

Cultural Immersion Journal

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Over the past six weeks, I have completed four cultural immersion activities ranging from shopping at an Asian market to interviewing small business owners from Honduras. I have learned a lot about other cultures, but mostly I learned about myself.

Observations/Awareness

Observation 1

Where did I go, and why did I choose it?

I chose to go to B-town International Market because I enjoy shopping at Asian Markets but had never been to this one. It came highly recommended by a friend who works in the local Asian food industry, and it sounded like a fun adventure to drag my husband on.

Overall reaction

The one thing that never ceases to amaze me about Asian markets is the smell. Even wearing our required masks, it hit us in the face. American supermarkets often smell sterile, whereas Asian Markets (at least to me) usually smell like seaweed, garlic, vinegar, and fish. There are also many visual differences. The packaging is highly colorful, with lots of pictures and illustrations, incredibly different from how it looks in the US. There was no annoying elevator music blaring through a sound system. We were not bothered by any of the employees and allowed to shop at our own pace. From the snacks to the produce, the foods we saw were extraordinarily different from what one can find in our supermarkets, even in the "international" aisle. And you would not believe the size of the carrots we saw...they were as big as a daikon!

How it will influence my counseling

Merely looking at the cost of some goods versus what typical supermarkets charge is drastic. Some things that are relatively inexpensive in US markets cost more in the Asian market

and many things that are expensive in the US market cost next to nothing in the Asian market. If something so basic as the cost of food can be that different, how different are other things about the culture? This experience drives home how many levels of differences exist between cultures. Taking this knowledge into a therapy session with me, it seems that it would be beneficial for me to ask about the environment in which the client was raised to understand a little more about what differences I should expect and consider when planning treatment.

Observation 2

Where did I go, and why did I choose it?

For my second experience, I chose to visit the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art. There are many reasons that I decided to go here, principal among them is that I had not been since I was in elementary school. I vaguely remembered there being an extensive collection of Native American cultural items and thought this would be an excellent opportunity for a refresher.

Overall reaction

I had forgotten how much Western American art they have at the museum. The main points that stuck out for me as a child were the Native American artifacts, so it was interesting to revisit the Western culture portion. There are four distinct sections of the museum: The education center housed in the basement level, the western painting and sculpture areas, as well as the temporary exhibit section, are on the ground floor, and lastly, the Native American art and artifact sections are on the second floor. Unfortunately, the education center was closed due to COVID, but the other areas were open.

The special exhibit was a multitude of old and new quilts and explained how quilts were often the way women told stories. A couple of quilts stood out to me, but as a fiber arts person (I

knit and crochet), I could appreciate the intricacy and history behind each quilt. I was amazed by some of the new quilts that, breaking out of traditional practice, use the techniques and ideas behind quilting to make a statement piece, such as the Identity quilt (see Figure 1). Judging by some of the other patron's reactions, I am not sure that everyone could appreciate the quilts as historical documents, but my husband and I enjoyed it.

The Western Art section was not much different from a typical art gallery (Figure 2). It gave an overview of the history of Western Art, and some pieces were fascinating, but overall, I could have skipped over that section and been fine. We spent most of our time in the Mihtohseenionki and Native American galleries. The former is typically an interactive gallery focusing specifically on the four major tribes from the Indiana area and the western migration history, beginning around 8000 BC. This section was astonishing to me. Not necessarily the history (reading that American soldiers sold whiskey and blankets riddled in smallpox to decimate tribes was not news to me), but to see the differences in something as simple as cradleboard design made me realize how different these tribes were from one another. The one part of the western migration that intrigued me was the map of the Indiana tribes' movements (Figure 3). This section made me desire to learn more about my Native American heritage because I know where and when certain relatives were born.

While in the Native American galleries, the beauty, art, and practicality in everything there, from toys to tipis and wigwams, struck me. I was amazed to find that each tribal region (Woodlands, Plains, Southwest, Northeast, et cetera) has a distinct construction style based on their lifestyle and the resources at hand. For example, using birch bark instead of leather to wrap a shelter's exterior in the Woodlands made it watertight; however, it was cumbersome and not conducive to travel. The Plains Indians, the nomad tribes, used leather for their structures

because it was light and easy to use and carry. The totems used in each region are also different. Figure 4 is a picture of totems used in the Northwest. How anyone could have thought these practical and artistic people to be savages is beyond imagination.

