Panel: “United States As a Work in Progress”

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Title: “Roe v. Wade: An Analytical Response of the United States Supreme Court Decision”
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My name is Katlynn Rushing and I am a senior here at IPFW, majoring in Legal Studies (Pre-Law) and minoring in History. On campus, I am involved in Ambassadons, Public Policy Student Association, and IPFW Cheerleading. Off campus I like to read, watch movies, and volunteer for Fort Wayne's Community Harvest Food Bank. After I graduate in May I plan on eventually going to law school and hope to practice either criminal or civil rights law.

Abstract

The way in which America handles the controversial matter of abortion today was precipitated by the 1973 United States Supreme Court case, Roe v. Wade. In this Court decision, it was declared that a pregnant woman has the right to privacy under the due process clause of the Fourteen Amendment, thus expanding her constitutional right to have an abortion. This landmark decision made by the Court prompted a contentious national debate, thus setting a divide amongst the public pitting Pro-Life beliefs against Pro-Choice beliefs. The American public was informed and further discussed this topic via the media outlets of the time: television, newspapers, and radio. The ways in which public discussion was construed were through letters to the editor and editorial articles in mainstream newspapers such as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and the Chicago Tribune. This national debate still continues today and weighs heavily upon American society and public opinion. To gage the public’s opinion, this paper utilized the JSTOR database and researched letters to the editor, ranging from letters submitted the same year to a couple years after the initial decision was made. Conclusions point to some regional differences in expressed opinions about abortion. The letters to the east in New York had a very mixed perception, while those to the west in Los Angeles predominantly had the opinion rooting against the Roe decision, and letters in Chicago viewed this topic from a more political rather than personal viewpoint. The abortion debate remains one of the most divisive issues in American politics and is arguably the most hotly contested political issue in history. The political divide separating Pro-Life from Pro-Choice has only become stronger and more pronounced throughout the years since the Roe decision. As depicted in the various letters from the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and the Chicago Tribune, public opinion relating to this subject has remained unrelenting with strong arguments coming from each unwavering side. The Roe decision has caused a great rift in our country that has played out in the media. Until a solution is found that can appease both sides, this conflict will remain and continue to have our country at odds with itself.

Bibliographical Note
Part of the fascination of studying history stems from leaving the present to travel back to a time that is both mystical and unfamiliar. Anyone could open a textbook and read about the semantics and hard facts of what happened, which is where secondary sources are especially useful. However, primary sources give firsthand insight to what the people of that time were actually feeling. The primary sources used throughout my analytical response to the Rowe decision do just that. To gage the public’s response, I turned to letters to the editor roughly between 1973 and 1976.