

Shedding the Professional Gaze: Lessons from Faculty Development in Jamaica

A. Rafik Mohamed, Ph.D.
California State University, San Bernardino

Abstract

In January 2016, I co-organized a Jamaica cultural immersion and faculty development trip in which ten professors from two Southern California universities participated. Our objective during the week-long program was to explore opportunities for faculty to incorporate community immersion and engagement into existing international programs, and to help conceptualize new international study abroad programs featuring a community engagement component. A growing body of literature has demonstrated the importance of cultural immersion and community engagement experiences in advancing critical thinking and global competencies in students,¹ but fewer papers have shifted the lens to faculty as they are first introduced to conditions similar to those of students studying abroad. This descriptive paper focuses on the Jamaica trip as a backdrop to discuss some of the challenges and opportunities for faculty leading community engaged study abroad programs.

Keywords: Cultural immersion; cultural competence; deficit perspective; faculty development; Jamaica; professorial gaze; privilege; study abroad

Close both eyes, see with the other one. Then we are no longer saddled by the burden of our persistent judgments, our ceaseless withholding, our constant exclusion. Our sphere has widened and we find ourselves quite unexpectedly in a new expansive location, in a place of Endless Acceptance and Infinite Love.

- Gregory Boyle

Professors in Paradise

In a recent keynote address delivered at the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Physicist Dr. Jim Gates² said of academic inquiry, “You can’t just sit in a room and figure it out.” Consistent with his assertion, a growing body of literature has highlighted the transformation of the traditional college classroom from one existing solely within four walls, in which students are merely “the recipients of knowledge,” to a more engaged learning environment where students are increasingly “sent outside” to “find knowledge” (Sánchez-López, 2013). Toward this end, numerous pedagogical articles have emphasized the importance of international cultural immersion and community engagement experiences in encouraging students to be active participants in the learning process and in advancing student critical thinking and global competency (Lessor et al, 1997). Less frequently has the lens been turned on faculty as they are asked to lead students down this evolving road of intellectual exploration, particularly in cases where they, too, are still learning the social landscape of their host country.

Instead, the general presumption seems that the broad training faculty members receive as teachers also prepares them to direct students in this shift to engaging with learning environments abroad.

In January of 2016, I was invited to serve as the co-facilitator and organizer of a cultural immersion and faculty development trip to Jamaica. The invitation stemmed from the success³ of an interdisciplinary Jamaica study abroad program that I, along with a colleague who specializes in tying curriculum to community engagement, have directed for the past eleven years. In total, ten professors from two Southern California universities took part in the trip. Program organizers deliberately sought involvement from faculty representing a diverse cross-section of disciplinary backgrounds. Accordingly, those ultimately selected for participation were professors of Anthropology, Business, Communication Studies, Education, English, International Relations, and Mathematics. They spanned the gamut of academic ranks from a post-doctoral fellow to full professors. Several, but certainly not the majority, had previously served as faculty members in larger multi-course study abroad programs. Some, but again not the majority, had conducted research or field work in international settings. A few of the faculty members had also incorporated community engagement components into courses at their home institutions. But none of the participants had experience directing or teaching in small, faculty-led study abroad programs, and none had experience blending study abroad curriculum with community immersion.

Our primary objective during this week-long program was to take advantage of our institution's established footing in Jamaica to explore opportunities for faculty to incorporate immersion and community engagement into existing international programs, and to facilitate the conceptualization of new study abroad programs with meaningful community engagement components. By experiencing how we constructed our program in Jamaica, and collectively drawing from the new cadre of contributors' individual academic and international experiences, we hoped that participating faculty would find this exercise generative for exploring ways to effectively, intentionally, and meaningfully connect and co-create with community internationally and at home.

