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The Root of Injustice: Disrespect

In our modern society, there are many incredibly important and often life threatening affronts to human rights. Each issue is so incredibly important and worthy of serious contemplation and discussion. Because of this, it was highly challenging to choose one single issue that could truly be viewed as the most pressing human rights issue of my generation. After deep reflection on each of these problems, I realized that there is one overall catalyst at the heart of each of these issues: respect. All of the biggest and most concerning injustices in our society stem from a lack of respect.

When you choose to disrespect someone because of the color of their skin, their gender identity, the gender they are attracted to, someone's right to freedom, their country of origin, or any other basic aspect of their being, you are opening the door to some of the greatest injustices of our modern society. The respect that I am referring to is not the dictionary definition of admiring someone because they have done or achieved something impressive. The type of respect I am referring to should never have to be earned. This type of respect simply involves accepting and valuing someone as a human being with the right to dignity and freedom.

This idea that respect must be earned is a concept highly ingrained into our culture, making it especially important that we learn to respect individuals because they are human. It is irrelevant whether or not a person chooses to live a different lifestyle or hold different opinions

than you. It is irrelevant whether or not a person is gay or transgender. It is irrelevant whether a person is a woman or child. No matter who or what they are, they deserve respect.

Simple things like sex and skin color should not determine whether or not someone will be hired or fired from their job and it most certainly should not determine whether or not someone will be killed in an alley or kidnapped and thrown into sex trafficking. The fact that the latter two things even occur in a supposedly advanced society is disgusting. Respect for the human life around you means not only protecting each other and ensuring that no one literally dies but also that no one goes hungry in a country where a multitude of millionaires and numerous billionaires live.

With respect comes peace. If everyone respected each other, then there would be no war; governments would respect their citizens and each other. There would be no rape or sex trafficking, people would respect that others have the right to freedom and saying no. If everyone respected each other, there would be no sexism; women would be seen as equal. There would be no more abuse of minorities; racial minorities, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community would be welcomed and viewed as unique. If we valued each human life as a life as worthy and important as our own, then there would be no other human rights issues. A lack of respect is at the root of every life threatening and horrific injustice of our modern world and that is why it is the most pressing.

Ayla Burba

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Knowledge is Power

Over the past few decades, the internet has risen from nothing to become the predominant source of information for billions of people. Such ease of access to humanity's knowledge has been a boon for countless individuals; however, despotic regimes have viewed it as a threat to their power and have taken drastic measures to censor it. Though online censorship appears to be an inconsequential issue, one best ignored for the sake of addressing more violent and conspicuous concerns, internet censorship itself violates a fundamental human right, encourages draconian policies to enforce it, and fosters a secretive environment where atrocities may remain unchallenged. As such, it is undoubtedly the most important human rights issue of my generation.

Article Nineteen of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." Countries that employ widespread internet censorship directly violate two key points of this article: being able to express opinions without interference and having the freedom to exchange information through any media. In China, the "Great Firewall" blocks access to many foreign websites and news outlets such as Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, BBC, and The New York Times. The websites that are not blocked are still

censored, especially concerning political matters, and certain search terms may yield no results, such as “Tibetan Independence.” Though citizens are not directly punished for searching forbidden terms, using them is risky, and journalists who report upon forbidden ideas and frame the Chinese government in a negative light are almost guaranteed to be imprisoned. In bordering North Korea, the situation is even more severe: the slim minority of citizens allowed to use the internet can access a mere twenty-eight websites, all government-run. Those who attempt to bypass this or communicate with the outside world via smuggled cellphones are hunted down and promptly executed. By ensuring that information about the outside world cannot so much as spread through word-of-mouth, the populace has no choice but to believe whatever the government-run news tells them, as no independent journalists exist in North Korea. Maintaining such a tight chokehold on information means that the disturbing amount of human rights violations that occur there are accepted as normal since those abysmal conditions are all they’ve ever known, a fact that can be attributed to censorship.

