Visiting Texas Renaissance Festival

I attended the Texas Renaissance Festival located on a large plot of land in Todd Mission, Texas. Since it is set during the Medieval era, you could sum up the culture as the dark ages where technology, education, medicines, and much more were lost after the fall and disappearance of massive empires. You're essentially taking a glimpse into what life was like during the middle ages. The festival is aptly named Renaissance probably due to the barbaric, unsanitary, barbaric stigma that follows the word "medieval," even though it's also considered the beginning of the rebirth of art, culture and intellectual endeavors. You can see some of what their diet consisted of, their everyday life, how the king would act, the vernacular used, the clothing, their sports and music, and the list goes on.

People from different cultures and backgrounds with various religious beliefs and norms gather in a place to revel in the same experience. Not only are you getting to dive into a culture from antiquity, but you also get to interact with people from current ones that are still thriving. Although one thinks of old Britannia when speaking of the Renaissance era, it in fact began as a cultural movement in Italy and later stretched across Europe to places like Greece, Spain and Germany. It was a time of pestilence and war, with a substantial gap between the wealthy class and the commoners. Though, there was a spark in classical art and focus on humanism for the first time since the loss of Ancient Greek and Roman empires. Due to the circumstances of the time, armories and weaponries were a necessity; blacksmiths were highly sought after. There was certainly no shortage of metalworking, a disciplined line of work. Farming methods were fairly simple due to the loss of techniques from antiquity, and a lack of funds means the main food sources were starches like potatoes and whatever meat you could catch, such as rabbits or fowl. The food stalls at the festival stayed true to the diet at the time, with a few modern twists every other booth. It was divided into Spain, Germany, Greece and Italian foods with the modest meals served in the dark ages. It's certainly more humble food, although they are meals to sit down with and you end up conversating with other families, couples or friends of all walks of life at the same table.

Those who worked at the festival in character, as well as those who came in character, did not stray from the way of life, manner of speaking and acting. Those in costume and in character have adapted the cultural identity of the past. You hear the usual "my lady" or "sire" when referring to customers as a sign of courtesy, everyone has their own honorifics. Many of them did so to entice you to come in and see their wares, as crafting and trading was a massive way of life. It's one of the many interaction scenes that have been rehearsed or given guidelines for, it displays the chivalry of the masses at the time. If someone of higher status was walking by, you would see those around you begin to bow. Clearly a nonverbal cue, you catch on and bow, as well. Though in modern times, you won't get punished for not bowing. During such a time of war and disease, there were many shops for heavy armory and weaponry. The jewelry that was shown was also created from heavy metals, which would be how they were made at the time. Blacksmithing of all sorts was crucial to their way of life, or they'd be weaker than the other kingdoms if their weapons and armor were still archaic. However, you also found wares for those who are still hunter and gatherers – usually if you don't have a farm and have little money, you'd follow a more nomadic lifestyle without having to keep moving. There were leather tanning shops full of all sorts of clothing, depending on your lifestyle. The more brilliantly

colored clothes with more layers and frills would usually signify those with more money. The clothing with more neutral colors, or those wearing leather, were typically common folk, thespians outside of plays, farmers and the sorts.

Although it was essentially the dark ages still, the Renaissance meant a rebirth of the arts, philosophy, music and beliefs. The artistic revival was one of the main components of this rebirth. It was a shift from focusing on the feats of a divine power to the achievements of man; a rekindling of classical Greek and Rome. Developing artists was a massive theme throughout cultures, especially in Italy with the rise of the Medici family and their ample funds and overreaching power. The festival had shop after shop with handmade wares, arts, and everyday items. They also included more modern takes on art, such as face painting for the kids and henna tattooing for anyone who wanted to be a walking piece of art. There were also those who crafted simple things like flower crowns to those who created the garments that were worn by the people of that time – aside from armor and leather needed for fighting and scouring the lands.

The feats of man during this revival of culture included sporting events such as jousting, which the festival conducted impeccably with well-trained horses. They had other events that people would have done, such as archery and axe throwing. People of all ages and ethnicities participated in the smaller events and you end up chatting with the person next to you, jesting about your aim or where the arrow may or may not have landed. With the arts on a rise theater was brought back in full force, as it was in Roman and Greek antiquity. The shows they put on were more often than not a comedy, or a tragic one at that. William Shakespeare was writing during this time, a playwright for the entertainment of the common folk. Drama and comedy were the most common themes in this era, relief from everyday life. Yet again, people of all ages could sit down in the community seats and enjoy the play.

Being positioned on a few acres, the festival is crawling with people from all over. The festival has its own little, unified ethos; you end up conforming to what is going on around you in such an accepting atmosphere as you immerse yourself into the past. As previously mentioned, you are going to be sitting with people you do not know while eating or while watching the jousting tournament. I met a lovely older couple that were originally from Spain, but since neither of us really spoke each other’s languages we relied heavily on context clues to get by. They mentioned the food on the Spanish side was what they would have been eating during this time, aside from the contemporary twists. Since it was a culture that is used to close proxemics, we had no issue sparking up a conversation or sitting by them to watch the jousting. If you look around the festival, you see many people interacting and socializing. Every person is in attendance for the same general reason, so whether your culture believes in being quiet, reserved and not making eye contact, they may strike up a conversation with someone looking at the same wares you are in awe of, or laugh beside you watching the play.

Everywhere you turn is some form of intercultural or intracultural communication. Festivals are essentially neutral territory when it comes to the clashing of cultures, people are there simply to enjoy the festivities, foods, sights and sounds. The festival is almost a melting pot within itself. Cultural patterns are melding together for the enjoyment of this event. One could even go as far as saying it could be its own culture within itself. Stereotyping and prejudice are nowhere to be found, it’s almost like a separate realm away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.