

Awareness

Ali Tritschler

Attending the same private school in Westport Connecticut for the past thirteen years has given me many exceptional opportunities, whether that be academically, athletically, and even socially; however, in a town that has a population that is over 90% white, it is understandable that most of my childhood school experiences have lacked major diversity. My school, Greens Farms Academy, has been increasing the diversity within our community since I started there in kindergarten, but it wasn't until my junior year of high school that I really started to become aware of the importance of it. That year was not only the year I joined LEAD, the diversity club at my school, but also the year that my school hired a Director of Diversity and Community. My first LEAD meeting was nerve-racking because I thought my whiteness somehow made me less "diverse"; however, the reason for my nervousness quickly changed as other kids started to engage in an emotional debate about Michael Brown and Eric Garner, two names I didn't recognize. After sitting, silently, for almost an hour, I left the meeting having realized that I have never had to open my eyes to the problems that surrounded our country; I blamed that mainly on the fact that I was white, which allowed me to believe they couldn't affect me. That day was the day I not only began educating myself on the race relations issues that I seemed to have missed out on, but also the day I stopped allowing my race to define how important these issues were allowed to be to me.

I spent the rest of my junior year catching up with the world, dedicating a couple of days to learning about a different issue, all of which seemed to be police brutality acts towards young men of color. After Michael Brown and Eric Garner, I learned about Dillon Taylor, Levar Jones, and Tamir Rice. Each death was harder for me to understand. For the remainder of that year, and the following summer, I kept myself up to date with

news related to racial tension, always trying to uncover reasons why any of it was happening.

I started my senior year differently than I had started my junior year- I was aware of almost everything that was broadcasted on the news, Internet, or social media, and I was confident of the fact that I was a white person, who was interested. The Identity in America: Race, Class and Gender history elective I took first semester allowed me to further investigate these issues and ask myself how I could make sense of them. We had one specific homework assignment where my teacher gave us an online article with videos and descriptions of “famous” police brutality acts from 2014-2015. I read through each story, watched each video, and took extensive notes on each of them, only to realize I was still as far from an answer as to why these events were happening as I was in my first LEAD meeting junior year. It took me a year to understand that the amount of education I had on these specific events was not going to make it any easier to make sense of them, because these events will never fully make sense to me. I wasn’t a direct witness in any of them, nor do I know any of the people involved personally. There are always two sides to one story, and although I am confident that these events are unethical and need to be dealt with, I am also aware that the full perspective of the perpetrator and the victim will never be fully or truthfully disclosed by the media. This was disappointing, because I am the type of student who likes to make sense of things and, like most people around the country, I was unable to make sense of these events.

It was my Identity elective, however, that guided me towards making sense of these situations in a different way. When researching racial oppression issues among college campuses this year for my final research paper, I realized a lack of understanding

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was common. While I wrote my paper on the protests that happened within the Yale campus, I still uncovered details about events at schools like University of Missouri, Brown, and Ithaca College. All of the different events at these different institutions had similar stories: people of color led protests regarding racial oppression issues they have dealt with at their own school and around the country, addressing the administrations failures leading to the involvement of the national media. Most people began taking sides during these protests; they either sided with the media, believing the students were acting out, or sided with the students, believing it was their right to be heard. I, however, was more intrigued with the role the media played. Although the media coverage of these events created controversy, mainly because the accuracy of the reportage was unverified, it was these reports that made the whole country aware. At the beginning of 2014, a lot of people around the country were junior year me. They had no knowledge of the racial oppression issues that were engulfing our country because it wasn't being constantly thrown in their faces. However, fast-forward to the end of 2015 and early 2016, when Black Lives Matter and college protests were shared as covers of News Sites like The Atlantic and news magazines such as The Libertarian Republic, as well as personal story's on blog sites, like Salon.

I spent almost a year trying to "make sense" of these events when, I could've recognized that knowing *what* was happening was almost as important as *why*. The media makes these events a part of everyone's life, not just those who are directly affected, and what gives us the opportunity for a stronger fight against these tragedies. I hope to one day understand these situations better, but more importantly I know I will fight against these events happening in the future.

