

Give and Take from the Great Demographic Fact: A Vagarious Look At Commercial Influence over Cultural Exchange in 20th- and 21st-century Philadelphia

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Overview

Taking form as equal parts historical-account, personal-narrative, and data-analysis projects, the following seventh grade curriculum unit serves as a means of exploring the role of the commerce as a dynamic, contemporary migration catalyst; a source of cultural arbitration; and a motivator for job migration, rather than worker migration.

The unit begins with data analysis. Using materials compiled from the *2007 Central Intelligence Agency Fact Book*, students will first attempt to answer a seemingly innocuous set of questions: Why do people come to Philadelphia? Why do people leave other points of origin? Why do people leave Philadelphia? How does work affect human stasis, evolution, and migration?

In support of these questions (and in an attempt to find and articulate data trends), students will use data regarding the worldwide clothing trade as a springboard, building various statistical matrices, comparing, for instance, life expectancy with infant mortality rates, gross domestic product, or annual population growth¹ among countries that produce clothing.

As a measure of comparison, students will assess the state of contemporary American economic influence as it relates to Philadelphia's early-20th-century textiles prowess. The ecumenical goal herein remains: build a unit that will help students identify a shift in economic modality: 100 years ago, workers moved to find sustainable work; currently, businesses move work to find a sustainable work force.

Rationale

Jedediah Purdy deftly ruminates on America's burgeoning multicultural identity:

“Take the clothing company Benetton, which has expressed every stage of anti-corporate and humanitarian discontent in the past decade. In 1984, in a period of Euro-American conservatism under Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Helmut Kohl, Benetton launched an ad campaign titled ‘All the Colors of the World.’ The early ads showed children of all races, draped over each other in playful affection, in Benetton clothes. The images were appealing but, as advertisements go, fairly conventional. Still, they captured part of the experience of a generation that, for the first time in American and modern European history, was growing up amid widespread racial integration. For those young people, sharing classrooms and playgrounds with black, white, East Asian, and Indian kids was natural. But they also knew that it was something new and unusual, that it was more of an event for their parents than for them, and that race mattered at the same time that it didn’t matter. The ads put right up front some of the energy and tension of a changing culture, and soon multiracial groups of high-school friends were draping themselves over each other for photos and mouthing, ‘United Colors of Benetton...’ The ads still took their energy from an uneasy combination of sentiments about race. On the one hand, almost all viewers accepted the official notion that racism was a thing of the past, and that tolerance and even open enthusiasm were the new currencies of interracial exchange. On the other hand, race was still an event. These images of the new American creed had none of the comfortable domesticity of, say, Norman Rockwell’s portrayals of upright American ways.” (Purdy, 226-7)

The author continues:

“Faced with nationalism upon nationalism, humiliations revisited in search of pride, it is tempting to see nationalism as a perversion. We Westerners hear enough about Serb nationalists, who slaughtered and deported Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims through most of the 1990s; Chinese nationalists, the wild-eyed students who stormed and almost overran the American embassy in Beijing in 1999; Russian and German nationalists, throwbacks to the fascist and totalitarian traditions in those countries; and the ‘tribalism’ that moved Rwandan Hutus to murder more than half a million Rwandan Tutsis in 1994.” (Purdy, 100)

The full measure of Purdy’s discourse appears where I teach.

Located between 42nd and 43rd Streets, and Locust and Spruce Streets, the Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School hosts roughly 700 students who represent no fewer than nineteen countries of origin other than the United States, including the African nations of Senegal, Ghana, Sudan, Cote D’Ivoire, Liberia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The unique challenges of the Penn Alexander School community rest less in the oversight of student understanding than in the ascription and development of a multiform, accessible ethos, what Moll et al. describe as a “totality of experiences, the cultural structuring of the households, whether related to work or play, whether they take place individually, with peers, or under the supervision of adults.”

(Moll, 134)

The attributes that make the Penn Alexander School unique are themselves, unique attributes. Like many high performing schools, PAS provides thorough, enriching social, emotional, and academic opportunities for all of its students. Moreover, the school services a student body representing an economic range with perhaps an even more disparate than (and, in large part because of) its ethnic diversity.

