“THE MYTH OF THE SELF MADE PERSON”

GUIDED QUESTIONS AND EXAMINATION WORKSHEET

Attached you will find four short readings discussing whether or not individuals are responsible for their own outcomes, or are their outcomes a result of the social circumstances they find themselves in. As you may recall, this is one of the central questions that the field of Sociology determines to answer.

The purpose of this assignment is for you to hear and think about both sides of the argument as made by some of the critical minds who have examined it. There are a few questions after each article, and following all of the readings, a series of questions to help focus your thoughts on what you think the answer to this question is.

Finally after answering each of these questions, you can reflect on what decision you have come to regarding this question, and your reasoning for reaching such a conclusion.

The Myth of the Self-Made Person

By Peter Kaufman

What do the alleged Boston Marathon bombers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev have in common with Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, J.K. Rowling, Jimi Hendrix, and Ben Franklin?
The answer: All of these individuals are said to have become who they are by their own individual means.

Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev are said to have been self-radicalized. Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, and J.K. Rowling are all said to be self-made billionaires. Jimi Hendrix, named as the greatest guitarist of all time by Rolling Stone, is said to have been self-taught. Ben Franklin is often invoked as “America’s first self-made man.”

The official term for those who are self-directed or self-taught learners is autodidacticism. Although there are many well-known so-called autodidacts, in the folklore of American history the most famous is the Horatio Alger story of the man who goes from rags to riches by “pulling himself up by his bootstraps.” The stories of Alger are often invoked as literary metaphors for achieving the American Dream.

I have a hard time wrapping my mind around this concept of autodidactism. To me, it seems like an oxymoron—a contradiction in terms. Even in Alger’s stories, the individual who goes from rags to riches is often aided by a willing and wealthy benefactor. So can we honestly say that a person is self-radicalized, self-taught, or self-made? Is it really possible for someone to become a terrorist, a billionaire, or a great artist completely on their own?

From a sociological standpoint, the answer to both of these questions is a resounding NO. After all, one of the basic principles of sociology suggests that we are social animals living in a social world who are socially created through our social interaction. It goes without saying that we are not self-contained individuals living independently and becoming ourselves through self-reflection, self-direction, or any other solitary experience.
The notion of the self-made person is arguably the most anti-sociological sentiment that we hear about in a society that often fails to grasp the sociological imagination. By invoking such a claim we are ignoring and discounting the whole array of social influences that make us who we are. The self-made myth disregards the indisputable fact that our lives are shaped by a myriad of social forces such as the people with whom we interact, the resources (or lack thereof) at our disposal, and the formal and informal rules that govern behavior. Sociologists often refer to this explanation as the issue of agency (our capability to act a certain way) and structure (the factors that enable or constrain behavior).

The myth of the self-made person also rejects another foundational premise of sociology: interdependence. As I explained in a previous post, interdependence is the idea that all life is connected; none of us exist in a vacuum. Many of us like to believe that we blaze our own trail largely free from the influence of others. In truth, the values we hold dear, the norms we follow, the behaviors in which we engage, and even the thoughts that go through our minds result from the interdependent web of relationships in which we exist.

To say that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev became radicalized on his own is just as misleading as saying that Oprah Winfrey is solely responsible for amassing her fortune. In both instances, as in all instances of autodidacts, these individuals could not become who they are—good or bad—merely through self-direction, self-initiative, or self-knowledge. All of us are products of the ongoing life process of socialization (a third foundational premise of sociology that the self-made myth rejects). From the various agents of socialization—family, peers, religion, media, education, government—we learn how to be members of society. Socialization also plays the
important role of influencing what, how, and why we become who we do—be it a Boston
Marathon bomber, a billionaire, or a recent college graduate who is undecided about the future.

Not surprisingly, this last point about the social foundations of aspiration is often overlooked.
This is what occurred when President Obama referred to Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev as
self-radicalized. The assumption is that the brothers developed their views on their own without
being trained directly by any militant fundamentalist organization. Although it may be true that
the brothers were not formally involved in any such groups, it is terribly misleading to imply that
their views and their actions were not the product of social relationships and social influences.

The self-made myth is both popular and seductive because we are
attracted to the idea that each of is the master of our own destiny. There is something comforting
in believing that you can be whoever and whatever you want to be. Sociologists are less likely to
endorse this perspective because we recognize and acknowledge the power of the social world in
shaping individual lives. The sociological position does not negate or deny that each of has some
agency or individual initiative that we may wield; however, we are cautious to not to swing the
balance too far to the individual-only side. Whether one is a suspected terrorist, a billionaire, or a
recent college graduate, I would resist the moniker “self-made” and instead speak of the socially-
made person. It’s not as convenient, catchy, or snappy as self-made but it is definitely more accurate.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. According to the author, from a sociological standpoint, what is the answer to the question, “Can a person be self-made?”

________________________________________________________________________

2. Why is this?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. What are agency and structure, and how do they fit into the author’s argument?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. What is interdependence?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
5. What are the agents of socialization, and what do we learn from them?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. Instead of “self-made” the author prefers what term, and why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
A great deal has already been made of President Obama’s “you didn’t build that” comment. Because I regularly write about business creation and startups here and at my McStartup blog, I have had many people ask for my opinion on what he said and what he actually meant.

I was resisting writing about this because although I do follow both business start-ups and politics, one of the things I can’t stand about the latter is the “gotcha” game of taking comments out of context and spinning them into something else.