As an incentive for involvement and to mitigate financial anxieties that may detract from fully engaging with the program, professor participation was heavily subsidized by the faculty members' home institutions.⁴ Airfare, lodging, ground transportation in Jamaica, fees associated with group activities, gratuities, and some meal expenses were covered by the program. In an effort to give faculty members a sense of our students' experience while abroad, we constructed a mini-curriculum and daily activity schedule that approximated "a week in the life" of a Jamaica study abroad student. Again, faculty participants represented a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, none had experience leading studies abroad, and only a handful had incorporated community engagement into their U.S. based courses.⁵ Therefore, as is the case with our student participants, the curriculum we designed began with an exploration of "place" by offering historical and cultural context for their brief sojourn to Jamaica.⁶ We also included literature for

discussion on faculty-led study abroad programs and community engagement in international settings.⁷ Daily “lunch and learn” seminars were held as a forum to discuss specific readings and, more generally, to consider emerging questions about program development in international settings. Beyond that, we also incorporated formal and informal reflection opportunities so that participants might collectively consider and process their experiences and encounters in Jamaica. A number of co-curricular and extracurricular excursions that mirrored or approximated some of the activities our students undertake in the summer program were built in. Examples of these included visits to our community partner sites⁸, a tour of a plantation great house⁹, a “beach-to-bush” hike highlighting local history and geographical features, and an artisans’ workshop hosted by Jamaican craftsmen and craftswomen.

Finally, we developed this faculty experience with an awareness that study abroad programs can often pose two significant challenges to student learning. First, they can tend to function more as extensions of host institutions in which students exist principally in an American bubble. Or, they can trend toward rapidly moving sight-seeing opportunities with limited substantive connection to the place from which students (and faculty) should ostensibly be gaining knowledge. The latter is particularly true for short-term study abroad experiences where relationship-building with local community members can be more challenging. It was our ultimate hope that involvement in our Jamaica faculty program might encourage participants to more deeply consider studies abroad as an opportunity to avoid these pitfalls by more consciously and purposively connecting the programs they were designing with community and place. Based on formal and informal faculty feedback, I think this objective was achieved to some degree. Inadvertently, our program also proved to be an opportunity to consider how faculty can respond to being “strangers in a strange land” and to some of the other challenges they may face in shedding what I refer to as their “professorial gaze.” I will return to that theme after a brief overview of the undergraduate Jamaica study abroad program that served as the foundation for this faculty development experience.

Six Weeks in Mexico

Six weeks in Mexico changed my personal and professional life for the better. In the summer of 2003, I served as a faculty member for a large study abroad program in Guadalajara, Mexico. Prior to this experience, I had traveled abroad, but not extensively. And in these previous travels, my status was either solely as a tourist or principally as a family member visiting relatives in Canada, the Caribbean, or South America. As an undergraduate at a private institution with a significant international student population and cadre of faculty members whose research focused on international relations, I had seen countless advertisements for opportunities to study abroad. But, I never considered what traveling abroad in an academic context would add to my “knapsack of knowledge,” and the naively perceived disincentives of being in a strange place surrounded by strange people effectively dissuaded me from taking advantage of one of these opportunities.

In the fall of 2002, at one of my previous universities, however, I was asked to apply as faculty for a large six-week summer study abroad program in Mexico. For context, I had only been to Mexico (Tijuana) as a teenager during a family trip to California; the last time I had attempted to meaningfully speak Spanish was in the eleventh grade; and in spite of having lived and worked in Southern California for more than ten years at that point, I knew embarrassingly little about our neighbor to the South. But, for reasons I'm still not quite clear on, as I am typically not that adventurous, I accepted the offer to get out of my comfort zone and was invited to participate in the program.

Guadalajara is not a tourist town, at least not in the conventional sense. Therefore, because of my physical appearance and feeble attempts to get about in Spanish, I was conspicuously non-native. Guadalajara is not (nor should it be) a city where one can reliably get by in English. Most of the cab drivers I encountered only spoke a few words of English. Spanish was the only language spoken among the employees at the Gold's Gym where I sought to negotiate a six-week membership. The cafeteria staff at our Mexican sister campus where classes were held were much more comfortable conversing in their native language. The gentleman who owned the little market near my hotel only spoke Spanish, and so on. While I found attempting to navigate daily encounters and transactions in another language in which I was nowhere near proficient both challenging and exhausting, for reasons too lengthy to go into in this paper, more than anything else I found the discomfort to be incredibly rewarding and enriching. Overall, I had a wonderful experience teaching and learning in Mexico, and I was determined to put myself in that strange and uncomfortable position again. Unfortunately, my gateway to Mexico had closed temporarily as, in the interest of curricular variety and faculty rotation, it would be another two years before I would be eligible to teach in the Guadalajara program again.

