

## **Essay #1**

### **The Devastation of the Oil Spill**

On April 20, 2010, a massive offshore drilling rig, known as the Deepwater Horizon, exploded and set fire. The results were devastating. Eleven people lost their lives, and approximately seventeen were injured (“BP Oil Spill Timeline”). The explosion caused oil pipes to rupture and spill thousands of barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The BP oil spill has since turned into one of the worst disasters in recent memory. The damage that it has caused is insurmountable, and it has taken its toll on a wide range of people (Walsh). Making Matters worse, the spill has spawned many controversies (Lustgarten). The question, however, remains the same: Why did this happen in the first place?

The BP Oil Spill is the result of a series of events that eventually led to thousands of barrels of petroleum leaking into the Gulf. In early September, BP released a report that analyzed the events leading up to the accident. The report states that the fire was caused by a release of hydrocarbons from the well, and then onto the oil rig (BP Internal Investigation Team). The Deepwater horizon was equipped with failsafe mechanisms in case anything went wrong. The problem is that they all failed as well. Once the rig sank, it caused three breaks in the pipes. That is when the spill occurred. "There were multiple chances to stop this. And they all failed," says Malcolm Spaulding, a professor of ocean engineering at the University of Rhode Island (Walsh).

One of the most unsettling aspects of the oil spill is that it could have been avoided entirely. Throughout the years, BP has shown an alarming amount of misconduct, including federal crimes. Legal problems started as early as 1998, when a contractor was caught illegally dumping hundreds of gallons of toxic waste into a well hole (Lustgarten). An analysis of state and federal records show that BP is the worst in the industry in terms of oil spills and even safety violations. Since 1990, BP has had fifty-two safety violations in Alaska alone. In 2005, an explosion went off in Texas City, Texas, at one of BP’s refineries. 15 people died while 170 were left injured. Even after all these violations, the government continued to support BP. They even went so far as to expand upon offshore drilling. According to White House environmental advisor, Carol Browner, the government did not consider BP’s long record of safety violations and environmental accidents a problem. The government had the power to stop BP from further drilling, but instead they chose not to (Lustgarten).

Another one of the controversies surrounding BP is the reports that they are constantly trying to cut cost, instead of focusing on safety. Still today, some of BP’s facilities run without proper fire and gas detectors because they are considered too expensive to replace. Some of the inspectors that BP used to monitor pipelines in Alaska were not even certified. Even some of BP’s employees knew what was going on. One worker even feared for his life. In 2004, BP mechanic, Marc Kovac sought help from Jeanne Pascal. At the time, Pascal was serving as an attorney for the Environmental Protection Agency. Kovac told her about corrosion in some sections of pipeline, and how he feared a leak or explosion could happen any day. Making matters worse, he said that BP was manipulating inspection reports in order to show that there was nothing wrong with the pipelines. "There are awful things happening on this oilfield," he told Pascal. There were even reports that BP went so far as to punish those who spoke out against their misconduct. Since those accusations were made, BP pledged they will not punish

those who report environmental concerns (Lustgarten).

Many people are also criticizing BP's response after the spill. In a recent survey, sixty percent of people rated their response as either "not so good" or "poor" (Goidel and Kirzinger). Some of the people affected most by the oil spill are people in the fishing business. One couple, Todd and Darla Rookses, know first hand how hard it has gotten, and their experience with BP has not been very good. They were forced to shut down their shrimping business for five months, but only received four weeks worth of work from BP. Without an income, they lost their home and had to start living in their boat (Yeoman).

Originally, BP was handling damage claims itself. They gave out \$399 million in payments to people affected by the spill. That changed in August when Kenneth Feinberg became the official independent administrator of the Gulf Coast Claims Facility. He has since drawn criticism for his approach. For example, Feinberg has determined that people will be paid up to six months for their losses. Then after three years, people can file for a final settlement of all their damages. Critics will argue that is an unrealistic timetable. They say that would hurt businesses that are currently struggling, because it does not give them enough time. Another criticism Feinberg faces is proximity issues in Florida. There are areas that were not affected by the spill, but are still suffering due in part to people having anxiety over the disaster. Feinberg's response to critics is that he "respectfully disagrees" with them, and he reminds them that his organization "is entirely voluntary" (King Jr.).

