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learning though
community

Winter 2007

ANR 310 Studies Religious Conflicts

Gel Alvarado, Carole Robinson, Dustin Petty, Olivia Hubert,
Nao Ushiku, Kiana Miller, Katie Deska, & Julie Thelen

Over the last four weeks, learners in ANR 310—Dustin Petty, Olivia Hubert, Nao Ushiku, Kiana Miller, Katie Deska, Julie Thelen, Gel Alvarado, and Carole Robinson—explored the topic of religious conflicts, particularly Middle Eastern conflicts. To expand our learning about this broad topic, we decided to gather materials about Islam in general. Our goal was to gain a more profound understanding of the Islam religion. Additionally, we wanted to discover what it was like to be a Muslim in East Lansing after September 11th. Because we knew that our readings would limit our learning to accounts of people we do not know and have not met, we asked ourselves, what better way to address our goals than to invite speakers who could share their own experiences, their own perspectives, and their personal stories about being a Muslim, especially after September 11th? So, we invited two guests from the MSU Muslim Student Association – Tassem Alwan and Hassan Khali, who graciously came to our class and eagerly shared their views, experiences, and stories about Islam. They also answered our questions about the practices of Islam; the different perspectives that Muslims adopt that influence

how they practice Islam; reasons for their practices and beliefs (e.g., women have to cover their hair because hair is a symbol of beauty and should be preserved and protected for their future husbands); their views on the conflict between Sunni and Shiites; their perspectives on dating; and some of the things they are or are not allowed to do.

After Tassem and Hassan, we invited Norseha Unin, a PhD Candidate from the College of Education, to share her views, experiences, and stories about what it is like to be a Muslim woman in Malaysia and in the United States. Like Tassem and Hassan, Norseha told us that Muslims believe and practice Islam in slightly different ways due to their slightly different interpretations of the Koran (the book that contains God's message to the Prophet Mohammad), albeit the fundamentals are the same (e.g., practicing the five pillars of Islam). Norseha also spoke about how Muslim women's role varies within families, in their jobs, and in society as a whole. For example, some women's role is to be supportive of their husbands who are the traditional "heads of the family"; some women assume an "equal" (cont. page 5)

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Blue Like Jazz Dustin Petty

Anyone who has ever struggled with understanding the principles of Christianity knows that it's not a simple task – figuring out Organic Chemistry written in ancient hieroglyphics might in fact be an easier chore. But for those who want to know what it means to be a Christian and find out who God really is, the Donald Miller book, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* could be a godsend (pardon the pun).

I don't want to write one of those "once was lost, but now I'm found" testimonials, but before reading *Blue Like Jazz*, I was, at best, a faux-Christian. It was something that was expected of those coming from small town conservative America and I just went with the crowd – oh, and I really liked the Christmas music. But then I read the book and was touched by Miller's writing and ideas.

Using his own life experiences mixed with a clever wit and humorous anecdotes, Miller attempts to explain the Christian concepts of grace, redemption and love to believers and nonbelievers alike.

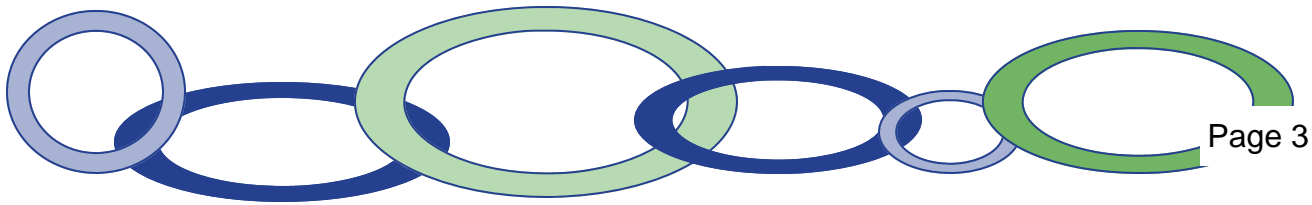
On the subject of grace, an idea that, simply put, reveals God's forgiveness for all Earthly sins, Miller's writing becomes most poignant. He speaks of a time when he was a fundamentalist Christian and gave up television, pipes, music and vowed to read lengthy pieces of scripture each day and to fast on Mondays. Ultimately, he started to fail at these self-set rules and felt despondent, as if he had failed God and lost his love.

