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11 May 2006

Professor Bianco

UNST 123G: Forbidden Knowledge

Jamaica and the International Monetary Fund

As the world pulled itself out of the carnage that was world war two, one of the biggest problems it faced was the question of economy. How would the allied nations of the world help those destroyed by the war? One of the organizations that emerged from the rubble was the International Monetary Fund, whose aim was to "...oversee the international monetary system and to promote both the elimination of exchange restrictions relating to trade in goods and services, and the stability of exchange rates" (Wikipedia). This organization would continue into the present day, drafting reforms for third world countries, in an attempt to help them out of their financial crises. But not all would be in support of the IMF, believing that it's practices did not help third world nations, but instead brought them down further. Jamaica is an example of such a country, whose economic deficit brought the gaze of the IMF down upon it, and it hasn't yet been able to pull itself out from under it. I propose that the International Monetary Fund, in drafting reforms and instituting change in Jamaican economic policy, actually helped to through the country further into debt and modern day slavery.

As a nation consisting mainly of descendants of African slaves, Jamaica was under the rule of Britain for most of its existance. But as the movement towards independence grew, Jamaica finally was able be self governed in 1962 (Wikipedia). The government that would take over in the stead of the British rulers, though, was left with a question of how to supress and alleviate the debt already spiraling out of control. Under Micheal Manley, though, the debt

became worse, and he tried to appeal to foreign economies to stagnate the debt (Wikipedia). This lead to an agreement between the government of Jamaica and the International Monetary fund.

As the International Monetary Fund basically took control of the Jamaican economy, they began to act more like an empire dictating policy to its satellite. The "...the imposition of IMF austerity measures"(Wikipedia) lead to much reform within Jamaica itself, and would prove disastrous for the local businesses. The International Monetary Fund would impose reforms such as free trade zones, in which the economic laws of Jamaica did not apply to foreign interests, and cut down any and all trade barriers, all of this lead to the devaluing of the Jamaican dollar to near worthlessness.

As the International Monetary Fund was breaking the back of the government, the farmers in the rural areas had it no better. Many sources believe that the organization's "interventions aggravate the poverty and debt of Third World and developing countries" (Wikipedia). This can seen most evidently by the state in which the produce farmers find themselves in currently, because the "U.S. demands for a free market allowed foreign, chemical-laden fruit to sell cheaper than local, organic produce" (Tomicki). With no restrictions on imports, as imposed by the IMF, the farmers now have to compete with cheaper, more abundant supplies of foreign produce. While they are busy fighting the war at home, though, foreign counties are busy shipping the exported Jamaican food back, citing violations in health or other regulations. In this situation, the country of Jamaica loses all autonomy to the International Monetary Fund.

As the debt of the nation increases, Jamaica loses its sovereignty to the overwhelming power of the International Monetary Fund. In this way the IMF has become a global force, an empire who's influence stretches from the greater nations of the world to the four corners of the

third world. And as nations struggle to get free from the bondage they have found themselves in, it only pulls them deeper down, until they simply surrender to the reforms.

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Substance Use References in the Lyrics of Favorite Songs of African-American Adolescents

The main purpose, and overall aim, of this study was to find out what percentage of the rap songs listed by a group of African American public school children featured drug references, whether positive or negative. The children were chosen from "...four middle schools located in a southeastern school district" (Brookshire et al), and asked to complete a written questionnaire, of which one of the questions pertained to their favorite song and several lyrics from it. Once the students answered the questions, the songs were reviewed; their artist and title verified via the Internet, until only the answers of 756 students were left. After being reviewed by independent graduate students of a local college, the findings were that two out of the three main categories, Gangsta rap and general rap, each song had on average one drug reference (Brookshire et al). The researchers then conclude that further study should be done on the relationship between adolescents who are bombarded with drug references in the media, and actual adolescence drug use.

Evaluating the study

What group did the studying can be crucial to the interpretation of the results. The authors state that the National Institute on Drug Abuse funded the summer program at which they did their research. As this is a government program, and not a private, special interest, it is reasonable to assume that there might not have been a slanting of the results.

The researchers themselves also play a critical role in how the subjects react. There is no direct mention of anyone from the research team having any contact at all with the students being tested. It might prove false to assume that the researchers were the ones proctoring the questionnaires, since a faculty member of the school could easily be assigned that duty. If, indeed, a faculty member was involved in overseeing the testing, then that could affect the student performance. The personality of the member, a mean stare, and a hurried pace could easily cause students to lose confidence, or not give the test their best effort. But, again, neither the identity of the proctor, nor their relationship to the students, is ever revealed.

And, of course, the subject is the most crucial aspect. The subjects of the testing are only revealed as African American students, currently attending seventh through eleventh grades at four schools in a southeastern school district. The researchers state that approximately 59.6% are female (Brookshire et al). The study does not tell us if the test is compulsory, in which case we can not know whether the group of students, should they have been voluntary, were predisposed to Rap, gangsta rap, or R&B. Also, it is hard to believe the results have little influence on the greater population of that area, since only African Americans were tested, a very small portion of the populace.