Even when areas reopened, Darla and Todd did not start shrimping right away. This was due to fears that the shrimp were not safe to eat. "It took me that long to decide that the area that I chose to go in was clean," Darla said (Yeoman). According to the Food and Drug Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, seafood in the Gulf is safe to eat. Recently, they tested 1,735 tissue samples of seafood, and only a few showed any traces of chemicals. They believe that the ones that did show chemical traces are well under the safety threshold, and do not pose any harm. "This test adds another layer of information, reinforcing our findings to date that seafood from the Gulf remains safe," said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary for commerce and NOAA administrator ("NOAA and FDA Announce Chemical Test for Dispersant in Gulf Seafood; All Samples Test Within Safety Threshold"). Still, there are some people like Darla that are feeling uneasy. "I don't care if the president of the United States, or the Queen of England, or BP, or the Coast Guard says it's safe," she says. They also will no longer sell their catch directly to a consumer, because they would feel personally responsible if that individual got sick (Yeoman).

The fishing industry gets a lot of the attention when people mention struggling businesses. However, another industry that some might overlook is Tourism. Tourism is one of the biggest economic drivers of the Gulf region. It is more important there than anywhere else in the country. In 2008, tourists spent \$34 billion when visiting the Gulf Coast. So what are things like now, after the oil spill? A survey was conducted in June that focused on people who had intended on traveling there before the spill. Only sixty-eight percent of them planned on going through with their plans. People are instead planning trips to northern states that are far away from the Gulf Coast, as well as the east coast of Florida (Oxford Economics). Tourism has even decreased in places that were not affected by the oil spill (King JR.). Much of this can be

contributed to misperceptions about what areas have been affected. According to a national survey, only forty-five percent of the respondents believed that Louisiana seafood was safe to eat. Most did not even know that oyster beds in Louisiana were not contaminated with oil (Oxford Economics).

The devastation of the oil spill has affected a very wide range of people. It is not just those that are living along the Gulf Coast. From fisherman to the President himself, almost everyone is being affected in some way. It is sad that the oil spill had to even happen in the first place. If the right precautions had been taken, the spill could have been totally avoided. We must not make the same mistake of ignoring the warning signs. People must become more aware in order to prevent another terrible disaster.

## Essay #2

### Trouble in the Gulf

How will we ever really know what happened with the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on April 10, 2010? We may never know truly know because the only witnesses to the events leading up to the explosion are no longer with us. To say the least, eleven men died and seventeen were severely injured. Many investigations have taken place in a means to uncover and understand what may have gone wrong on a day that seemed like any other. One word that comes to mind when talking about this is responsibility. To this day, there continues to be endless investigations in order to find out how this happened, who is truly responsible for this tragic disaster, and what can be done to fix it.

One objective, possibly the primary objective is to assign blame, but we all know someone will get the easy way out. This is a very serious matter and citizens are blaming everyone imaginable for the massive Deepwater Horizon oilrig explosion. Alarms signaling a gas leak from the reservoir sounded right and left, but no one seemed to be able to get there fast enough or they just had no place to take rescue. This resulted in 60,000 barrels of oil and hydrocarbons to break away and flow freely throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The rig, positioned about fifty miles south of the Louisiana Coast, fell into the record books as the deepest oil and gas well ever constructed more than 35,000 feet below sea level. It was owned by Transocean Ltd. and leased to British Petroleum Exploration and Production Inc. (British Petroleum). Fourteen long days later, experts realized that a damaged wellhead from the recent explosion was continuously leaking oil throughout the Gulf. Vulnerable wetlands and scenic wildlife along the coast of Louisiana were damaged tremendously. Executives from several companies involved in the oil spill continue to point the finger of blame at one another. Bottom line is, it is time to put an end to all the bickering and time to start working hand in hand in fixing this catastrophic issue.

Surprisingly, British Petroleum did not hesitate to start fixing the problem. After all, one would think they were professionals at this by now; considering that in Alaska, they have had more oil spills than any of its competitors (Lustgarten). Many believe they should just be banned from the business all together. They began their investigation immediately after the calamity, and many specialists from nearby areas came to lend a hand (Deepwater Horizon Accident Investigation Report). In the end, the potential impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill may very well cost the U.S. coastal economics over \$22.5 billion. This series of events was one of much misfortune, and many people were and remain affected in many different ways especially those who relied on fishing for a living.

Businesses and food industries all along the Gulf Coast suffered huge losses. A perfect example is the shrimp business that Darla and Todd Rooks obtained back from when they were shrimping together at the age of twelve. Unfortunately, they were unable to continue their business for five months; therefore, they did not have an income to pay for rent. Mr. and Mrs. Rooks resorted to their shrimp boat, accompanied by twin bunk beds and just enough to survive off of. Needless to say, they are not the only ones drowned in this wretched situation of financial distress. Ms. Rooks' states, "I'm a seafood dealer. That's how I make my living" (Yeoman). Fishing is all some people along the coastal region did for a living, and the constant pollution by

the oil is only hurting many fishermen's income.

