Exercise 2: The Big Question | Due: Sept. 4

Goal:
The goal of this assignment is to is to refine a research topic/Big Question and practice exploratory research to find a written conversation to join.

Assignment:
Joining a conversation is not always a simple task. It often requires us to listen, to ask questions, to research, to identify competing perspectives. Before joining and adding to a conversation, we must identify a question that hasn't yet been answered (or not answered satisfactorily) in the conversation. **Your assignment will be to identify a topic related to our theme of "identity and public policy" and to pose a specific Big Question related to that topic. You will identify your Big Question, explain its exigence (i.e., why does it matter--to you and to the world), and develop a plan of how you will investigate the question.**

The final product should do the following, in **one to two double-spaced pages** (12-point Times New Roman font, one-inch margins on all sides, no extra space between paragraphs, no superfluous spacing)**:**

- Compose a paragraph or two that introduces your topic (a relevant and debatable public issue) and explains it's *exigency* (i.e., what makes it relevant—why the research/conversation is worth undertaking).
- Identify what you already know (or think you know) about the topic;
- Identify what you do not know but hope to learn in your research;
- Propose a Big Question that you can use to focus your study and drive your inquiry. It may help to pose your Big Question along the lines of "I am studying _____[the topic] because I want to find out what/why/how _____ [your specific question]."

Invention and Inquiry:
In preparing this assignment, brainstorm and draft a Big Question (BQ)—it can be one derived from Exercise 1—that specifically describes what specific, big, complex question you would like to answer about your topic. Conduct some further light research, building on the research you have already done. See what kinds of big and small questions have already been answered and what might still be up for debate—or hasn't been investigated much at all.

Focus your topic and be as specific as you can—perhaps look for a very thin sliver of your larger topic. Write out your topic and explore why you're interested or curious: "I want to understand how ____" "I'd like to find out why ____". Try formulating your topic as a question in the following way: "I am studying ____ [the topic] because I want to find out what/why/how ____ [your specific question]."

As you locate potential resources, skim the articles to determine if they correspond well to your topic <u>and</u> your potential research question. Are they trying to answer a similar question? Examine the sources that these articles cite and track the conversation. Find more articles than you need to determine which are most relevant. Not all information is reliable or relevant.

Read the articles and begin to sort and classify them according to their findings/arguments. Determine what questions the conversation concerns itself with. Would your question be of interest to those in the conversation? **Remember that you are not taking a position but finding a question to explore**.

Audience and Tone:
The audience is your instructor and your peers, that have some education and knowledge of the subject but not necessarily a deep understanding of it. Your tone should be informative, but not overly formal.

____

If you have any questions or concerns about this assignment, I encourage you to e-mail me or come see me during my office hours. Also consider visiting the Miller Writing Center for help.