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Performance Art or the Art of Performance

By Rochell Isaac

As the new Coordinator of Core Seminar, I am struck by the vast array of sub-themes explored by the Core Faculty. I am also impressed with the field explorations that allow students the actual experience of encountering concepts introduced in the classroom.

Even more interesting was the realization that these sub-themes intersected in powerful ways. For instance, last semester, my class explored the notion of human ingenuity juxtaposed against human folly. In that vein, we explored art as a means of social change and attended a performance of the Tony Award winning Broadway play, *Memphis*. Prof. Sneed focused on poetry

and social movements investigating the connection between the personal and the political. The students themselves became poets fashioning images relevant to their own experiences.



Prof. Campbell's class studied the construction of the other in society, and her class along with their whole cohort travelled to various unfamiliar neighborhoods

where they were the "outsiders." During these neighborhood explorations the students became active players in their own dramas.

In their joint sessions, students discussed, reflected, and created artistic portraits of their field exploration experiences, often making connections with course assigned readings. In the following selections, a few students share their perspectives and reactions which emerged from those various experiences. Jeff S. Pierre and Kerry Louis discuss their perspectives on the play, *Memphis*, while Brittany Gordon fondly recalls the idea of home in her poetry, and Jennifer Laudano ponders the way(s) human beings treat each other.

Memphis

By Jeff S. Pierre (COS 50, sec 010)

Memphis is a Broadway musical that casts explosive dancing, and irresistible songs against the dilemmas of American society. It stretches out the drama of a love forbidden by racism and segregation between the black and white communities established by society during the 1940s. Based on facts in American history, *Memphis* is about a white DJ (Huey Calhoun) who is trying to bring change to his society, and a black club singer (Felicia) who is willing

to symbolize the change through their forbidden love.

When I was watching the play I was captivated by the idea of evolution of society through music. Art, especially music, was what united the white and the black society to help end segregation. The play showed the power of art to bring about social change. Music also represented the way the black community came to be heard politically. The role of the artist, therefore, is an important one in society.

This was my first Broadway experience and I was absolutely captivated by the play. I felt like I was really there in the 1950s because the play was so real. Everything was perfect; the songs, the dance and the performance were all in a simple motion to keep everything alive and moving. Everyone in the audience seemed to enjoy the performance as well. At the end of the show many people lined up to purchase souvenirs like t-shirts, cds, mugs, and photos.

Memphis, the Musical

By Kerry Louie (COS 50, sec 010)

In the early 1950's, a time when black was black, and white was white, a rebellious, but inspired young white man wanted to change the way that the world (Memphis to him), saw these color boundaries. What inspired him to believe the world would see things the way he did was music. The music he considered was rhythm and blues, but what other people referred to as race music, or black music. This young man, Huey Calhoun, seemed to have a blurred vision of the world. There were no color boundaries to him; it seemed that the only boundary were the walls that held in the music that he loved and wanted to share with everyone. The reason Huey refuses to see these color lines is because he is blinded by his love for the music. He finds the music exhilarating and uplifting, giving meaning to his own life. He tells the audience that when he was young, his father always told him to stay away from the dark side of town, but that was where the music he loved so much was coming from. Another reason he is able to relate to the colored folk of Memphis is

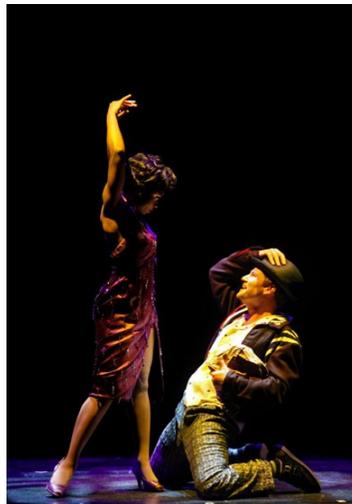
because much like most people from the dark side of town, he is also uneducated and poor.

The absurdity of racism plays a big part in all the characters' lives. It exists between Delray and Huey, Huey's mother and Felicia, and among the people of Memphis. As Huey and Felicia begin to fall in love, the problems of their mixed race relationship cause more tension between them. To solve this problem, Felicia wants to move up north where it would be safe for them to be together. Huey does not want to run, but would rather stay and fight for his right to be with whoever he wants. Though we know that the world will one day no longer be divided by race, Huey does not, and presents a sense of hope within himself that one day color will no longer matter. Each day he plays his music, he hopes that it will change how people feel. Just as Camus' Sisyphus continually rolls the rock up the hill, and enjoys but a brief moment of happiness during his chore, Huey continually plays his music, enjoying his brief moments of happiness as he listens to his music. Throughout his career on radio and

then on television, Huey slowly changes the views of some of the people around him, namely his mother and the owner of the radio station and some of the regulars at Delray's bar. And although it is not as evident, Huey goes through a transformation of insight such as Gregor's transformation in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

Throughout the performance, the audience is able to experience joy and sadness along with the performers, just as if they were going through it themselves. Just as art imitates life, the performance brings us closer to the reality of the times. Though many of us did not experience the bias and prejudice of the 50's, we are able to experience it for just a little bit as we sit through this wonderful performance. The performers were able to transform the theater and bring the audience back in time, back in time where black was black and white was white, and music was the true color of your soul.