Nonetheless, I was still deeply influenced by my time teaching in Mexico and didn't want to lose the freshness of that impact by waiting several years before teaching abroad again. Beyond that, there were a few aspects of the Guadalajara program that I felt fell short of maximizing the benefits of studies abroad, particularly in regard to community engagement and connecting curriculum to place. Specifically, and succinctly: faculty teaching in the Mexico program were not asked to tailor their course content to Mexico or Latin America and, at the program level, there was not any meaningful structure involving interaction and co-learning with members of the local community.¹⁰ Essentially, if they chose, both students and faculty could exist in a very insular American bubble without being encouraged to learn much about the culture or people of Mexico's fourth largest city.

With these interests and concerns in mind, I developed and proposed a three-week summer study abroad program in Jamaica. I chose Jamaica for a variety of reasons, including personal ancestral ties to the Caribbean nation. My maternal grandmother was an immigrant to the U.S. from Jamaica¹¹ and I had visited Jamaica on several occasions as a tourist; once, during a hiatus from graduate school, I spent ten days in there as a member of the production staff for a large music festival. But, more significant than my family ties, I felt Jamaica was a place where I

thought could meaningfully put on display for students what I've come to describe as the "paradox of paradise."¹² In spite of some faculty and administrative skepticism about the authenticity of a study abroad program in the Caribbean, the administration approved the program, and we accepted the first cohort of 17 students in 2006. The program has continued every year since, averaging from 20-25 students per summer and featuring coursework in Sociology, Marine Science, English, Communication, Philosophy, and Theater.¹³

A Small Place – Looking Beyond Paradise

The philosophical foundations of the undergraduate Jamaica program are rooted in the assumption that the independent island nations making up the Caribbean help form a comprehensive understanding of modern global societies, the difficulties faced by the majority of post-colonial nations in the developing world, and the privileges associated with citizenship in the post-industrial "first world." Through an interdisciplinary curriculum and a required community engagement component involving formal partnership with local community agencies, the Jamaica program offers undergraduate students¹⁴ an overview of Caribbean society and culture from the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the present. The program further encourages students to step away from their "first-world" gaze and consider the impact of European colonization from the perspective of the colonized and those forced into service or labor. Through meaningful interaction with Jamaican community members, students experience the day-to-day lives of people who live and work in a region with an identity that is inextricably tied to its colonial past and a contemporary economic dependence upon American and European tourism and trade. The program also seeks to have student participants develop an appreciation for the intrinsic value of Caribbean societies and to have our American students use the filter of Jamaican culture as an opportunity to critically evaluate their own racial, ethnic, gendered, national, and socioeconomic selves.

Jamaicans often refer to their homeland as "the land of contradictions." For the visitor on island holiday, Jamaica is presented as an idyllic tropical paradise. Visitors are sold a cultural fiction (or, at best, a partial truth) devoid of depth or complexity and rooted in "no problem" and "ya mon" stereotypes. But for many natives, Jamaica can feel like an inescapable pen characterized by poverty, corruption, crime, and an overall absence of self-determination. In her book *A Small Place*,¹⁵ author Jamaica Kincaid writes of her similarly-situated homeland, Antigua: "It is as if, then, the beauty – the beauty of the sea, the land, the air, the trees, the market, the people, the sounds they make – were a prison, and as if everything and everybody inside it were locked in..." (Kincaid, 1988, p. 79). This is not to say that Jamaicans don't love their country and appreciate its beauty; the Jamaicans that we have come to know over the years are deeply proud of their homeland and heritage. But they are equally aware of the challenges their country faces and the role that their colonial past has played in shaping their present-day reality.

