

Professor [REDACTED]

Eng 101-[REDACTED]

December 1, 2009

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a [REDACTED] year old college freshman. I had a bit of a late start as a college student because I joined the U.S. Army right out of high school, serving four years as a Mandarin Chinese Linguist, and a year-long deployment to Iraq. I think my experience in the military has taught me how to value the opportunity I have been given to go to school far more than if I had gone straight to college after graduation. I am also a single mom to an energetic 14 month old, which makes things a little difficult at times, but it is incredibly worth it. I want to be able to be a good role model for my son and show him that regardless of what he chooses to do with his life, he can achieve anything and overcome difficulties.

For my in-class essay, I chose one that we wrote in response to a news article reporting that Illinois MAP Grant funding had been put on hold. Although at the time of writing the essay, the funding had already been reinstated, I wrote the essay as if I didn't know. I feel that this essay was more thorough and cleaner overall than the other in-class essay written in response to a book we had read. If I had been able to do more research or revision I would have loved to also include instances from other states in which college tuition assistance programs had been cut or changed, and what the long term effects of such actions were.

My short essay is in response to the second book we read in class, *Graceland*, by Chris Abani. Although I didn't want to include a paper in response to a book for fear it would sound too much like a book report, I felt that this subject—the contradiction between the gender roles the characters say and the ones they act out—was stronger than most of my other essays. Although this essay did not start out as one of my better essays, I feel after revision it has become a decent one. Through revision, I mostly had to clean up the organization. The hardest part about this essay was trying to explain the stories behind my examples without allowing it to sound like a book report.

The research topic I chose was about the United States' foreign policy, namely our government and military's tendency to involve ourselves in other countries' affairs, even when it isn't warranted, and how that affects their view of us. While this is a topic with a lot of information, and it is also one that I personally care about, I found it hard to strike the balance between an informative essay and an essay that was much too broad. During revision, it was brought to my attention that I even had two separate theses, and I was faced with the choice of

cutting some stuff out of the final essay or going off on a tangent with a lot of explanatory information that wasn't directly related to my topic.

Overall I feel that even though I have written better essays in the past, these essays adequately sample my writing style and ability. In this class I have improved my writing style as far as being able to insert my opinion and write a good argumentative document without making it too one-sided. I hope you enjoy reading the selections that I have chosen.

Best Regards,



Eng Comp 101

October 27, 2009

Contradictory Gender Roles in Graceland (revised)

Here in the comfort of our own country it is hard to define the way gender roles in America work, simply because of the diversities from one family or one culture to the next. In some other countries, gender roles are much more discernible. For example, now thirty years since the implementation of the One Child Policy in China, males are considered to be of a much higher value than females, hold much more responsibilities, and are given more opportunities for work and education. In the past, I have always believed that Nigeria's gender roles would be just as obvious. I had the idea that the culture of that country would be very "tribal", that it would be extremely male-dominated and that the females in Nigeria were living lives that we in America might describe as repressed. After reading Chris Abani's Graceland, I realized that my views may have been a little outdated, or perhaps even skewed. Overall, however, Graceland left me more confused than my original ignorance of Nigerian culture did. Now, the only real conclusion I can draw pertaining to Nigerian gender roles, and the status within families and society, is that there is somewhat of a struggle.

Upon first impression through the book, it would seem that my early opinion wasn't too far from the truth. From a very young age, emphasis is placed on little boys, and in this story- Elvis in particular, to become a "man," even though nobody actually explains what being a man means. In the second chapter, Elvis recounts the story of when he had to kill his first "eagle" to begin his path to manhood. Elvis' father, Sunday, and his uncle Joseph, say how it's important

for him to learn early to be a man. Elvis' male cousins and other males from the neighborhood gathered to see the ritual. However, it wasn't important enough for Sunday and Joseph to require Elvis to actually learn the lessons by killing the bird himself. Instead, they thrust the bird at him and told the elders that Elvis did indeed kill it himself (page 19). This gives the impression that the appearance is more important than the experience, and may have set Elvis up for the confusion we see later in the novel.

