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The Learner's Journey

4 May, 2020

Reflective Essay on Racism

The Plato's modern version of the cave that I chose to research and present for my project was on racism and insitutional discrimination. As a community and a nation as a whole I felt that I should choose this project because there are too many instances, whether that may be medical care, criminal justice, education, and employment, where many people follow the path of ignorance while African Americans and Latinos are left treated unfairly and unjustly. I feel quite passionate about social injustice and inequality and that's why I am following my calling to become a social worker one day. Leading up to this project while I had known that there was injustice, I had no idea to what extent and how intensely it has affected millions of individuals in the U.S.. After completing this assignment, I realized that ignorance is everywhere, big or small, yet you have to look deeper to find the truth hidden beneath the microaggressions, the stereotypes, and the fear. By completing this assignment I hope I can pass on my knowledge so that I can help others come out of the cave blinded in their ignorance and recognize the injustice and inequality all around them. Therefore, one day I hope I can follow my heart's calling and help guide the community and nation towards a more just and equal society as a whole.

The research that I did on this project was both extensive on the one hand and eye-opening on the other hand. For instance, when I began researching medical care discrimination, I didn't realize how common it was at every level. I learned that in 2008, 27% of

African Americans with a serious health condition had experienced discrimination, which is a staggering statistic. I also learned the extent to which discrimination was executed on a medical level, including that microaggressions, stereotypes, fear and anxiety all play a clear role in medical care discrimination. Then, when I researched about racial profiling I was horrified at the statistics. The statistics showed millions of majority innocent young African American and Latino men who were interrogated, searched, and sometimes arrested for no reason but the ignorance of the police and the Bloomberg Administration for implementing those practices.

Once I began researching institutional discrimination, or the method by which institutions and communities discriminate against minorities, the ignorance, injustice, and inequality became clear. I found that with regards to education, both African Americans and Hispanics graduated high school at a rate 10% lower than their Caucasian counterparts. Additionally, I recognized that even after the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the supreme court desegregation of schools under *Brown v. Board of Education* still couldn't stop segregation in schools many years later. However, this segregation, de facto segregation, is a residential form of segregation in which many wealthy Caucasian families moved outside of the inner cities and into suburbs with their own districts while the minority population were left with the failing inner city districts. By these school administrators and legislators letting these school systems fall apart they are failing these children and depriving them of their right to a high quality education. Furthermore, not only were minorities such as African American and Hispanics more likely to be unemployed than Caucasians, when they are employed they make on average, \$20,000 less annually. This showed me the clear wealth gap and income inequality that is discriminating against these minorities hurting their ability to take care of their families, save for

college for their children, or retirement, or even save for a house of their own. I was dumbfounded when I realized that around 30% more Caucasian families own a house than African American and Hispanic Families. This just goes to show that the cycle of discrimination is clear from education, to employment, to medical care, to criminal justice and beyond. It seems there is almost no place to escape the ignorance but within.

When I read other student's presentations I learned many facts, concepts and information that have guided my own self out of the cave and beyond ignorance. One of those presentations was the presentation on PTSD and Burnout Syndrome for Medical Professionals by Hayley Miranda. The presentation was well organized and stood out to me as it was very relatable, relevant and important in the time of Coronavirus. What stood out to me was how common PTSD and BOS really is among hospital workers by which "...18% of critical care nurses meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD" and "25-33% of critical care nurses manifest symptoms of severe BOS..." This is so relevant right now with the Coronavirus pandemic right now because many hospital workers are working 12 or even 15 hour shifts and they are working day after day consecutively, and they are seeing so many people die. I'm sure that is extremely stressful and can cause BOS and PTSD alone, but they also have to think about their families and how to keep them safe from the virus when they could potentially bring it home. Furthermore, another presentation that inspired me and opened my eyes was Isabelle Lefrancois's presentation on substance abuse. Some of the statistics in that presentation were staggering to me like, "21.5 million Americans (age 12+) battled some sort of substance abuse disorder," or that "38% of American Adults abuse illicit drugs daily." Another interesting statistic is that "Genetics can account for 40%-60% of one's personal risk to addiction..." These statistics really hit home for

me because I have alcoholism on both sides of my family tree, which gives me more susceptibility to having it myself. Also, these statistics made me feel somewhat saddened by how many individuals are living their lives each day and inspire me to want to help those facing addiction. These presentations both woke me up to recognize the value of mental health and how important it is to have the support and help as needed so that someone doesn't fall back on their mental and start abusing drugs which could, in turn, affect them for the rest of their lives.

This project, and all the assignments that I've worked on in this class has helped me to recognize the truth beneath the surface of ignorance in order to find the true value of humanity and life itself. This project has led me to realize that we all have a purpose and we all can make a difference in this world whether that may be mental health, substance abuse or even inequality and racism. We all have a duty to be kind, respectful, compassionate and help others out of the cave once we have found our way. By giving back, we have made a ripple effect that greatly impacts the community and nation and world as a whole. Only we can recognize the true extent of our potential and we do that by finding our path outside of the cave. Beyond that of ignorance, fear, discrimination, anxiety, but that of understanding, equality, and dignity for all we find that hidden truth. This is how we shall rise up and get others out of the cave. There are many individual caves throughout this world and once we have found ours we have a duty to give back and guide others towards their path. But first, we have to know how to tend to our rocks, make the most of our 168, and be proactive within every aspect of our lives. Then, and only then, shall we make the most of our lives and help bring light to those in caves all over the world.