Miller wrote, "I would hear about grace, read about grace and even sing about grace, but accepting grace is an action I could not understand. It seemed wrong to me not to have to pay for my sin, not to feel guilty about it or kick myself around. More than that, grace did not seem like the thing I was looking for. It was too easy. I wanted to feel as though I earned my forgiveness, as though God and I were buddies doing favors for each other."

Through this and countless other deeply personal and sometimes painful reflections, I (and hopefully other readers) learn that despite our imperfections, we are loved, we are valued and we are saved. It may sound remarkably corny, but realizing this for the first time is a moving experience and I owe it to this book.

Now comes the time where I should offer some tagline that will stick with you and make you go to your nearest Barnes & Noble or Schulers and purchase *Blue Like Jazz* with such speed that will make a cheetah jealous. Unfortunately, there is no such tagline and the awesomeness of this book cannot be condensed into a few words. But if you're looking for reasons to believe or just a good read that will leave you laughing and moved, check out *Blue Like Jazz*. You won't be disappointed.





Semester in D.C. Rachel Edwards



NBC's fall 2006 television line up took a huge blow when *The West Wing* did not return for an 8th season. Without the weekly political drama to run my life, I decided to take an internship in our nation's capital to get my dose of good old fashion American politics. After turning down internship offers at Save America's Forests, The Wilderness Society and the White House Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, I decided to settle down at the National Council for Science and the Environment (www.ncseonline.org), in the heart of Washington DC's lobby row.

After vicariously reading their website and getting familiar with their programs and the work they do, I was very excited thinking that I would be working with lobbyist who manhandle Congress into changing environmental laws for the better. While that is apart of the work they do, I have no part in it. I was placed in a subdivision in their education initiative, EnvironMentors.

Boy was I wrong!

EnvironMentors (www.ncseonline.org/02education/EnvironMentors/) has proven to be everything I could have wanted and more! During my first 6

weeks, I have learned so much about the wonderful high school students of DC Public Schools, the environment and natural resources of DC and most importantly, about myself.

During my first couple of weeks I emailed my mentor, Gary Williams of MSU Wayne County Extension (who I meet through Bailey Scholar Sherri Dann) and complained about how I couldn't get away from programs working with youth (Gary gave me a job teaching kids angler skills). He later replied to my email by telling me "You were born to be an educator. You have it in your blood to develop and direct the path of young people." After I got his email I jokingly told a professor of mine that I was in the market for a new mentor because I didn't like what Gary told me, and that professor told me that "It's the truth that hurts".

After getting the fact through my head that the rest of my life will be engulfed with kids, I started seeing the good this program does and the impact it has on DC youth and the potential impact on America's youth (the program is in the process of going national with their first affiliate program at North Carolina State University). Over the 10+ years of EnvironMentors, students who participate achieve a satisfying 98% high school graduation rate, with 95% admitted to college. System wide, only 50% of DC public school students graduate. This program is doing an awesome job getting not only urban kids outside in the dirt, trees and water, but it has become a tool for interesting women and minorities in environmental careers.

Earlier I was reading Dr. Habron's email about his "encounter with the possible" and that is exactly what this internship has become. I am encountering not only the possible of these extremely bright students, but I am encountering the possible in me. Weather I am lobbying for education or working with EnvironMentors or becoming a mother, I am now determined to "develop and direct the path of young people" just like Gary said.

Conference on Radicalism Katie Deska

The First North American Conference On Radicalism took place over the weekend of January 25th to January 27th at the Kellogg Center. Professor Ann Larabee and Professor Arthur Versluis, of the MSU American Studies Program, organized the conference in correlation with the inaugural edition of the *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, published by the MSU Press.