In a similar challenge as is offered by the approach taken with our students, we asked the participants in our faculty development program to consider the contradictions captured by this juxtaposition between the images of Jamaica put forward by the Jamaica Tourist Board and the vastly different economic and social conditions experienced by everyday Jamaicans. In doing so, through guided readings and semi-structured conversation, we asked faculty participants to open their minds to different perspectives and question the centrality of their own beliefs and assumptions about others. We did this with the understanding that in spite of “knowing better” and being exposed through formal educational training to relativist perspectives, professors can be just as inclined as their students to embody implicit biases, to get caught in restrictive ways of thinking, and to presume the supremacy of their specific disciplinary and cultural perspectives.

As a tool to advance this exercise in self-interrogation, we drew upon the complementary metaphors of “sunglasses” and “blindspots.” Beyond physically symbolizing the sunglasses-donning tourist on holiday, metaphorically, sunglasses refer to the deliberate shading of what is otherwise in plain sight and that which allows us to shift our gaze from realities that are inconsistent with our purpose for visiting certain places. These disagreeing or contrasting truths are captured in Suzanne Gauch’s (2002) discussion of “blind spots,” in which she characterizes travel agencies and similar outfits charged with promoting tourism as intentionally complicit in marketing an incomplete image of the Caribbean to tourists, indulging the supremacy of the visitor’s perspectives while simultaneously diminishing the viewpoints of local denizens. Since such “convenient ignorance” is often compatible with why people travel to exotic destinations in the first place, so that, rather than question our gaze, we – the travelers – often readily accept the blind spots and overlook what is otherwise hidden in plain sight.

Jamaican music provides an excellent example of this tendency of the tourist-consumer. Spoken underneath reggae music’s irrepressible rhythms, to which so many tourists gleefully dance and relax, are often lyrics embodying suffering, dissonance, and an insistence that Jamaica be recognized as a “place” rather than a “space.”¹⁶ Like the overlooked messages embedded in the island’s signature sound, visitors to Jamaica, regardless of the capacity in which they travel (e.g. conventional tourists, missionaries, students, or professors), often don’t see these blind spots because they are not in our interest to see them, they don’t jibe with why we are in that particular *place*, or the blind spots don’t exist within the preexisting frameworks of our ideological structure and what we (particularly as scholars) are trained to value. In short, our limited gaze does not permit us to see things that are otherwise obvious, particularly to those people who have no choice but to contend with them as part of their everyday reality.

Interrogating Yourself & the Paradox of the Professorial Gaze

Philosopher-author Cornel West once asked, “What happens when you interrogate yourself? What happens when you begin calling into question your tacit assumptions and unarticulated presuppositions and begin then to become a different kind of person?” (West,

2008). One of the main challenges with this sort of catechization is the inherent vulnerability it commands and the accompanying requisite quiescence of “gaze” – the manner in which we look at things,¹⁷ and the wealth of assumptions that are implicitly embedded in our perspective based on dominant statuses that we occupy. Paraphrasing Clare O’Farrell in her examination of Michel Foucault and the concept of “gaze,” both the object of knowledge and *the knower* are constructed or shaped by their statuses and the environments that nurtured their belief systems. As an example, in their examination of “the medical gaze” and the wealth of presuppositions that doctors make almost reflexively, Benjamin Gray and Richard Gunderman¹⁸ offer this analogy:

For a fish, one of the most difficult things to notice is the fact that it spends every moment of every day in water. Water is such a ubiquitous and ever-present feature of its experience that it goes through its days unaware of this utterly pervasive feature of its daily life. Something similar can happen to human beings, for whom constant features of daily experience can prove difficult to recognize and therefore difficult to understand with any degree of depth. (Gray and Gunderman, 2016, p. 774)

Like the fish above, faculty submerged in the characteristic physical structure of universities and ubiquitous social circumstances that comprise the fabric of daily university life become our (professor's) “water” and create what might rightly be called a “professorial gaze.” This manner of looking at things can be advantageous as it empowers the professor as the expert in a given field and instills in students and others the confidence to accept what this professor says as true, or at least worth considering. Indeed, that trust based on status is one of the key cornerstones of any teacher-student relationship. But, the professorial gaze can also be a hindrance in a number of ways. For example, in designating the professor as the one to be listened to, and positioning the student solely as “the recipient of knowledge,” it establishes and reinforces the pedagogical problem presented at the beginning of this paper. Positioning professors as experts further gives faculty the illusion that we have little to learn from laypeople and often creates encounters in which all others exist as passive objects of study or as people who have something to be “taught.”¹⁹ Ultimately, our positioning as “scholars” and “experts” encourages us to interrogate others, but not ourselves.

