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Eng. 101 Tues.

Mr. Powell

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Classical Argument Assignment

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Salvaging Our Old-Growth Forests

It's been so long since I've been there I can't clearly remember what it's like. I can only look at the pictures in my family photo album. I found the pictures of me when I was a little girl standing in front of a towering tree with what seems like endless miles and miles of forest in the background. My mom is standing on one side of me holding my hand, and my older brother is standing on the other side of me, making a strange face. The faded pictures don't do justice to the real-life magnificence of their forest in which they were taken---the Olympic National Forest---but they capture the awe my parents felt when they took their children to the ancient forest.

Today these forests are threatened by the timber companies that want state and federal governments to open protected old-growth forests to commercial logging. The timber industry's lobbying attempts must be rejected because the logging of old-growth forests is unnecessary, because it will destroy a delicate and valuable ecosystem, and because these rare forests are a sacred trust.

Those who promote logging of old-growth forests offer several reasons, but when closely examined, none is substantial. First, forest industry spokesmen tell us the forest will regenerate after logging is finished. This argument is flawed. In reality, the logging industry clear-cuts forests on a 50-80 year cycle, so that the ecosystem being destroyed---

one built up over more than 250 years---will never be replaced. At most, the replanted trees will reach only one-third the age of the original trees. Because the same ecosystem cannot rebuild if the trees do not develop full maturity, the plants and animals that depend on the complex ecosystem---with its incredibly tall canopies and trees of all sizes and ages---cannot survive. The forest industry brags about replaceable trees but doesn't mention a thing about the irreplaceable ecosystems.

Another argument used by the timber industry, as forestry engineer D. Alan Rockwood has said in a personal correspondence, is that "an old-growth forest is basically a forest in decline....the biomass is decomposing at a higher rate than tree growth." According to Rockwood, preserving old-growth forests is "wasting a resource" since the land should be used to grow trees rather than let the old ones slowly rot away, especially when harvesting the trees before they rot would provide valuable lumber. But the timber industry looks only at the trees, not at the incredibly diverse bio-system which the ancient trees create and nourish. The mixture of young and old-growth trees creates a unique habitat that logging would destroy.

Perhaps the main argument used by the logging industry is economic. Using the plight of loggers to their own advantage, the industry claims that logging old-growth forests will provide jobs. They make all of us feel sorry for the loggers by giving us an image of a hardworking man put out of work and unable to support his family. They make us imagine the sad eyes of the logger's children. We think, "How's he going to pay the electricity bill? How's he going to pay the mortgage? Will his family become homeless?" We all see these images in our minds and want to give the logger his job so his family won't suffer. But in reality giving him his job back is only a temporary solution

to a long-term problem. Logging in the old-growth forest couldn't possibly give the logger his job for long. For example, according to Peter Morrison of the Wilderness Society, all the old-growth forests in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest would be gone in three years if it were opened to logging (vi). What will the loggers do then? Loggers need to worry about finding new jobs now and not wait until there are no old-growth trees left.

Having looked at the views of those who favor logging of old-growth forests, let's turn to the arguments for preserving all old growth. Three main reasons can be cited. First, it is simply unnecessary to log these forests to supply the world's lumber. According to environmentalist Mark Sagoff, we have plenty of new-growth forest from which timber can be taken (89-90). Recently, there have been major reforestation efforts all over the United States, and it is common practice now for loggers to replant every tree that is harvested. These new-growth forests, combined with extensive planting of tree farms, provide more than enough wood for the world's needs. According to forestry expert Robert Sedjo (qtd. in Sagoff 90), tree farms alone can supply the world's demand for industrial lumber. Although tree farms are ugly and possess little diversity in their ecology, expanding tree farms is far preferable to destroying old-growth forests.

Moreover, we can reduce the demand for lumber. Recycling, for example, can cut down on the use of trees for paper products. Another way to reduce the amount of trees used for paper is with a promising new innovation, kenaf, a fast growing, 15-foot-tall, annual herb that is native to Africa. According to Jack Page in *Plant Earth, Forest*, kenaf has long been used to make rope, and it has been found to work just as well for paper pulp (158).

Another reason to protect old growth forests is the value of its complex and very delicate ecosystem. The threat of logging to the northern spotted owl is well known. Although loggers say "people before owls," ecologists consider the owls to be warnings, like canaries in mine shafts that signal the health of the whole ecosystem. Evidence provided by the World Resource Institute shows that continuing logging will endanger other species. Also, Dr. David Brubaker, an environmentalist biologist at Seattle University, has said in a personal interview that the long-term effects of logging will be severe. Loss of the spotted owl, for example, may affect the small rodent population, which at the moment is kept in check by the predator owl. Dr. Brubaker also explained that the old-growth forests also connect to salmon runs. When dead timber falls into the streams, it creates a habitat conducive to spawning. If the dead logs are removed, the habitat is destroyed. These are only two examples in a long list of animals that would be harmed by logging of old-growth forests.

Finally, it is wrong to log in old-growth forests because of their sacred beauty. When you walk in an old-growth forest, you are touched by a feeling that ordinary forests can't evoke. As you look up to the sky, all you see branch after branch in a canopy of towering trees. Each of these amazingly tall trees feels inhabited by a spirit; it has its own personality. "For spiritual bliss take a few moments and sit quietly in the Grove of the patriarchs near Mount Rainier or the redwood forests of Northern California," said Richard Linder, environmental activist and member of the National Wildlife Federation. "Sit silently," he said, "and look at the giant living organisms you're surrounded by; you can feel the history of your own species." Although Linder is obviously biased in favor of preserving the forests, the spiritual awe he feels for ancient trees is shared by millions of

other people who recognize that we destroy something of the world's spirit when we destroy ancient trees, or great whales, or native runs of salmon. According to Al Gore, "We have become so successful at controlling nature that we have lost our connection to it" (qtd. in Sagoff 96). We need to find that connection again, and one place we can find it is in the old-growth forests.

The old-growth forests are part of the web of life. If we cut this delicate strand of the web, we may end up destroying the whole. Once the old trees are gone, they are gone forever. Even if foresters replanted every tree and waited 250 years for the trees to grow to ancient size, the genetic pool would be lost. We'd have a 250-year old tree farm, not an old-growth forest. If we want to maintain a healthy earth, we must respect the beauty and sacredness of the old-growth forests.

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