These conversations have usually started like this:

“Are you angry that the President says you didn’t build your business?”
“Don’t think that’s exactly what he meant.”
“So you’re not angry with what he said?!?!?!?”
“I’d say I’m more sad about it than I am angry.”

And then more explanation is needed. You see, in the full context of what was said, there is disagreement as to what “you didn’t build that” actually meant. Some believe it meant, “You didn’t build your business.” Others believe it meant, “You didn’t build the support infrastructure that led to your business (the teachers, the roads, etc.).”
I’m willing to give the benefit of the doubt here because in context, and in consideration of things the President has said in the past, I believe he did mean “the support infrastructure” and not “the business.”

But this is what makes me sad.

It makes me sad because it shows a complete lack of understanding for the struggle that it is to create a business. For every person who supports what you are doing when starting a business from scratch, you can find a half dozen who are not helpful at all, who doubt what you are doing, who think you will fail and aren’t afraid to tell you that. Sure there are great teachers, but there are also bad teachers. Yes, there are roads, but there is also tremendous red tape and regulations to deal with. By far, the most frequently asked questions I get at McStartup are not about business strategy, but are about startup regulations and law. The current “infrastructure” is stacked AGAINST the entrepreneur.

Anyone who has ever started a business knows this to be true.

So hearing this come from the President and then defended “in context” is what makes me sad because it shows a complete lack of appreciation and knowledge for what it actually takes to start a business. I don’t believe that the President must be a business expert but certainly I should expect that with businesses being the epicenter of job growth, the tax base, and the source of the innovations that make life better, the President should have a basic appreciation for what it takes.

In politics, the phrase, “______ couldn’t run a hardware store!” has become a common poke at ability and intelligence.

I doubt you will find anyone who has actually created and ran a hardware store make such a stupid statement. Running a hardware store is hard. Unfortunately, the struggle of creating and running a business is disregarded and downplayed in modern American politics.

“You didn’t build your business” would be a dumb thing to say. “You didn’t build this fabulous support infrastructure” is a very naïve thing to say.

And, to hear a President say and then defend something so naïve about something so fundamental to how our country works makes me sad.

My disappointment with the remarks (taken in their full context) is not with a particular policy of President Obama. Likewise, this article should not be taken to indicate some kind of endorsement or favoring of the Bush administration as providing better “infrastructure.” It should also not be taken to mean that I am endorsing particular policies of the Mitt Romney campaign in this context. Policy debate is not the point of the article.

Instead, my disappointment is with the infrastructure in general, and with the President’s stated understanding of the influence of that infrastructure. Sure, I take issue with certain specific policies, but they aren’t necessarily tied to President Obama at all. The Securities Law of 1933 makes raising startup capital from your own parents illegal in many cases. That is not President Obama’s fault. It’s a part of the system that is not helping create businesses, jobs and competition. Can you imagine not being able to take a successful company public because years ago a family friend gave you the startup capital that launched your business and they weren’t an “accredited investor” as defined by the SEC?
That can really happen and it has real consequences. Why is it that private equity firms, like Bain Capital, hold so much power and leverage when it comes to startup companies? You need look no further than these same laws. Receiving a check from my own father might be illegal per the SEC. Receiving a check from a venture capitalist is not.

My article isn’t about Obama administration policy – it’s about a lack of appreciation of all the pieces of the “infrastructure” that are often stacked against the entrepreneur, and about a lack of understanding for how much the “good” pieces actually “help.”

Do entrepreneurs benefit from roads? Of course. Do roads offset the inability to legally raise startup capital from your neighbors? I doubt it. There are things that help and there are things that hurt, and on balance, there is a tremendous amount of difficulty and challenge put in place by the “infrastructure” itself.

It is also important that we not forget that any piece of infrastructure that does “help” is also of help to the competition. My competition wants me to go out of business. So the roads may help me, but they may help a competitor put me under. If Michael Dell can figure out a way to use the infrastructure to ensure that I never sell another computer system, he will. There is no doubt about that.

To use an analogy: The pass interference penalty helped Jerry Rice catch more balls. But the pass interference penalty didn’t make Jerry Rice the greatest receiver of all time, nor did it help Jerry Rice win football games. It helped him and it helped his competitors. Perhaps Jerry Rice would have caught fewer footballs without that penalty. But even if that is the case, the contribution to his career attributable to that penalty is insignificant relative to the work, struggle and practice he personally put into his own career.

It would be ridiculous to put a bust of Jerry Rice at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio and then attach to it a statue of the rules the committee that wrote the pass interference penalty. Jerry’s achievements are his own and they should be celebrated. He knows who helped him. He knows who doubted him. He knows what rules helped and he knows what rules hurt. In the end, it was up to him to get up at 5 a.m. and run that hill. It was up to him to spend his free time studying film. And, it is to his credit that he did all of those things, worked within the system and achieved greatness. All of the support and all of the rules of the game couldn’t run that hill for him.

Yes, the infrastructure can help you succeed but it can also help a competitor put you out of business. If my business is not successful, it would be silly of me to place the “blame” on the existence of roads for helping my competitors. Or, to blame the bad teacher I had in the second grade. These elements of the infrastructure are just too small a part of the overall picture specific to my business to be considered a significant factor.

The same holds true in the reverse. When I see people, especially politicians, from either side taking credit for this great infrastructure, it shows me that they don’t have an understanding of what it’s like to try and compete “in the trenches” in the real world of business.

