

LEARNING OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

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These past months of confinement have taught me to see the world through a different lens. Although I pride myself on being an educated and culturally sensitive individual, I have realized that my privilege as a White Hispanic woman in America places me in a comfort bubble, from which I benefit greatly. Just like a digital camera, I have been fortunate enough to put my focus on the aspects of life that I chose to indulge. Prior to the outbreak, when schools were still open and it was safe to take public transportation - when the world was “normal” - I was busy pursuing my own academic, social and personal goals. What I failed to realize then was that “normal” was a privilege that many minorities who don’t look like me lack.

When I talk about privilege I do not only refer to the privilege that protects me from being racially profiled when I am shopping, my white privilege, but also the privilege that I experience as an individual. During this quarantine, I have been able to discern the two. As a Hispanic immigrant, I have experienced a personal struggle in accommodating to a new culture and language. However, my individual hardships and my personal story do not negate the fact that I benefit from the way society sees me on the surface: a White woman whose appearance is not a threat.

I have learned that my own experience as a minority does not nullify the actuality of my white privilege. I owe this realization to the impact social media has instilled in me. While school has been my main source of education for as long as I can remember, I admit that it has served as a distraction from life outside academics- the real world. Although African American History is a required course for all Philadelphia District schools, I have sensed a disregard for the teaching of African American struggles today. When I say disregard, I am referring to the exclusion of the teaching of modern-day injustices the Black community faces like police brutality and other aspects of systemic racism today- a time where we are all “equal” under the law, but sadly not treated the same. This omission of current events has blinded me from the reality and meaning of being Black in America, which has kept me in a comfort bubble from which I have never felt the need to escape. However, the alarming change in the content of social media is what has kept me educated and exposed to the cruel realities of this country. Although I cannot help but admit that all this despairing information has been overwhelming at times, leaving me wishing for life to go back to “normal”, I have come to understand that it is my white privilege that allows me to think of these remarks, and to continue to hope for things to go back to a place that was not working before. “Normal” was failing African Americans in our country, and those like me who remained unharmed in our comfort bubbles failed to see that until now, that disturbing videos of Black lives being taken by killer cops have surfaced the media.

Although I have not been in school, and have not been as productive as I promised myself I would be, I cannot say that I have not learned during this quarantine. I have used one of our generation’s most powerful tools to reflect upon and recognize my privilege, both individual and white privilege. I have realized that the mere fact that I get to learn about racism in America, without suffering from its outcome firsthand, is a privilege in itself. The most important lesson I have learned in this time of uncertainty is that “I understand that I will never understand, but I stand”, and for this reason, I have committed myself to use my privilege in the favor of those who need it the most right now.

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