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Love vs. Capitalism

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Love vs. Capitalism

Writing Process

My purpose in writing this Summary and Response paper was to take a deep look at Norris' essay, *The Secret Ingredient*, and focus on a main aspect that I found to be important to me. I am trying to show, using Norris' essay as evidence, that I agree with Norris' assertion that people are too materialistic today and that people should be focuses on love instead. The hardest challenge for me when I was working on this paper was trying to balance between using textual evidence and using my own words. I wanted to make sure that I provided enough evidence to support my claim but I also wanted to make sure that I incorporate my own ideas into the paper. When I was able to find a balance between these two aspects, I was able to fully create a rough draft of my paper. I created three rough drafts that were looked over by peers and then a final draft that my professor graded. I revised my paper based on my peers' evaluations as well as the feedback that my professor gave me on my final draft.

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Love vs. Capitalistic Society

In her essay, “The Secret Ingredient,” Kathleen Norris discusses the modern day issues in a consumeristic nation by contrasting the monastic life with the everyday American life. She observes how commercialism in contemporary America is changing our lives by focusing on how the products we buy determine our identity. Today we are concerned with our self-image and what brands we can buy and afford. In order to restore human freedom in such a time, Norris argues that we follow the monastic perspective, which is honed by celibacy. True freedom also can be restored through carrying out acts of charity and opening ourselves to love. She concludes that through love we are able to experience prayer and care for one another. The love of God and of one another is the only thing worth caring about, not what we buy or own. I agree with Norris’s assertion that people today are too materialistic and focus too much on what they buy and wear, and that instead people should be focused on the “secret ingredient” of love.

Norris says, “The ultimate goal of the marketer is to have us see consumer products, not as mere things, but as keys to our identity” (108). This means that what people wear essentially becomes an extension of themselves. I agree with Norris’s statement because it is clearly evident in today’s society that what people wear represents who they are due to the advertisement industry. Never before have people faced such a growing problem and practically no one is trying to stop this injustice because they are not fully aware of the influence that advertisement has on them. Norris takes it one step further when she says, “to suggest that we have willingly

embraced a form of slavery is to go over the top, but that is exactly where we need to go” (108). Norris’s choice of the word “slavery” made me think more deeply about the effects that marketing has had on me. I eventually came to the conclusion that I was indeed a “slave” to advertising because of the brands that I wear. I would only wear certain brands and those brands would represent my self-image. Norris sums up my thoughts when she says, “Our self-worth is founded on which brands and labels we can afford to purchase and display” (109). The whole idea that people determine their self-worth from what they can afford piqued my interest and made me want to read more of Norris’s essay.

Next, Norris tackles the false sense of freedom that people have in today’s society, which I think is also prevalent (114). Norris raises an interesting question when she asks, “How do we define ourselves as free in a workaholic society that pressures so many of its most productive, well-trained, and well-compensated people to be available 24/7?” (114). This is interesting to think about because how can people truly be free if work expects people to be available 24/7? The answer is quite simple: people are not truly free if their work controls their lives. I have actually experienced this first hand at my old job at home, which was working at Chick-Fil-A. As a team leader, which is essentially an assistant manager, I would be called into work all of the time. Sometimes I would work 12 hour shifts and would also work 7 hour shifts every day. I was not truly “free” because I was expected to go into work whenever they needed me, which prevented me from doing other activities. The only way to be “free” is to live simply, similar to the way that the monks at the monasteries do (Norris 114). By living simply and refusing to be exploited by corporations, I will be able to achieve what Norris calls true “freedom” (114).

Another piece of helpful advice that Norris provides is related to temptation. Norris focuses on a question that is posed to her by a monk: “Why expose yourself to temptation” (115).

This is an excellent question for people to think about and it continues to be a question that I ask myself. Every day individuals choose to expose themselves to the temptations of the capitalistic society in which they live. People allow themselves to be tempted by brands and marketers when they enter a mall or store and then they end up buying stuff that we later deem to be useless.

What truly intrigued me about Norris is her comment that “the only cure for consumerism is a dose of monastic formation” (115). Norris brings up an excellent proposition for how to avoid the temptation of consumerism. The dose of monastic formation that Norris mentions resulted in the creation of her own rule that says, “If I buy something new, it is to replace something I no longer use. If it might be of use to someone else, it goes to charity” (116). I agree with Norris’s new rule because it prevents people from being tempted through the use of a monastic value applied to a capitalistic idea. The merging of these two worlds through the creation of Norris’s new rule serves as a guideline for me and should inspire others to adopt this new rule in order to avoid temptation.

When Norris reveals the “secret ingredient” at the end of her essay, I immediately agreed with her “secret ingredient”. The “secret ingredient” for life as Norris says, is love because “the love of God, of the neighbor, and the self, is the only “secret ingredient” worth caring about. Life is too short, and too valuable, for anything less” (117). This is a very good point that Norris makes because it challenges the main focus of a capitalistic society, which relies on brands and labels. By placing love as the main concern for people, Norris has therefore found a way to avoid the temptation of labels and brands. Norris has essentially given the world solutions on how to free people from the enslavement of advertising. If everyone follows Norris’s “secret ingredient” then everyone will be able to break the hold the society has on everybody and live a much more simple life.

Norris challenges individuals to look more deeply at the materialistic society that they live in today by asking everyone to examine the labels and brands that people use. Once people examine their brands and labels, they immediately become aware of their enslavement to the advertising industry and must figure out how to break “free”. Norris’s solution to gain freedom is through living simply and avoiding temptation. By avoiding temptation and living simply, people will be able to discover the “secret ingredient”, which Norris presents is love. Through the “secret ingredient” of love, everybody will be able to fully break free and live simply.

Works Cited

Norris, Kathleen. "The Secret Ingredient." *Readings for ENG 100: Writing Seminar I*. By University of Dayton. 3rd ed. Boston, New York: Bedford/St Martin's, 2014. 108-117. Print.