Pervasive censorship fosters a culture of oppression and disregard for human rights: when information detrimental to a powerful entity can be eliminated, so too is accountability eliminated. For example, China continues to evade responsibility for the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 where hundreds to thousands of unarmed civilians were massacred for peacefully protesting. Should anyone attempt to mention the incident online or be generally critical about the government, even once, they could face a harsh prison sentence and disappear from the public eye. As a result, scarce few within China know that anything happened, and those that do tend to keep silent to avoid harsh consequences. This climate of secrecy shields those in power from the negative repercussions of their actions; while prevalent knowledge of the government’s atrocities would likely result in public disapproval and a potential revolution,

suppression ensures their continual rule at the cost of human decency. Societal change could improve the lives of many, but efforts to ignite positive reform are stifled by online censorship preventing the public from knowing that improvements could be made. Even if people desperately seek to oppose an oppressive government, internet censorship can still prevent them from taking action, as was the case in early 2021 during Myanmar's military coup. The military repeatedly shut down the internet to prevent protestors from communicating with each other, and as a result, they were unable to effectively organize opposition during that time. Of those dissenting individuals who continued to speak out against the military rule, over one thousand were slaughtered and ten thousand were arrested.

Freedom of information, or the lack thereof, is often overlooked. Though broad censorship itself may seem benign in comparison to more overt violations of human rights, its repercussions are just as harsh, if not more so: its pervasive implementation nearly guarantees a continuation of monstrous practices. Knowledge is power, and in the Information Age, the frightening power granted by internet censorship is indisputable.

Jane Dubberke



The Loss of Human Rights Due to Natural Disasters Caused by Climate Change

In Kentucky this year, thousands of people became homeless in one night because of a devastating tornado. I asked myself, why? What caused this destruction? Then I learned about a vicious cycle that could become the downfall of the world. I learned that climate change leads to an increase in the number and the severity of natural disasters. These disasters cause human displacement, and this displacement results in the loss of basic human rights of access to shelter, food, and clean water, making climate change the most important human rights issue of this generation.

The cause of the devastating Australian bush fires of 2020 has been connected to climate change. In late 2019 to early 2020, the Australian landscape was scarred and scorched due to raging fires. With the increase of the Earth's temperature, the probability of a fire increased by 30% and the intensity of heat in fires like the Australian bush fires is 10 times more likely to occur than in 1900 ("Attribution of the Australian bushfire risk to anthropogenic climate change – World Weather Attribution"). Our warming globe causes fires to erupt. As fires continue to increase in intensity in dry areas like Australia, people will be forced to move to escape. Australian fires in 2020 alone caused an estimated 65,000 people to move and destroyed around 3,100 homes (Du Parc and Yasukawa). The humans displaced by natural disasters face the consequences of climate change. They lose their homes as well as reliable sources of food and water. The loss of these needs violates a person's human rights.

Americans consider Hurricane Katrina as one of the worst disasters in U.S. history, and it could have been prevented. In 1900, the flood elevations of Katrina would have been 15-60% lower than when it occurred in 2005. Greenhouse gas emissions warm the ice cap, which causes the sea level to rise ("Hurricane Katrina 2005"). With a lower sea level, Hurricane Katrina would have been less intense and the devastation caused by it would have been prevented. Hurricane Katrina caused mass permanent human displacement. The hurricane moved over 200,000 people from the Gulf Coast region (where the hurricane hit) to Texas, Washington D.C., Georgia, and Florida (Raedle). This relocation resulted in a loss of homes, and without stable shelter, food and clean water are much harder to obtain. People need reliable sources of food, water, and shelter to function in society. Massive hurricanes caused by climate change take away a human's right to the resources people need to survive.

