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The Short End of the Stick: The Problem with America's Education and Society Today

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The Short End of the Stick: The Problem with America's Education and Society Today

Arman Nazari

DePauw University Honor Scholar

Class of 2019

Faculty Sponsor: Beth Benedix

First Reader: Jonathan Nichols-Pethick

Second Reader: Humberto Barreto

Links to Podcast

Stream: <https://soundcloud.com/user-718714835/the-short-end-of-the-stick-the-problem-with-americas-education-and-society-today>

Download:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/1vz5qqolbp9ejb5/The%20Short%20End%20of%20the%20Stick%20The%20Problem%20with%20America%27s%20Education%20and%20Society%20Today.mp3?dl=0>

Process Paper

My thesis has taken a long road to get to where it is today. Like most Honor Scholars, my original topic idea is not what my thesis focused on. My original inspiration still made its way into the final product, the scene from *The Big Short*, but I originally wanted to look into how that concept of corporate greed I explore in my thesis was the driving force behind the housing bubble and therefore the Financial Crisis of 2007-08. I believed my education as an economics major as well as the other research skills I had gained at DePauw would allow me to peruse the vast sources written on last decade's market collapse, which would reveal to me that greed in corporate business was a consistent theme in the executives who committed fraud in the early 2000s. After my Investment Analysis/Portfolio Management class last year, I did some research to find what led to the housing bubble in the first place. Much of the research showed that in the 1990s as the internet was gaining popularity, many investors began investing in internet companies, whether they had a solid business model or not. The Dotcom Bubble burst in the late 1990s and threw investors into a panic. Many of these investors did not want to experience another bubble bursting, so they invested in the most stable asset they could: housing. Housing

prices kept rising as wages stayed the same and the rest is history. In my mind, I thought I had a clear shot to the answer and believed I just may have figured out everything that was wrong with the economy.

I set out to meet with my faculty sponsor for my thesis at the beginning of this year to begin fleshing out plans for what my thesis should look like. I chose Beth Benedix as my sponsor after having taken her Biblical Literature Honor Scholar seminar during my second semester of my junior year. That class, and specifically my relationship with Beth, flipped my script of what academia and pedagogy should look like. Throughout that semester, we would meet consistently to discuss project ideas or thoughts I had during class. During those meetings, I always found Beth asking me profound, thought-provoking questions which allowed me to really dive deep into whatever topic we were discussing. I believed (correctly) that through that process Beth would be invaluable as a thesis sponsor. During one of our first conversations, Beth and I were talking about the format of my thesis and after discussing one of the podcasts I had created for her class, Beth asked if I would be interested in producing a podcast for my thesis. I absolutely loved this idea. I have always found myself able to get thought across better when I am able to just talk for extended periods of time, which is one of the reasons I have loved meeting with Beth.

I had done a podcast before, but it was a very barebones recording done on my iPhone and not really edited before submitted. I knew that if I were to submit a podcast for my thesis, it would have to be of significantly higher quality. I began listening to a number of varying podcasts for inspiration. I listened to podcasts that aligned with my interests of sports and comedy in order to get a feel for how one should sound stylistically when only one's voice is heard. I listened to a number of varying NPR podcasts ranging from economics and business to

This American Life. The more I listened to these podcasts I was able to tell the underlying details that made each one unique and great. At first, I listened to the words, volume, and style. As time went on, I began listening to the transition sound effects, background music, and stylistic production choices. I believe the countless hours I spent listening to an assortment of podcasts and genres allowed me to find my own style of things I liked for my own work.

At that point, I believed I would be doing a podcast on how corporate greed essentially collapsed the American, and then world economy. After my first meeting with my entire faculty committee, I realized that would not be the case. Professor Barreto told me there were far too many factors involved in the Great Recession that boiling it all down to corporate greed was a gross oversimplification. My committee began suggesting that I use my own experiences to talk about how I as a graduating senior am entering this business world that is greedy and immoral and how can my story fit into that. The idea was interesting, but I had a hard time conceptualizing it. Sure, I had been lucky to have a great internship and to already have a job, but what does this have to do with me?

The answer became clear to me over Thanksgiving break. I told the story of meeting Joyce during my podcast, but our conversation really had a toll on me. I spent the entire weekend talking to my sister about how guilty I felt that next year I would be making almost double Joyce's income in my first year out of college, and even now when I think back to that night, I get a pang in my heart. When I came back and told Beth about my conversation, I felt that everything was lining up. Joyce was able to personify the problem my thesis was talking about. I was able to speak to a real-life person from a very different background than me, and that opened my eyes to the vast community of people out there who are not benefitting from the system at hand. This is what led me to Robert Reich.

Over Winter Term, I was reading *Saving Capitalism, Boomerang*, and a number of David Brooks articles. These concepts of such dramatic economic inequality seemed to scream off the pages at me. This is when it became clear to me, that when there are the obvious cases of people like Joyce who are not making enough money and struggle to pay for their basic necessities, there are also people who have built billion-dollar fortunes off other peoples' misfortunes. This idea of dramatic economic inequity sat wrong in my stomach and I could not figure out how we got to where we are.

After I read *The New Education*, I realized I found the missing piece of the puzzle. People are acting so aggressively in their own self-interest because, while self-preservation is a part of human nature, our education system fosters that. Reading that book and hearing of all the problems in the country made me feel very uneasy, but once I got to the chapter on Dr. Coward, I found a little bit of hope. I was exceptionally lucky to be able to speak with both Dr. Davidson and Dr. Coward over the phone and learned a great deal just from that conversation. Their insight on how broken the education system is and how we need to work alongside our education system to build a better one was exceptionally interesting to me. I had not thought of that idea before, but it seems to almost fit into my post-graduate profession of consultancy and finding solutions in a system that could work very well, which I found a bit of poetic justice in.

My hope for this podcast is for it to raise awareness of the problems in our education and society today. I do not believe this podcast has all the answers to solve the problems we face, but I do believe it can open a listener's mind to why we face these problems. Understanding a problem is the first step in solving it, so I hope this podcast can be the first domino of education reform whether here in Greencastle, or anywhere else throughout the country or world.

Acknowledgements

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