The repetitious playing out of this status exchange can also have the macro-level effect of elevating the status of certain ideological positions in the academy while diminishing the social position of others. A good example of this broader application of the professorial gaze can be seen in academic and non-academic attitudes toward international educational opportunities, specifically the tendency to insist upon the supremacy of studies abroad in Europe. It is generally a presumptive given that sending students to Western European nations is inherently worthwhile in a learning sense, building on the American academy’s assumption that there is intrinsic knowledge to be gained from spending time in European countries. In contrast, the attitude

toward less-developed and non-Western nations is often characterized by a “deficit perspective” rooted in an explicit or implicit premise that some cultural groups lack the sophistication or ability to advance just because of their cultural background (Silverman, 2011, p. 446). We mistake difference for deficit, approach these cultures “based on our perceptions of their weaknesses rather than their strengths” (Gorski, 2011, p. 152), and weaken ~~deteriorate~~ expectations of reciprocal learning for faculty and students. As a consequence, student experiences in developing and less-developed nations often have to have a community service or other “helping” component to be perceived as legitimate exhaustions of student and faculty time and resources. This not intended as a formal critique of these traditional approaches to studies abroad. Rather, it is a pointing-out of this dominant academic gaze and a suggestion that, even absent a “helping” piece, there is real knowledge to be gained by professors and students from the perspectives of those who hold comparatively subordinate positions and who call *home* the places that our gaze has conditioned us to view from the deficit perspective as “spaces.” As West again offers, “It takes courage to interrogate yourself. It takes courage to look in the mirror and see past your reflection to who you really are when you take off the mask, when you’re not performing the same old routines and social roles” (West, 2009, p. 8).

Returning to the Jamaica program, we invite our students to take on this challenge by critically considering themselves as visitors in Jamaica. Using Kincaid’s text and other vehicles, we present them with (but don’t accuse them of, or ask them to hold or own) an archetype of the “The Ugly American” similar to that described by Karen Smith Rotabi:

In lesser developed nations, our material wealth makes us particularly vulnerable to being out of touch with the realities of poor peoples, where we may appear lacking in compassion, arrogant and ego-centric. Alternatively, as Americans studying abroad, we may over-compensate by becoming paternalistic and offering our resources or advice as “experts,” potentially alienating colleagues and the communities from whom we seek to learn. (Rotabi et al., 2006, p. 452)

We extended the same invitation to the faculty who participated in our January program, asking them to consider the trip as an opportunity to self-interrogate and break through the professorial gaze. But, it was precisely this challenge of gaze-suspension that some (but certainly not all) of our participants seemed to have the greatest difficulty with. In spite of the fact that all participants had an expressed interest in studies abroad and international scholarship, and two were raised abroad (albeit in countries with European colonial legacies of their own to wrestle with), many still had a hard time taking their “sunglasses” off and looking beyond their culturally constructed blind spots.

Most assuredly, this resistance was not for lack of good intentions on their part, or even an inability to recognize the influence or bias of their gaze. But, being “confronted with radically different moralities and frameworks of meaning”²⁰ imposes a different truth from that shaped by

their formal training and implicitly embedded assumptions, and exposes the interplay between “the potential and limits of colonised thinking” (Mika & Stewart, 2016, p. 300). This is in contrast to what we have observed with our student participants, who often seem to have an easier time altering their gaze, seeing with “the other eye,” and recognizing culturally constructed blind spots. I speculate that this is, in part, because students are far less invested in their gaze than professors are. After all, in a way analogous to how entitlement was learned by elite boarding school students in Shamus Khan’s book *Privilege*, much of what we do as professors – intentionally or unintentionally – has the effect of teaching us to embody a privilege that is produced through years of academic training. Furthermore, the idea of this privilege is reinforced over time through the social structures and networks that exist in the academy. Setting aside that status to accept that a “layperson” – someone who hasn’t gone through a similar gauntlet of academic study and professional vetting by the academy – may be a keeper of knowledge as, if not more, valuable than what one has to offer can be daunting to one’s professorial identity.

