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MUHL 250

15 September 2025

### **Personal Narrative Assignment**

Heartbreak, and the pain of ending a relationship is a near-universal experience that is often portrayed in culture, especially music. The rush, nostalgia, and hurt of your first heartbreak is something that one never truly forgets; and I am no different. My high school boyfriend and I originally bonded over our shared love of music. And every time I hear *American Wedding* by Frank Ocean, I'm transported back to riding shotgun in his neon blue Dodge Charger, windows rolled down, hand-in-hand. At the time, the world felt bigger than I could hold, and I felt like no one could understand what I was feeling. Simultaneously, this song said everything I didn't know how to say. The lyrics in the second and third verses cemented my feelings toward my first love and taught me lasting lessons about myself, relationships, and the human experience.

Frank Ocean's *American Wedding* was recorded and released in 2011 as part of his breakout mixtape *Nostalgia, Ultra*. The track reimagines *Hotel California* by The Eagles, using its exact, unmistakable guitar riff and chord progression while layering Ocean's lyrics over it to tell a modern, disillusioned American love story. While Ocean's mixtape was self-released online and not sold commercially, the interpolation sparked intense controversy, as this song and the mixtape as a whole amassed immense commercial and critical success. The Eagles' vocalist and drummer Don Henley publicly opposed the track, calling it an illegal use of their song and barring Ocean from performing it live. Ocean strongly defended the track as a form of creative reinterpretation, emblematic of mixtape culture where artists borrow, remix, and repurpose music to make new meaning. This clash between an iconic 1970s rock band and a rising R&B artist highlighted not only the generational divide in how musicians view sampling and ownership but also underscored the legal gray areas that mixtapes often occupy.

In analyzing the song, the key lines and elements that Frank discusses correlated with my own personal journey of falling in love for the first time and experiencing my first heartbreak. The first verse breaks down a quick wedding in a courthouse, and the rush we feel of young love. The chorus segues into the line "They don't mean too much; But we were so in love." This line acknowledges the youthfulness and lack of understanding of the world around, simply due to age, but two people feeling these types of intense feelings for the first time. In my own story, I quickly realized that someone I considered my best friend had become something more, and that foundation of friendship made our relationship feel both freeing and profound. "Then turned her term papers in; A thesis on Islamic; Virgin brides and arranged marriage; Hijabs and Polygamist husbands; Those poor un-American girls." This section of the second verse delves into the slow loss of the spark, as the girl begins to delve deeper into her academics, and starts to become

infatuated with other cultures and practices. This part of the song also works to critique American culture, as Americans often pity women in other cultures as victims of traditionalism, without realizing the quick-paced and detrimental nature of American relationship norms. In my own experience, as I began to leave for university and embark on a new chapter of my life, my partner no longer held the center of my attention, and that caused tension and resentment towards one another. The last four lines of the chorus truly embody the breakdown of young love: “She said, “I’ve had a hell of a summer; So, baby, don’t take this hard; But maybe we should get an annulment; Before this goes way too far.” Here, the relationship ended just as quickly as it started, the rose-colored lenses of first love wear off, and now it’s time to deal with the first heartbreak. The last chorus ends with the line “Now what’s mine is yours American divorce,” and the song quickly cuts into the final bridge “Well, you can have my Mustang; That’s all I’ve got in my name; But, Jesus Christ, don’t break my heart; This wedding ring won’t ever wipe off; But if you stay; Oh, if you stay (stay); You’ll probably leave later anyway; It’s love made in the USA, ohh.” This final line of this song details a heartbreaking conversation between the now divorcees. These lines sound like a desperate plea: leave now before more damage is done. What remains is the scar of first love—an indelible mark Ocean captures with painful precision.

I think that music has a way of articulating the things that we don’t know how to say, and reassuring us that things that feel so intense and scary are actually normal and a part of life. At the time, every date, text message, and car ride with my partner felt so intense and dire, but I realize that that’s how first love feels. And its own way, the clash between the Eagles and Frank Ocean is also a parallel between first love and first heartbreak what begins with passion, admiration, and the thrill of discovery can just as quickly fracture into conflict, rejection, and the realization that some unions, whether romantic or artistic, aren’t allowed to last. Music reminds us that the imprint of first love is permanent. Even when relationships fade, the feelings linger, etched into songs, scents, and fleeting memories of a summer that once felt infinite. Maybe that is the paradox of true love: it ends, yet it never fully disappears. It leaves us asking: does anyone ever really move on, or do we simply learn to live with the echoes of what we once felt?

**Works Cited**

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