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Black and Free

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Author Bio

Amanda Harlacher is a freshman at Gettysburg College where she minors in Education. Her possible majors include English or Spanish. She hopes to someday visit Madrid, become a famous author and have tons of dogs. Her favorites include SNL, John Mayer, "V for Vendetta" and her chocolate lab. She wants to write like David Sedaris and play tennis like Roger Federer.

Black and Free

Coffee drinkers are a breed all their own and a breed I have trouble understanding. Latte, espresso, macchiato, mocha; you may as well be speaking Portuguese. It is a strange society in which we live—one based on drinks ready to burn the tongue of any masochist willing to endure the pain for their daily fix. Why we do it is a mystery few, if any, have solved. Me, I only drink coffee when it's black and free.

Coffee is an addiction as dangerous as they come. Sadly, those who drink coffee will defend it to a bitter end. If you ask a coffee drinker why they drink it, few will admit their dependency. Others will fervently deny the pressure to drink in a society of heavy drinkers, for it portrays them as weak individuals incapable of thinking for themselves. However, most coffee drinkers refer to coffee as a “pick-me-up”, something they need to make it through the trials and tribulations of daily life.

...They won't tell you this as a fun fact on the cardboard cup warmer.

I can assure you that there are millions who survive without contaminating their bodies with coffee and millions more who will get by without it in years to come. I understand fatigue. I understand early mornings, alarm clocks, all-nighters and eyelids that refuse to stay open. I've been there, but the answer to the problem of tiredness doesn't lie in multiple creamers, sugar and the occasional ration of whipped cream. Black coffee, and only black coffee, is the answer to your problems, my sleep-deprived and weary friends. All these extras won't pick you up, they will slow you down. And decaf. Don't get me started on decaf. Without caffeine, the culprit responsible for the energy we derive from coffee, what's the point?

There's no denying coffee's unhealthy side effects. There have been studies done, articles published and stories on the five o'clock news, all revealing the same not-so-surprising facts: coffee is not good for you. But apart from this, there are other risks to consider. I've seen an alarming number of cups accidentally kicked over in my college classrooms—money, time and sustenance down the drain. Why risk the embarrassment of spilling? Or burning your taste buds? Or spilling it on that new, white shirt, rendering it unwearable after five minutes of wearing it? You take more risks than you think when you buy that latte. Too many times I've watched a Starbucks cup throw itself over the edge of a desk, ready to end its life. I've seen people miss their mouths, pouring the steaming liquid into their laps. I've even seen coffee cause the destruction of many homework assignments, textbooks and various other important pieces of paperwork. Don't take the chance. Stop bringing your cups to class. Stop buying the drinks all together and save yourself the worrying.

You can save yourself time as well. Think about how much earlier you

have to get up in the morning to get your mocha-whatever before going to work or school. Go straight there; no need to try to avoid the inevitable. Instead of standing in the line at Starbucks, try the do-it-yourself checkouts in your local grocery store. Buy a banana. Cheaper, healthier and faster; bananas make more sense than coffee. The hours wasted in a year running for coffee is enough to make an addict stop drinking cold-turkey. If a man bought coffee Monday through Friday for a year and it took him fifteen extra minutes before work to obtain it, he would spend almost 53 hours running for coffee. That is over two full days getting coffee. There are more productive ways to spend your time. Knit a sweater—at least the knitter will get something out of it. A coffee drinker receives nothing in return for their money spent, aside from bad breath, a quick caffeine kick and the occasional bout of heartburn.

I forgot to mention the stained teeth, the hundreds of calories and the grams upon grams of sodium and carbohydrates. I hear people disgrace McDonald's every day. The Big Macs and Whoppers of the world are seemingly the biggest foes in today's society. In a Big Mac you get 540 calories—in a sandwich. Frappuccinos can have the same amount, whether or not you feel you're being healthy by opting for the non-fat milk. Don't kid yourself. I'm talking about a medium here, not even a large. Thanks, but I'll take the burger. We're scared of bagels and toast; too many carbohydrates. But coffee drinks have managed to slip through the cracks. They're clogging the arteries of people everywhere as fast, if not faster, than the foods we tell them to avoid. It's a drink, how bad for you can it be? Terrible. Let me put it in perspective. A "Dulce de Leche Crème," a drink Starbucks categorizes as a classic, contains approximately 450 calories, 65 grams of carbohydrates, 360 milligrams of sodium and no caffeine. No caffeine. Black coffee has 445 less calories, zero carbs and 350 less milligrams of sodium. Not only are you keeping all this excess out of your body by drinking black coffee, but it is the only way to ensure you're getting the energy you crave. You don't only lose the caffeine by buying the fancy (and often more expensive) drinks, but you lose all justification for drinking them.

I refuse to spend money on coffee. I'm pretty sure the founder of Starbucks doesn't need my money. He's got plenty. If the same man who wasted almost three days a year in line for coffee spends three dollars on his drink, he'll be spending over \$600 a year. Add a muffin—forget about it. That's twice the price of the car that will last me years. And my car has a lot more miles than a 16 ounce Grande-sized latte. But they won't tell you this as a fun fact on the cardboard cup warmer.

Perhaps I'm a contrarian. Perhaps this is my pathetic attempt at non-conformity. I've never tried any of the drinks that I'm launching my mini-campaign against, so perhaps this makes me a hypocrite. However, I can't help thinking that the money wasted on these drinks would be better spent in other places. Help the poor or put the money towards your kids going to college. Hell, you can even buy yourself something nice, but at least something nice will last. There are healthier options out there; options that won't cause you ulcers. Coffee is an expensive and dangerous fad. When people drink alcohol or abuse drugs because they are pressured to, we condemn them for being weak. When people drink coffee because

they are subconsciously pressured to by society, they are normal. There's nothing normal about a 400-plus-calorie beverage. Addicting and unhealthy, the macchiatos and the mochas we drink are part of the reason we are, statistically, the most obese nation. But what do I know? I'm no expert. I only drink it when it's black and free.