While Sunday presents himself as an authoritative male head of household, in several instances he also shows that he only thinks of himself that way and he really isn't the end-all authority of the family. For example, even after the doctor put Elvis' mother, Beatrice, on bed rest, she would still get out to her garden to pull weeds. Sunday would scold her and remind her of the doctor's orders, but she still didn't listen to or obey him (page 34). Another example of a female not "obeying" Sunday is after he beats young Elvis for dressing in girl's clothing and having his hair braided. Elvis's aunt Felicia stands up against Sunday in Elvis's defense. Instead, he threatens to beat Felicia as well, until Oye, Elvis' grandmother, calls out his name in protest. Sunday marches into the room with a razor and attempts to threaten and intimidate her as well, but she remains steadfast. The end result is Sunday, near tears, suddenly changing his tone, saying "I was not threatening you... I only want to shave de boy's head," (page 62). After that confrontation he is less aggressive, but once again reminds Elvis how he needs to "be a man." It is another example of the confusion Elvis must be experiencing at this point. His father constantly tells him to be a man, yet Elvis sees, even if he doesn't consciously realize it, that the women are the ones who quietly hold the real authority in his family.

I believe Elvis gives up trying to fulfill his father's desire that he become a man when he sees his father's reaction after he tells his father about his cousin Efua's rape, and later when he

confronts his father with the murder of uncle Joseph's son, Godfrey. Sunday not only refuses to even hear of the rape, he threatens Elvis in a most extremely harsh way, "If you ever repeat what you have told me now, I will blow your brains out," (Page 144). As a father so preoccupied with exerting his power and showing his son how to be a man, this was an insane and violent way to handle the situation, even if he still wanted to keep Elvis quiet about it. A few years later, Elvis brings up Godfrey's disappearance to his father, and the theory that Sunday and Joseph paid another family member to kill Godfrey. At first Sunday denies any knowledge of what happened to Godfrey, then later goes back to his usual rant of how difficult it is to be a man, and how your name is your honor and that is why Godfrey was murdered. He tells Elvis "He was killed because he was a threat to all we had. De only inheritance I had to give you was a name of honor. His actions were muddying de only thing of value we had to give you." Elvis immediately challenges this by saying "What kind of honor... kills its own?" (Page 187). His response shows that he is finally challenging the skewed definition of a man that his father holds.

By now, Elvis is nearly an adult, and Sunday already embodies everything he has always told his son not to be. Even though he was the man of the family, head of the household, after his wife's death he completely fell apart. His drinking got worse; he soon couldn't hold a job at all and was depending on the income of his live-in girlfriend to support his drinking. He urges and berates Elvis to get a real job like other young men his age, yet he tells Elvis that earning money does not make him a man. Early in Elvis's life, Sunday presented the image of an authoritative father figure, but after the loss of his wife, he no longer held such prestige. Although this is Elvis' story, it also represents that the struggle exists outside of his own family as well. Sunday's new girlfriend, for example, needed to live with a man in order to keep from being looked down upon since she had three children and no husband. However, even with a male partner, she was forced

to still work, since Sunday couldn't stay employed, in order to feed her children. Sunday constantly took money from her, therefore depending on her to support his drinking habit.

All of this leaves me with the impression that many people in Nigeria are faced with struggles and double standards when it comes to expectations of males and females. My original idea of this culture having clear and distinctive gender roles turned out to have no substantial ground. Even though their society as a whole places more emphasis on the male-dominant idea that the father should rule the house, there are also women who are forced to take on that role. Some do so behind the scenes as Oye did, while others are pushed out to the front more, having to do what they can to get by, such as Sunday's girlfriend.