Anyone who has started a business knows that there are supporters and doubters. There are laws that help and laws that hurt. But above all else, the struggle in the trenches, the 99.9 percent
of the effort that is required and the key element that ultimately leads to success or failure, is getting out of bed at 5 a.m. and running up that hill every day. If you don’t, your competitors will.

No amount of “infrastructure” will run that hill for you.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. According to the author, what is “the complete lack of understanding for the struggle that it is to create a business”?

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

2. What is the author’s main argument regarding “infrastructure”?

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________
Remarks by the President at a Campaign Event in Roanoke, Virginia

Roanoke Fire Station #1, Roanoke, Virginia

The White House Office of the Press Secretary

Section One

.....And the reason you're here tonight is because no matter how petty and small politics seems sometimes, you recognize that the stakes could not be bigger. In some ways, the stakes are even bigger now than they were in 2008, because what's at stake is not just two people or two political parties. What's at stake is a decision between two fundamentally different views about where we take the country right now. And the choice is up to you.

Now, this is my last political campaign.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Awww --

THE PRESIDENT: No, it's true. There is a term limit for Presidents. You get two. (Laughter.) So no matter what happens, this will be my last campaign. And it makes you nostalgic sometimes, and I started thinking about some of my first campaigns.

When I was traveling across Illinois -- and Illinois is a big state. And it's got big cities like Chicago and it's got small towns, and it's got rural areas and suburban areas, and you meet people from every walk of life -- black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American. You stop in VFW halls, you stop in diners, you go to churches, you go to synagogues. Wherever you go, you're going to have a chance to meet people from different walks of life. And when I think about that first campaign, what strikes me is no matter where I went, no matter who I was talking to, I could see my own life in the life of the people whose vote I was asking for.

So I would meet an elderly vet and I'd think about my grandfather who fought in World War II, and my grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line during the war. And I'd think
about how, when my grandfather came back home, because of this country he was able to get an
education on the GI Bill and they were able to buy their first home using an FHA loan.

And then I'd meet a single mom somewhere and I'd think about my mom. I never knew my
dad. He left when I was just barely a baby, and so -- and my mother didn’t have a lot of money
and she was struggling, and she had to go back to school raising a kid, later raising my sister, and
she had to work while she was in school. But despite all that, because she was in America, she
was able to get grants and scholarships and her kids were able to get grants and scholarships.
(Appause.) And they could go as far as their dreams could take them.

And then I'd talk to some working folks, and I'd think about Michelle's family -- her dad who
was a blue-collar worker, worked at a water filtration plant in Chicago, and her mom was a
secretary. And yet, despite never having a lot, there was so much love and so much passion --
and her dad had MS, so he had to wake up an hour earlier than everybody else just to get to work
because it took him that long to get dressed, and he could barely walk. But he never missed a
day’s work -- because he took pride in the idea that, you know what, I’m going to earn my way
and look after my family. (Applause.) And I’d see that same pride in the people I was talking to.

And what this reminded me of was that, at the heart of this country, its central idea is the idea
that in this country, if you’re willing to work hard, if you’re willing to take responsibility, you
can make it if you try. (Applause.) That you can find a job that supports a family and find a home
you can make your own; that you won’t go bankrupt when you get sick. That maybe you can
take a little vacation with your family once in a while -- nothing fancy, but just time to spend
with those you love. Maybe see the country a little bit, maybe come down to Roanoke.
(Appause.) That your kids can get a great education, and if they’re willing to work hard, then
they can achieve things that you wouldn’t have even imagined achieving. And then you can
maybe retire with some dignity and some respect, and be part of a community and give
something back. (Applause.)

That’s the idea of America. It doesn’t matter what you look like. It doesn’t matter where you
come from. It doesn’t matter what your last name is. You can live out the American Dream.
That’s what binds us all together. (Applause.)

Section Two

Now, the reason that I think so many of us came together in 2008 was because we saw that
for a decade that dream was fraying, that it was slipping away; that there were too many people
who were working hard but not seeing their incomes or wages go up; that we had taken a surplus
and turned it into a deficit -- we were running two wars on a credit card; that job growth was the
most sluggish it had been in 50 years. There was a sense that those who were in charge didn’t
feel responsible.

And so we came together to say we are going to bring about the kinds of changes that allow
us to get back to those basics, allow us to restore and live out those values. What we didn’t
realize was that some of that recklessness, some of that irresponsibility would lead to the worst
financial crisis we’ve seen since the Great Depression. And I don’t need to tell you what we’ve
been through over the last three and a half years because you’ve lived it. Too many folks lost
jobs. Too many people saw their homes lose value. Too many folks saw their savings take a hit.

But you know what’s given me confidence and faith is that fact that as I’ve traveled around
the country now, just like I used to travel around Illinois, that same decency, those same values --
they’re still alive, at least outside Washington. (Applause.) Times have been tough, but
America’s character hasn’t changed. The core decency of the American people is undiminished.
(Applause.) Our willingness to fight through and work through the tough times and come
together, that’s still there.

And so, just as we came together in the last campaign -- not just Democrats, by the way, but
Republicans and independents, because we’re not Democrats or Republicans first, we’re
Americans first. (Applause.) Just like we came together in 2008, we know that we’ve got to keep
working; we got to keep moving forward in 2012. And we knew back then that it wasn’t going to
be easy. These problems we’re facing, they didn’t happen overnight, and they’re not going to be
solved overnight. We understood it might take more than one year or one term or even one
President. But what we also understood was that we weren’t going to stop until we had restored
that basic American bargain that makes us the greatest country on Earth. (Applause.)

