globalization as the driving force of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, calling it the “defining feature of world affairs” from this point onward (Joffe, par.3). Friedman sees the United States, with its top-notch system of job preparation and education, as uniquely prepared

for a globalized market, causing him to state: “[If] you had to design a country best suited to compete in such a world, it would be today’s America” (par.3). I agree with Friedman that globalization will be an important part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, I respectfully disagree, as will be discussed later, with his claim that the U.S. serves as a blueprint for success in the future. While Friedman acknowledges my belief that nations such as China and India may challenge the United States for economic superiority in a globalized economy, he ultimately believes that the U.S., spurred by the best workers in the world, will maintain its position as the world’s predominant economic hegemon ([www.Friedman.com](http://www.Friedman.com)). As I will also note later, Friedman and I disagree over his claim that the U.S. has the best workers in the world.

Others who also refute my view that the United States is in global economic decline point to the fact that the United States has a long history of rebounding from periods in which its decline was predicted. A supporter of this idea that U.S. history will repeat itself is Josef Joffe, who is a Senior Fellow at Stanford University’s Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, as well as an Abramowitz Fellow in International Relations at Stanford’s Hoover Institution (Joffe, introduction). Joffe notes that approximately every ten years, the United States seems to face a crisis of some kind, which causes many people to predict that the nation stands on the precipice of global economic decline (par. 1). Instances such as the “missile gap” between the Soviet Union and the U.S. in the 1960s, the “malaise” speech of President Jimmy Carter in the 1970s, and the economic rise of Japan in the 1980s caused a panic in many Americans that the U.S. was on a downward spiral (par. 1). While I acknowledge these instances on the basis of their historical fact, I believe Joffe fails to realize that the current situation faced by the U.S. is much direr than anything ever faced by the nation in the past. However, Joffe rebuts my argument with his claim that the U.S. never fell into these predicted global economic

declines; instead, it experienced the “longest economic expansion in history” (par. 3). Even in times of war, Joffe asserts that the United States’ economy was never severely hampered. He believes this because taxes were never raised during times of war and the draft was never reinstated after Vietnam, causing the U.S. to at worst experience a “mild recession” in 1991, out of which it quickly rebounded (par. 1). With this statement, Joffe touches on a key point of disagreement between our respective views. If the U.S. experienced a mild recession in the past, I believe that the recession in our current times will be more severe and prolonged because of the unparalleled economic catastrophe which the nation currently faces. However, due to the nation’s track record of continued economic growth and ability to defy historical situations in which its decline seemed likely, Joffe views the current fiscal crisis of 2008 as another obstacle which the United States will be able to overcome (par. 3). Joffe predicts that the United States will pull itself out of its current economic struggles, just as it has in the past, leading to its continued economic growth and dominance far into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (par. 3). While I see Joffe’s line of reasoning and respect it, I do not share his belief in future success for the U.S. economy.

In addition, other critics’ disagreement with my position that the United States is in global economic decline stems from the idea that we have the most innovative society in the world, in which great amount of time are spent on developing the latest technology. One scholar who espouses this view is Fareed Zakaria, who is the editor of *Newsweek International* and hosts the weekly public affairs show *Fareed Zakaria GPS* on CNN (Zakaria, introduction). Zakaria also authored the cover story for the November 1<sup>st</sup> issue of *Time Magazine*, entitled “How to Restore the American Dream,” in which he discusses America’s economic future at home and abroad (Rose, “A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria”). In a recent appearance on *The Charlie Rose Show*, (a daily, hour-long public affairs show on PBS) Zakaria discussed his belief

