

“Why?” Because you have never accorded the importance necessary to the world that surrounds you. You've interpreted the world according to your convenience; you define the universe and the world as you have arranged it and you do not know that there is another reality. It doesn't conform to the idea you have of the world." (Reader I'm a He)

After two long years of hard work and dedication to a program filled with new thoughts, ways of understanding the world, and ultimately utilizing these ideas in my daily life, I have come to the end of my studies in the Master of Liberal Arts (MALS) program. When I first started to think about this portfolio I began by reflecting on the various paths that have lead me to this point, and how I have been able to get to this point in the MALS process. It is a daunting task to look over your old work with fresh eyes, but by doing this I was able to see the growth I have made and the substantial ways in which my life experiences and education have helped to expand my thoughts.

As I progressed through the MALS program I was able to see a noticeable shift in my work and how I was able to adapt my work to the changes. Looking at what I wanted to include in my final portfolio the most obvious theme that kept appearing was the concept of adaptability and change. One of the key things I came to realize in the MALS program is that change is inevitable and on a micro-level the direction we take now will steer the course our lives will take tomorrow; and on a macro-level the direction the world takes now will effect the course the world will take tomorrow. The papers I have selected for my portfolio show the direction that not only I have taken personally and educationally, but the direction the world has taken as well.

Throughout the course of this program I have had the opportunity to take classes that both challenged my comfort zone and broadened my understanding of what my "comfort zone" even means. It is always difficult to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to fully embrace another's thoughts, cultural restrictions, and lifestyle, but it is only

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by doing this that we gain any insight into the vast and complex world around us. The most significant piece of work that I have been able to understand this concept in was in my paper, "Beyond the Burqa." Being a woman from the "west" the very idea of covering up with a veil is not something I feel represents the version of femininity or equality that is part of my world perspective. In the western world women obsess over how they look when they have no clothes on to allow them to feel comfortable showing more skin. To women in the Islamic world the idea of showing more skin is just as foreign of a suggestion as wearing a burqa is to women in the west. In fact, if we fully examine what the veil means to those who wear it we would see that it is not considered a restriction by women in the Muslim world. In reality, the veil is a symbol of their country, religion and values just as much as wearing pants and tank tops are to us here in America.

What is most interesting to me about the dichotomy of the burqa for women is not that it is seen as a sign of repression by the women who are wearing it, but that it is seen as repressive by women who do not wear it. If the very people who are wearing it do not find it offensive, then why should anyone else? The view of the world is changing and so are the people that it is made up of. It is not just Europeans or Americans who have control of the world; politically and financially, but it is the people in these strange and unknown lands that are now considered the movers and the shakers in the world. If we here in America do not recognize and embrace this change in the world, we will quickly be seen as the ones who are strange and different.

Being able to reflect, adapt, and modify one's view of the world does not happen overnight. For most of the time while I was in the MALS program I was living in the

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Middle east, mainly Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. The time I spent submersed in such a historic, culturally diverse, and violent region has been instrumental in helping shape my understanding and perception of not only the region, but war, religion, and one's own personal choice. In my next selection for this portfolio, "The Iraq War" I was truly able to expand upon this new found appreciation for the Middle East and those who call it home. While writing the paper I realized that what I thought about war and what affect it has on others is a product of the environment I was raised in. I have never been an advocate for war or violence, but as I approached this particular paper, the Arab spring was in full bloom and suddenly the idea of liberating a nation from tyranny and radicalism became an ideal and not just an excuse for another war. As Marine Lieutenant General Walter Boomer once said, "There are things worth fighting for. A world in which brutality and lawlessness are allowed to go unchecked isn't the kind of world we're going to want to live in." (The liberation of Kuwait has begun)

As an American who was born into freedom and stability, I took it for granted that these fundamental rights are worth fighting for. My view has now developed into one of acceptance regarding the rights of others to be able to fight for their individual freedoms. If we only look at war as a purely violent act this does not give any opportunity to explore the idea that good changes could result from it. While I still do not advocate violence I have been able to see what our forefathers wanted and why they were so passionate about fighting for our freedoms. People in many nations around the world, not just in the Middle East, experience oppression on a daily basis and as the world becomes more and more interconnected the change that each one of these nations will have to embrace will become inevitable. What leaders of these nations must do as many others

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have throughout history is adapt, lead, or get out of the way, if they wish to survive in a globally challenging and changing world.

The choices nations make will affect the outcome of world order and stability; the same outcome could be argued about the choices we as individuals make. For society to be strong and fully developed it must keep in mind that the people are at the core and their well-being is at the heart of the nation's strength. The solidarity of a nation affects its citizens on a political, individual, and social level. In my work "Rachinda," I was able to understand this phenomenon and begin to develop a sense to what extent the world around us affects who we are and who we will become. As a middle class American, born in the 20th century, I have always had the benefit of stability in both my home and country; while Rachida, the story of a young woman, on the other hand, grew up in a culture of violence and fear. In the movie, Rachida was able to separate the external world of terror from her personal life of peace and stability. It wasn't until she became a victim of the violence around her that her worldview was altered. The film was able to show us that society does not define us or put limitations on us, but it is the limitations we put on ourselves that ultimately hold us back. In all areas of life we must be willing to change and expand who we are or we will suffer under the hands of those who we let decide our path for us.

