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202 Response & Lower Division Intellectual Journey

To be wrapping up a course titled “CHALLENGE and RESPONSE in the MODERN WORLD” feels like a joke due to the unfortunate challenges we are actively facing, and the lack of proper response I seem to have. The very first sentence on your syllabus, under goals and objectives says: “Rapid change is a defining feature of modern life. Whatever the cause... change inevitably produces dislocations in long-established patterns of behaviors and belief, often with unpredictable and disturbing results.” To call the results of this rapid change unpredictable and disturbing feels like an understatement. One minute I was sitting in your office discussing how I could improve as a seminar student for the remainder of the semester, the next I was calling my mom to let her know I would be coming home early- and in hindsight, for what could have been the remainder of the semester. Our country, actually our planet, is now experiencing a time where a virus is quickly killing the human population yet the politics of our country is not providing all people with equal access to medication, masks, shelter or testing kits. To summarize this semester into one sentence, it would be from page 165 of *Talking To My Daughter About the Economy* when he quotes the Matrix: “Human beings are a disease, a cancer to this planet. You are a plague.” As we watch our own people die from a real disease, we also see our planet grow healthier in response to the cancerous human population remaining inside.

Throughout this semester, I spent my time in seminar expressing my beliefs that all humans deserve equal rights. Whether it was working conditions for all types of employees, immigration, different political standpoints or poverty issues, I always wanted to argue the idea that people should come before finances. And then I would stand up, leave seminar, and

disregard the homeless people I passed on the street or the advertisements to donate to organizations in need. Now, I watch as people struggle through a global pandemic and wish I could be arguing for the equal rights of people during this difficult time. “I said that in this book I would be talking to you about the economy, but you’ll have noticed by now that it’s impossible to talk about the economy without talking about politics” (Varoufakis, 179). I cannot help but question how this time would be different with a different political party in office. As a businessman affiliated to the Republican Party leads our country through this pandemic, I wonder what changes need to be made to come out of this time stronger for all people. People have lost their jobs and kids cannot go to school, yet rent is still due monthly, taxes are being collected, and food still costs money. I cannot help but see how political the choices being made are throughout this scary time.

“As a species, humans prefer power to truth. We spend far more time and effort on trying to control the world than on trying to understand it- and even if we try to understand it, we usually do so in the hope that understanding the world will make it easier to control it” (Harari, 249). First, I would like to recognize the “royal we” used throughout the entire book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. Something I will always remember from 2021! Anyways, power is an issue I believe to be heavily related to the current pandemic and issue within society. Something that I absolutely cannot wrap my head around is the way we have 3.17 million confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide, and 225 thousand confirmed COVID-19 deaths worldwide, yet we do not see global connection or any means of working together to cure the virus destroying our countries, societies, and families. Just like individual humans want power and control, in this situation I see the way individual countries want power. Each leader across the globe wants to be the leader that

was in charge when their country cures COVID-19. Yet somehow, I believe if we were able to work together rather than against each other as countries, we could probably find a way to end this pandemic faster. Within our country specifically, we see our leaders demanding that we stay home, threaten \$1,000 fines against individuals who have lost their jobs if they don't wear masks outside, and then see our Vice President not wearing a mask inside a COVID-19 clinic. Power, with a lack of understanding. "Access to lifeline medicines, including vaccines, antibiotics, and antivirals, should be a human right, universally available at no cost"(HaymarketBooks). Masks should be provided to every single human being inside our country if our justice system is going to decide to fine individuals \$1,000 for not wearing a mask. Police officers should be wearing masks if they are going to be the individuals giving these fines out. Homeless people should be provided masks as well, because they are already forced to be exposed to the public and have no protection against this virus. Human rights over politics seems obvious, especially during a pandemic, but this semester has taught me that no matter how clear something may be to me, there will be plenty of other views and responses to the same challenge. We learned about capitalism, communism, and everything in between. Now, we get to watch the way different political systems and societies respond to the same virus.

My experience in Hutchins has been the best educational experience of my life. One of the funniest days of my life was move in day, freshman year, when I had to pick up about 50 packages from the mailroom- about 30 of those being books for Hutchins. I had ordered everything before I went to Europe for a few weeks, because I was returning two days before move in day and I wanted to have everything ready when I arrived in Sonoma. When my plane landed back in the United States, I had multiple missed calls and a voicemail or two complaining

about my absurd amount of packages I had sent to the mailroom. Every semester since, I have sent all my books to the mailroom. Just for fun. My first day of college classes was a day I have looked forward to since I was so young. I imagined myself being “that girl,” the one that looks great but totally lost and confused and potentially physically runs into the man of her dreams and lives happily ever after. Or the girl who walks into the wrong class, because I wouldn’t put that past me either. Unfortunately I did not have the pleasure because of course my first week of classes Mercy was out of town. Classic! Once we did begin, I felt like I had never felt in an educational setting: I was thriving. We talked about art, ways of thinking, ways of seeing, and went on some incredible field trips. I met some of my best friends, I learned how to ask questions and challenge truths. I also experienced one of my toughest times of college, having a family friend commit suicide at home and not being able to put my life at school on pause to be home with my family. It was hard to talk about things like corrupt prison systems, inequality and injustice while struggling with my own dark times. I remember the day I went off in class about how frustrating it can be the way Hutchins is so brutally dark and sad sometimes, and Mercy simply did not understand where I was coming from because she had no idea what had just happened in my home life. “‘I am about life’ I said to myself. ‘I’m gonna live as hard as I can and as full as I can until I die. And I’m not letting these parasites, these oppressors, these greedy racist swine make me kill my children in my mind, before they are even born... I was ready for whatever happened. I relaxed and let nature take its course” (Assata, 93). Mercy was my first taste of understanding true inequality.