The conference began Thursday night with keynote speaker Frank Furedi, author of Politics of Fear and Culture of Fear. Furedi addressed fear and its changing nature based on culture, society, and time. He stated that for the first time in history we fear: fear. Furedi highlighted that the media has saturated the U.S. with “unimaginable threats,” those incomprehensible threats that cannot be grasped until they become a reality. His topic was a very appropriate opener for the multiple thought-provoking seminars that followed on Friday and Saturday.

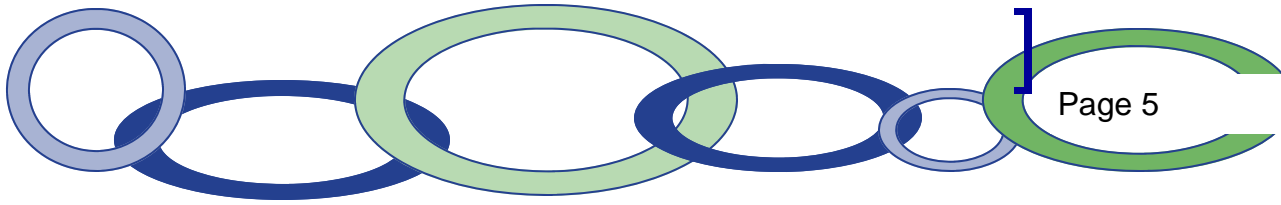
Michelle Morkert, from Concordia University of Chicago, presented her analysis of militarism from a feminist perspective. She discussed the patriarchal character of militarism, and argued that gender is at the heart of militarism. The ideas brought to the surface during Morkert’s seminar were appreciated because rarely is the military critiqued from a feminist perspective.

The film “Sit-In on the Sea: 600 Days Anti-Base Struggle in Henoko, Okinawa” was also screened during the Conference. It captured Okinawans in protest against a U.S. military base that was being drilled into the sea. The sea not only has a history of meaning for Okinawans, but it also serves as an important source of food and resources. 75% of U.S. bases in Japan are located on Okinawa territory. Additionally, the movie illustrated how Okinawans unfortunately feel tied to the war in Iraq due to the U.S. bases that are located in proximity to their homes.

A series of talks about Radicalism, Literature, and the Arts took place as well. John Roche, from the Rochester Institute of Technology, discussed the rise of virtual poetry in contrast to the non-virtual space of basements or small shops that traditionally house poetry readings. Roche discussed the increased availability of poetry and the decreased constraints that have come with online sites. People now have accessible outlets for their poetry and the opportunity to read others’ work, which would remain unknown without Internet sites. However, something is lost when the reader is separated from the words by a computer screen. In today’s virtual world, sharing connections with others is very important, and should be sustained and supported.

The seminars given at the Conference on Radicalism were springboards for intellectual interactions. The Conference included a wide variety of topics pertaining to the radical left, radical right, radical activism, and radicalism from a historical perspective, among others. The topics discussed at the Conference sparked much interesting contemplation among attendees. In regards to the conversations, Nels Brogren, an editorial assistant for the *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, said, “Often the seminar discussions would spill into the hallways and be picked up again later in the evening. People seemed very curious and willing to talk about issues that are usually left unexplored.”

I enjoyed going to the Conference on Radicalism, as it was a learning experience outside of the classroom. I heard about unique topics from people of various perspectives, which is very valuable. As the Bailey Community understands, learning about issues that aren’t commonly addressed in conventional classrooms play a vital role in the development of one’s worldview.



Religious Conflicts (from p.1) ANR 310

leadership role in the family; and still other women assume a bigger responsibility and leadership role than the husband, possibly due to their bringing more money into the household for a particular period of time. In general, however, Norseha pointed out that unlike women in many parts of the world, women in Malaysia hold a high status. Women in Malaysia can earn as much salary as men if they are educated and if they have obtained required credentials for a particular job. "Here in the US," she observed, "men and women's salaries are not equal. Even if women have the right credentials, they still don't get paid as much as men do."