PAS intends to undermine the common divides in American education between economic advantage and disadvantage (which, more often than not, manifest as inequity between white and non-white students). Teacher and social theorist Peter Sipe deftly concretizes this dilemma:

“Last winter, I stopped to take a look at the bulletin board outside the guidance office. Three flyers were posted; two advertised for local public high schools, each with academic records even more wretched than those at our school, and one highlighted a training program run by a local pharmacy chain. This program offered teens certification in retail sales, and promised those who completed training preferential candidacy for entry-level vacancies. As I walked away, I wondered how the bulletin board outside the guidance office of a suburban middle school must look. There would be brochures for preparatory high schools, as well as for summer programs in art, music, science, and sports. Students would be encouraged to become doctors, lawyers, artists, and executives; at our school, a lone flyer exhorts students to work cash registers.” (Sipe, 331)

To what extent can a community, bifurcated (often tersely) along cultural lines, ignore the plurality of cultures and their subsequent conflicting political agendas? More importantly, what types of adversity emerge from a community that (to varying degrees) embraces the thorniness of multicultural life: How can recent émigrés, as well as longstanding low-income community members derive self- and community-esteem from a place whose burgeoning property owners (n.b., in particular those property owners who lease housing to refugee families) intend to remodel the neighborhood, thereby displacing (however discursively, obliquely) longstanding and recent low-income community members? Most importantly, what types of cultural confluence emerge in an environment where the implications of International Day transcend the realm of enchiladas and paper-cranes? How does commercial influence mitigate culture (n.b., perhaps more importantly, a sense of place). Furthermore, how do populations claim and reclaim neighborhoods in the interest of cultural preservation? Finally, what array of new avatars exists in the wake of such diverse socioeconomic tribal commingling?

Using Commerce As Culture

George Packer’s essay, “How Susie Bayer’s T-Shirt Ended Up On Yusuf Mama’s Back,” under-girds most of this unit. The essay explores various forms of cultural identity, influence, and imperialism through the lens of the 21st-century African used-clothing trade. Packer’s essay essentially tells the story of American entrepreneurs who

function like so many Frank Norris characters, selling wiper-rag-caliber used clothing to African importers by the compressed ton. These second-hand goods serve as indicators of American-ness; some Africans accept and celebrate the clothes; others obstreperously reject and renounce the goods. The essay remains a meditation on the extent to which America lives as a form of cultural distortion and (n.b., with no small nod given to Packer's politics) a brand—a commercial entity that allows for cultural access, inviting people from various nations to “try on” a culture as if it were used clothing. Packer asserts:

“With the liberalization in Africa of the rules governing used-clothing imports in the past 10 years, Africans, who keep getting poorer, can now afford to wear better than rags. Many told me that without used clothes they would go naked, which, as one pointed out, is not in their traditional culture. And yet they know that something precious has been lost.” (Packer, 33)

I will use Packer's essay as it serves to scaffold the type of conversation I hope to have with middle-grade students: a discussion of cultural identity that transcends simple, totemic cultural and commercial identities.

Philadelphia: Industrial-era Textile Hub

At the 20th century's dawn, Philadelphia and Chicago stood at the precipice of North American industrial supremacy. Minus Chicago's railroad locus, Philadelphia owed its burgeoning commercial identity to textile manufacture and trade. The textile industry engendered prosperity along economic and social lines. Textiles served as civic foundation:

“Philadelphia Mill owners, chiefly immigrants from working-class backgrounds, had erected a coherent alternative manufacturing system, applying their craft talents in individual, partial process textile firms, reliant on skilled labor to generate a diverse array of seasonal specialties rather than staple textiles. These separate establishments clustered in urban industrial districts and were linked sequentially (spinning, dyeing, weaving, knitting, etc.) to meet variable demands through batch output of fashionable intermediate and final goods (cloths vs. carpet or hosiery). Proprietors both owned and managed their plants, engaged in contentious but mutualistic relations with workers, and regarded their family and partnership enterprises as personal projects and legacies as much as or more than their investments. This proprietary capitalism differed from the better known corporate and bureaucratizing form along virtually every parameter of comparison and exemplified a penchant for flexibility and product differentiation that secured a national reputation for Philadelphia goods, fueled profitability and expansion, and underwrote high earnings for thousands of veteran craftsman.” (Scranton, 2-3)

