

For the People

Issues in America

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

... and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. 6

-Abraham Lincoln

May 12, 2015

A Starting Point

Issue 1

Take the blinders from your vision, take the padding from your ears, and confess you've heard me crying, and admit you've seen my tears.¹

-Maya Anjelou

Each of us needs to look at our own behavior. Am I perpetuating and reinforcing the negative images so pervasive in our culture, or am I seeking to challenge them? If I have not been exposed to positive images of marginalized groups, am I seeking them out to expand my own knowledge base for myself and my children? ²

-Beverly Daniel Tatum Ph.D

Note from the editor

Hello and welcome to a new newsletter that invites conversations critical discourse towards the aims of democracy. *For the People: Issues in America* was originally started to meet the expectations of my graduate program in Education and Applied Behavior Analysis at Johnson State College. Every semester we submit a new post onto our own educational blog that is meant to reflect on the objectives of the course. This semester, I completed *Critical and Cultural Perspectives in Education*. It was a deeply engaging course, meant to prepare teachers and practitioners for working with diverse families in America; to help us understand what cultural, political, and social factors influence families, and how as professionals, we can use this knowledge and our own privilege to benefit all individual towards the aims of democracy. Personally, I was deeply affected by the information presented in this course, the critical and difficult discussions we engaged in, and the opportunities to practice speaking and writing as a means to change thinking and biases.

So what began as a college requirement is now an attempt to morph into the public sphere, and share the stories of others, especially those who are disadvantaged by complex systems of oppression. Moving forward, I encourage others to share their opinions and comment on the blog posts, with the understanding that everyone has a right to have their voice heard. Finally, I am unsure of the intended schedule of postings (weekly, monthly, etc.); just know that I am personally sacrificing my own individualism in hopes that collaborating with others and listening to their stories, will create a safe place for understanding biases and how biases affect others in what is, hopefully, the reconcilable pursuit of freedom and equality.

Sincerely,
Heather Lynn Corey



The Explorer

There was a time
How do you perceive it?
A man on a ship
leading two more
towards “undiscovered”
land surrounded by
water pushing ships
to shore up upon
India? Bermuda?
Where are we now?
This is India.
This is Asia.

“This Hispaniola
is a miracle.” A land
left untouched and
full of gold. “The natives
are so free with their
possessions. With fifty
men, we could subjugate
them all.” 3

Rape them and
kill them until
thousands are perished.
Enslave them for the
quest of hungry, civilized
conquerors, who sailed
vast oceans to ‘discover’
a new world ‘in the name
of the Holy Trinity.’ 3

Stolen, kidnapped, slaughtered.
The Nina, the Pinta, the Santa...

“I took some of the natives
by force.” 3 Thousands
perished. Mass genocide
In fourteen hundred
and ninety-two... “Thus
the eternal God our
Lord gives victory
to those who
follow His way
over apparent
impossibilities. 3

-Heather Lynn Corey

During the semester, we were assigned to read, “Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress,” from Howard Zinn’s book, *A People’s History of the United States*. 3 I was reminded of how little was taught in grade school about the thousands of native people that were slaughtered by Columbus and his people, from the Carribean, into the land that we now call the Unites States. How can a huge amount of history be left out of teaching? I find this to be highly immoral and irresponsible. It’s as if there is an entire history of people, who somehow vanished, but we don’t know how, or are too uncomfortable to talk about what happened. This is how white privilege works: if we hide these histories by not talking about them, then we have done, and continue to do, nothing wrong; then there is nothing to change and those privileged continue to be privileged. According to Peggy McIntosh, “The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage, and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects.” 4 As an educator, I am obligated to “...create and manage systems that support children’s learning and well-being for the aims of democracy.” 5 Providing children with a history that represents everyone, teaches children that everyone’s voice matters.



In the beginning of the semester, I expressed this sentiment in one of my response papers: “Despite any good values or intentions that I have, what causes the most concern for me is not knowing the magnitude that my white privilege blinds me to my own biases and racism. It will be hard work to constantly and consistently identify and deconstruct any prejudices that may be held against others.”

Since then, my voice has grown stronger. The following is my last response paper to some of the readings from the course. I think this best reflects how through practice, I am more able to competently critique the values in the American system, that influence human equality.