On the other hand, tourism is an essential part of the Gulf Coast's economy. Real estate values and rental income are put in jeopardy because of the crisis (Oxford). The entire affected region has decreased drastically in the tourist population, and tourists believe this issue will be a long-term disaster—holding them back from visiting the devastated Gulf Coast. Restaurants, hotels, and popular resorts were affected from the scarcity of marine life for food and the lack of tourism.

While the Gulf Coast economy tried to build itself up from the lack of tourism, one of President Barack Obama's responses to the oil crisis was to surrender the pain and suffering of the thousands of people affected in the oil crisis. He first explains the difficult and dangerous measures endured at the ocean's surface. Performing various types of projects, his effort was to do everything he could to quickly restrain the flow of oil. He demanded that all drilling be terminated until they discovered the underlying cause of the Deepwater Horizon. In his speech of remarks on the ongoing oil spill he stated, "I'm not going to rest or be satisfied until the leak is stopped at the source, the oil in the Gulf is contained and cleaned up, and the people of the Gulf are able to go back to their lives and their livelihoods" (Garden). President Obama ensured the nation that it is not us taxpayers who are responsible for the oil spill, but it is British Petroleum who is held accountable. There seemed to be an absurd amount of blaming other people for what happened, and President Obama will not tolerate it any longer. He closes his speech out by encouraging everyone that it is a responsibility that he and federal government agencies share to guarantee that an incident does not happen ever again.

There are several drawbacks to the situation when it comes to the process of restoring the Gulf Coast. It will be an unruly long-term project that may or may not be fixed in the future, and an abundance amount of money will be needed to clean up the entire disaster. The eleven men who died as a result of the explosion left behind their beloved wives and children. Explain to me how you compensate for that one? The United States has experienced several oil spills in previous years, so this is nothing new to us. Despite the fact that the Deepwater Horizon oil spill is immensely greater, lets not give up hope that our society can bring forth the effort and secure the Gulf Coast back together.

### Essay #3

#### Coastal Catastrophe

“You usually hear birds singing, crickets chirping, and a whole cacophony of sound. Now, you hear yourself paddling, and that’s it”(Nijhuis 4). These words spoken by Ralph Portier, an environmental biologist at Louisiana State after an unprecedented event in American history occurred in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010. Explosions in an oil rig resulted in eleven deaths, 17 injuries and countless of oil wasted (BP 1). The following days Americans watch live footage of 60,000 barrels of oil flowing into the Gulf of Mexico daily (Goidel 2). Such dramatic environmental changes have resulted in countless deaths in the wildlife. The beautiful clear waters of the coast have been replaced by water saturated with oil. Many coastal residents like Portier yearn for normality. This event raised an uproar of controversies as Americans frantically searched to answer who is responsible for the accident, the extent of damage made on the culture and the environment, and the best method to mitigate the problem.

BP is the world’s third largest private oil company who was the lease operator of Mississippi Canyon Block and the owner of the well that exploded (Executive 1). The oil spill affected thousands of Americans, including the coast’s residence, fishermen, and shrimpers. Shrimpers Darla and Todd Rooks have been out of work for five months (Yeoman 2). The food supplies have been contaminated with harmful toxins. “I’m a seafood dealer. That’s how I make my living. And I’m telling people, when it comes from that over there --motioning to the gulf-- do not eat it” said Darla Rooks (Yeoman 3). The couple has been forced to stay with relatives not being able to afford rent (Yeoman 2). Unfortunately the Rooks are not alone. This devastation has thousands of Americans wondering how they will support themselves since their livelihood has been destroyed. Most victims of the oil spill want to know who will clean this up.

BP is obviously responsible for some of the actions, on the other hand, other companies equipment was involved in the failure of the oil containment. Those who argue that BP is responsible for the spill mention their history of reckless spills. They have had 518 safety violations over the last two decades (Lustgarten 2). According to Jeanne Pascal, an Environmental Protection Agency attorney, BP should have been debarred a long time ago (Lustgarten 1). She believes the company has been consistently negligent in the past and is hazardous. In the past ten years BP have had four times as many large spills of oil chemicals or waste than their counterpart ConocoPhillips even though ConocoPhillips have produced twice as much oil (Lustgarten 1). President Obama stated “A full investigation will tell us exactly what happened. But it is pretty clear that the system failed, and it failed badly. And for that, there is enough responsibility to go around. And all parties should be willing to accept it” (Obama 1).

