Brave New World

Literary Response Journal Prompts

Each response should be thoughtful and well-developed. 2-3 pages in your LRJ per response is the proper range. Remember: Your LRJ will be collected and graded on the last day we spend on the text (usually exam and/or Socratic circle day) and should be legibly written in your composition notebook. Your LRJ will be graded for completeness, thoughtfulness, neatness (legibility!), and overall effort. Above all, I want to see evidence of critical thinking!

1. Mood-Altering Drugs and Happiness
Consider this quotation from *Brave New World*: "Christianity without the tears - that's what soma is." In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley warns of the dangers of mood-altering drugs, but our society in recent decades has failed to heed the warning because antidepressants and similar mood-altering drugs are being used today, much like Soma, to make people less of a "burden" on society. Research some of the commonly prescribed mood-altering drugs of the day, e.g., Prozac, Xanax, etc. and read the article "Forced Smiles" from *The New Criterion* (in the RLJ folder). Note the positive effects as well as the negative side effects and other unintended consequences of using various prescription mood-altering drugs. Then answer this question: Do you support the prescription of and use of mood-altering drugs? (Feel free to "qualify" your answer; it does not have to be a black-and-white "yes" or "no" response.) In general, are these soma-style drugs good for the individual? For society? Explain your response with facts, details, and examples from your research.

2. Mindless Entertainment: Amusing Ourselves to Death
The following quotation comes from the foreword to Neil Postman's 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, comparing George Orwell's *1984* to Huxley's *Brave New World*:

Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell [author of *1984*] did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity, and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the *feelies*, the *orgy pore*, and the *centrifugal bumblepuppy*. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions." In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

None of what they feared is mutually exclusive. All sides are present today. We are a captive culture (Madison Avenue). We are a trivial culture (the television programs the public prefers). So on for the other fears. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

According to Postman, what is a Huxleyan future? In your educated opinion, in what ways does our country and culture resemble Huxley’s "prophecy" in *Brave New World* as Postman articulates it? Be specific. Use details and examples. Consider the various ways we amuse ourselves these days - cable television, Internet, video games, virtual realities, social networking, etc. How might these forms of amusement be having a negative impact on us and our society?

3. The Myth of Malthus & Human Poverty
One issue dealt with by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* is strict control of world population. The one world government of Huxley’s dystopia has complete control over every “birth” and every “death.” Huxley, more or less, predicted the Nazi eugenics campaign, forced sterilizations, government-funded contraception, and China’s one child

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policy as ways of limiting population growth. Moreover, a mainstream contemporary mindset supports many of these measures, assuming that surging human population is the real root of the world’s evils, from global warming to poverty, from starvation to habitat loss. “Not so fast. Three recent books by renowned experts on the subject paint a far more complex portrait of the world’s population and what it portends” (Salon.com, Sept. 17, 2008). Read S. Michael Craven’s “The Myth of Overpopulation” (see RIJ folder) and watch the five POP101 animations episodes at overpopulationisamyth.com, and then respond to the following questions: Is population control a solution to global human poverty? Does a higher population increase poverty levels? Explain why or why not. Who are Thomas Malthus and Charles Darwin? What do they have to do with the “myth of overpopulation”? What, in your educated opinion, is the solution to ending global human poverty?

4. Grab Bag – Your Choice
For your final LRJ entry, please respond to one of the following two prompts:

A. Relationships & Marriage
Many people would say that children are being “sexualized” at a much younger age these days. Many people would also argue that relationships and marriage are changing for the worse. Explain whether you disagree or agree with these statements and make sure to provide support for your argument. If you agree, who or what do you think is responsible for this trend? Also consider the way in which Huxley portrays relationships and sex within the novel – is he promoting this type of lifestyle or is he trying to warn us about something? Find an article, an Internet site, or an advertisement which somehow addresses these concerns. Explain the connection at the end of your journal entry.

B. Hypnopaedia & Other Propaganda Techniques
Hypnopaedia is one of the many methods of propaganda used by the one-world government in Brave New World. "Propaganda is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. If the means achieves the end then the means is good........the new Ministry has no other aim than to unite the nation behind the ideal of the national revolution." - Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda

What is the purpose of propaganda? What are some moral objections to the use of propaganda? How did the Nazis use propaganda? What were they trying to achieve? How did the Soviet Communists use propaganda? And, what were they trying to achieve? Then, identify and explain one significant use of propaganda in our country today. Consider advertising, political sloganening, mass media, etc. Be specific. Give details. Are we headed down a dangerous road or is America’s use of propaganda still acceptable?

*The articles for LRJ #1 and #3 are posted on the LRJ page on our class website.