The author continues:

“[The textile owner’s] dogged perseverance is a testament to the durability of the proprietary motif, the ambiguous mixing of firm and individual identity, and the refusal to embrace or master the ‘scientific’ techniques of ‘rational’ cost management.” (Scranton, 12)

Scranton paints a virtually egalitarian picture of the textile industry. Furthermore, the author draws lucid distinctions between those employed as menial cogs and a much greater number of Philadelphians who served as highly skilled artisans working toward the production of a specific component in a textile process.

Ultimately, the intractability of factory owners against “worker anonymity” (i.e., diminished wages, longer days, poorer working conditions) led as much to Philadelphia’s diminishment in textile prowess as each factory’s devotion to various and unique specialized processes. Epauettes, for instance, eventually fall out of fashion. Naturally, a factory devoted to the production of epauettes will either adapt or concede to multi-product factories. Likewise, workers who produce epauettes may lose some job-transfer standing. In this particular instance, “highly skilled” equates to “underqualified.”

In fine, Philadelphia’s textile trade served as a civic signature—equal parts official industrial *raison d’être* and font of personality. The growth of the industry, moreover, served as an effective means of immigrant acculturation as well as access point for immigrants hoping to gain credibility as “locals.”

Objectives

The unit conceived herein demands that students make inferences about cultural exchange as a commercial expression. Ultimately, these lessons serve to scaffold students as they come to understand the role of immigration in the post-industrial world. This Unit’s tacit conclusion emerges when students come to understand any nation’s need for a migrant-work-force population during periods of industrial growth. As Scranton and Purdy insinuate, Philadelphia’s need for immigrant laborers served as microcosm of America’s need for the same. As Packer indicates, the post-industrial world brings the work to the laborer, rather than demanding that the laborer migrate to the work.

As benchmarks of fluency, students will be able to:

- Define and distinguish among the elements of a map;
- Ask synthesis-level questions germane to geography, orientation, and cardinal direction;
- Define cartography and its component processes;
- Read and interpret a cultural critique;
- Assemble a map-generated data table;
- Make inferences regarding textile-manufacture locales as indicators of global-economic balance and health;
- Differentiate between mass-market and specialty 19th- and 20th-century textiles produced in Philadelphia;

- Define and distinguish among industry-specific vocabulary (i.e., epaulet, napery, ephod, etc.);
- Compare Philadelphia products to contemporary comparables, inspecting for workmanship;
- Develop a rubric for textile quality.

Strategies

This curriculum unit covers topics rife with thematic possibility. Considerations must be made across curricula:

Mathematical Considerations

Naturally, data collection and interpretation demands a certain statistical awareness. In their quests toward tabulation, students will perform manual calculations to the greatest extent possible.

An Important Note Concerning Data Collection and Articulation: the success of this unit hinges on a teacher's willingness to create graphic representations of various data sets. Moreover, a truer success emerges from a teacher's willingness to allow students the opportunity to produce diverse graphic data representations. To this end, *InspireData*, the student-friendly data-collection and –representation software proves especially important.

Science Considerations

An assessment of global commerce warrants natural earth-science and ecology extension. In the interest of time, science integration will most likely happen in the science classroom. When considering the migration of work (n.b., and with due consideration given to the various data sets), conversations regarding ecological regulation and deregulation emerge manifestly.

Literacy Considerations

Packer's article will be read as a shared read-aloud. In a perfect world, a carousel activity will accompany the reading. In this activity, students will move from posted question to posted question, asserting their perspectives and commenting on each other's points of view. Naturally, this type of activity presumes a class culture where students honor each other's opinions. Likewise, this activity demands a fair degree of modeling and rehearsal before implementation.

