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**Not Trivial: How Studying the Traditional Liberal Arts Can Set You Free by Laurie Endicott Thomas Leawood, KS Freedom of Speech Publishing, 2013 ISBN: 1938634993**

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*Not Trivial: How Studying the Traditional Liberal Arts Can Set You Free* by Laurie  
Endicott Thomas  
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Sarah Dierlam

While reading this book, I often thrust my fist in the air and felt proud to be a liberal arts major. I found so many declarations made by Ms. Laurie Endicott Thomas to be true and unanimously thought in the English department at my university. So often did I think, *why hasn't congress, or even the president of our university read this book... maybe then our departments would be a little more respected.* But even as I felt motivated and rejuvenated in my decision to be an English major, I still felt there were so many transgressions in this book that suggested to me that Ms. Thomas may be unfamiliar with what is actually happening in universities across our nation as opposed to the closed circles she may be accustomed to.

From the beginning of her book, she describes in great detail what *liberal arts* is as opposed to the definition most of us have become familiar with. Most individuals believe the liberal arts to be anything and everything that does not include subjects dealing with STEMS. While this definition is only partially correct, Thomas describes this area of study to be much more- at least, that it originated with a greater purpose. She states that since its inception the liberal arts were so revered that it was specifically “designed for free people” (2). While giving her audience a proficient amount information on the history of the liberal arts, she also describes how recently the liberal arts has declined in prestige

which, in her opinion, is the main reason for the decline of politics and rhetoric, communication, literacy, and quality of thinkers in the United States. She finds that there is a clear correlation between ignorance and the amount of exposure to grammar, for example. Thomas often refers to her own experiences as a student in grade school as a comparison to the quality of education received by students in today's classrooms. Through deduction, she determines that those students who lack a basic and formidable education in grammar suffer later as students in college and later in the real world as their ability to communicate is sufficiently depreciated. She claims that if individuals understood the function of grammar, these same individuals would have an easier time expressing themselves more effectively, and furthermore, that these same individuals would have better skills to understand situations around them. Her overall tone in the book shows the same sentiments that most if not all teachers share across America- with each growing generation, students are having a harder time expressing themselves, destined only to become individuals in a society of discommunication. Admittedly, most of the individuals from which she gathers her data are those that submit their academic and scholarly articles to esteemed journals. While keeping this in mind, as a reader I couldn't help but conclude that as she calls the papers she edits to come from those who lack a basic understanding of grammar, it is obvious that these same individuals had enough knowledge to lead them through 8 years of graduate and medical school.

Through the rest of the book, I found that her tone switches to focus on a more political platform, both exposing the truths of history and past wars. Her direction in the novel became a history lesson, which while seemingly has gone off the topic, is in fact hoping to prove to the reader that more focus should be directed on the political state of our nation. Even as she portrays past historical events in a particular black and white fashion without showing the facts from both sides, she does maintain the overall sense of uprising felt by the reader. She clearly hopes that by providing evidence of political fallacies because of the lack of attention from the people in this country, that readers will be more willing to claim that better education is the solution. She, in chapter 14 of her book, encourages her readers to resist propaganda by learning how to recognize it, learning techniques used to encourage it, and by developing skills used to both question and challenge popular ideas. She states that propaganda knows no bounds and thus is used by individuals like the wealthy and influential to affect the quality of education in poor neighborhoods and public schools. Thomas states that it is this influence that is the sole reason for the decline in quality education in poor areas and why grammar, for example has lost its quality and affect on students.

While Thomas does bring up many real and hard issues in her book, I feel that she still fails to meet many of the true problems of our education system. Coming from an area where most students never learn basic and formidable grammar, I can say without the guidance of my mother who was taught grammar from a school in Detroit, I would not have the writing skills I

do today. My area, like most are becoming in the United States, are those that have a high population of English as a Second language learners. Thomas does not take this population into consideration in her book, and while she is addressing school systems across the nation, it seems she is talking to an America from 10 years ago. Today, more and more students are learning English for the first time as a second language, and it is not that these individuals have any issues communicating in their own language, but rather, are having difficulty expressing themselves in a second language. As far as those educated individuals who are ineffective communicators, she writes to address a one-sided view of why America is in our current state. While I highly recommend this book to anyone involved with education in America, I also hope that the reader exercises the same skepticism and critical mind to her words she preaches in her novel.