Our goal isn’t just to put people back to work -- although that’s priority number one -- it is to
build an economy where that work pays off. An economy where everyone, whether you are
starting a business or punching a clock, can see your hard work and responsibility rewarded.
That’s what this campaign’s about, Roanoke. And that’s why I’m running for a second term as
President of the United States of America. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE: Four more years! Four more years!

THE PRESIDENT: Now, let me say this. It’s fashionable among some pundits -- and this
happens every time America hits a rough patch -- it’s fashionable to be saying, well, this time it’s
different, this time we really are in the soup; it’s going to be hard to solve our problems. Let me
tell you something. What’s missing is not big ideas. What’s missing is not that we’ve got an
absence of technical solutions to deal with issues like education or energy or our deficit. The
problem we’ve got right now is we’ve just got a stalemate in Washington.

And the outcome of this debate that we’re having is going to set the stage not just for the next
year or five years, but for the next twenty. On the one side you’ve got my opponent in this
presidential race and his Republican allies who --

AUDIENCE: Booo --

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, look -- I mean, we’re having a good, healthy, democratic debate.
That’s how this works. And on their side, they’ve got a basic theory about how you grow the
economy. And the theory is very simple: They think that the economy grows from the top down.
So their basic theory is, if wealthy investors are doing well then everybody does well. So if we
spend trillions of dollars on more tax cuts mostly for the wealthy, that that’s somehow going to
create jobs, even if we have to pay for it by gutting education and gutting job-training programs
and gutting transportation projects, and maybe even seeing middle-class folks have a higher tax burden.

AUDIENCE: No!

THE PRESIDENT: So that’s part number one, right. More tax cuts for those at the top.

Part number two is they believe if you tear down all the regulations that we’ve put in place -- for example, on Wall Street banks or on insurance companies or on credit card companies or on polluters -- that somehow the economy is going to do much, much better. So those are their two theories. They’ve got the tax cuts for the high end, and they’ve got rollback regulation.

Now, here’s the problem. You may have guessed -- we tried this. We tried this in the last decade and it did not work.

AUDIENCE: No!

THE PRESIDENT: Now, before I finish, can I say, by the way, that some of you have been standing for a while and I see a couple folks slumping down a little bit. Make sure you’re drinking water. Bend your knees. Don’t stand up too straight. The paralegals will be -- the paralegals? (Laughter.) You don’t need lawyers. (Laughter.) The paramedics will be coming by, so just give folks a little bit of room, they’ll be fine. This happens at every event.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We love you, Obama!

THE PRESIDENT: I love you back. (Applause.) But I just want to point out that we tried their theory for almost 10 years, and here’s what it got us: We got the slowest job growth in decades. We got deficits as far as the eye can see. Your incomes and your wages didn’t go up. And it culminated in a crisis because there weren’t enough regulations on Wall Street and they could make reckless bets with other people’s money that resulted in this financial crisis, and you had to foot the bill. So that’s where their theory turned out.

Now, we don’t need more top-down economics. I’ve got a different view. I believe that the way you grow the economy is from the middle out. (Applause.) I believe that you grow the economy from the bottom up. I believe that when working people are doing well, the country does well. (Applause.)

I believe in fighting for the middle class because if they’re prospering, all of us will prosper. (Applause.) That’s what I'm fighting for, and that’s why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States. (Applause.)

Now, this is what I've been focused on since I've been in office. In 2008, I promised to make sure that middle-class taxes didn’t go up. And in fact, because of the recession, you needed some help, so we cut the typical family's income taxes by $3,600. (Applause.) So if you hear somebody say that I'm a big tax guy, just remember $3,600 for the typical family. That’s the tax break you’ve gotten since I've been in office. (Applause.)
Four years later, I'm running to keep middle-class taxes low. So this week, I called on Congress to immediately extend income tax cuts on the first $250,000 of income. Now, what that means is 98 percent of Americans make less than $250,000, so 98 percent of folks would have the certainty and security that your taxes, your income taxes would not go up a dime. (Applause.) And, by the way, this is not a hypothetical. This wasn't some campaign promise. The reason I called on Congress to act now is because if they don't do anything, on January 1st, almost everybody here, your taxes will go up an average of $1,600.

AUDIENCE: Booo --

THE PRESIDENT: So we need to stop that tax hike from happening.

So you would think that this makes sense, right, because the Republicans say they're the party of no new taxes, right? That's what they always say. Except so far, they've refused to act. And this might confuse you. You might say, why would they not want to give 98 percent of Americans the certainty of this income tax cut?

Well, it turns out they don't want you to get your tax break unless the other 2 percent, the top 2 percent, they get their tax break as well.

Now, understand, the top 2 percent, folks like me, we're the ones who most benefited over the last decade from not only tax breaks, but also a lot of the money from increased profits and productivity went up to that top 2 percent. So the bottom line is, the top 2 percent doesn't need help. They're doing just fine.

And I understand why they wouldn't want to pay more in taxes. Nobody likes to pay more in taxes. Here's the problem: If you continue their tax breaks, that costs a trillion dollars. And since we're trying to bring down our deficit and our debt, if we spend a trillion dollars on tax cuts for them, we're going to have to find that trillion dollars someplace else. That means we're going to have to maybe make student loans more expensive for students. Or we might have to cut back on the services we're providing our brave veterans when they come home.

AUDIENCE: No!

THE PRESIDENT: Or we might have to stop investing in basic science and research that keeps us as a leading-edge economy. Or, as they suggested, maybe you would have to turn Medicare into a voucher program.