Several claims have been filed against BP. Individuals who criticize BP for the spill criticize Kenneth Feinberg, the administrator of Claims for Gulf coast, for not properly handling damage claims itself (King 1). Some state officials claim that he is laying down the rules with little input from the states most affect (King 1). Other complaints of the BP’s administrator are he is setting unrealistic time tables. He gave victims until Nov. 23 to file for temporary payments for losses (King 2). Feinberg stated in an interview that he disagreed with the criticism and that if anyone believed that they weren’t being properly compensated by BP and wanted to spend countless years in court then he said “Go ahead” (King 1).

Not all believe BP is exclusively responsible for the spill. According to the BP executive report issued in September “The team did not identify any single action or inaction that caused this accident. Rather a complex and interlinked series of mechanical failures, human judgments, engineering design..... Multiple companies, work teams and circumstances were invited over time” (Executive 5). With so many companies and humans involved it is very hard to determine the exact cause of failure in such a complicated procedure. Researchers found eight key causes to the incident (Executive 1). The very last cause they found was the BP emergency mode did not seal the well. This implies that other parts (not manufactured by BP) also failed before their well did. Professor Malcolm Spaulding stated “There were multiple chances to stop this and they all fail” (Walsh 3). Texas Governor, Rick Perry, suggested that this was simply an “act of God.” (Walsh 3). According to Pascal the government shares responsibility for the incident because they were totally aware of BP’s negligence. In 2004 she received a phone call from a BP employee who described how BP was manipulating inspection reports to hide hazardous flaws (Lustgarten 4). Pascal said “I had documents in which showed the pipelines were in bad shapes and that sooner or later there was going to be some kind of a failure.” Nothing was ever done about Pascal’s warning and on April 20, 2010 her fear happened. Pascal isn’t the only one who believes the government shares responsibility for the spill. President Obama accuses the federal government of having a “cozy” relationship with BP and issuing out permits with little assurance of safety (Obama 1). The exact reason for accident is still being investigated whether or not BP is solely responsible for the spill is unknown.

The extent of how much the oil will affect the environment, economy and culture is significant. The oil spill has hurt the environment. Scientist estimates that as much as 80 percent of the oil is still underwater affecting sponges, corals (Nijhuis 1). This will certainly interfere with growth and reproduction damaging the wildlife and its inhabitants. The oil spill also has a negative effect on the economy by decreasing tourism. Tourism is one of the biggest economic drivers of the Gulf region (Oxford 1). The oil spill can potentially cause \$22.7 billion over the next three years due to the decrease in tourism (Oxford 1). Not only does the spill affect the economy and environment it affects the culture. Southern hospitality, good eating and traveling are associated with the south. Louisianan notorious spicy foods may no longer be as prevalent. (Oxford 1). The beautiful bayous have been replaced by salty marshes. The welcoming ways of some Southerners have been replaced with worries of relocating and business failure. Most of Coastal residence wants to know the best way to alleviate this problem.

There are several different theories that researchers believe could be the solution for the cleanup. These techniques include shovels, skimmers, and even paper towels (Nijhuis 3.) The first attempt was to send robots to activate the blowout preventer, however, this failed (Walsh 3). BP suggested two solutions: first is to attempt to place domes over the well and the second alternative is to begin drilling which will allow the leaking well to be sealed with dense liquid (Walsh 3). Another proposed technique is called situ burn, which cage the oil with booms and set it on fire (Walsh 4). Biologist Portier, designed a specialized bacteria, fungi and plants to digest the toxic waste (Nijhuis 3). Portier believes his technique is the most effective way of cleaning the oil without leaving a toxic residue. Other methods to methods have been used to help break up the oil such as dispersing hundreds of thousands of gallons of dispersant in the water (Obama 2). There are different estimations on how long the recovery will take.

Scientists are also trying to figure out ways of preventing this devastation again. Suggestions like additional offshore drilling and developing an alternative-energy are being considered by President Obama (Walsh 6). Researchers have also made suggestions to BP in particular to help prevent similar accidents. These suggestions include cover contractor, risk assessment, well monitoring, and well control practices, and BOP system maintenance (Executive 6). The oil spill has left a lot of unanswered questions. Controversies have risen from who is actually responsible for the accident, the extent of damage made on the culture and the environment, and the best way to solve the problem. One thing is certain all of these questions must be answered in order for the environment, economy and culture to return to normal. Louisianan, Ralph Porter, said “When I hear crickets and birds again in those marshes” he will know everything is well again (Nijhuis 4).

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