102 was the most awakening experience of my journey through Hutchins so far because not only was it about identity and humans, but also many of the texts directly impacted the part

of my life I was actively experiencing. We read, learned about and discussed autism in so many ways, and my friend who had recently passed away at home had autism. Autism is something that I have always been closely related to and passionate about, so having the opportunity to have a dialogue with individuals who had never had an experience with people different from ourselves in that way was absolutely eye opening. I felt like I experienced true ignorance for the first time, listening to people say that people with disabilities are even more special than us and all the right things, when in reality kids with autism are usually the kids that are ignored on the playground and last picked as a partner in class. ““The cure can be its own disease: when you take away what’s perceived as wrong, you may also take away the person’s gift” (Far From The Tree, 273). Death was also a prominent topic of 102 (poor timing, but I grew so much from the experience) and I struggled as people said things like “we don’t choose if we are born so we should get to choose when we die” and “suicide can be seen as selfish but I think everyone is entitled to that choice if they want to make that choice.” Before I left the classroom so people didn’t watch me cry, I challenged that idea because I have been the victim of loss through suicide way too many times, and I believe it is selfish and anyone in that dark state of mind is not thinking clearly. My grandma was diagnosed with cancer a month into the semester, so I wrote my autobiography with her in mind and a lot of my greatest moments have been with her. I wrote my autobiography based off of the style of writing Randy Pauch used while writing The Last Lecture, one of the most impactful books I have ever read. It was a semester of growth from class preparation, to seminar skills, to writing abilities. I would consider a lot of the writing I did in that class to be my best writing. Wendy supported me through a really tough time and made

being in the classroom a place where I felt safe. To this day, Wendy is one of my favorite human beings. She helped me through the difficulties of 201 as well, which we will get into now.

201 was my least favorite semester in terms of professor, seminar, and course content. It was also the semester I was most excited about. I had Ben for an EDMS class freshman year, so I was really excited to have Ben for 201. I knew I was going to be able to work well in his class and I was extremely excited to have a semester talking about religion. I absolutely love seminar, and freshman year I learned how much I love playing devil's advocate around the table. Love stirring the pot and mixing things up. I have had a long journey with religion, being placed into a catholic school at the blink of an eye, then christian school, then graduating from a public school with a Jewish majority of the student body. However, when I walked in on day one, my excitement was crushed when I was introduced to Amanda, Bens filler. I feel as if I missed a semester in Hutchins, because her class was nothing like my other seminars. After adapting to the lack of structure that comes with the Hutchins way, I was placed back into a room with a structured way of learning, writing, and reading. I was graded lower than I have ever been graded before, in all aspects of the classroom. I felt a disconnect between Amanda and I as humans, and felt that disconnect was being applied while grading my work. Wendy helped me petition my grade, which did not result in the way I had hoped. The weight of the B in a twelve unit class combined with my math grade ended up putting me on "academic probation" within my extracurriculars, which was frustrating because as a track three student I know I am doing well. 201 taught me that I need to be flexible in undesirable situations, and work hard to get through it. "Their naive innocence about the world was something for which I no longer had the capacity" (Gaiman, 17). This quote comes from The Moth: All These Wonders, one of my

favorite texts from 201 and Hutchins in general. I no longer have a capacity for ignorance about our world, only the truth.

I imagined the end of my lower division experience being a bit more dramatic. I envisioned the last symposium being fun and sentimental. I imagined the emotional ending of our last seminar. Yes, I can be dramatic. But I know my fellow Hutchins pals are quite dramatic as well. Yet in reality, it isn't all that dramatic to be sad about the ending of two of the most developmental years of my life. I faced what feels like an absurd amount of challenges, and grew from each experience. From death, to illness, to natural disaster and even pandemic, I have been shaped by these experiences into the person that I want to become. I have watched people come and go, in and out of my life through these two years. I learned something from every single one of them and for that I am grateful. I have accumulated stacks and stacks and stacks of books, and with every glance in their direction I smile with the thought of all the new knowledge these two years have given me. I hope to hold onto them forever, and reread each and every one. I have enhanced my ability to question reality, and think critically about the issues I come across in our world. I have made memories that I will hold onto for a lifetime. Hiking Angel Island, scrubbing poison ivy off our bodies in the middle of nowhere, trying to hold still for way too long in a Buddhist temple and singing on the bus with my class. Ignorance is bliss, but I will always seek the truth. The biggest lesson I learned throughout the past two years is the concept of change. No one can predict the future, so instead of trying to prepare for what I think is coming, I have learned to be prepared for anything. "Change is afoot. And depending on who you are, how you see the world, and what your place in the world is, that change means different things and offers different constraints and possibilities" (Shapira, xvii).