Eng Comp 101

In-class Essay

October 28, 2009

Cancellation of Illinois MAP Grants

In early October 2009, Illinois lawmakers cut the funding of the state's Monetary Assistance Program (MAP). The program awards grants and financial aid to low income college students, most of whom would not be able to afford the tuition and enrollment fees or deal with the rising cost of textbooks without this assistance. The yearly amount awarded must be used towards tuition and fees, but many students still have to work on the side to be able to afford books, transportation to and from school, and even childcare costs for some. Although this is only one of many areas that has either received less state funding, or lost it altogether this year, the loss of the funding of the MAP grants could prove to be the most harmful to the future of the state overall. In fact, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission gave an estimate that out of the approximately 138,000 students using the MAP grants, up to a third of those currently receiving money through the program will not be able to attend classes next semester, and another third will most likely discontinue school altogether. Although Illinois lawmakers believe that cutting the cost of this program and a few others will help balance out the increasing costs of other portions of their budget, such as social services and Medicaid, I believe they fail to see the importance of the MAP program alone.

The loss of funding and the resulting decline of students will eventually prove to be harmful to the state overall. An end result will be that in the coming years there will fewer college graduates to fill needed jobs, both on a governmental and state level. Less people will meet the degree requirements

that most of today's above minimum wage jobs require. One possible outcome of this is that with a decreased earning potential for all of those students who will either postpone or completely abandon graduation plans could lead to an increase of people claiming state assistance through other programs, such as food stamps or welfare, and the length of time for which they receive those forms of assistance. In the end that would wind up costing the state of Illinois much more money than giving assistance for those same individuals to finish college and get a higher paying job.

Also, a drop in attendance at many colleges could simultaneously hurt the colleges themselves, as well. Lowered attendance each semester will hurt the colleges as they will not receive nearly as much money collected through tuition as they may need to get through the year and cover overhead costs, teachers' salaries, and provide normal school extracurricular activities, such as sports programs and honor societies. If this was to continue for more than a few semesters, a lack of money for the college could eventually impact the number of scholarships awarded to incoming and current students, as well as the amount of those scholarships. As you can see, the cancellation of MAP grants therefore would negatively impact students who may not even be receiving those grants.

While it is easy to advocate the reinstatement of the MAP grant program, it must also be said that MAP isn't the only area to suffer. As stated earlier, Medicaid is suffering, and social service providers received only 86 percent of the money they needed as well. There are obvious areas where Illinois can cut costs to lower the budget, and I am sure that with an examination of an itemized list of where our tax money is going it would be easier to find other areas where corners could be cut without decreasing the funding to a program that is designed to create more college graduates. For example, it was approved through the same state of Illinois lawmakers to spend \$40 million to build a new campus for Chicago State University, even though they didn't ask for it. If the MAP program isn't restored soon, they may not even have enough students to fill a new campus anyway.

Professor

Eng 101

November 22, 2009

United States Involvement in Foreign Affairs Throughout History

Nowadays, it is commonly said that many other countries “hate” America. It’s a statement that is easy for most to believe, especially when speaking about many Middle Eastern countries. In fact, most of the time when people make that claim, they are actually exclusively referring to Middle Eastern countries with a Muslim majority. That could be due to backlash after such events as the attack on the World Trade Center, or the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the truth is that the United States’ “approval rating” by European, Latin, and Asian countries is also much lower than many people would believe. Although there are several reasons for this, the most popular justification seems to be that the countries disagree with our idea of freedom, whether freedom of religion, freedom of speech, or even the everyday freedoms many of us Americans take for granted, such as being able to walk outside in a short sleeved shirt on a warm day and not having to worry about roadside bombs or rebel militants chasing us down with weapons. Regardless of how accurate that justification may or may not be, I believe that the beginning roots of the United States’ unpopularity stem from a far more political angle, specifically how the United States pushes itself into the affairs of smaller, weaker, or poorer nations.

According to Ellen C. Collier, a Foreign Policy specialist for the Naval Historical Center, the number of times the United States has involved itself in foreign disputes is much higher than one would think. In her report, *Instances of Use of United States Forces Abroad, 1793-1993*, she lists 234 instances in which the United States has deployed military forces overseas, not counting normal peacetime operations or covert operations. Of these 234 examples, many were for situations or conflicts that did not directly pose a militaristic threat to the United States itself. In fact, only five of the instances were U.S. declared wars: the War of 1812, the Mexican War of 1846, the Spanish American War of 1898, World War I declared in 1917, and World War II declared in 1941 (Collier). That leaves 229 situations of quasi-wars, or situations in which the U.S. was protecting some sort of national interest. Many of those instances prior to the twentieth century were smaller affairs intended to protect American citizens on foreign soil, or to retaliate after the injury or death of an American citizen in a foreign country, there are many other situations where it would appear the United States involved itself in the domestic affairs of another country without invitation.