AUDIENCE: No!

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think those are good ideas. So what I've said to the Republicans is, look, all right, let's have this debate about the tax cuts for the wealthiest folks. I don't mind having that debate. But in the meantime, let's go ahead and do what we agree on, which is give 98 percent of Americans some certainty and some security. (Applause.) So far, they haven't taken me up on my offer.
Now, this gives you a sense of how Congress works these days -- you've got the possibility of your taxes going up in four months, five months, and instead of working on that, guess what they worked on this week? They worked --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Nothing!

THE PRESIDENT: -- they voted for the 33rd time to try to repeal a health care bill we passed two years ago, after the Supreme Court said it's constitutional and we are going to go ahead and implement that law. (Applause.) I don’t know about you, Virginia, but I think they've got a better way to use their time. I think helping you make sure your taxes don’t go up, that would be a good use of congressional time. (Applause.)

Now, this is just a small example of the difference between myself and Mr. Romney, between myself and some of the Republicans who are running Congress. And look, Virginia, I want to repeat -- this is a choice. If you think their way of doing things is a recipe for economic growth and helping the middle class, then you should vote for them.

AUDIENCE: No!

Section Three

THE PRESIDENT: You can send those folks to Washington. I promise you they will carry out what they promise to do.

But that’s not why I went to Washington. I went to Washington to fight for the middle class. (Applause.) I went to Washington to fight for working people who are trying to get into the middle class, and have some sense of security in their lives. (Applause.) People like me and Mr. Romney don’t need another tax cut. You need some help right now to make sure your kids are living the kind of life you want for them. And that’s why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States. (Applause.)

On almost every issue, you've got the same kind of choice. When the auto industry was about to go under, a million jobs lost, and my opponent said, "Let’s let Detroit go bankrupt," what did I say? I said --

AUDIENCE: No!

THE PRESIDENT: I said I'm betting on America's workers. (Applause.) I’m betting on American industry. And guess what? Three years later, GM is number one again and the American auto industry has come roaring back. (Applause.)

So I believe in American manufacturing. I believe in making stuff here in America. (Applause.) My opponent, he invested in companies who are called “pioneers” of outsourcing. I don’t believe in outsourcing -- I believe in insourcing. (Applause.) I want to stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas; let’s give tax breaks to companies that are investing right here in Roanoke, right here in the United States of America. (Applause.) Let’s invest in
American workers so they can make products and ship them around the world with those three proud words: Made in America. (Applause.)

I’m running because our men and women in uniform have sacrificed so much. We could not be prouder of them and we could not be prouder of our veterans. And because of their efforts, I was able to keep my promise and end the war in Iraq. (Applause.)

And I now intend to transition out of Afghanistan and bring our troops home. (Applause.) And what I said is, because of their outstanding work, we’ve been able to decimate al Qaeda and take out bin Laden. (Applause.) And so now it’s time for us to take half of the money we were saving on war and pay down our deficit, and use the other half to do some nation-building here at home. (Applause.)

Roanoke knows something about transportation -- this was a railroad hub for a long time. So you know how important that is to growing an economy. Let’s take some of that money and rebuild our roads and our bridges and our rail systems, and let’s build wireless networks into rural communities so everybody can tap into world markets. Let’s put construction workers back to work doing what they do best and that is rebuilding America. That’s why I’m running for a second term as President of the United States. That’s the choice you face. (Applause.)

I’m running to make sure that our kids are getting the best education in the world. When I came into office, we passed a tuition tax credit that has saved millions of families thousands of dollars, and now I want to extend it. But I don’t want to stop there. We just won a fight thanks to some of the folks who are here, including students from VT that -- we just won a fight to make sure that student loan interest rates would not double.

But that’s not enough. I want to lower tuition to make it more affordable for all young people. (Applause.) I want to help our elementary schools and our middle schools and our high schools hire more teachers, especially in math and science. I want 2 million more people to be able to go to community colleges to get trained in the jobs that businesses are hiring for right now -- because a higher education, a good education is not a luxury, it is an economic necessity. That’s how we’re going to win the race for the future. And that’s why I’m running for a second term as President -- to finish the job we started in 2008. (Applause.)

We’ve got to deal with homeownership, and the fact of the matter is that my opponent’s philosophy when it comes to dealing with homeowners is, let the market bottom out and let as many foreclosures happen as it takes. I don’t think that’s part of a solution -- that’s part of the problem.

So what I want to do is, I want to let every single person refinance their homes and save about $3,000 a year because you’ll spend that $3,000 on some of these stores right here in downtown. You’ll help small businesses and large businesses grow because they’ll have more customers. It will be good for you and it will be good for the economy. And that’s why I’m running for a second term as President -- because I want to help America’s homeowners. (Applause.)
I am running because I still believe that you shouldn’t go bankrupt when you get sick. We passed that health care law because it was the right thing to do. (Applause.) And because we did, 30 million people who don’t have health insurance are going to get help getting health insurance. (Applause.) Six million young people who didn’t have health insurance can now stay on their parent’s plan and get health insurance.

Seniors are seeing their prescription drug costs go down. And, by the way, if you’ve got health insurance, you’re not getting hit by a tax. The only thing that’s happening to you is that you now have more security because insurance companies can’t drop you when you get sick. (Applause.) And they can’t mess around with you because of some fine print in your policy. If you’re paying your policy, you will get the deal that you paid for. That’s why we passed health care reform. (Applause.)

