

Paper One

“Go all the way back to Sumerian civilization,” Bill Clinton instructed a crowd of global jet-setters at the 2011 World Economic Forum in Davos, “and you’ll see that every successful civilization builds institutions that work, that lift people up and reward people for their greatness. Then, if you look at every one of those civilization, all those institutions that benefited people get long in the tooth. They get creaky. The people ruling them become more interested in holding on to power than the purpose they were designed for. That’s where we are now in the public and private sector” (qtd. in *Twilight of the Elites* 9)

Chris Hayes, in *The Twilight of the Elites*, examines what he calls the “near total failure of each pillar institution of our [American] society” (1). The book came out four years ago, in 2012, and looks at events in what he calls the “fail decade,” from 2000-2010 and just beyond.

Here is a list of some of the major failures of various institutions and their “elite” leaders since 2000:

- Jerry Sandusky scandal involving Penn State revealed in 2011
- Bennet Omalu publishes CTE papers in 2005-6 and NFL covers up concussion issues
- 2002—*Boston Globe* “Spotlight” reporters break the story that Boston’s Catholic diocese covered up child sexual abuse
- 2007-8 global financial crisis
- 2001 (approximate) to present—General Motors ignition switch cover up
- Corruption in corporations and politics: ENRON; Arthur Anderson accounting debacle; Bernie Madoff’s pyramid scheme; various politician resigned, tried, and sometimes put in prison for theft, corruption, sex abuse
- Collapse of traditional journalism and journalistic ethics in the cable news era
- The killings of unarmed Black males by police and resulting cover-ups
- Chicago (schools, Homan Square, murder rate, police cover ups)
- Various professional athletes cheating through steroids, drugs, deflated footballs
- Infrastructure issues (collapse of bridges, dams, levees; electrical grid issues; cybersecurity)
- Hurricane Katrina
- Failure to act on intelligence about bin Laden’s intention to use airplanes to attack U.S.
- Manipulation of “intelligence” to provide excuse to invade Iraq
- Political dirty tricks, going back to Nixon’s election in 1972 and continuing through the Russian hacking in 2016
- Exploding debt among college students
- Climate change denial by high political officials and corporations
- “Citizens United” ruling by the Supreme Court
- Asset forfeiture without due process
- Two presidential election that failed in fundamental ways (Bush v. Gore Supreme Court case, voter suppression, Russian hacking)
- Flint, Michigan water poisoning crisis

You may not know about any of these failures, if you don't follow the news or if you are not from this country. But you can see the failure of government leaders; local, state and federal governments; corporations; banks and other financial institutions; churches, educational institutions; local police and other law enforcement entities—what Hayes calls “the elites.”

Your Task

You will write a paper in two parts.

Part One: Write a 2-page single-spaced paper in which you explain Hayes's basic argument about what he calls the “near total failure of each pillar institution of our [American] society.” Base your paper on the first two chapters of the book. Choose the key terms and examples from that will help you unpack his argument effectively. Pay attention to what Hayes sees as failure as well as what he identifies as the causes of the failures he cites.

Part Two: Then choose one major failure to investigate using Hayes's ideas. You can pick a case to study from the list above or use the list to bring to mind something that matters to you. You can also look at Hayes's bibliography to see what else might interest you.

This is the research portion of the paper. You will need to do some intensive research so that you know not only what happened and who was responsible, but why this case represents a failure of a “pillar institution” in the U.S. What impact did (and does) this failure have, beyond its impact on individual people? Does this particular failure fit into the larger pattern that Hayes is describing? Or is something else at work? This part of the paper should be two single-spaced pages.

In this second part of the paper, you are either extending Hayes's work into your own detailed example or using your example to qualify and challenge his argument. For this assignment, stick to an American subject. You will have opportunities to look at the “failure of the elites” from a global perspective in Paper Three.

Final submission: Format the paper according to MLA. You should have 6-8 pages, plus your Works Cited.

- Double space
- Use internal page citations
- Follow MLA rules for quotation
- Present a correct “Works Cited” page
- Proofread and edit