Francis Dinh

Laura Chrisman

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Growth Statement

English 331 is my first English class in a college, so it was certainly an experience where I had no idea what I was getting into. I registered in this class not because it was suggested or because it was easy, but rather because I was genuinely interested in studying colonialism. In high school, I found issue in that colonialism was taught in the perspective of the colonizers. How can indigenous American history be told by the Europeans who burned their history? There were few or no perspectives from the colonized, which truly doesn’t paint the true scale or horrors of European imperialism. So, when we began to read the poems and writings of Fanan, McKay, and especially Mofolo, I was very surprised and pleased (This is an extreme understatement). This class was also my first taste in working with people I hadn’t known for several years prior. Even in high school, where all middle schools meet, it’s unusual to be without at least one person you knew in a classroom. I suppose that is one of the most important lessons a university provides: working with people you’ve never met and probably not see again. Maybe that is a little harsh, because I did really like my group. Victor and Maxwell are exceptional speakers and philosophers, and Becca a thorough note taker. And the grade contract? It’s as you said: it’s much easier to write what I truly want to when I don’t have to worry about meeting every line in the rubric! Anyways, those are my thoughts on this class.

Of course, this wouldn’t be an English class if we did not practice literature as we studied it. The creative writing assignments challenged the writing I have done in high school. You only need to look at my first four column assignment! What I wrote for my second column was, “In this section, we can see Mrs. Dalloway compare herself to others and generally has a materialistic view of herself…” Looking back now, this was a very shallow understanding of *Mrs. Dalloway*. It was a conclusion that I based off Woolf’s mention of Dalloway worrying about her gloves. It’s a conclusion that I am now not pleased with, because it did not demonstrate the nuance and complexity of the novel. Now, contrast this with one of my more recent four columns: “I suppose that honor today is not so different than that Chaka experiences, but I was curious why it was so important.” This four-column entry is significantly more complex because it is more inquisitive, and it tries to relate ideas from *Chaka* to the world today. This is more beneficial both for myself as well as for my assignment partner because the complexity allows for more exploration and truly uncovering the deeper meaning within the readings we covered in class. These are skills that I have learned and developed throughout this course and make my writing more applicable in the world today.

I have also honed my soft skills with my peers in class. With the plethora of group discussions, I’ve learned to expand the ideas of my classmates. For example, during the group discussion on chapter 16 of Chaka, my group discussed how Chaka dehumanizes both his enemies and subjects. To this, I added examples of how because Chaka’s enemies are seen as sub-human, the Zulu would show no mercy. Therefore, they are turned into a tool of imperialism which was acceptable during the time. Prior to this class, “student-led activities” were few and fraught. My high school English’s idea of collaboration was graded Socratic seminars, which rewarded artificial conversations that consisted of everyone reciting as many quotes as possible. However, in this class, I have learned to draw more dangerous conclusions. In this case, I made the conclusion that imperialism was okay in this book, because war was a matter of fact for the Zulu culture. My high school teacher would not be pleased with that though. However, this would prove to be quite beneficial for my group’s conversation, as we looked into if Chaka was an imperialist, since he employed their strategies. From this, I learned that the ability to share my opinion, even if slightly controversial, is beneficial.

Through the text merge and four column writing assignments, I’ve learned new techniques of developing my writing ideas. For example, in my text merge reflection, I noted, “There was some repetition... It was especially noticeable when I tried breaking apart sentences…” Rather than doing the typical read a paragraph and draw conclusions, the text merge gave me a deeper understanding of how literature works. I’ve learned that writing is often more subtle than the message it seeks to express. I suppose it is not about what is said, but what is heard. The mannerism and tone which the poets and authors we read in class differ drastically, and learning to look for the subtle details uncovers a layer which I would have never thought was there. For example, I noticed that Mofolo writes *Chaka* in a matter-of-fact manner. This plays a significant role in the beginning chapters *Chaka*, as it is ambiguous if we should support him or not. These creative writing assignments have taught me to deliberate in my reading, to pick up the subtle details that make a text what it is.

I recall during our meeting on my midterm paper, you criticized the three-body paragraph structure I employed in my midterm. I agree now that it is a limiting form for writing to take. This structure is rigid and simplistic, which really does restrict creativity and addressing complex and nuanced ideas. It’s almost like a list, each paragraph containing the same components (I hope this growth statement isn’t like that). Fortunately, this class delves into nontraditional writing many times. I was pleased to deviate from the typical essay formula with the text merge, discussion posts, and ultimately the TIPS letters. I’ve learned that each one of these structures for literature has its own strengths and purposes that expand further than possible with the traditional three-body formula. Writing must evolve, and what I have learned in this class has advanced my ability to both analyze and create literature.

Word count: 1034