Now, one last thing -- one of the biggest differences is how we pay down our debt and our deficit. My opponent, Mr. Romney’s plan is he wants to cut taxes another $5 trillion on top of the Bush tax cuts.

AUDIENCE: Booo --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, like I said, the only way you can pay for that -- if you’re actually saying you’re bringing down the deficit -- is to cut transportation, cut education, cut basic research, voucherize Medicare, and you’re still going to end up having to raise taxes on middle-class families to pay for this $5 trillion tax cut. That’s not a deficit reduction plan. That’s a deficit expansion plan.

I’ve got a different idea. I do believe we can cut -- we’ve already made a trillion dollars’ worth of cuts. We can make some more cuts in programs that don’t work, and make government work more efficiently. (Applause.) Not every government program works the way it’s supposed to. And frankly, government can’t solve every problem. If somebody doesn’t want to be helped, government can’t always help them. Parents -- we can put more money into schools, but if your kids don’t want to learn it’s hard to teach them. (Applause.)

But you know what, I’m not going to see us gut the investments that grow our economy to give tax breaks to me or Mr. Romney or folks who don’t need them. So I’m going to reduce the deficit in a balanced way. We’ve already made a trillion dollars’ worth of cuts. We can make another trillion or trillion-two, and what we then do is ask for the wealthy to pay a little bit more. (Applause.) And, by the way, we’ve tried that before -- a guy named Bill Clinton did it. We created 23 million new jobs, turned a deficit into a surplus, and rich people did just fine. We created a lot of millionaires.

Section Four

There are a lot of wealthy, successful Americans who agree with me -- because they want to give something back. They know they didn’t -- look, if you’ve been successful, you didn’t get there on your own. You didn’t get there on your own. I’m always struck by people who think, well, it must be because I was just so smart. There are a lot of smart people out there. It must be
because I worked harder than everybody else. Let me tell you something -- there are a whole bunch of hardworking people out there. (Applause.)

If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you’ve got a business -- you didn’t build that. Somebody else made that happen. The Internet didn’t get invented on its own. Government research created the Internet so that all the companies could make money off the Internet.

The point is, is that when we succeed, we succeed because of our individual initiative, but also because we do things together. There are some things, just like fighting fires, we don’t do on our own. I mean, imagine if everybody had their own fire service. That would be a hard way to organize fighting fires.

So we say to ourselves, ever since the founding of this country, you know what, there are some things we do better together. That’s how we funded the GI Bill. That’s how we created the middle class. That’s how we built the Golden Gate Bridge or the Hoover Dam. That’s how we invented the Internet. That’s how we sent a man to the moon. We rise or fall together as one nation and as one people, and that’s the reason I’m running for President -- because I still believe in that idea. You’re not on your own, we’re in this together. (Applause.)

So all these issues go back to that first campaign that I talked about, because everything has to do with how do we help middle-class families, working people, strivers, doers -- how do we help them succeed? How do we make sure that their hard work pays off? That's what I've been thinking about the entire time I've been President.

Now, over the next four months, the other side is going to spend more money than we've even seen in history. And they don't really have a good argument for how they would do better, but they're thinking they can win the election if they just remind people that a lot of people are still out of work, and the economy is not growing as fast as it needs to, and it's all Obama's fault. That's basically their pitch.

AUDIENCE: Booo --

THE PRESIDENT: No, no, I mean, I'm just telling you. You've seen the ads, and they're going to run more of them, and there will be all kinds of variations on the same theme. But it will be the same basic message over and over and over and over again.

Now, their ads may be a plan to win an election, but it's not a plan to put people back to work. It's not a plan to strengthen the middle class. And the reason it doesn't worry me is because we've been outspent before. We've been counted out before. The pundits, they didn't think I could win Virginia the last time. (Applause.) The last time I came to this part of Virginia, all the political writers, they're all like, well, he's not serious, he's just making a tactical move. No, I'm serious -- I'm going to get some votes down here. (Applause.)
And so the reason that I continue to have confidence is because when I look at you, I see my grandparents. When I see your kids, I see my kids. And I think about all those previous generations -- our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. Some of them came here as immigrants, some were brought here against their will. Some of them worked on farms, and some worked in mills, and some worked in mines, and some worked on the railroad.

But no matter where they worked, no matter how times were tough, they always had faith that there was something different about this country; that in this country, you have some God-given rights: a life in liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and a belief that all of us are equal -- (applause) -- and that we're not guaranteed success, but we're guaranteed the right to work hard for success. (Applause.)

They understood that, and they understood that succeeding in America wasn't about how much money was in your bank account, but it was about whether you were doing right by your people, doing right by your family, doing right by your neighborhood, doing right by your community, doing right by your country, living out our values, living out our dreams, living out our hopes. That’s what America was about. (Applause.)

And so when I look out at this crowd, you inspire me. (Applause.) And I have to tell you that the privilege of being your President is something that I thank God for every single day. (Applause.)

I said to you back in 2008 when I was running, I'm not a perfect man -- you can ask Michelle about that. (Laughter.) And I told you I wouldn't be a perfect President. But what I did say to you was that I'd always tell you what I thought and I'd always tell you where I stood, and that I would wake up every single morning thinking about you and fighting as hard as I knew how to make your life a little bit better. (Applause.)

And over these last three and a half years, I know times have been tough, and I know change hasn't always come as fast as you'd like. But you know what, I've kept that promise. (Applause.) I thought about you. I fought for you. I believe in you. And if you still believe in me, if you're willing to stand up with me, and campaign with me, and make phone calls for me, and knock on doors with me, I promise you we will finish what we started -- (applause) -- and we will restore that basic bargain that built this country, and we'll remind the world just why it is that America is the greatest nation on Earth.