"Just as Camus' Sisyphus continually rolls the rock up the hill, and enjoys but a brief moment of happiness during his chore, Huey continually plays his music, enjoying his brief moments of happiness as he listens to his music. "



Jamaica

By Brittany Gordon (COS 50, sec 002)

Jamaica my home sweet home
 Jamaica the place where I was born
 Jamaica a place with nice beaches and a blue sky

Jamaica the place where I remember sitting under
 the Ackee tree; enjoying the cool day's breeze
 Eating Mangos and just chatting away remembering
 the good old days

Jamaica the place where mosquitoes will eat you
 alive
 Jamaica the place where my Grandma was laid to
 rest

Jamaica the place where they cook outside
 and the chickens run wild

Jamaica the place where they party until the
 sun comes up
 As the night comes upon us, we walk though
 the streets with no street light
 I look up to the sky and see all the bright
 stars which lead me home

I search for my Grandma's star to guide me
 the right way because I knew if this was New
 York, I would have had to do with all the
 bright lights

Jamaica The place where my family will
 reunite once again because that's what my
 Grandma would have wanted

Jamaica the place I miss dearly
 How can one forget where they came from? I
 know for sure I will never forget my home

Jamaica my home sweet home
 Jamaica the place where my Grandma was
 laid to rest
 Jamaica the place I love dearly.

Ethnic Enclaves and the Idea of Human as Other

By Jennifer Laudano (COS 50, sec 007)

In April, my classmates and I visited the small, oceanside community of Little Odessa in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn to gain an experience of an ethnic enclave and the idea of the human as "other." Back at LIU, my group members and I were paired up in a joint session with students from two other classes who also visited Little Odessa. We were asked to create a skit and an art presentation of our findings.

Our skit and artwork reflected our visit to *Little Odessa*, where I felt that my group members and I represented the

"other" because we were treated quite differently than members of the community. For instance, I decided to go into a fashion boutique, to see if I could possibly get an interview about European fashion styles and this historical community. We were met by an indifferent saleswoman who spoke English but would not give us an interview. After similar experiences, we left the store and the community feeling uncomfortable and definitely "other."

While we felt distinctly "other" in our trip to Little Odessa and somewhat "other" when we met to work with students from other classes, we quickly developed a plan of action with our group

members. Some members took part in the skit, while others participated in the artistic presentation. In a cooperative spirit, some members stepped out of their comfort zones in order to accomplish the assigned tasks. We profited as a group because we learned to work together and use each other's ideas and insights to produce a great result.

The ethnic enclave field trip and joint session showed us what it meant to feel "other" and left us thinking about how human beings treat one another.

"The ethnic enclave field trip and joint session showed us what it meant to feel "other."

Call for Student Submissions

The Core Seminar Newsletter invites submissions from students to report on their experiences in Core Seminar.

Did you have a unique experience or make a surprising discovery in the course of your inquiries in Core Seminar? If so, please share it with the rest of the Brooklyn Campus community!

Submissions might focus on your experience in any aspect of COS 50. This could include your field activities, joint sessions, research related to your seminar papers or even creative work you did in exploring the Idea of the Human or the sub-themes investigated by your class. How did that experience shape your education here on the Brooklyn Campus?

Your submission might be anywhere from 100 to 250 words. Including images related to your experiences is highly encouraged!

Please submit them either to your Instructor or directly to the Core Seminar office in the Pratt Building, Room 510.



Try your hand at writing for The Idea of the Human!

COS 50 The Idea of the Human

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Core Seminar is a three-credit interdisciplinary course providing a common intellectual experience for undergraduate students of all disciplines. The Seminar explores what it means to be human through shared readings, discussion in the Seminar and in Joint Sessions with other sections, field explorations, and multiple forms of writing.

The Idea of the Human: Core Seminar News is edited by Rochell Isaac, Administrative Coordinator for the COS Program. We welcome submissions of ideas or notes on unique COS experiences from both faculty and students from the program.

COS CULTURAL ALLIANCE INITIATIVE

CORE SEMINAR CULTURAL ALLIANCES

**Invites you to visit three of Brooklyn's greatest cultural institutions:
The Brooklyn Museum, The Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, and The New York Transit Museum
For Free**

NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM



Funded by the Office of the Provost, the Core Seminar Cultural Alliances expands the space of learning and intellectual pursuit beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. All members of our campus community are invited to explore the riches of our cultural alliance partners.

For free admission, present a current LIU ID at the Visitor Entrance.