In the particular case of our Jamaica faculty program, several participants experienced and expressed difficulty accepting things like gendered social spaces or “island time” as constructs to be understood in their context rather than judged. For example, casual nighttime social settings in Jamaica are dominated by young men, and women are conspicuously absent. This presented a challenge for some of our faculty participants, who presumed that this was a function of patriarchy and gender exclusion rather than something characteristic of other social arrangements and economic conditions. Regarding “island time,” for a host of social and practical reasons, punctuality is not always at a premium in Jamaica, which many visitors to the island, including some of our faculty participants, interpreted as inconsiderate or irresponsible behavior rather than behavior indicative of other cultural and social factors.

Relatedly, comments and postures offered by some faculty members showed a reluctance to consider seriously Jamaica as a place that they could learn from. Instead, through what’s known as the deficit model lens, they saw Jamaica as a space that needed to be “fixed.” Even when asked to “interrogate themselves,” the more recalcitrant seemed content with an ethnocentric gaze and intent on treating the Jamaica opportunity as a bit of a sightseeing excursion, safari, or otherwise some mission of self-service, one in which their gaze remained steadfastly “superior.”

Final Thoughts

As mentioned at the outset, this is not intended to be a comprehensive reporting in any sense. Rather, it is a snapshot of one specific faculty’s immersion experience. But I do think it offers some possible insights into how future programs like this might be constructed, and it identifies some important questions for faculty members to ask of themselves before, during, and after going abroad. In short, shedding the professorial gaze is challenging because it asks for us to suspend an identity that has come to define us professionally and socially. But it is a challenge

worth intentionally encouraging and planning for when preparing faculty excursions abroad. Ultimately, there is tremendous value to be gained from this shifting of gaze and from working to interrogate ourselves as faculty and question our “tacit assumptions and unarticulated presuppositions” (West, 2008).

Jamaica, like most places, is complex. But its complexity is too readily overshadowed by its beauty, its rhythms, and its common characterization as “paradise.” Particularly as a study abroad destination, it's a locus exposing how deep tourist tendencies can run, inviting even us educated folks to hide behind touristy sunglasses, relegating Jamaica to being a *space* for vacationers and the gazes that accompany that often-distasteful posture, rather than positioning it as a *place* that is culturally distinct, relevant, and someone else's home. Because taking off our sunglasses is inconvenient, makes us uncomfortable, or otherwise challenges our preferred gaze, implicit biases, and privileged desires to exoticize the “other,” like ordinary tourists. Faculty participants in studies abroad may just as willingly adopt a deficit perspective and reduce Jamaicans and others similarly positioned to a “subordinate and inferior class of beings” (Dred Scott v. Sandford, 1856). In doing so, as Jamaica Kincaid suggested of native Antiguan's common understanding of tourists, we only reinforce the perception that we're “human rubbish,” when, in fact, the privilege implicit in our gaze should move us to remove our sunglasses and try as best we can to see the blind spots.

References

- Dred Scott v. Sandford. (1856). 60 US 393.
- Gauch, S. (2002). A small place: Some perspectives on the ordinary.” *Callaloo*, 25(3), 910-919.
- Gibson, A., & Sands, C. (2011). Intellectual engagement abroad: What is a critic to do? [with Response]. *International Journal*, 67(1), 241-253.
- Gorski, P. (2011). Unlearning deficit ideology and the scornful gaze: Thoughts on authenticating the class discourse in education. *Counterpoints*, 402, 152-173.
- Gray, B., & Gunderman, R. (2016). Lessons of history: The medical gaze. *Academic Radiology*, 23 (6), 774-776.
- Hawthorn, K. (2013). Michel Foucault and the examining gaze. <https://kirstyahawthorn.wordpress.com/sociology-2/>
- Kincaid, J. (1988). *A small place*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.
- Lessor, R., Reeves, M., & Andrade, E. (1997). Interdisciplinary team teaching on sustainable development in Costa Rica. *Teaching Sociology*, 25(2), 134-149.
- Mika, C. & Stewart, G. (2016). Maori in the kingdom of the gaze: Subjects or critics?” *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 48(3), 300-312.
- O'Farrell, C. (2005). *Michel Foucault*, London: SAGE.
- Rotabi, K., Gammonley, D., & Gamble, D. (2006). Ethical guidelines for study abroad: Can we transform ugly Americans into engaged global citizens? *The British Journal of Social Work*, 36(3), 451-465.

