Feb. 15, 2013

HI HOWARD,

Just wanted to share with you what I attempted to pilot as a theme for my ENGLISH 122 class last semester (Fall 2012—specifically what I called Conflict Resolution. While the general topic area is not a new endeavor and much has been written and discussed in academia about it in terms of Peace Studies, peace advocacy, and also WWII and initiatives and ideas on related and similar major conflicts and resolutions to them, I was considering how I might combine global history, cultural group/community experiences, and critical and ethical thinking about resolutions. **Themes** and are should be broad, but I also wanted to be able help student examine global history and events of human oppression, particularly genocide across the globe.

Actually, I discovered just in recent reading, however, similar approaches done fit under another broad-based title or theme called **Global Humanity**, a theme a couple of colleagues tried and discussed maybe about three or four years back for English 122 and perhaps for English 121 as well. I did not do a similar approach at the time, but by then, I was already teaching with some emphasis on integrating ideas and information about genocide into my African-American History courses, particularly in helping students understand the impact of a global African Diaspora experience, which we cover mainly in African-American History I (**HIST 145**). We also have addressed some similar connections to African genocides that were occurring on the African continent in the past two decades.

Still anxious to do more in my English 122 Writing and Research course, I decided to try to focus first on a historical, large-scale conflict that perhaps is not so well known among students and then allow them to explore and study others such events as well, moving forward in the course. Secondly, allow them to choose and research a different global conflict that led to genocide or genocidal acts at any point in history, here or abroad, making the case for why and how the conflict should be considered as “**genocide**” and how it may have been resolved, if at all.

FOR this second assignment, as part of our exploration and background research, we took **a field trip** to the CHHange Center on campus for a presentation, topic sharing, and the incorporation a lecture as a primary research for students. Resources were discussed and ideas shared for viable sources depending upon the students’ individual topic choices were also a part of this campus field trip. Student could revisit the center later for follow-up interviews with staff or for further exploration of source materials available for use, including media. (The center’s director also shared historical artifacts donated to the Center with the class during the lecture.)

Third, we attempted to consider individuals who devoted their lives and took substantial risks to lead or orchestrate resolutions or peace strategies for such global conflicts, including **Peace Prize Nobelists** who have been recognized globally for their work amidst conflict and contributions toward peaceful resolution. (I had some great ideas to begin with, including some media support sources I had discovered: Ralph Bunche, Haclav Baclav (sp), the women of Liberia, some dissidents, other true “outsiders” who risked much to solve human issues and in some cases save lives and communities. (Unfortunately, Hurricane Sandy interrupted, so this mostly **biographical research paper** had to be dropped; we simply did not have ample time to do the work for this project. However, I do plan to try this topic project during this Spring semester in one of my sections of the course as I try this same theme once again.)

Next, students did **an article review**, selecting one (of their choice and with my approval and help) addressing a major conflict in the nation, state, or the world at large. Some selected articles covered alternative energy, nuclear arms, lack of water resources, addressing hunger and new approaches to food resources, and several others that I can no longer recall without that list of article sources before me now. The article summary analysis (the review) is not required for the Final Portfolio, but it is an important assignment and I usually place it with a deadline near the middle of semester. Some revised theirs and did include a revised version of this assignment in the Final Portfolio although this is optional for them.

By the way, all papers (except the final essay) are shared and discussed in peer review/workshopping during the semester before submission to me as we go through each Project. So, students get to hear and learn from their classmates’ papers along with their own work. They all get to revise earlier versions of the major papers assigned for the Final Portfolio submissions. (Just sharing a bit on how the course works and is organized; feel free to ask more about this process.)

With Hurricane Sandy’s disruption, I adjusted the assignments a bit. We added two film journals based on “*Schindler’s List*” and “*Hotel Rwanda*,” both based on authentic historical events that include stories of genocides in Europe and then in Africa. In the journals, students were asked to not only discussed what they learned, but how the film made them understand the conflict, the response to it, the genocide, and their feelings/reflections about the film itself and how each story was presented. Many of journals students submitted were quite moving. A third journal added as a final writing required for the Final Portfolio had to do with the theme itself: **Why study conflict resolution? Why does it matter that global conflicts are resolved?**

**What reflections do you want to share about your study of this theme during this semester?**

Finally, given the magnitude of problems brought on by Hurricane Sandy, we spent class time sharing how local communities faced problems and conflicts; how some did or were attempting to address their conflicts provided the ideas for a final critical essay writing assignment for almost all. Several considered articles about problems in local newspapers and use these new accounts as a means to document and discuss a local conflict and provide their own thesis about what worked, what could have worked better, and if the problem or conflict lingered, what each felt could be a workable solution and why. This paper of information and argument became the final for the course. (I encouraged them to pick a topic that was meaningful to them, their community, something they truly cared about and felt needed a response or solution. Passion and a persuasive voice within this final essay are both elements I encouraged. Sources, of course, were required, as usual, but the final is, as noted above, a critical essay rather than a full-blown research paper, thus fewer sources required, usually three.)

I may be leaving out something, but I want you to know that most in my little Thursday afternoon group seemed interested and they worked hard. Two earned A’s for their final portfolios:

1. **Ryan Cantlon:** Project I (Senseless Violence: The Nanking Massacre)

Project II (A Cruel Victimization: The Trail of Tears)

Final Essay (It Has to Stop: High School/Teen Suicide)

(film journals & final reflective journal: very good)

1. **Laura Ostar**: Project I (The Rape of Nanking: Why Does It Always

Lead to Genocide?)

Project II (The Rwanda Conflict: Genocide or War?)

Final Essay (What Is One Turbine in Union Beach?)

(film journals & final reflective journal: excellent)

**The Nanking Massacre** was the global conflict I selected as a topic focus for all to begin with as our first project; later, I learned and announced to students the coming of a December, 2012, two-day, conference scheduled on campus on the Nanking Massacre, planned as the anniversary of this **1937 genocide** called the “**Forgotten Holocaust**.” I knew nothing previously about the campus-based conference or who was involved with it; it was yet an unexpected plus in terms of possible sources or primary research for any who could attend. I only wish it had been a bit earlier in the term; it was close to finals and deadlines for the semester. I wish I had been able to attend and more of my students as well, but I was not able to do so, but I have since discovered more about that program and its planners to help my students connect to more sources on this topic for this semester.

Okay, so Howard, with the above summarized details, I hope this gives you some idea about my work planned for this term using this theme once again. I have in mind to address as the final this time something on “Water Democracy” and/or “Earth Democracy” to address global issues of clean water shortage and earth conservation and environmental respect and protection garnered through global efforts. There is a woman activist who has done remarkable work in both areas now for about 30 years; she is Asian, and I can not spell her name, but saw two films during break on her work, one I had seen before some time ago. I hope to find both again along with the handouts to share with my class this term and urge them to take on one of these global topics as the final essay possibly.

HOPE I didn’t bore you too much with all this, and do forgive any typos in my notes here. I was proud of the enthusiasm and hard work done by **Laura** and **Ryan** during the class. Discussion along the way from the class was also encouraging. Ryan is still at BCC this term, but as I said, I am unsure if Laura is. I’ve yet to mail back my English 122 portfolios to my students, so I still had their topics, etc. Take care and feel free to let me know what you think of these ideas. It’s okay if they do not fit the project you have going for student awards, but I want you to know of what I enjoy doing on global issues these days and why I asked about your project. Enjoy the rest of your weekend./fdj