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English 296

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Research Statement

My interests of intersectionality and racial and gender equality were instigated during high school and have been expanded during my time at UNM from several elective courses I have taken. Because of this, many concepts that I interact with are charged by those interests. Thus, when taking a field trip in my Early American Literature class to the library led by Michael Taylor to interact with primary sources (including several editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), I was immediately drawn to the different visual depictions of race. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was a significant and progressive work in relation to how people thought about race during the time of its original publication. Thus, the fact that the following editions still showed how we continue to interact with different beliefs and messages about race seemed significant, as the original text had not been altered. The UNM Archives gave me an opportunity to connect with these works, and the physicality of them made the messages that they were carrying more impactful, pushing me to investigate what the difference between the editions could mean.

During my initial research of these works, I assessed the details of each of the images and compared them. Then, I drew assumptions about what they could mean and finally I consulted academic material through UNM’s online library database, JSTOR, and Google Scholar to see if what I assumed of them had historical significance, which resulted in the creation of my topic. This was a type of research that I had never done before. I was under the impression that research was done by looking at peer-reviewed journals or books and using the evidence you
found to produce an essay that was well supported. Archival research was not just a new concept, as I did not know that UNM had archives, but it was a new process and required me to think differently. By interacting with the original works personally and examining them, I was provided with an opportunity to apply and expand my ability to think critically and independently to create an original claim.

However, this new way of researching did provide me with several challenges. Firstly, as a result of doing archival research I was unsure if my assumptions about the artworks would be supported by academia. Although I do have a personal interest in inequality, I am an emerging English major and have not had much opportunity to take classes that expand on my personal motivations as I am a Sophomore. So, consulting the internet and trying to pinpoint what my findings meant was my first hurdle. Then, I had to pair the general terminology I learned to specific pieces of academia. This was the most difficult when I was researching the ‘black-brute’. This was partially overcome by alteration of my searches, and I specified time period, place, and subject more appropriately (i.e. inequality myths of African Americans—America Black Brute Myth). However, my original thought that Tom was drawn to massive proportions because he was perpetuating the ‘black-brute’ myth was not confirmed. Differently, I learned through journals found on UNMs online library database that during the 1850s African American males were thought of as ignorant and docile instead of beast-like, as I primarily assumed. Initially, this was discouraging and represents the difficulties when doing archival research. I consulted the illustration again and realized that the mannerisms of Tom enforced the older stereotype of black men being docile and ignorant, and I was able to incorporate all of the academia I encountered to make my evidence even stronger. The nature of this investigation was
also difficult, as race is a sticky and controversial topic. I had to make sure that the sources that I was consulting were not biased. Upon investigation authors were aware of this, as exemplified through Smiley and Fakunle, academics of color writing on police brutality and intersectionality, “We believe our own experiences are relevant and valid toward…this article” (355).

Through this process the importance of interacting with archived resources has become clear. By analyzing different editions, histories that are present can be confirmed, supported, and brought into focus. These truths are essential for understanding social changes and the status of works of literature. During the span of my essay I have refined my ability to think critically, to quickly assess sources from their abstracts, consult an array of databases to give me the most accurate information, and utilize both online and tangible sources that I have access to.

Word Count: 750