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American Music Theatre

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Reflective Essay: The 1975 Academic Journey

Academic writing is difficult. From children to our adult like we are continuing to learn how to write correctly, what punctuations are needed in certain areas, and most importantly how to write a thesis statement. In grade school we are taught how to write a thesis, but as we further our education and enhance our knowledge the way we write thesis statements change drastically. By my first year of college I would’ve thought that I finally learned all I had to in order to create a profound thesis, but I was wrong. My first semester I took my first English course called ‘American Music Theatre.’ In this class we would analyze a sequence of musicals from different times periods and be responsible for creating one final thesis based on the musical’s year. Because of this course and its academic expectations, I have certainly become a better writer and critical thinker.

Firstly, coming into the course, I did not know what to expect in American Music Theatre besides musicals. I figured we would speak about how the American music culture has changed the world and challenged society by being eccentric. In a way we do discuss how American music changed the norms in society, however the purpose of the course was much deeper. By the end of the course we would’ve become great researchers, critical readers, and erudite writers. The first assignment that we completed was an aesthetic experience essay. In this essay we had to write about the day we fell in love or noticed the beauty of any kind of music. So, I decided to write about the day I started playing the piano. I explained how as being a drummer I saw music in a thin lens and through the piano I was able to broaden my horizons. In my essay I wrote, “Unfortunately, I hadn’t realized how naive I was. Music is so much more than just a beat, sticks, cymbals, pedals, and toms. Music at its finest is the collaboration of multiple instruments and various pitches, sounds, to create an ideal representation of emotion.” Throughout the essay I was able to explain how having the ability to play the music that you love is more powerful than simply listening to it. Furthermore, I noted how “Highschool Musical” had become my favorite musical because of its story and because of its music. In the beginning of this course I hadn’t realized that this essay represented the motif that would be presented throughout the course. People are deeply influenced by music and certainly musicals, therefore these art forms deeply impact the moral of any society.

Later in the course, we were introduced to the musicals that each student would be responsible for. The class would be split into three groups that represented the three musicals we would be focusing on. The first was ‘Oklahoma’ (1943), the second was ‘West-Side story’ (1961) and the last was Michael Bennet’s ‘A Chorus Line’ (1975). ‘A Chorus Line’ was my musical and it was certainly a musical to remember. The hidden themes of the musical were racial discrimination, minority inequalities, extreme gender bias, unemployment, and prejudices of sexuality. It would’ve been easy to write an essay on how 1975 was not a progressive year in America’s history, however ‘A Chorus Line’ was not about those different issues that America faced, this musical was about creating a world where those issues did not exist. In our musical discussion September sixth, I explained that ‘A Chorus Line’ “Is about these people with particular talents wanting this job (a chorus dancer) more than anything else. For some, it is to prove themselves, for others, it is simply a passion.” In this musical everyone in the cast were struggling, and the job as a chorus dancer was a way they could deal both with their financial needs and pursue their careers.

The next assignment we were responsible for was the common knowledge pre-annotated bibliography. This is was honestly my first real research paper. We learned how to use the City College databases in order to find reliable sources for the topic of our year. As aforementioned, there were so many topics in ‘A Chorus Line,’ so with this assignment we would be able to find out which topics had the most material and how could these sources interlink to form a universal thesis. The researching was certainly strenuous. The information was extremely and trying to find sources or all the different topics was difficult. When the assignment was completed my annotated bibliography dealt with racial discrimination, gay liberation, women rights, and the united states unemployment rate. On September 20, I elaborated on blackboard the sources I was planning to use for my final essay. The sources spoke about how many families were barely making $10,000 a year which was not enough to survive even in 1975. That later became the main topic that I would speak about on the critical research paper. During this time in the seventies everyone straggled to find jobs and minorities struggled even more. If they had a job they didn’t receive equal pay, neither did women and because of their gender, sexual preference, and ethnicity they were