The researchers must be careful about what they ask, and how they phrase the questions. After the students have answered the question of their favorite song, the researchers must standardize the data, since no two students may write the song the same way. They must also realize, when searching for drug references in songs, whether or not the students would have heard the “clean” version, or some kind of a remix without the drug references (Brookshire et al). Once the answers have been filtered, the “dirty” versions used as the standard, the researchers can now compile the data.

Sometimes where the study is conducted can have a drastic effect on the outcome. As the students sat down to take the test, it's possible that the environment they were in, the school setting, possibly figures of authority hovering over them, all mixing to form a setting not conducive to giving the researchers the true, honest answers they need to continue. The students may be afraid to write down their favorite song and lyrics, for fear of reprisal. This might indicate that more songs with greater references to drugs were left out.

The researchers must be careful not to see a relationship when there is not. Such as when using two groups of people, and making the assumption that an outcome is due to the difference, and that difference alone. Seeing as the researchers narrowed the field of their research to African American students between Seventh and Eleventh grades, it could be safely assumed that the results were directly related to the subjects. But, there could always be another explanation. Such as that maybe the conditions, such as violence at the home, or violence in social life, may cause the children to prefer to listen to music that they can relate to, which the researchers asked about in their questionnaire.

And finally, the ramifications of the results must not be overstated. When using a base subject population of 756 African American students, you must not try and relate them to the entire nation at large. When the study poses that over half of all songs listened to by the subject population had at least one drug reference, the four school district area itself could always be a factor as well. If the area is known for its gangsta rap, or violent activities, where force and drugs are exceptional things to have, then that could effect the outcome of the questionnaire.

In conclusion. The researchers, to the best of their abilities, conducted the experiment appropriately, and did not seek to apply their findings to the African American population at

large. They did indeed specify the limitations of their findings, not leading the reader to believe that they had the whole truth and nothing but.

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Critical Thinking and Inquiry

The past year has brought many changes in the way I objectively view and process information. I have grown from simply hap-hazarding my plans, to taking a step back and seeing how my actions will inevitably impact my future. I thought that thinking critically meant thinking critically about what people told me, not what I told myself as well. I had not learned to question myself, or fabricate opposition to my claims in order to grasp a better understanding of what *I* was saying. My continued existence and success at Portland State will be based on how well I can objectively question others, as well as my own, assertions.

The two pieces of work that I choose to show case on my website are two of the quantitative literacy assignments we have received throughout the year. I think the choice is good because one comes in the form of an assignment focusing on an article, where as one is part of a final exam focusing on how well I can apply the knowledge I've taken from a year of quantitative literacy to a myriad of small situations as described in the exam.

Communication

My use of different kinds of research and writing techniques has improved my ability to clearly and efficiently state my case. The way in which I write research material is concise and to the point, without deviating or focusing too much on a side topic. I have become more adept at

my sentence structure and elimination of the passive voice. The work I do now for the assignments required by my freshman inquiry are more insightful than what I produced at the beginning of the year. My communication skills, in respect to the visual arts, have like wisdom increased. Picking out the meaning in a painting, or the message in a drawing are now more enjoyable, and more rewarding.

For the communication portion of my portfolio, I included the work I did while studying Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In my writings, I believe I was competent enough to pull out meaning from the story, not just the basic plot line itself, and relate it to the human experience. I also included a R.A.I.D, the subject of which was the relation of *2001: A Space Odyssey* to the Prometheus myth. By delving into both forms of media, theatrical and mythical, I was able to see how they were related, and how they spoke of humanity. And finally I included my work on stem cell research techniques, which is an example of how I was able to compile a large list of information into a understandable and thought provoking piece.

Diversity of the Human Experience

As I leave freshman inquiry, I feel as though I have learned a great deal not only about my life, but the experiences of other ethnicities, and nationalities. My experiences lead me to believe that I now have a greater understanding of the way in which scientific change and advancement affects not only me, but also the entire planet. I have learned to view the world through a global lens, not simply an American one. The performing arts have shown me their place in the world as well. Paintings rich with meaning, as well as movies filled with social commentary, all drill into me the idea that I am connected to each and every other human being.

But along with the good it has shown me, I also have witnessed the bad. I can now see how groups struggle and vie for domination in a world of scarce resources.

The two assignments I have chosen to represent my advancement in the area of diversity are my notes on the African Diaspora, and the deconstruction of song lyrics by African American females. In doing both, I have found that my culture today is still as deeply connected with slavery, and the after effects of it, as we were over one hundred years ago. I cannot simply think to myself that slavery is gone and we are a country of tolerance. Sadly racism still exists, but in its wake it has left many people with the will to create such beautiful pieces of art.

Ethics and Social Responsibility

With the knowledge of diversity in mind, I can advance my ideas of ethics and responsibility. Once I view the world from a global perspective, I can fully take into account how my actions will help or hinder certain individuals. I can see how one person can make a difference, or how groups of a million or more can change a country's destiny. I have taken to heart the principles that I can have the motivation and determination to make a safe, democratic change in my society.