God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. While reading Section One, President Obama’s remarks regarding what he thought of as he travelled and campaigned throughout Illinois, do you feel he sides more with structure or agency at this point in his remarks, and why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. What do you think is “The American Dream” to President Obama?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. As you read the President’s comments on Republican economic theory in section 2, do you feel as if his views on structure and agency change, why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. How does President Obama’s rhetoric in section three illustrate the conflicting views of structure vs. agency in the United States?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
5. In section four, President Obama finally lays out his views of structure vs. agency. As the leader of his political party, what do his views say about the politicization of what is otherwise simply a philosophical question?
To those of you in the audience who kind of have a fit when you hear me say that this administration's targeting and making an all-out assault on the individual, which is an assault on freedom, individual freedom and liberty, where and how do you think your freedom comes from? Why is it you are free? To me, that answers it. I mean are you free because you are a member of a group? Or are you free because you are your own soul, endowed by your creator, God, with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness. From where does your freedom come? Do you not have freedom until you join a club? Do you not have freedom until you join a union? Do you not have freedom until you are part of the disabled? Do you not have freedom until you are a minority? Where does your freedom come from?

In the United States of America, what our revolution was fought over -- the whole concept of individual freedom and liberty was the reason we sought independence from the tyranny of King George. Not Bush. George III of Britain. I said back in the nineties when the Clintons were running this show, "You know, rugged individualism is what built this country," and Mrs. Clinton went out there and took me on and ripped me, and we forget what she said, but she had a very critical comment about rugged individualism. Rugged individuals don't care about anybody else, they leave everybody else behind, and it takes people like Mrs. Clinton to care about the people who get left behind when rugged individuals take over.

Mrs. Clinton had a book that says *It Takes a Village* to raise a child. I said, no, it doesn't, it takes individuals to raise a child. It doesn't take a village. The town doesn't raise a child, village or what have you. That was just code word for the parents don't really matter. It's the school. It's government enterprises that are responsible for raising the child right. And nothing could be further from the truth. This country was not built on group politics. The country was not built on group identities. The country was built on rugged individualism. Rugged individualism is portrayed, unfortunately, as selfishness. But it is not selfishness. Rugged individualism is self-
interest, and self-interest is good. If we were all acting in our own self-interest. What are your self-interests? Let's say you're a father, a husband. What is your self-interest?

Well, if you take it responsibly, the responsibility of being a husband and father, your self-interest is improving the life that your family lives. You want economic opportunity for them. You want social stability for them. You want a relatively crime-free existence. You want some security. You want to see to it that your kids don't go off the wrong path. All of these things are the things that you work for. And you rely on yourself to provide them. Of course you have support groups, the church and friends and so forth. It doesn't mean that you are solitary, doesn't mean that you're isolated. But it means that you accept responsibility for your life and what happens to you is your responsibility, and that you have, in this country, all of the ability and opportunity in the world to make the most of it. Or, you can slough it off, and you cannot make the most of yourself.

But then you're not acting in your own self-interest. Then you're letting everybody down. When you don't seek your best, when you don't try to be the best you can be, you're letting everybody down; you're letting the country down. Obama even said this. When talking about the dropout rate, he said, "You people dropping out, you're not helping your country. You're harming your country." That's the same thing: self-interest. He won't ever say that again. It sounds too Reaganesque, and it sounds too conservative. But individuals, rugged individuals have great and high expectations of themselves. It was rugged individualists that built the railroads. It was rugged individualists that discovered the New World. It was rugged individualists that dreamed about getting to the moon.

It was rugged individualists that invented the automobile and the airplane, the bullet, the gun. It was rugged individualists who invented medicines, improvements in health care. It wasn't a bunch of groups. "But, Rush! But, Rush! The pharmaceuticals have a bunch of people in laboratories working." Yeah, they do. There's somebody that runs them, but they're all working to try to be the best they can be and come out on top. Thomas Edison, the light bulb. Benjamin Franklin, electricity. Alexander Graham Bell, the telephone. Marconi, the radio. Henry Ford, automobile mass production, the assembly line. Karl Benz, the automobile. I'll never forget a story. Reagan was governor of California in the seventies -- and this is in one of the books about Reagan.
I heard William Rusher who was the former publisher of National Review tell the story. I'm paraphrasing this. There may be others that know it better. But the students at Berkeley were all bent out of shape one day as they always were during the free speech movement. They didn't like what Reagan was doing with the National Guard. They didn't like Reagan's policies. They thought Reagan, back in the seventies, was just an old man, out of touch, he had no clue about their lives, and who was he to sit there and make policies about their future? So they demanded, they had a sit-in, State Capitol in California, somewhere outside his office, they got in the building, they were let in, they demanded to see him. And at some point Reagan let a couple of these student leaders in, and they went in there, cocky young little kids, and they essentially said, "Who are you, old man? You don't know anything about our lives. You don't know how we function. You don't know how we get along. You don't know anything about the telephone, you don't know anything about computers, televisions, you don't know anything about that. These things are all foreign to you. Look at all these old-fashioned things around here."

