



April 2010

A Sharpened Lens

Mackenzie Smith

Johnson County Community College, mesmith@jccc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/mvoc>

Recommended Citation

Smith, Mackenzie (2010) "A Sharpened Lens," *Many Voices - One Community*: Vol. 1: Iss. 3, Article 8.

Available at: <http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/mvoc/vol1/iss3/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at ScholarSpace @ JCCC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Many Voices - One Community by an authorized administrator of ScholarSpace @ JCCC. For more information, please contact bbaile14@jccc.edu.



A SHARPENED LENS

by Mackenzie Evan Smith, recent graduate

Making my way through the crowded market, I am overwhelmed by the mesmerizing sights, demanding sounds and intoxicating aroma of life in a North African city. As I stumble through the narrow, muddy streets of the old Fez Medina, I see severed camel heads dangling above vendors' stands and customers bartering for fresh meats from their local butcher. Throngs of people move in waves through the city's core. Carts rumble past, Arabic pop music reverberates loudly through the city walls, and a man next to me is riding a donkey while chatting on his mobile phone. Pushing my way past piles of fruits and vegetables, I smell spices and fresh mint leaves mixed with pungent body odor. I have come to learn that Morocco is a fascinating mix of traditional and modern, where the lines of North African, Middle Eastern and Western cultures begin to blur and lose shape as they take on a new, distinctly Moroccan meaning.

I spent six months of last year living in Morocco and studying Arabic at Al Akhawayn University. More than simply changing my perspective on life in the Middle East, living abroad sharpened the lens through which I view the United States. From time to time, I stumbled upon references to American culture as I traveled around Morocco, and I was often asked questions about the United States. The subtle influence of American pop culture on Morocco first struck me while riding in a taxi cab through the tiny mountain town of Chefchaouen. Mariah Carey's high voice popped and fizzled through the taxi's aging stereo system, and the driver sang along to every lyric as we zipped through the city's maze of streets.

When the song concluded, the driver, who introduced himself as Hassan, gave a satisfied sigh and said in Arabic, "I love Mariah Carey." We spent the remainder of the journey discussing American pop culture. Hassan asked me to share my thoughts on movies, music and finally the United States' role in world politics. Driving through the streets with reckless abandon, Hassan listened thoughtfully as I stammered my responses in Arabic and clutched my seat in fear of Hassan's driving. This interaction asked me to carefully consider the influence of American culture abroad and my role as an American when I travel. Prior to my exchange with Hassan, I would have been reluctant to use American music as a

conversation starter, but I have since discovered that taxi drivers in many countries have a penchant for Mariah Carey. My time abroad developed my knowledge of the Middle East and North Africa and fueled my desire to learn about the world around me. Although the days since I left Morocco are becoming numerous, Morocco remains vividly in my mind and memory. As I cut and paste images from Morocco into my brain, they have become my own mental collage of people, experiences and an onslaught of sensory overload. While living in Morocco, I gained intellectual knowledge, but more importantly I saw the world from a new angle and experienced a perspective on life very different from my own.