Many times the United States has sent military troops to another country in order to quell violence during a civil war. Unsurprisingly, the United States is picky as to which countries are assisted and which aren't, prompting one to ask on what basis are those decisions made? For example, in the late 1800's and the early 1900's the United States was heavily involved in Cuba's sugar trade, importing sugar almost exclusively from Cuba; consequently, in 1898, when Cuba was fighting for independence from Spain, the United States jumped on the opportunity to gain control of Cuba's industries. In fact, during that time, the U.S. Secretary of War wrote "Before we do [annex Cuba], we must clean up the country... create conflicts for the independent government... support the weaker against the stronger until we have obtained the

elimination of them both, in order to annex the Pearl of Antilles,” (Scott). In Collier’s report, however, the use of forces in Cuba during this time was to “restore order, protect foreigners, and establish a stable government after serious revolutionary activity,” (Collier). The two conflicting explanations form a great platform for the basis of thought and perceptions directed toward us by these countries we choose to help or not help. Around this time, Iran was in the midst of the Persian Civil War, and yet we didn’t send a single troop to aid in their revolution. Perhaps this is because at that time we didn’t have any national interests in Iran. A few years after all of this, Mexico underwent a revolution as well. The only troops sent to Mexico were to aid in the evacuation of American citizens, not to aid the Mexican government. In 1992, when Sierra Leone’s government was overthrown, the United States once again sent troops only to evacuate American citizens (Collier).

While it is important to bring more recent or current examples to the table, I feel it is equally important to show that the selective favoritism exhibited by the United States has been seen by other countries for a long time. One such example would be the United States’ involvement in Honduran affairs. Although we have maintained a somewhat quiet presence in Honduras since the early 1900s, it began much like our involvement with Cuba. We were interested in the banana trade, and held several ports in Northern Honduras, and dispatched troops occasionally to quell revolutionary violence and to protect our holdings. More recently, however, we have become more involved, giving financial aid totaling approximately \$1.6 billion and military aid since the 1950s (Merrill). While we pushed for agricultural, health, and educational development, it wasn’t purely a humanitarian effort. The United States used Honduras to gain access to be able to break down Nicaraguan military buildups, and also as a platform to create the Caribbean Basin Initiative. This initiative allowed Caribbean and Central

American countries to trade freely with the United States, duty-free, if they shared a large portion of their market with us. By allowing those countries to trade in the United States duty-free it meant that for them, it would be cheaper to export their resources to the United States versus any other trade partners. This generated more revenue for the United States, and allowed for a wider and more plentiful supply in resources such as the aforementioned bananas and sugar. In the 1980s, American forces in Honduras began seeing small to medium sized riots, protesting the American force and power in Honduran affairs (Merrill). Even after all the contributions, assistance, and benefits Honduras received, it still remained to be one of the poorest countries, leading one to wonder how much we really “assisted” Honduras at all.

According to an approval survey conducted by the Pew Research Group, only 15% of Jordanian citizens surveyed gave the United States a favorable rating (Pew). This small number is appalling when thought of in terms of the \$668 million dollars we gave to “aid” Jordan in 2008 alone. Since 1991, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United states has annually provided the Jordanian government with anywhere between \$38.4 million and \$668 million, but their citizens still view us as unfavorable. According to the official USAID website, the assistance is intended for “providing economic and development assistance to partner countries in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States,” (usaid.jordan.gov). This goes to show that even when we do try to help a country, they may not be thankful for it, or even want the help to begin with.

Of course the United States is not the only country who does this, it would be illogical and counterproductive to a country’s growth and self interests if they involved themselves in every foreign dispute. However, no other country comes close to the frequency with which the United States does. From the perspective of a smaller and weaker country, it is easy to see why

they could harbor negative feelings toward us. If they needed assistance, would the United States come to their aid at all? Even if they did, what would the short term and long term costs be?

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