Sánchez-López, L. (2013). Service-learning course design for languages for specific purposes programs. *Hispania*, 96 (2), 383-396.

Silverman, S. (2011). Cultural deficit perspective." *Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development*, 446-447.

West, C. (Featured in) Producer, Silva Basmajian (Producer), & Director, Astra Taylor (Director). (2008). *Examined Life* [Motion Picture]. United States: Zeitgeist Films (2008).

West, C. (2009). *Hope on a tightrope: Words and wisdom*. Carlsbad, California: Smiley Books.

About the Author

Dr. A. Rafik Mohamed is Dean of Social & Behavioral Sciences and Professor of Sociology at California State University, San Bernardino. He has been involved in international education for nearly fifteen years, and has published articles and presented conference papers on teaching and faculty development abroad. Dr. Mohamed has served as the director for an interdisciplinary study abroad program in Jamaica since 2006. His other research focuses on issues of racial identity and socioeconomic inequality in the United States, domestic drug policy, and sports sociology.

¹ College educators and administrators have increasingly realized the need to prepare students for citizenship in a global society (Lessor et al., 1997).

² Dr. Sylvester James (Jim) Gates serves as University System of Maryland Regents Professor, Center for String and Particle Theory Director, Distinguished University Professor, John S. Toll Professor of Physics, University of Maryland.

³ It should be noted at the outset that our "success" in incorporating community engagement in the Jamaica program has been the result of years of trial and error, and it was helped along by the good fortune of recruiting excellent and outgoing students in the program's early years who bought into the idea of traveling differently.

⁴ Over the years, we have found that in-country finances provide a significant source of anxiety for some students and distract from their ability to fully engage in their experience abroad.

⁵ Some of the faculty participants had a relatable experiences or sets of expertise. For example, one participant had conducted extensive research in Sub-Saharan Africa; another specialized in International Relations; another's academic focus was on African American and Caribbean literature. But, with the exception of the secondary emphasis on Caribbean literature mentioned above, none of the participants had any meaningful exposure to Caribbean societies, especially in regard to Caribbean history and culture, and the broader Caribbean as a living manifestation of European colonization and contemporary geopolitics.

⁶ Toward this end, we asked faculty participants to read:

- *A Small Place*, by Jamaica Kincaid
- "A Small Place: Some Perspectives on the Ordinary," by Suzanne Gauch
- "To Hell with Good Intentions," by Ivan Illich.
- "Kinky Hair Blues," by Una Marson (a short poem)
- "To Da-Duh, in Memoriam," by Paule Marshall (a short story)
- "Sugarcane as History in Paule Marshall's "To Da-Duh, in Memoriam," by Martin Japtok
- "To Feel a Just Indignation," by Adam Hochschild

⁷ Toward this goal, we asked faculty participants to read:

- "Multidisciplinary Learning: Interdisciplinary Teaching and Community Service-Learning in Jamaica," by A. Rafik Mohamed, John Loggins, and Carlton D. Floyd.

-
- “Interdisciplinary Team Teaching on Sustainable Development in Costa Rica,” by Roberta Lessor, Margaret Reeves, and Enrique Andrade.

⁸ We have established formal partnerships with a local preschool, a primary school, and a nearby residential facility for abused and at-risk girls. Our summer students have the option working with site coordinators at these facilities on collaborative educational projects. We scheduled visits to these partner sites for our January faculty participants which, at times, became highly interactive.