How it will influence my counseling

In general, this experience taught me that even though we may look the same and share a similar background, it does not mean that we do things the same way or even use the same resources in the same way. This lesson is valuable to keep in mind when counseling someone for a couple of reasons. The first is that there is always another way to achieve the same goal. The other is that I cannot assume how this person will act based on how they look. Whether they look like me or not, I cannot understand their story until I ask, just as I cannot know how they would build a shelter until I observe.

Article Response

My Reaction

After reading *The Case for Reparations* (Coates, 2014), I had mixed feelings and some intense reactions. I have never been one to support the idea of reparations. I have always felt that if one group of people wronged by the government receives them, all those whom the government has wronged deserve them. It will set precedence from which this country will never recover. Regardless of the sentiments in this article, an acknowledgment and apology from the government will never be enough to placate those who believe they are entitled to monetary reparations, and the tone of the majority of this article does nothing to dissuade this belief.

Initially, I felt sympathy for the families whom Coates (2014) interviewed because of the things that suffered under Jim Crow laws and the affiliated discrimination, as well as the slaves who suffered for years before them. The atrocities they endured were criminal, inhumane, and

genuinely tragic. There is no denying this fact. However, the progress Coates (2014) made building empathy toward the cause was quickly lost when the tone of the article changed from basic fact-presentation to entitled, victim-mentality attacking. This simple change put me, as a white person, on the defensive and created anger within me. I did not appreciate the insinuation that I am a predator and will do everything in my power to keep the black man down, simply because I am white.

Some other things bothered me about this article, such as the manipulative and biased language Coates uses. For example, rather than pointing to a specific decade in which an event happened, he would say the mid-20th century (Coates, 2014). This manipulation accomplishes two things. The first is that it makes the event seem much more recent than it truly is. The second is that he does not have to admit the behavior was pre-Civil Rights. He also uses language that leads the reader toward a specific belief, rather than letting them conclude something independently. For example, the constant use of the verb plunder (Coates, 2014) leads the reader to envision raped and broken people, barely hanging onto life.

Coates (2014) also takes many liberties with historical facts. He paints American history as if all whites were evil, and all blacks were saints. For example, when discussing Taft's comments about the intelligent white southerners, Coates (2014) conveniently leaves out the fact that the Klan terrorized and lynched many white southerners sympathetic to the cause, and southern Jews (who were mostly white). When listing our Founding Fathers' negative actions and pairing them with their most famous positive moments (Coates, 2014), he conveniently leaves out things they did in support of abolition. For example, George Washington discussed, several times, his desire for the abolishment of the practice of slavery. He was also the only Founding Father who, in his will, freed every slave that he owned and dictated that his estate was to

support every slave who could not provide for themselves due to age, illness, or disability in perpetuity (Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2020). Yet, Coates (2014) would have us believe that Washington was a racist who never lifted a finger to help the black man. I also had issues with the fact that he does not directly mention the Civil Rights Act. This unprecedented governmental regulation was proposed by a rich, white man and passed into law by white men.

I am not naïve enough to believe that all people, of all statuses, are treated the same. I have to work twice as hard as my male co-workers to show that I am just as smart and capable. Yet, there are still guests who will come in who do not believe a word I say because I am a woman and prefer to hear the same information, verbatim, from my male co-workers. There are undeniable differences, but I have always believed that if a person wants to change how society views a particular group, the group must work, as a whole, to overcome the stereotypes. To change a stereotype, first, one must not succumb to it. The more people within a specific group act how society expects them to, the more the stereotype, and thus the belief is strengthened. Is it fair to have to be better than good or work harder than others for the same things? No, but until the belief changes, it is the reality for non-dominant statuses.

How this article will influence my counseling

Unfortunately, the mentality displayed in this article is one that many oppressed people have and I will likely encounter it as a counselor. So, reading this and being forced to work through my feelings about it was helpful, to a point. I know that I will never favor the idea of reparations for the reasons previously mentioned, but it is my personal opinion. I realize that some people will misconstrue my thoughts and believe that I am racist, which is not the case. I am just cynical enough to know that the United States was built on the backs of everyone who was not a rich, white male, not just the slaves. I am also enough a realist to know that no one will

ever be able to pay back everything that was taken from the oppressed people, not with all the money or acknowledgement in the world.