Students will create one 500-word essay, supporting an argument either in opposition to, or in favor of immigration and naturalization. The criteria for exception writing in middle-school social sciences follow:

1. The absence of a capital I: in order to successfully complete the assignment, students will remove the first person perspective from their work.
2. Spare pronoun use: students will be asked to use pronouns sparingly. Furthermore, students will be asked to demonstrate that each pronoun follows an easily discernible antecedent.
3. A deliberate syntax of precision: by virtue of the fact that the assignment limits a piece of writing to 500 words, students must measure every word. Naturally, this criterion exists as a means of insurance against one-draft composition.
4. A thesis of incision: in consideration of my students' intellectual development, the essay must be an exercise in building a well-supported argument. Propositions must support a thesis statement and thicken to form a cohesive argument.

Social Studies Considerations

In support of the content area's themes, this unit demands that students create a comprehensive social studies project, asking students to make considerations along geographic, civic, economic, historical, and cultural lines.

Classroom Activities

Lesson Plan I

Objectives:

Students will be able to: read and interpret a cultural critique; assemble a map-generated data table; students will make inferences regarding textile-manufacture locales as indicators of global commerce.

Procedures:

Students and I will begin reading George Packer's, "How Susie Bayer's T-shirt Ended Up On Yusuf Mama's Back." Through the lens of the used-clothing trade, Packer's article calls into question America's sometimes unwitting sense of imperialism.

I will share with students that my shirt was made in the Los Angeles, United States, according to the garment's tag.

I will affix a blue sticker to the city of Los Angeles and explain that each sticker will represent a garment from the room.

Students will assemble in groups of four, according to random assignment. Using 8.5x11 in. detailed world maps, students will create pictographic representations of their personal clothing data, drawing conclusions about current common textile regions (corollary to their group's shirt origins).

For the next class period: Students will inventory their wardrobes, completing a country-of-origin data table. Due 18 September 2007

Materials:

George Packer's "How Susie Bayer's T-Shirt Ended Up On Yusuf Mama's Back," (class set); *InspireData* software; CIA Factbook, 8.5x11 in. laminated world maps (class set)

Remarks:

Part one of this lesson involves reading half of the Packer article.

Lesson Plan II

Objectives:

Students will be able to: read and interpret a cultural critique; assemble a map-generated data table; make inferences regarding textile-manufacture locales as indicators of global-economic balance and health; differentiate between mass-market and specialty 19th- and 20th-century textiles produced in Philadelphia.

Procedures:

The students and I will continue reading Packer's essay. Using our classroom data, I will present a map that resizes the seven continents according to their respective textile outputs. If ten out of thirty students wear shirts attributable to South America, South America will occupy 33% of the world's total area.

As a measure of competency, students will build a graphic representation of their data. Students will choose among pie chart, bar graph and histogram.

For the next class period, students will make final adjustments to their data tables. Students will also write an essay (pursuant to our discussion): In five hundred words or fewer, please assume you are an immigrant of equatorial African origin. Please decide whether you will naturalize in America (assuming you have the opportunity to do so), detailing the inherent advantages and disadvantages to your passage to or renunciation of America.

Materials:

George Packer's "How Susie Bayer's T-Shirt Ended Up On Yusuf Mama's Back," (class set); *InspireData* software; CIA Factbook, 8.5x11 in. laminated world maps (class set)

Remarks:

As we finish Packer's essay, a conversation that began as a meditation on fair trade and sustainable business practices becomes a debate. The resolution: As a member of the third world, the idea of becoming American remains desirable.

Lesson Plan III

Objectives:

Students will be able to: differentiate between mass-market and specialty 19th- and 20th-century textiles produced in Philadelphia; define and distinguish among industry-specific vocabulary (i.e., epaulet, napery, ephod, etc.); compare Philadelphia products to contemporary comparables, inspecting for workmanship; develop a rubric for textile quality.

Procedures:

Students will participate in a field trip to Philadelphia University's textile archive. During this two-hour experience, students will appraise various contemporary and century-old materials produced worldwide.

Of particular importance (and pursuant to the student's reading of George Packer's essay): students will measure the differences between homespun and Egyptian cotton.

As students survey materials, they will work in small groups to create quality standards for the various textiles they encounter. They will also work to compile a near-exhaustive set of textile vocabulary terms.

Materials:

30 blank rubrics, 30 clipboards (or white-board remnants), 30 textile terminology lists.