In addition to inviting international guests to class, we watched two movies about persecution, intolerance, discrimination, and prejudice. "A Love to Hide" is a movie about persecuting Jews and gays. "Paper Clips" is a documentary about a student project where the children of the Whitwell, Tennessee Middle School, wanted to learn about the Holocaust, and sought to collect 6 million paper clips to represent the 6 million Jews exterminated by the Nazis. The documentary chronicles how the project evolved including the time when students personally met several Holocaust survivors who traveled to Whitwell and shared their stories about their horrific experiences. It also showed how a small school's class project eventually involved an entire community and impacted the world in an attempt to honor, celebrate, and provide love, care, and support to those who survived, and to provide a "resting place" for the 6 million plus who did not survive.

In our reflections, we shared our thoughts, feelings, opinions, and perspectives on what we learned and found meaningful. The summary below reveals the major themes that emerged:

On diversity:

- "Diversity is not just about how we look differently; it is also about how people have different religious beliefs or sexual feelings." (Julie)

- "Diversity not only exists across major social groups, but also within groups and subgroups" (e.g., different Muslim groups practice Islam in slightly different ways) (Gel)

On persecution, discrimination, intolerance, or prejudice:

- "It is much more vivid in my life than it was demonstrated during the first segment." (Julie)

- "Persecution, however subtle or overt, is alive and well today." (Carole)

- "The September 11th attack has extremely heightened intolerance, prejudice and injustice for Muslim Americans today." (Katie)

On the human heart...on love and on hatred:

- "There is a lot of hatred in this world." (Kiana)

- "We are capable of unspeakable evils. . .persecution of the "other" (Dustin)

- "There is also a remarkable brand of love...love from students learning in a very Bailey way to appreciate diversity and respect it." (Dustin)

- "Love can be found any where." (Dustin)

- "The world is ironic and paradoxical...you'll find love where there is hatred; benevolence and kindness where there is persecution and cruelty; comfort where there is agony and pain...good where there is evil." (Gel)

On learning:

- "Just one person can create a learning environment that exceeds all expectations, sharing control, valuing the expertise and knowledge of those who are not "experts," and being inclusive can stimulate experiences that touch participants emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically." (Carole)

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Bailey

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Dailey Dailey

Upcoming Events Bailey Art Show!!

March 30

1 - 5 p.m.

Agriculture Hall

Questions?

Please email:

Hillary: weltonh@msu.edu

Jenna: rangejen@msu.edu

Spring Open House

March 20

6–8 p.m.

65 Agriculture Hall

Questions?

Please email:

Glenn Sterner

sternerg@msu.edu

Semester

Celebration-

May 5

Time: TBA

Location: TBA

Questions?

Please email:

Glenn Sterner

sternerg@msu.edu

Bailey Scholars Program

Michigan State University

65 Agriculture Hall

East Lansing, MI 48824

517-432-0732 (p)

517-432-0737 (f)

lihbailey@msu.edu

www.bsp.msu.edu

Religious Conflicts (from p. 5)

- “Sharing control is valuable...valuing knowledge and expertise of the “non-experts and being inclusive can stimulate experiences that touch participants emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically.” (Carole)

- “Stretch learning is important.” (Olivia)

- “Telling one’s story is vital...it’s a deep human need.” (Carole)

- “The synergy of emotions and thinking fosters deep learning experiences.” (Carole)

- “Learning may be multi-layered, complex, and sometimes painful.” (Carole)

- “Learning can or also occurs beyond the classroom as happens so often in Bailey.” (Carole)

- “When one creates spaces for emergence, interaction, is inclusive, open-minded, self-directed, and curious, deep learning occurs.” (Carole)

What next? How are we going to make use of these reflections?

Here are some of the things learners in ANR 310 plan to do:

- “Give love to everyone I interact with...I cannot and should not forget their (Holocaust survivors) pain.” (Kiana)

- “Challenge our own assumptions, beliefs, and values.” (Carole)

- “Do not stereotype.” (Gel, Dustin)

- “Actions of a few people should not be taken out on others that had nothing to do with a situation.” (Kiana)

Being Mindful: What can you do?

- Unless we challenge our assumptions and examine our attitudes, belief systems, and values, how can we expect to grow and shape our culture in a positive way?



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