Now the hardest part of this course was certainly finding a thesis. The longest part of this journey was to figure out how could we connect all the details we’ve attained throughout the course, to then conjure a profound statement in which we would corroborate and debate. Professor Lawrence had given us sheet called a synthesis matrix. What the matrixes did was basically connect all of our information from the different sources. This worksheet was a lifesaver because it made the thesis process less stressful and tiring. In first matrix I wrote about the largest piece of evidence I had for gender inequalities which was Warren Weaver’s article ‘High Court Backs Women's Jury Rights,’ and Edward Hamlish’s ‘Dance: Three; Looks Ten’ from ‘A Chorus Line.’ The article speaks on the Supreme Court Case, Taylor v. Louisiana, and how people questioned whether women could serve as legal and just jurors in the court room. Fortunately, this was a case in which women were the victors, however, the fact that they had to be trialed in order to determine their worthiness was preposterous. This coincided with Hamish’s song about how a woman had to add to her natural body to become more voluptuous and attractive to males. With that being said, I was able to declare that gender inequalities were essential in my thesis. Next, would be the issues of racial discrimination. In the musical, Richie Walters was the only black dancer out of seventeen dancers. In musical just based on his character anyone in the audience could tell that he was a skilled dancer or the most skilled dancer in the entire production. However, 1975 was still a difficult time for black actors in theatre. Even after musicals like ‘The Wiz,’ ‘Dream girls’ and ‘Show Boat’ black actors/actresses hadn’t maintained a white audience whatsoever. Even if African Americans were successful at the time it was still difficult to become prominent. This fact was conveyed in the article Judith Cummings ‘Blacks Gain on Broadway; Lag in 2 Other Arts**.’** African American individuals were very talented and successful, but racism and discrimination kept them within a societal box that would only be broken by the destruction of bigotry.

Moreover, what truly helped me decide on my final thesis was our group presentation. I finally had the chance to converse with other people in my musical group who had different ideas then I had. The group presentation was an eye opener for me, certainly because as a Black man it was easy for me to visualize myself in Richie Walters shoes. An archetypal black man trying his best to fit in a society that finds it difficult to accept him simply because of his skin color. But, just by speaking to my group members with different ethnic backgrounds I realized that naturally we all see through different lenses. If I had retained knowledge from this course the one thing I treasured the most was the diversity in the classroom and how everyone can relate to issues differently. The group presentation entailed slides that each person had to complete based on the selected topics. I chose to write about the topics of race and sexuality in 1975 and how these two issues not only impacted the plot of ‘A Chorus line,’ but influenced the society as well. Just six years prior I learned that there were the Stonewall Riots in which the gay community had to remind the police force and society as whole that they existed and should not be treated beneath their worth. In my slide I explained how musicals like ‘Lovers’ (1975) were especially created for the gay community to help liberate them and show that their lifestyle should be accepted and embraced.

Finally, after finalizing my research and sources I created the thesis for my critical research essay which states, “1975 was a year in which the dominant forces of racial discrimination, sexual prejudice, and gender inequality in the labor force devastated the lives of millions.” With this thesis I was able to analyze each of the key points of the year 1975. I discussed how women were looked down upon while minority men were scoffed at and gays scolded. Because many employers at the time were not minorities, minorities were not hired as often as they should’ve been and that affected the nation as whole. In today’s society if an ethnic group accumulatively stopped working or stop contributing to society than of course the nation would suffer. In 1975, minorities were held from work and practically told not to because of they were. Women were certainly discriminated against in pay and in opportunity. Most of all gays were almost forced to live their lives in secret because to the rest of the world it was radical and extreme.

In conclusion, I believe that I have become a better writer overall and I know that American Music Theatre has equipped me with the right tools to be successful in college and abroad. With this course alone, I believe that I have become a better student overall. Having the ability to do heavy research on a single topic and analyze that information to make a centralized theme is used a lot in college. In addition, I’ve definitely become more musically and historically conscious after taking this course. I’ve learned that with prejudice and inequality America is literally stagnated.

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