Remarks:

While the field trip entails a docent's tutelage, perfect-world preparation for this trip involves chaperone orientation. During this session, those adults in attendance will orient themselves to the same vocabulary that students will define during the trip.

Field trips to the Textile Archive are only permissible by special appointment through the Reference Librarian's Officeⁱⁱ.

Lesson Plan IV

Objectives:

Students will be able to: define and distinguish among the elements of a map; ask synthesis-level questions germane to geography, orientation, and cardinal direction; define cartography and its component processes; interpret a cultural critique; assemble a map-generated data table; make inferences regarding textile-manufacture locales as indicators of global-economic balance and health;

Procedures:

The culminating assignment asks students to develop a data-and-graph set encompassing the collection and cataloging of new fewer than 500 articles of clothing. This data set will allow students to make statistical deductions about loci of 21st-century textile production.

Once compiled, each collected data set will allow students to compare rates of textile production to other resource and wellness indicators compiled for students via the *InspireData*ⁱⁱⁱ fields. As a demonstration of research, students will create no fewer than five discrete graphs comparing; definitively, each graph must compare two or more fields.

Details for the finished project are explained in the Remarks section of this plan.

Materials:

George Packer's "How Susie Bayer's T-Shirt Ended Up On Yusuf Mama's Back," class set; *InspireData* software; *2007 CIA Factbook*.

Remarks:

The initial assignment explanation follows (n.b., to be used as an assignment sheet):

A 7th Grade Research and Mapping Assignment: to be completed in groups not exceeding five people wherein each group member will assume a given role; to be graded by the social studies teacher (n.b., in this case, Mr. Johnson, although if you happen to know another social studies teacher and you happen to want a second opinion, please let me know so that I might email my rubric to that teacher) and where the group's grade will be a measure of the completed product as a unified, cohesive thing, as well as the product's constituent parts.

The members of your group will complete a data-representation assignment pursuant to George Packer's article.

By **[Insert Date]** you must collect, interpret, and represent the following:

A data set of 500 articles of clothing. This is the primary reason for group work. You will need to survey as many people in your respective families as the process demands. Once you reach the 500-article threshold, you have enough data to complete your project.

Various graphic representations of your data, detailing the rates of clothing production in various countries. This will probably look like a map, although you are welcome to choose any graphic representation you prefer (i.e., pie chart, bar graph, pictograph, box-and-whisker plot, et cetera). **Please note:** in order to successfully complete this assignment, the student-researcher must create no fewer than five graphic representations of various data sets.

A summative essay, explaining your data analysis. This will be a typed essay that details your findings (n.b., not exceeding three typed pages).

All the best,

Mr. J

Bibliography

Works Cited

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Sipe, Peter. "Newjack: Teaching in A Failing Middle School," *Harvard Education Review*, Vol. 74, No. 3, Fall 2004.

Works Consulted

Juliani, Richard. *Priest, Parish, and People: Saving the Faith in Philadelphia's "Little Italy."* University of Notre Dame Press, 2006.

Licht, Walter. *Getting Work: Philadelphia, 1840-1950*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present (with Author's Post Script)*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

Appendix A: Suggested Readings Readings

“United States of Huck: An Introduction to *Huckleberry Finn*,” George Saunders

“The Insurgent’s Tale,” Tom Downey

The Tetherballs of Bougainville, Mark Leyner

Know What I Mean? Reflections on Hip-Hop, Michael Eric Dyson

Appendix B: Resources

Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce

200 South Broad Street

Suite 700□

Philadelphia, PA 19102

Gutman Library, Philadelphia University

School House Lane & Henry Avenue

Philadelphia, PA 19144-5497

Circulation Desk: 215-951-2840□

Reference Desk: 215-951-2848□

Media Services: 215-951-4648

University City Arts League

4226 Spruce St.

Philadelphia, PA 19104

Appendix C: CIA Factbook Data Tables

Please see accompanying spreadsheet.

ⁱ Data collected comes from the *2007 Central Intelligence Agency Factbook*.

ⁱⁱ Please see Appendix B: Resources for more information.

ⁱⁱⁱ Data collected comes from the *2007 Central Intelligence Agency Factbook*. Please see Appendix C: CIA Factbook Data Tables for more information.