⁹ Faculty members toured the Greenwood Great House, a sugar plantation estate completed by slave laborers in 1800 under the oversight of Edward Barrett (Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s father) and his brother Richard Barrett. The great house was part of a massive estate on Jamaica’s north coast near the port city of Falmouth, and was used by the Barretts primarily for entertainment. For context, faculty were asked to read a chapter from *Bury the Chains* in which Adam Hochschild describes the few physical structures that form the archeological skeleton of the plantation societies that dominated the Caribbean from the 16th through 19th centuries. In these descriptions, Hochschild also asks the reader to consider with whom or what visitors to the great houses are asked to identify with. In all cases, conspicuously marginalized or altogether absent are narratives focused on the bondsmen and bondswomen who made up the vast majority of these societies and whose forced labor provided the massive wealth that the Barretts and countless others enjoyed.

¹⁰ The chief criterion for course adoption in the program was potential student interest, and I was invited to teach two of our major’s more popular courses – Race & Ethnicity and Law & Society. While I chose to redesign my curriculum to focus more on issues of Latino-American identity and Latinos and the law, the program director made it clear that this was not a requirement. Insofar as community engagement was concerned, students and faculty could opt to live with host families in some of Guadalajara’s more prosperous neighborhoods. Some students and a handful of faculty members took advantage of this opportunity. But, beyond this residential option and an optional weekly community-service trip to a local orphanage, there were no structured opportunities to engage with the local community.

¹¹ My grandmother was born and initially raised in Jamaica. She immigrated to the United States at the age of 10 but maintained close ties with her Jamaican family and routinely hosted Jamaican relatives in her suburban Washington, D.C. home.

¹² The specific contradictions we sought to highlight through our undergraduate study abroad program were those revolving around the paradoxes of living in “paradise,” particularly as they relate to relationships between the Jamaican people and the tourism industry that has become the island’s post-colonial hallmark. Aesthetically, most of the island appears to be a true tropical paradise. But, there are “blind spots” that lie just out of sight of heavily traveled tourist pathways and we reasoned that it would be a powerful learning tool to have students experience on a daily basis the juxtaposition of north coast resort opulence with the dire poverty that exists directly outside the resort gates quite literally across the street on what Jamaicans call “the gully side.” Finally, through this combination of competing existences, we wanted our students to contemplate how life for real Jamaicans differs from the “no problem” and “irie” Jamaican stereotypes and tourist frivolity promoted by the Jamaican travel industry in the United States and Europe.

¹³ Typically, there are two courses available for students during the three week program.

¹⁴ For five of our eleven years, a cohort of Educational Counseling graduate students have also participated in the Jamaica program. However, the primary emphasis has been on undergraduate students.

¹⁵ *A Small Place* is one of the foundational texts for our Jamaica program. The book is an extended essay of creative nonfiction that serves as an indictment of the “ugly tourist” who travels to the Caribbean in hopes of escaping the banality and boredom of their own lives without taking time to consider the feelings and perspectives of the “natives.” Simultaneously, Kincaid calls out the former colonial subjects (i.e. natives) whose inability to intellectually decolonize themselves results in a continued reification of colonial traditions and their former colonial masters. In an attempt to quickly heighten awareness of their status as tourists, our students are required to read *A Small Place* immediately prior to arriving in Jamaica.

¹⁶ This is an application of Suzanne Gauch’s distinction between *space* and *place*, “where space is defined ‘as territory which is mappable, explorable’ (in the sense of colonizable) and place as ‘occupation, dwelling, being lived in’” (Gauch, 2002, p. 910).

¹⁷ Suzanne Gauch has a similar definition of Gaze in her already cited article.

¹⁸ Gunderman and Gray are both medical doctors and, in this particular piece, they were applying the “medical gaze” to assumptions that radiologists make daily as they go about diagnosing illness and injury.

¹⁹ Hawthorn (2016) made similar observations of medical doctors and their relationships with passively constructed patients.

²⁰ This quote was excerpted from Gibson’s (2011-2012) exploration of intellectual engagement abroad.