In my next selection for this project I have chosen a paper from my work in *The Contemporary World* with Professor Ann Saab. In this course I was able to see the clear and discernible choices the world has made in the last twenty years and how they have shaped what it is today. In this portfolio I hope to show that change is not just inevitable and necessary for the individual, but culturally and globally as well. In my paper "The

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Attack,” based on my work on the novel, *The Attack*, I was able to take a look into the world of suicide bombers with a sense of sympathy and clarity that I have never afforded this group of individuals. Our world today can only be seen as a combination of the past, present, and future. The space and time we call home is simply a collaboration of the old and new, and the problems of today are just rehashed versions of yesterdays. History is no longer confined to those before us, but is part of the now, and without a full understanding and reflection of the past, real and lasting change cannot be achieved. “Every Jew in Palestine is a bit of an Arab, and no Arab in Israel can deny that he’s a little Jewish”. I could not agree more. So, why the hate between relatives? It’s because we haven’t learned much from the prophets and hardly anything about the elementary rules of life.” (Khadra, 242) The problems that plague the world today are not easy or as black and white as many of us would like to think.

For any change to be embraced and become a reflection of it’s’ society it must also be a reflection of the government of that society and their place in the world. In the current political climate, the United States is a prime example of one such nation that needs to reevaluate its place in the world and embrace the change that this may bring. During my MALS studies, I was able to see this change by studying the growing political and economic divide in power throughout the world. The U.S. has drastically fallen behind and must embrace this new global economic power struggle in order to survive. As Charles Darwin once famously quoted, "In the struggle for survival, the fittest win out at the expense of their rivals because they succeed in adapting themselves best to their environment" (Charles Darwin).

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Over the past 20 years as our world has changed to a more multi-faceted, multi-cultural place the work I have selected for this portion of the portfolio shows exactly this phenomenon. In my group project on the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), we can see this change in action and each one of these nations independently can be seen as up-and-coming powerhouses; financially, politically, and militarily, but when they work together as one they are unstoppable. Each one of the BRICS nations has been able to adapt their strategies in order to work and support each other. With the BRICS nations now working as one they have created a new force to be reckoned with as well as setting the stage to become a newly emerging “superpower.” The threat of another country taking "our" place as a world powerhouse is terrifying to many people in the United States and unfortunately if the United States does not show their willingness to adapt, as Darwin pointed out, the landscape of power in the world will drastically change. The United States faces a common problem that most people will encounter at one point in their lives and that is being stuck in what we know and feel comfortable with.

When looking at the “changing of the guard” in reference to “superpowers” and nation building, it becomes clear that this phase will be just another part of history. Each time in history there have been revolutions; these revolutions have determined the direction the world will take. Some of these paths have lead to changes that are good and benefit all, while others clearly were designed to benefit the few. The path that large industrial nations have taken to get to the point they are at today have been nothing short of colonialism and a pseudo “slave and master” relationship aimed at benefitting the few. Countries like England, France, and Spain all at one point in time had vast empires that

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consumed other nation's culture, religion, and land. Of course, over time, colonialism gave way to empire building, and in the present, we refer to this as nation building. In our modern era other countries do not try to publically control the governments or land of others, but instead use trade, political manipulation, and money to motivate ideas in one direction or another.

Since the end of colonial rule in Central and South America, these nations have been left to fend for themselves and the United States has skillfully swapped in to fill the void left from imperial rule. The United States has taken this opportunity to buy and convince its way into power in the region. In my writing on Plan Columbia, "Who are the real terrorist," I explore this idea and we begin to see just how the United States has used its power to influence the politics and financial stability of the region. If the leaders of the United States choose to learn from its own history in order to create positive change in the region they might have realized that the strategy of dictatorship and colonialism has and probably never will be effective for long-term stability. The United States has unfortunately not used its powers in the region to create positive change and stability, but instead has created a collective feeling of unified hatred and distrust towards its policies and its people. The Central and South American region as a whole is turning away from American influence and changing the course of their history to one that includes independence and self-sustainability, as we have already seen with the example of Brazil and the BRICS nations. The lack of willingness to accept this newfound power and independence by the United States has created a sphere of distrust and weakening influence the United States now has in the region. With President Hugo Chavez passing in Venezuelan, a change is occurring once again in the region and if the United States

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wants to maintain any influence and power in the region they need to reevaluate their game plan. As other nations in the region inevitable change leadership, the major struggle the United States will face is being able to adapt and change its perspective and views as the region does.

My final portfolio submission coincidentally comes from my final course in the MALS program. This was a science-based course focusing on biology and the spread of disease. As I began thinking about this portfolio I would have never imagined that my biology project on the Dengue Virus would be the perfect culmination of point and position to end this portfolio by truly summing up the entire point of what change and adaptability means. In each of the papers I have included up in my portfolio up to now have focused on change and adaptability in either the individual or in a nation as a whole. After studying the Dengue Virus the main point I walked away with was that no matter what happens this small organism has been able to adapt and survive better then any country, superpower, or individual that has ever existed. We as people should take the example the Dengue Virus has given us and be more like it and just keep adapting and coming back stronger and more determined each time we hit a stall in life and use that determination to be able to adapt to any surroundings. It is this determination and steadfastness that we humans need to learn and this microscopic organism can clearly teach us.

While I reflect on the lessons I have learned over the past two years I know the person I am today is due not only to my life experiences, but is clearly due to the courses I have taken in the MALS program. This program requires everyone who embarks on it to constantly reopen their eyes and take the world on with a new perspective and a new

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understanding of it. If we are to succeed and be as innovative and relevant today as our predecessors were 100 years ago we need to take on the challenge of constantly adapting and changing to fit our surroundings. As humans, our thoughts and opinions are always evolving due to the way we see the world and what part of the world we are in. As an individual, I am no different in the way I have developed my thoughts and feelings are a direct reflection of that skewed lens. The MALS program has made me realize that with each new perspective I have learned to continue to develop, but more importantly, will force me to constantly reevaluate my position and understanding of the world in order to remain relevant and become a vital part of whatever part of the world I might find myself in.