

## Shannon Kilian

*Author's Note: I began attending MHCC in 2003, when I was 16 years old. My plan is to graduate with my AS-OT degree in Spring 2005—the same year I will be graduating from high school. By completing MHCC's Criminal Justice program, I hope to transfer directly to a four-year university. After earning my Bachelor's degree, I want to work for the government in the Criminal Justice field.*

*I chose this paper's topic as an example of the countless injustices that occur daily to society's proletariat. It's because of the inexcusable justices that I feel a need to make a difference in our justice system.*

### Good-bye Garden, Hello Mega-Yacht

Imagine immersing your arena corporation into the complexities of a bankruptcy filing and then heading out to the Mediterranean to spend time on your 413-foot yacht. Paul Allen, the fifth richest man in the world and co-founder of Microsoft software, did exactly that this past winter. In February, 2004, Allen's company (The Oregon Arena Corp.) filed bankruptcy due to a debt of approximately \$130 million. The question here is: How ethical is it for American entrepreneurs to petition to their loan and bond holders for financial help while using their own wealth to purchase personal "toys" and assets? Chapter 11 and Chapter 7 bankruptcy filing laws should hold the stipulation that billionaires are not permitted to seek financial aid for their companies or corporations when their worth in dollar signs exceeds a certain amount; in doing this, city growth plans would not be delayed; interest rates for honest, debt-paying citizens would not be so high; and corporation stockholders would take more care to insure the financial well-being of their business.

On a surprising morning in February 2004, Oregonian readers' mouths dropped open at the headline that screamed the miserable plight of their beloved Rose Quarter. "How could a building, owned by one of the wealthiest men in the world, be bankrupt?" they asked themselves. Here's the answer: Paul Allen has allowed his liabilities to loan holders to take the back seat (with an 8.99 percent interest rate, mind you!), while "certain" other pleasurable purchases have kept him busy. So, now that his debts have caught up with him, Allen is faced with the grim news that his company assets are at a mere worth of \$10 to \$50 million—not even half of the bonds still owned. Although Allen has personally contributed around \$90 million to the Oregon Arena Corp., he has decided to "stop funding a losing business" (qtd. in Redden). As a consequence, if bondholders do not reduce the interest rates on the bonds or if the bankruptcy judge refuses to order the refinancing of the building, the City of Roses will lose its beloved Garden (Redden).

After attending several concerts, rodeos, circus performances, and basketball games at the Rose Garden, I have grown to love the unity shared there among Portlanders and visitors. The standing in lines, the finding your seats, the reciting of the National Anthem, the cheering with the crowd . . . These and many other unforgettable memories have lent to my reluctance to see the Garden go. Furthermore, the Rose Garden has been a part of Portland history for over nine years and to have it torn down would be akin to ripping the heart out of the city. If Allen could stick it out with the Rose Garden's problems and muster up enough generosity to fund this important Portland feature, we as a city would not have to lose sleep over its fate.

As one of those conscientious people who cannot stand a minute in debt, I have a problem with Paul Allen's money-spending choices. To go out and spend millions of dollars on a boat while his hometown company is wallowing so deep in debt it cannot even meet the deadlines of a \$3.2 million interest payment (Redden and Brenneman) is not a sign of a good corporate businessman. Jim Redden and Kristina Brenneman from The Portland Tribune inform us that Allen is not acting the role of "sole stockholder in [his] own company" (Redden). Normal citizens are working overtime and underpaid to meet the demands of bills and family care, while at the same time paying their debts with interest included. Every person's hard earned money should be going toward the doctor's bill for the birth of his newborn son or to the orthodontist for the price of braces for his pubescent teenager. They don't have the extra money to be paying for another person's pleasure.

For those of us who begin to drool at the sight of even a small, sporty jet ski, to think of a yacht as monstrous as Allen's is almost nauseating. Allen's yachts (he now owns three over the length of 197 feet, thanks to his latest edition) are ranked as the 1st, 12th, and 65th biggest privately owned yachts in the world ("Profilage's"). Just think, those of us who work day and night to pay off those nightmare loans are assisting billionaires like Allen in their spending sprees. Yep, that's right. The First Financial Federal Credit Union of Maryland tells us "It is the consumer who repays their debt in full and on time, that actually ends up paying the true cost of bankruptcy" ("Who"). No matter what our individual credit histories look like, financial institutions are forcing us to pay unreasonably high loan rates. Do Ameri-

cans actually realize that money tycoons like Allen are relaxing on yachts in the Mediterranean while they themselves struggle to pay loan rates that continue to skyrocket? If financial institutions do not do something about this growing problem, big companies will take advantage of bankruptcy filings and the working class will be duped into even more excessive loan rates.

In the short time since the Oregon Arena Corp.'s bankruptcy filing, the city of Portland has already seen a serious consequence. The Portland Tribune's Redden and Brenneman report that The Portland Development Commission had set up "city plans to revitalize the Rose Quarter, which has fallen far short of the lively entertainment district the city envisioned when it worked with billionaire Paul Allen to develop the area in the early 1990's" (Redden). What's more, Portland's entertainment appeal has rapidly declined over the past decade and now the city is only mainly visited when there are big events at the Garden or the Coliseum. Now the redevelopment of the area will have to wait until the arena's bankruptcy is cleared up because they want to involve all property holders in the development process (Redden). Because of Paul Allen's selfishness, the downtown Portland neighborhood will suffer delays on long-promised growth plans.

Allen has an obligation to the city of Portland first and foremost because, as Redden and Brenneman tell us, "his company is the major tenant in the area along the east bank of the Willamette River, just south of the Broadway Bridge" (Redden). His company owns the Rose Garden Arena and the entertainment complex where Cucina!Cucina! Restaurant, the Trailblazers' broadcasting studio, and a sports medicine office are all located. The company also leases most of the property in the downtown vicinity and owns first development rights on the Memorial Coliseum (Redden). If Allen felt that his loyalty to Portland was an important ideal, he would cut back on his personal purchases and fork over a little extra cash to a city in despair.

I am not saying that all billionaires are selfish, id-driven men. However, Paul Allen's recent actions have shown us how bizarre the loan/debt system really is. If the rich continue to use the working class as their means to free debt payoff, the stability of the system will become unbalanced and our financial institutions will experience a breakdown. This issue is only recently coming to light, but I am sure that we can expect it to become a bigger problem in the years to come.

#### Works Cited

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*Instructor's Note: The following essay represents the threshold between WR 122 and WR 123; the assignment was to create a "garden-variety" argument with outside sources. I asked the students to introduce and take a stand on a current, regional issue (something that would be appropriate for a NW resident and non-expert on the chosen issue). More specifically, the writer's job was to build an enthymeme supported by logos, ethos, and pathos—all while avoiding fallacies. A strong voice fortified with evidence was what I had hoped the essays would produce, and indeed Shannon Kilian's piece does.*

--Jodie Marion Dittler