that America's global economic hegemony will continue, due to a society which prides itself on the leading the world in cutting-edge technology ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). Furthermore, Zakaria noted that the United States leads the world in the amount of government money spent yearly on technological research and development, a total which Zakaria approximates at \$300 billion or about 3% of the U.S. GDP ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). Despite this spending on research and development, Zakaria agrees with my position that the federal government needs to take more action to ensure that the nation continues its global economic hegemony. On this matter, Zakaria and I both believe that spending on research and development should increase to around 6% of GDP ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). With greater commitment by the government to developing new technologies, according to Zakaria, the U.S. finds itself in prime position to continue global economic dominance by retaining its status as the country with the greatest amount of high-tech jobs ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). Zakaria calls these high-tech jobs, which require knowledge in math and science, "the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century," leading him to assert that the country which can "corner the market" on these jobs will find itself in the best economic position ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). While I agree with Zakaria that the nation which corners the market in these jobs will find itself in the predominant economic position, I disagree that this nation will be the United States. By leading the world with its continued emphasis on technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Zakaria claims that the U.S. has the "strength and dynamism to continue shaping the world" well into the future (Zakaria, introduction). In my opinion, the U.S. has this potential which Zakaria describes, yet multiple factors, which I will discuss in the coming paragraphs, will prevent it from shaping the world well into the future.



While a number of fundamental disagreements exist between those who believe the United States will be able to maintain its position as a global economic hegemon and those, like me, who view it as a hegemon in decline, a degree of common ground also exists between our respective views. For instance, members on all sides of the argument have stressed their belief that the U.S. government should do a better job in its funding of technological research and development. Fareed Zakaria, Dr. Infranco, and I have all called on the government to double its funding of research and development to 6% of GDP (Rose, “A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria” & Infranco, lecture). Dr. Infranco called this lack of funding “abhorrent,” and noted that nations such as Brazil and China spend a much greater percentage of their GDP on research and development than the U.S. does (lecture). All sides in this argument have also stressed their hopes that the U.S. can have a successful, thriving economy for years to come. During his TV appearance, Zakaria made it a special point of emphasis to state that he “deeply hopes the U.S. can reclaim the American Dream and retain its current economic standing” (“A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria”). Dr. Infranco, in response to Zakaria’s comments, was quick to echo his sentiments by stating that he hopes “American economic prosperity will continue for many generations to come” (lecture). I agree wholeheartedly with both of these gentlemen’s comments. As an American citizen and a person who deeply loves this country, I will do everything in my power to see that the U.S. economy thrives for many years to come. I hope, just as Zakaria and Dr. Infranco do, that millions of Americans will find the American Dream of economic success within their reach well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

In my opinion, the United States is a global economic hegemon in decline. One of the major reasons for this decline is the nation’s astronomical and ballooning \$13.7 trillion debt (U.S. Department of Labor). With this continued growth of the national debt, it will be

extremely difficult for the U.S. economy to grow and compete with the economies of other nations. One scholar who agrees with my point of view is Niall Ferguson, a history professor at Harvard University and a Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution (Ferguson, introduction). Ferguson notes that the U.S. economy will struggle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to the soaring "fiscal deficits" accrued by the federal government, leading him to call the U.S. "an empire on the precipice" of decline (introduction). Dr. Michael Infranco also supports my point of view that the United States will be greatly hindered by its large national debt. Infranco asserts that a nation with a large national debt will be "plagued by high unemployment rates, a stagnant currency, and an impoverished middle class" (lecture). In his opinion, these problems will plague the United States for many years to come, until the nation can "get its financial house in order by reducing the national debt" (lecture). I believe the U.S. economic decline will continue because the national debt will not be reduced anytime in the foreseeable future. My belief is due to the fact that one of the first votes in Congress' new session will be to raise the national debt ceiling to approximately \$14 trillion (Rose, "A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). Congress will have to continue raising the national debt ceiling periodically for at least the next 3 years, or the United States will run the risk of defaulting on its debt, which would cause a global financial panic ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). As the U.S. continues to increase its debt, nations such as China and Japan (the two largest creditors of the United States) will continue to hold more of the mounting U.S. debt ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). This trend is very alarming to myself and many scholars, including Peter Peterson, the former Secretary of Commerce under President Nixon, who called this "increasing reliance on foreign debt" a trend which threatens to "bankrupt America" (Peterson, introduction). In order to pay off this debt, the United States will have to make payments to these and many other nations around the world

(Infranco, lecture). As I see it, even if the U.S. manages to reduce its national debt, it will come at the economic cost of having to make payments to other countries, which would only work to strengthen the economies of these other nations and weaken the U.S. economy in the process. Thus, the United States' large national debt has placed it in a lose-lose situation in the global economy.