However, I know that attempting to impart my beliefs on another person is not healthy for the client or me. When working with someone who has this kind of mentality, it would likely be best for the client if I referred them to someone who has less intense feelings about the issue. This particular area is one I know my feelings will overwhelm my ability to cast them aside, so I will not be an effective counselor for it. I would prefer to maintain a good therapeutic relationship with the client by sending them to someone else who can help, and perhaps working with them again in the future if necessary.

Information/Knowledge

Information 1

Whom did I speak with, and why did I choose it?

I chose to speak with Nora Carranza and Lester Ardon because they (and their children) recently became a part of my extended family when they moved in with my uncle after my grandparents passed away. I know a little of their story, but I decided it would be nice to learn more about my new family members.

Overall reaction

I was amazed by Nora and Lester's stories. They came to the US from Honduras to escape the horrible living situation there. Typically, the only people who are allowed to immigrate from Honduras are the very rich, who also happen to be the criminals. They braved escaping their country and living in ours, continually looking over their shoulders. They settled in Indiana because there were other family members here, started their businesses (they own a contracting company and a cleaning company), and recently declared their illegal status to the

state after owning their legal LLCs for many years. Their position as legal business owners, who have paid business taxes for many years likely had something to do with this, but they are now close to becoming full US citizens. They have signed the mortgage with my uncle and he and their family live there.

How it will influence my counseling

I cannot imagine the resilience and fortitude that it took to overcome the challenges that this couple faced, especially with two small children along for the ride. I am embarrassed to admit that early on when we first found out that Nora and her family were going to move in my uncle, we assumed the worst. We had an implicit bias of why a group of illegal aliens would want to take care of someone who had access to a big house with so many antiques in it. This exercise taught me the danger of making assumptions about someone based on a small part of their story. Now, I realize the importance of entering each introductory session with a new client with an open mind and allowing them to tell me their story.

Information 2

Whom did I speak with, and why did I choose it?

Initially, when I asked for approval to start researching my Native American heritage, I had no with whom I should, or even could, speak. I only knew that Indiana University Bloomington has a First Nation's Educational and Cultural Center, and I figured this would be a decent place to start my research. I was pleased to find that they had a Facebook page, so I reached out to them through Facebook messenger. The person on the other end was Nicky Belle, the director of the center.

Overall reaction

Nicky informed me that he would be unable to offer any genealogical information, but he could at least tell me where to start if I could share what I knew. So, I sent him a picture of my 3rd great-grandmother (Harriett Hennis), the genealogical information that I have, and Harriett's birth year and place and her mother, Sarah's. Unfortunately, it seems that information was not enough even to start because I have not heard back from him since I explained that we had only discovered this information a few years ago, long after the last person who would have known anything passed away.

After speaking with my uncle, who owns the picture of Harriett, we have concluded that it is likely that having Native American blood was considered shameful in the late 1800s and early 1900s and not something to be discussed in polite society. My grandmother certainly never knew. It is unknown whether my great-grandmother knew anything. Her father likely did because Harriett was his mother, but again, we cannot know. There are times that I wish I could meet my great-grandparents, and this is one of them. However, when I have more time, I plan to travel to the towns where Harriett and Sarah were born to do some more research.

How it will influence my counseling

Having the inability to find out where you come from because someone hid the information because it brought shame is not a feeling that I ever expected to feel in my life. The frustration is soul-deep and heart-wrenching. I can only imagine many others, especially other native and black Americans, face the same frustration. Having this knowledge, perhaps using a technique that helps to connect someone with their heritage, might help overcome ethnicity-based self-hatred.