Fires and hurricanes aren't the only natural disasters causing human displacement as a result of climate change. Flooding increased drastically with the warming globe. At the end of the century, flooding increased by 45% (Connell). As heat made by humans continues to increase and circulate around the globe, ice caps begin to melt and water levels rise. With rising water levels comes floods. Floods destroyed the Carteret Islands in Oceania. What were once beautiful islands that people lived on are now submerged in sea water. The once drinkable water is now too salinated to drink, and people on the island had to move (Leckie 18). Each person has a right to safe water and a stable home. Floods, like those on the Carteret Islands, take away these rights. Without shelter and safe drinking water, people cannot survive. The loss of shelter and water due to flooding is a violation of access to these fundamental rights.

Humans have the right to shelter, food and water. These rights are threatened by natural disasters, causing displacement of human populations across the globe. Climate change is the

root of this issue. Climate change must be addressed in order to prevent the frequency and severity of natural disasters, which will protect and preserve humans' rights to live safely in their homes, their rights to clean water, and adequate food sources. To provide each human with these basic needs, climate change must be stopped.

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Lucy O'Brien



Preschool is the New College

As the daughter of an early childhood educator and as someone often around children, I see how important education is. Education undoubtedly affects a person's entire life, especially in today's world where high school and university graduation are required to advance professionally and make a living wage. Employers scrutinize resumes and without educational degrees, the chance of being hired is low. Work opportunities without education requirements bring many challenges, including making enough money to support yourself.

I grew up with a solid preschool foundation that started when I was three years old. I loved to go to school in order to make friends, see my teachers, and take in new information. This is where my love for learning began. It has carried me all the way to high school and is the reason I wake up in the morning and want to go to school. But not every child is lucky enough to get a head start in their learning. Children who start their education at a younger age are oftentimes more prepared and perform better when they reach Kindergarten. Preschool is essential for the success of young children in their education, yet not everyone has access to it. Because preschool is not required in the United States, the only options are private facilities which are costly and can have long waiting lists. This is why only financially well-off families are able to send their children to preschool to get ahead, while other children struggle to keep up when they enter Kindergarten. The headstart that some children receive is unfair, and is why preschool should be required and publicly funded.

I hear stories about and interact with many different types of children. In first grade at North Glendale Elementary, I watched a student struggle from the beginning. He experienced financial and family issues, which caused him to be very far behind his peers. This was made clear through the many days of tardies and the lack of homework completed. While the rest of the class was learning how to subtract numbers, he was still working on knowing how to count numbers higher than ten. Meanwhile at my mother's wealthy private school, children worked on adding and subtracting in Kindergarten. In this classroom of privileged children, everyone is caught up and learning at around the same rate. In our elementary schools it is clear that students are divided by their different levels of knowledge. This creates a split in our community between the wealthy who can provide early education for their children, and those whose children have a late start and continue to struggle throughout their educational career.

The current education system has come a long way from the past, as the expectation of children's learning has progressively become higher. Previously, children were expected to learn their alphabet at age six, but now three year olds must have this knowledge. With changing times, there has become more of a divide between children. In Kindergarten classrooms there are children who barely know their letters and there are children who are working on forming sentences. Not only is this a challenge for teachers to accommodate all children, but it is a challenge for some students to meet the level that is expected of them. The students trying to catch up are the same students in middle school and high school who are struggling and need extra help from teachers.

As a high school student, I learn among all types of peers. Some are in advanced classes with lofty goals. Others never complete their assignments and are rarely present in class. This great separation in our schools starts at a very young age, and later on affects our entire

community as well. If our community can get to the root of the problem, this partition in our schools will be minimized. By having children aged three-five in the classroom, a love for learning can be cultivated in young minds.

Many individuals advocate for public preschool education and there have been various movements. There even are some proposed plans from the federal government to provide preschool for all children. But even with laid out plans, it is the communities that will have the ability to help children grow through education. By providing quality educators and the needed resources, we have the ability to shape the minds of our community's young developing children. As we cultivate inclusivity in our education system, our youth will have more success in life and make our community proud.