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December 7, 2009

World Politics Final

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I Am A Citizen of This World and I Am Here To Help

When a person identifies themselves as a citizen of a community, there is a choice that they can make. Either they can be an inactive citizen and take on the label without really acting, or they can be an active citizen and take an interest in the welfare of the community. As Aristotle stated: “To take no part in the running of the community's affairs is to be either a beast or a god!” I believe that service, or working for the primary good of the collective, is an important part of being a citizen.

I believe that as a third culture kid with no particular hometown, I am a global citizen. I am a citizen of the United States; however I do not automatically identify myself as American. I believe that I have an obligation to be aware of global issues. I was able to see ultimate government corruption in Ecuador in the late 90s, extreme poverty in Kenya and then extreme wealth in Abu Dhabi. These experiences showed me the hardships that most of the citizens of Ecuador and Kenya overcame every day with perfect humility; while alternatively in Abu Dhabi I saw the person I never wanted to become. Those experiences profoundly changed my world-view, and reminded me of my role as part of a privileged culture that has the capacity to make a difference.

I have become very aware of how the individual choices I make impact others, especially environmentally and economically. For example I had to be conscious of where my food was coming from in Abu Dhabi because most of the food was imported. Every item of food had its own carbon foot print, so if I chose to buy the red delicious apples from the United States rather than the Fuji apples from Egypt there was a large difference in the amount of energy that was used to both farm and ship those apples. In addition, the workers in Egypt farming those apples would also appreciate my choice because they would probably have poorer working and living conditions than the workers a developing nation.

Also from living in Kenya I learned how precious my own education was, because some of the children in Kenya did not have an elementary education available to them because it was so expensive. Those children who were able to go to school were so excited about education because of the optimism they held. Education is one of the ways that I would love to engage myself in serving the international community.

However, because I have started to refer to myself as a student of American University, I am identifying myself as a citizen of this community as well. I have an obligation to participate in the rituals citizens of this community go through (studying, working hard, being involved), while at the same time adhering to the rules and structure that is set in place. Being a citizen of this community will help me decide what kind of citizen of the world I want to be. To count myself as a citizen of the American University community I should be proud of my university, while at the same time want to be part of the movement to make the university the best it could be.

My concept of service is based around a critical Historical Materialist school of thought. The critical view of the world is based upon power dynamics and struggles between classes and groups. In a society, there is a dominant group who exercises control over a larger subordinate group which produces the goods. “Production generates the capacity to exercise power, but power determines the manner in which production takes place.” (Cox 1) Therefore the most powerful group is also the group that has control over the economic wealth.

Should the dominant group ever feel the urge to become corrupt or biased, which happens often in developing nations, the gap between rich and poor widens. Many crises originate from production and bureaucratic “waste and corruption…in the administration of the social surplus provided by labor.” (Cox 31) This creates problems such as crime, and consequences of poor living conditions such as disease, urban crowding and starvation. These problems often turn into violence between the two competing groups, which has the potential to reverse the social order and put another class in power. The world is very divided right now because of power gaps between the global south (the subordinate group) and the developed world (the dominant group).

The dynamics of power are constantly changing and we cannot simply view the world with the same models we have in the past. Manufacturing has changed drastically over time. Most of the manufacturing that supplies the developing world with consumer goods is supplied a labor force by the third world. Tension has been rising among businesses in the United States because manufacturing has been exported overseas to countries like India and China. That is because while in the United States a factory owner would have to pay his workers $19.17 per hour, he could export his factory to Sri Lanka and only pay $0.52 per hour. (<http://www.bls.gov/fls/hcpwsupptabtoc.htm>) This is a ridiculous difference, which causes tension not only between the two groups but also within the United States. Citizens who previously had a solid middle class job as a manufacturer have to compete with large corporations who have exported their companies overseas.

Historical Materialism also feels that education is the way to escape the dominant culture, which goes along with my belief that my education is extremely important for my own development as a person. It also implies that I should take nothing at face value because the world is always changing. Also, because it is a critical school of thought, it encourages application of the skills that I have accumulated from education. It is no longer enough to be informed about a topic, there is a need to be able to apply my knowledge in the same way that being a citizen does.

Sometimes liberals get bogged down in the politics and discussing a problem instead of doing anything. “Delegation of responsibility through bureaucratic organization can be very remote from the rank and file and the indirectly appointed.” (Cox 27) Service is about action in order to help people, and I believe that hands-on work is the most beneficial to the people in need.

I think that the greatest problem facing our generation will be our dwindling resources; especially fuel, food and fresh water. “Access to vital resources, primarily food and water, can be an additional causative factor of conflicts, a number of which are already playing out in Africa.” (National Security and the Threat of Climate Change 15) The class struggle will become even more important because the dominant group will be in charge of the resources. “The lack, or mismanagement, of [food and water] can undercut the stability of local populations; it can affect regions on a national or international scale.” (National Security and the Threat of Climate Change 18) If the dominant group does not distribute resources correctly, Darfur-like conflicts will emerge in much of the global south. This violence could have spillover effects, such as mass migration, to other countries as well if not contained or resolved.

I am aware that this is a pressing issue, and as such I am taking personal measures now to do my part. I am a vegetarian, which helps the environment and efficiency of food production. To create one pound of beef, it can take up to 16 pounds of soybeans. (Gold 22) I know that my personal decision will probably not have a very large impact on the meat industry; however, I will do all that I can right now to reduce my carbon footprint and eat food efficiently. I also mentioned above that I am conscious about my choices every day, especially water usage.

I would like to be more conscious about my consumer choices that do not involve the foods I eat. Even though there are positive effects of shopping, such as economic stimulation for a country badly in need of a boost, there is a lot of waste that I can see. By being aware of where my clothes are made (and consequently by who) I may be able to gain another level of awareness in the international system.

In the future I hope to have the capacity to do more. I want to serve my global community when I am older, hopefully by joining the Peace Corps after college. The Peace Corps directly helps developing nations by going there directly and working locally to encourage education, healthcare and teaching about agricultural efficiency. The Peace Corps is dedicated to helping people in need, and I would like to make sure that humans can stay on Earth as long as possible. I do not know what I want to do beyond that in my future because I am not sure whether or not I want to join the bureaucratic structure of an organization like the United Nations. I really hope that the damage we are doing to the environment can be slowed and that it is not irreparable damage; however, until we know for sure all we can do is ration what we have.

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