References

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- Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. (2020). *Slavery*. Retrieved October 3, 2020, from George Washington's Mount Vernon: <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/>

Figures title:

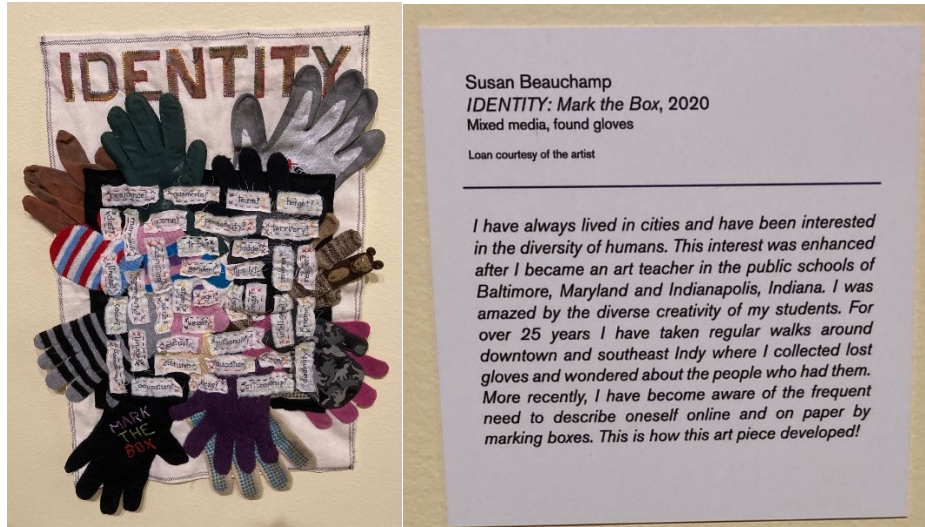


Figure 1. Identity Quilt.



Figure 2. Example of Western Art. *Bartering for a Bride*, Alfred Jacob Miller.

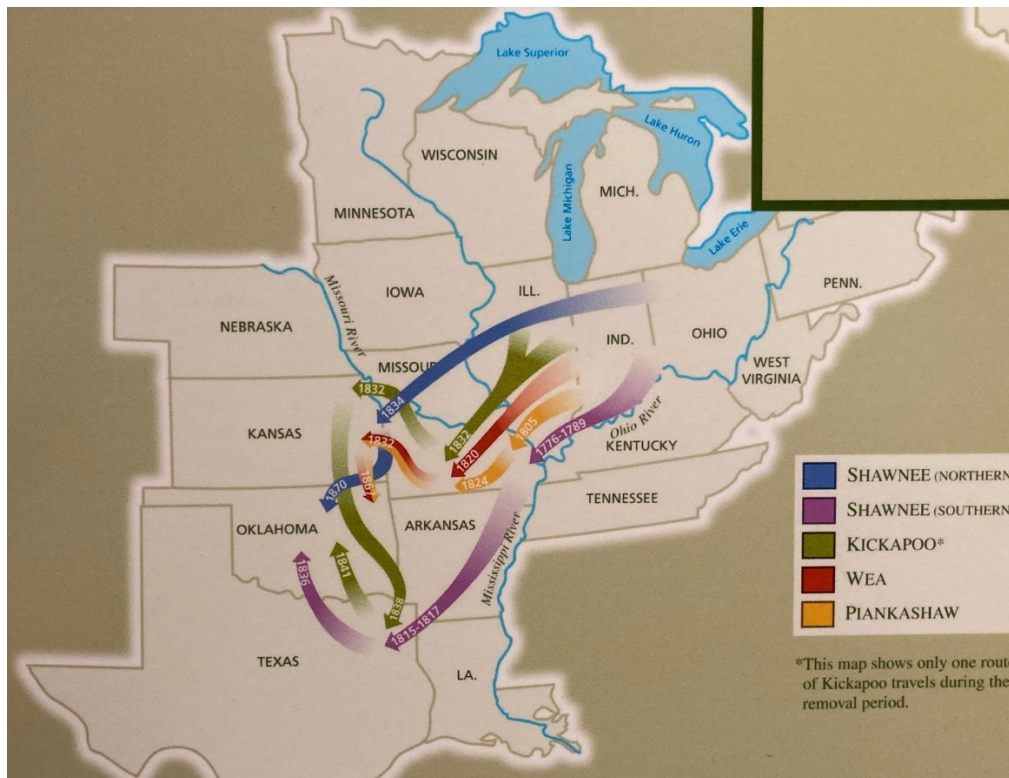


Figure 3. Western Migration Maps for Indiana Native Americans.



Figure 4. Pacific Northwest Totems