While proponents of the idea that America can remain dominant in an increasingly globalized economy point to the strength of American workers as a reason for their belief, I view American workers and their lack of knowledge regarding high-tech jobs as a reason why the United States will suffer a decline as a global economic hegemon. Proponents of continued American economic dominance, such as Fareed Zakaria, have stated that America will excel in the high-tech industry jobs of the future (Rose, "A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). Zakaria views these jobs as ones which will cater to workers with strong backgrounds in math and science, causing him to believe that American workers are fully equipped to handle such challenges ("A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). While I respect Zakaria's beliefs, statistics show that American workers are not ready to handle these high-tech jobs of the future due to their weak knowledge in math and science. A 2010 study by the Pew Research Group yielded some glaring findings about the knowledge gap between the U.S. and the rest of the world. According to the study, which looked at the world's most developed nations, U.S. high school graduates rank 31<sup>st</sup> in the world in math proficiency and 22<sup>nd</sup> in science proficiency (Infranco, lecture). The research begs the question: Shouldn't a country which is supposed to maintain its global economic hegemony rank first in the world in these critical skill areas? The findings were not only concerning to me, but to Dr. Infranco, who noted that a nation with a workforce so weak in math and science has "little chance of maintaining any semblance of global economic

hegemony” (lecture). In my view, a labor force with low amounts of knowledge in math and science will not have the necessary skills to perform high-tech jobs, meaning that these jobs will be shipped overseas to foreign nations with highly-skilled and knowledgeable workers. This outsourcing of high-tech jobs has already occurred (with companies such as Dell and Budweiser) and will continue well into the future, meaning that many American companies may move overseas due to a lack of American workers with the necessary skills to perform the jobs these companies employ (lecture). This emigration of American companies overseas would be severely detrimental to the American economy, with both liberal and conservative economists projecting that millions of American workers could be put out of work (lecture). To me, an economy with millions of unskilled, unemployed citizens signals a nation facing a precipitous global decline.

While all sides make compelling arguments regarding whether or not the United States is an economic global hegemon in decline, all sides also have shortcomings and faults in their arguments. In regards to those who disagree with me and promote the idea that the United States can maintain its global economic hegemony, they don't take into account that never before has the United States faced so many countries which equal its technological and economic power in so many respects. One of these rising powers, China, has an economy which is growing rapidly and is expected to become the world's largest economy in approximately 20 years (Infranco, lecture). With China's booming population of over 1.3 billion people, it may be mathematically unrealistic to think that the United States, with a population of around 320 million people, can produce the same number of goods and services as its Asian rival (lecture). Another rising power in the global economy, India, also has a population of over 1 billion people and is considered by many to be the world's leader in high-tech jobs, due to outsourcing of

technological work from the United States to India (Rose, “A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria”). Equipped with these high-tech jobs and a soaring population, India also seems poised, along with China, to surpass the U.S. economy in the years to come (“A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria”). My supporters and I, who advocate the view that the U.S. is in global economic decline, have a key shortcoming in our argument that the \$13.7 trillion national debt will negatively affect the United States’ global economic performance (U.S. Department of Labor). My supporters and I sometimes forget that other nations all around the world are facing similar national debt problems, meaning that the United States does not face this debt crisis alone. For instance, all nations in the European Union currently face massive debt problems, creating a scenario in which the economies of many European countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, have been severely crippled (lecture). Thus, since other nations face similar debt problems, the United States faces a competitively level global economic playing field, giving the U.S. a better chance of economic success since all its global competitors are also hurting. In regards to the U.S. national debt, it is also important for my supporters and me to remember that a Republican majority has recently been swept into the U.S. House of Representatives, which has proposed many policies aimed at reducing the debt (Williams, “Election 2010”). NBC economic analyst Steve Liesman points out that these policies give “great hope” that the debt will be reduced, which will lead to “stable global growth for the U.S. economy” (“Election 2010”).