The Complexity of the Systems that Shape Families in America

The last section of Coontz is called, “Recognizing Diversity, Building Solidarity: Integrating Race and Class Issues Into Public Policy.”⁷ I chose the two readings from this section of Coontz, because I believe the themes from them more closely relate to the themes I am left with at the end of the semester. Also, I found the writing styles of Null and Bracey a little difficult to follow until they were explained in class. Both Gerstel/Sarkisian and Jacobs/Gerson identify the complexity of our labor systems’ effects on families and how our understanding of the effects cannot be generalized across class, or even across cultural systems of people. For instance, Jacobs/Gerson communicate that, “No one trend can adequately portray the complicated changes taking place in the American labor force and among American households. A more accurate account must recognize the diversity among workers and their families,” (p. 454). Gerstel/Sarkisian express a similar point: “Although social class disparities are key to understanding racial and ethnic variation in familial involvement, it is too simple to say that class differences create ‘more’ involvement with relative in one group and ‘less’ in another,” (p. 452).

From Gerstel/Sarkisian, what I found to be most illuminating, was the argument that, “White, Black, and Latino/a individuals with the same amount of income and education have similar patterns of involvement with their extended families,” (p.450). This is important on several different levels: 1) This reiterates the findings that immediate families living with low-income and limited resources, more commonly share responsibilities with extended family members than higher income families do; 2) that this contradicts the assumption that only non-white families living in poverty commonly rely on extended family, when the authors’ findings show that white families living in poverty share similar behaviors; and 3) that this reality of so many families should be taken into consideration when designing policies for families and workers. The last point is key; without it, I might be saying, “well, this is very interesting, but why is it important, specifically?” Consider this example: “Such relatives might need the rights and support systems that we usually reserve for spouses.” The authors point out that the Family medical Leave Act limits which family members qualify for this benefit. Without broadening our understanding of family, to include extended family, people will be punished for taking care of other family members (particularly when no one else is available), by losing wages, or even their job.

Jacob/Gerson reiterate the need to understand the complexity of American families, by providing this illuminating idea, “Contrary to widespread belief, the average American work week has not changed dramatically over the last several decades...it does suggest that focusing only on the problem of long work weeks is not the only policy response required to meet the needs of today’s diverse families,” (p. 455). The authors believe that what is happening, is that salary-workers, who tend to be white, educated, and making more money are working longer hours, even though they do not get paid more for more hours. Meanwhile, those who work jobs that pay by the hour, which tends to be people who already live with limited resources and privilege, are not getting enough hours, and are frequently working several jobs, to make up for only getting part-time work. These points are also important on several levels: 1) Workers with salary-incomes, who are working longer hours are paying money for childcare, or choosing to have one spouse stay at home; 2) This not only puts emotional strains on families, but actually lowers their net income; 3) the worker who gets promoted is the worker who chooses work over family; 4) Low-income families are left to constantly juggle finding enough work; 5) Low-income families must also choose between finding child-care or working less; 5) Low-income families become super-stressed and sick from trying to survive, typically, without health insurance or paid time-off; 6) Finally, middle-class families are left stuck in middle-level management positions, never doing enough to get promoted, or less enough to enjoy their lives fully; and 7) Low-income families remain in poverty and with poor health, without the opportunity to make better wages, to get more education, to have health care, or paid work-leave.

The biggest theme for me at the end of the semester, and looking forward as a professional, is the idea of: ‘liberty versus equality’ or choosing between myself (the individual), versus making choices for the greater community (aims of democracy). This is the dichotomy of our system. These forces pull at each other in such a way that some might argue that the individual is winning. “The 99%” are working so the 1% can live independently and own property. Our system of democracy tries to keep systems in check, by making policies to create more equality: the right to marry for all people, no matter their sexual identity; the right to a fair and appropriate education; the right to vote. Unfortunately, there are constantly players in the system who are “enamored with power” (McGough & Ravitch). They can cleverly find ways to keep their power, and persecute the oppressed, because of our system of capitalism, the rhetoric of Protestantism, and the power and influence of money and “the name of God.”

Going forward, my goal is to continue to craft and utilize what I’ve been working on this whole semester: my voice. Like a few others, that have sacrificed their own liberty and freedom, for equality for others I too, believe in sacrifice for the good of others, and the nation as a whole. Through more discourse, reading, writing, engaging with the community, and sacrificing my own time, I can continue to build the language that can convince others of their own blindness or indifference to their own privilege, and help people find what is personal for them, in the stories of other people. “The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don’t listen to it, you will never know what justice is,” (Zinn). Through discussion groups, workshops, and community meetings, I can continue discourse with others, about the disparities in America and the influence of macro-forces on families, and like Bernie, I may or may not become president, but I at least want this message heard.

The cry of the poor is not always just,
but if you don’t listen to it, you will
never know what justice is.

-Howard Zinn

The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage, and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects. ⁴

-Peggy McIntosh

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6. Lincoln, A. (1863). The Gettysburg Address. WETA. Retrieved from Learn the Address website <http://www.learntheaddress.org/static/media/uploads/docs/gettysburg-address.pdf>
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