And Reagan looked at them and said, "You know, you're right about that. We had to invent these for you to use them. We had to invent them for you." Take your favorite actor or actress, take your favorite television personality and ask yourselves what government, what protective agency got them their job, or was it rugged individualism? Or sleeping on the couch or whatever they had to do, but they did it. They also get $20 million a movie because they put people in the theater seats. Whether the movie's any good or not, people go, except Tom Cruise is in trouble right now. Well, Valkyrie just wasn't quite it. But the point here, ladies and gentlemen, is that anything that beats you down, anything that says to you that you're no more than anybody else, that you're no better, no different, no worse, that you're the same as anybody else, is lying to you, and they're seeking to control you. They're seeking to limit your own ability and your own desire, because we're not the same. The whole premise of equality, it's a great thing to strive for, like equality before the law, equality in job opportunity and so forth. But there are no two things
that are equal, certainly not outcomes. Other than identical twins, no two human beings look exactly alike.

Do you realize that as many human beings as will be created in the history of the earth, no two of them will look alike. It's not possible, other than the rare cases of identical twins. But even those people are not the same. They have the same shell, the same look, but they're not the same inside. No two people are the same. Everybody's got a different level of ambition, desire. Everybody has a different IQ. Everybody has different intelligence. Everybody has a different metabolism. Everybody has a different hairline. Everybody's got something. No two people are the same. And it's not fair. Some people are smarter than others; some people are more creative than others. Some people could walk down the street and just have people throw money at them.

Other people can toil their whole lives and never make more than minimum wage. Why? Who knows. But it is our contention that the people who never make more than minimum wage can do far better if they're just invested in themselves, not in a government, not in a president, not a Congress, not a program. How many people in those people's lives tell 'em that they're special, versus how many of them tell them, "You don't have a chance. You don't have a prayer. This country's racist. It's homophobic; it's bigoted. You don't have a chance. You need to vote for us." Even I, ladies and gentlemen, you listen to me, and you see whatever you see, but you see me as successful, it may make you mad, may make you furious, but nevertheless you see me successful. But you don't know the 35, 37 years that I've spent in this business since I was 16 (minus five that I worked for the Kansas City Royals baseball team) you don't know the seven times I got fired, and you don't know how many people in this business told me to quit and told me to give it up, that it's not a fair business, even if you're good, there are too many idiots above you, too many jealous people above you that don't want you to get anywhere because you're better than them. Hey? Hello? That's the world. There are a lot of professors who don't want you to be smarter than they are. There are a lot of people working at banks who are tellers that probably could be at the investment side but somebody is threatened by them. Everybody's trying to hold everybody back.

It's just human nature, and it's only the belief in yourself that propels you through all those things, and yourself is the individual. I got fired seven times. One time it was probably justified. The other times due to vagaries of the broadcast business, but each time I got fired the person that fired me said, "You know, you really don't have what it takes to succeed here. If you want to stay in this business you need to go into sales or something else. You really don't have that much talent," and I'm saying to myself, "How would you know? You've never let me exhibit it. You and your brilliant management have come up with ways that I could only say this here or that there, and I can only take that much time. How do you know what my talent is? And when was the last time you cared to really find out what my talent is?"
Without believing in yourself, you're going nowhere, and you won't believe in yourself if somebody beats the individual out of you. If somebody convinces you that you don't deserve to do better than anybody else because that's not fair, and they are teaching you that in school about your grades and they're teaching you that about economics. It's not fair that you might have a nicer car than the schlub down the street. It's not fair. It's humiliating to the people who have less. So they're trying to beat the individual out of you, and the individual in you, the belief in yourself is the only thing you've got to compete against everybody that's trying to hold you back, and they all are. It's the way of the world. You look at things from afar, you look at pop culture, you look at movie stars, and you think that's a community, and they all decided one day, they all decide that Cameron Diaz is great and they all got together and they all loved Cameron Diaz and they've all made her a big star.

That's the image they project because they want you to think it's all a giant community. Cameron Diaz is like everybody else, she had to fight for everything she has, and they're nipping at her heels now as she gets older, same thing with Julia Roberts, it doesn't change, no matter where you are, no matter what kind of glamour. You take a look around you, the genuinely successful people that you see who you want to be did not check their individualism at the door when they started their work. They didn't check their self-interests at the door, and they didn't check their self-respect, and they didn't turn over the belief in themselves to somebody else. That's all I'm talking about and that's under assault by this administration, which wants to control and limit freedom, 'cause the only way Obama can get the power he wants and the Democrats can get the power they want is if you willingly turn it over to them, by getting rid of your self-interest, your self-respect and holding your best interests at heart. Your best interests do not coincide with your government's, especially now.
REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. After reading the first paragraph, what side of the structure vs. agency argument do you think this author is on, and why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. This author claims Hillary Clinton felt what way about “rugged individualism”, and what does this say about the nature of “rugged self-individualism”?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What does this author equate “rugged self-individualism” with, and why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. As you read the anecdote regarding Ronald Reagan, what view of structure vs. agency do you feel that the former president held, and why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
5. How would you characterize the interaction of structure vs. agency this author presents after reading his entire article?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Which of the major theorists would you compare this author to, and why?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
ARGUMENTATIVE EXAMINATION

Now that you have seen a few different perspectives of the agency vs. structure argument, I would like for you to take a moment and reflect on what your views on this topic are, and why. Begin this process by answering the following questions.

1. What exactly is the argument of agency vs. structure in your own words?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Why are Americans so split on this issue, in your opinion?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. If you think of the current national issue of immigration reform, how does this argument manifest itself within that issue?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. Now, in a double spaced, typed, two paged essay, explain your views on the argument of structure vs. agency. Be clear and detailed, and use evidence to support your claim.