Regardless of one’s position, every U.S. citizen should be concerned with what direction the U.S. economy will take in the months and years to come. Joseph Nye, Dean of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, has deemed the United States the “most dominant power since Rome” and I wholeheartedly agree with his assessment (Nye, introduction). When a nation of

this magnitude faces such economic challenges, should not all Americans feel at least some level of concern as to the direction of the United States' economy? An answer to this question in the affirmative seems to be one point upon which all sides of this debate can agree. As a college student and future full-time worker, I have great concern as to whether the U.S. economy will be strong in the years to come because the economy's strength will affect my employment opportunities. I must echo the words of Stephen Walt, a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, who said regarding the U.S. economy's future, "The time to worry is now" (Walt, par. 4).

While the future of the U.S. economy may be uncertain, all sides (including my own) should realize that action is currently required to ensure our nation's economic growth for years to come. The federal government needs to take action to reduce the national debt, which will take a large financial burden off the backs of future generations of Americans. As noted by Fareed Zakaria, the lack of an astronomical debt will benefit future Americans because their taxes will be lower, thereby allowing them to pay less to the government and stimulate the economy through the purchasing of goods and services (Rose, "A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria"). In my view, reduction of the national debt will create long-term economic stability for our nation; however, America's political parties and citizens must seek a compromise and work together to tackle this vital issue. Furthermore, the United States' economic situation will benefit from free trade negotiations with rival powers like China, India, and Brazil, which will allow for the flow of goods between all nations. These free trade pacts, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), will help the economies of all nations because important goods will be sold on the global market at fair, competitive prices (Infranco, lecture).

As Americans, we must have the boldness to seek bi-partisan solutions, such as these free trade agreements, to ensure our future global economic success for many years to come.

### Works Cited

- “A Conversation with Fareed Zakaria.” Dir. Charlie Rose. *The Charlie Rose Show*. Perf. Charlie Rose. PBS. New York City, 30 Oct. 2010. Television.
- “Election 2010.” Dir. Brett Holey. *NBC Nightly News*. Perf. Brian Williams. NBC. New York City, 3 Nov. 2010. Television.
- Ferguson, Niall. “Complexity and Collapse.” *Foreign Affairs* March/April (2010): n.pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- “A Financial Crisis in America.” Dir. Brett Holey. *NBC Nightly News*. Perf. Brian Williams. NBC. New York City, 17 Sept. 2008. Television.
- Friedman, Thomas L. *The New York Times & “Foreign Affairs” Columnist Thomas L. Friedman*. The New York Times Company, 6 Nov. 2010. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- Infranco, Michael P. “The Global Political Economy.” Washington State University, Pullman. 9 November 2010. Lecture.
- Joffe, Josef. “The Default Power.” *Foreign Affairs* September/October (2009): n. pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- Nye, Joseph S. “U.S. Power and Strategy after Iraq.” *Foreign Affairs* July/August (2003): n.pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- Peterson, Peter G. “Riding for a Fall.” *Foreign Affairs* September/October (2004): n.pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- United States Department of Labor. *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. United States Federal Government, 9 Nov. 2010. Web. 9 Nov. 2010
- Walt, Stephen M. “Taming American Power.” *Foreign Affairs* September/October (2005): n.pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.
- Zakaria, Fareed. “The Future of American Power.” *Foreign Affairs* May/June (2008): n.pag. Web. 9 Nov. 2010.