To represent my ethics and social responsibility, I have chosen my discussion panel on the Danish cartoon scandal, and my notes on how the Harlem Renaissance became so enticing. On the one extreme, the Danish scandal, one man sends turmoil and change throughout the world with a single caricature of Muhammad, while in the other; generations of disenfranchised African Americans step up and take what's rightfully theirs, education.

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Midterm Learning Reflection

As my freshman years at Portland State University draws to a close, I am left wondering how it has impacted me, and what I have learned. An entire school year, though only about nine months of one's life, can render drastic changes in both life and perspective. One may start out naïve and unknowing of the ways of the university, but may end up hardened and experienced. Or they may end up giving into the stress, and letting knowledge that could serve the city go to waste. In the end, all that matters is how you take the experiences you've gained and apply them to your life.

Writing for Dr. Bianco

Transitioning from private school made it easier Because of the rigorous curriculum of Valley Catholic, I believe I was better prepared and well equipped to tackle my first year at Portland State. Coming from a highly advanced English class, I felt, and still do feel, that I am exceptional at my work. I have used ideas such as transition sentences, topic sentences, the diagram of a paper, and correct grammar to give myself a head start at the beginning of the year. In this way I feel I was successful.

But as new principles and different schools of thought arose, I had to apply myself. As Dr. Bianco threw out the idea of the five-paragraph essay, I knew I was in for trouble. Being raised on that the idea that said structure was the be all and end all of expository writing severely impaired me when time came to cast it aside. And as I soon learned, Dr. Bianco was a stickler for

regulation citations, which unfortunately I was not taught sufficiently enough of in high school. So as papers began returning to me with loads of red ink prominently displayed on the “works cited” page, I began to worry about my success in the class. This problem was solved, though, as Dr. Bianco lent herself to being a vast storage unit for links, WebPages, and books full of knowledge on the subject of proper citation.

My interpretation of “Forbidden Knowledge

I joined the class for the thrill of dangerous knowledge My interests in a plethora of subjects, ranging from Astronomy to Philosophy are what piqued my interest in regard to Dr. Bianco’s freshman inquiry. The idea of studying knowledge, whether experimental science to thought provoking philosophy, had my brain churning at the freshman orientation that hot, August day. I decided I would sign up for, knowing that I would be able to hold my own when it came time to give my opinion. And I do believe I have shown my dexterity at tackling the subjects we have learned about these last three terms. I always enjoyed the readings, and have taken a lot to heart. Beginning the year with such a liberal bias, an idea that no knowledge should be forbidden, was sorely tested.

How my view of Forbidden Knowledge changed Readings such as *Frankenstein*, *Paradise Lost*, and *In the Name of Science* had a profound impact on me, leading me to believe that maybe some knowledge *shouldn’t* be sought by man. I had once believed the idea of forbidden knowledge to be something an Evangelical Christian pastor would think up in order to keep his herd from questioning his authority. But now I see the idea of dangerous knowledge as more of a philosophical, logical term.

How I feel about our class, as it comes to an end Though most of the year has come and gone with much debate, insight, and wonder, I fear I have begun to lost interest in the current

topic of the class. As we studied controversial topics such as stem cell research, unauthorized human testing, and the idea of death in the first and second term, the topics of the Harlem Renaissance, the slave identity of African Americans, and gangs in America do not hold the same appeal for me. Though I find the way they are taught and debated to be intellectually stimulating and interesting to learn about, I do not feel as though they have much relevance to what we have *been* studying in the past. I feel as though the connection to stem cell research, cloning, and the moral dilemma of reanimated corpses is not a strong one.

The Good and the Bad, but not so much Ugly

Like the first day of high school all year long As I made my way up to the stairs to my first mentor session at 8am in the cool September morning, my heart beat spasmodically. I constantly wondered if my new classmates would like me, if I could still be the same person I was in high school around these new, almost alien, individuals. Spending most of the morning grooming myself and being as precise as I could be in regards to organization and punctuality, I strived to be not too early, nor too late. The timing had to be just right; arriving at either extreme could prove disastrous. But as those first days melded together in my mind, shifting from day to day into week to week, the friendships I made I do believe will last throughout my University career. I may have even found a potential roommate in Joshua Grimes. Though I'll never again relive those first days of freshman inquiry, I will always remember the constant friendships I had through the entire year at Portland State. Having a group of friends and students all year long is what most likely kept my sanity intact.

What I know I must improve upon My organizational skills, and procrastination, I know for a fact, are what kept me from my coveted 4.0 all year long. Though Dr. Bianco may think all of her effort to infuse us with some discipline may have failed, it was not in vain. I know what

my weaknesses are, where as before I was not so inclined to admit. I have worked through several personal crises, and been through my fair share of SHAC visits, but I am happy with my performance, maybe not proud, but I am happy. And when I think about my progress, the fun I have had, and the knowledge I have gained, I become even happier.

In Conclusion As the last term finally winds down, I am left with the burning question, what have I accomplished? This chapter of my life has seemed so short, yet as I look back, I know the nine months were also the longest of my life. They were formative, and crucial to my advancement at Portland State, which, as I look forward, seems like the place I may want to make my home for the next four years. And as I move forward, with the knowledge I have gained, and the experiences I have garnered, I truly think things will turn out just fine.

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6

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