



LET'S TALK equality

From the Inside Looking Out by Tamara B.

Privilege is a word that is bounced around in everyday conversations. It is used to discuss everyone from the wealthy upstate New Yorkers to homeless people looking to achieve the American dream. However, privilege is not just decided in checks and balances. As a young African-American, I have personally experienced what it means to be both privileged and underprivileged in today's society. America has always been a white heterosexual male dominated society, and although some may argue that due to laws everyone is now considered equal, that is simply not the case. By analyzing a number of different factors, one will be able to understand why privilege does not lead to a direct result of justice for all.

Since the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement, African-Americans have legally come along way with the privileges and rights they now have. We were given the privilege to vote for our country's leaders, sit next to whomever we wanted to sit next to, and most importantly, be able to receive better educational opportunities. I first realized what being black in America truly meant when I was at the young age of five and excited to start kindergarten. While my parents were looking into the schools in my district, they discovered that I would be allowed to attend a prestigious school in the next city over simply based on my race. The school didn't want me because I was intelligent or my passion for learning; they wanted me to make their school diverse. Although this elementary school did in fact give me an amazing foundation in education, looking back, I see that I gave them something equally as important: a good image. Image is one of the most important factors in society. On the outside, they were perceived as a well-rounded school, but I still had to be educated on what black history was in my own home. I was a token for them to put in the front of the class picture, and although they instructed me on my ABCs and 123s, they couldn't have told me who Ruby Bridges was, the first African-American student to enter an all-Caucasian school. My race may have given me the privilege of attending a reputable school, but it also taught me the reality of our country's priorities.

Another huge victory in the Civil Rights movement was the overruling of the Jim Crow laws. By getting rid of these laws, African-Americans were given the privilege of being treated as citizens of this country. Ideally, once the laws changed, the attitudes of the rest of the country were supposed to change with it. However, as we know from past events, any type of change comes with a lot of resistance and patience. The only problem to this though is that it has been more than fifty years since the Civil Rights movement and the waiting has not ended. As I have grown up in Sanford, Florida I have only witnessed a glimpse of what life was like during the 1960's while the investigation and trial surrounding the events of Trayvon Martin's death occurred. When a racially motivated crime appears on the news, you look at everyone else that could have led to this event happening. When a racially motivated crime

happens fifteen minutes from your childhood home, you look in the mirror. I wondered for many weeks how an event that seemed so outdated could happen during a time where racism was supposed to be a thing of the past, and blacks should be able to be treated as the privileged citizens that they are. It made me think about how a boy two years older than me could be left for dead with only Skittles in his pocket. It made me question why the police in my community, who were supposed to protect every person, failed to investigate the death of a young black person. For the first time in my life, I directly saw the dangerous side of racism. It taught me how a community that I loved could still harbor deplorable people in it. It would ultimately teach me that sacrifice and heartbreak are a few of the only things that will get people to stop waiting for acceptance, but start demanding it.

Furthermore, as written in “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack” by Peggy McIntosh, McIntosh writes on the division of privilege in America. As stated earlier, although African-Americans do have similar legal privileges as Caucasians, there is a vast difference between the judicial laws and the laws that society put into effect. Tim Wise, an activist, states, “In short, and let us be clear on it: race is not a card. It determines whom the dealer is, and who gets dealt.” Society has made it so that a person who does not fit the ‘norm’ of America cannot be acknowledged for their accomplishments that are either downgraded or put to a caliber of honor. This has not only been seen in the African-American community, but in other communities as well. It was not until a few years ago, that a soldier who was willing to give up their life for this country was allowed to hold the person’s hand that they loved in public. America was more concerned about the sexuality of a soldier more so than their courage and bravery. If a man or woman in the military stayed within what society considered ‘American’ and ‘respectable’ they were treated as a hero, but when anything strayed from the perfect image, we would treat them as a foreigner. This is only one of the many examples in United States history how Americans have not been treated with the respect and courtesy that an American should be treated as. No matter what the community may be, there has been undeniable evidence of the fact that when someone is different, we as a country not only belittle them, but attempt to mask their identity.

All in all, although the African-American community does have a lot of privileges in today’s day and age, there are some that are still unfortunately not attainable. This is due to the fact that we cannot rewrite history. There will always be an image in the back of a person’s mind of how an American should act, talk, and look like. As long as there are blurred lines between the difference between equality and privilege, the goal that our forefathers first stated that everyone would be seen as an equal, will never be fully achieved. To close in the words of Rev. Al Sharpton, “We are not where we should be. We are not where we ought to be, but we are further than we were.”