

The Others Beside Me

Mark Twain once said, “The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice”. How come history which is presumptively based on facts be influenced by a subjective factor such as prejudice? This enigma has haunted people’s minds for decades. Its roots hide in the fundamental questions of how we judge other people, and whether we even have the rights to do that. Since the dawn of humanity individuals have been different, and this has caused friction. Being part of a group was the only way of survival and the members of society who were different were seen as a threat to the community. Nowadays, when people are much more advanced they have become even more different. Some factors based upon which people divide other groups of individuals are race, social status, sexual orientation, age, and religion. Many believe that these are reasons for a major distinction between themselves and the given group which leads to ideological, social, and even physical collisions which are caused by the lack of understanding which the common modern day person is ready to put towards a person who has another perspective on life. These collisions are indeed unnecessary since they are based solely upon irrational signs of divergence which cannot define the qualities of a given individual nor can be truly deciding for a whole group of people who all have unique personal beliefs, and therefore this can cause harmful for the society habit of defining and disparaging an individual just because of beliefs which in many cases have no relevance to his qualities as an active and meaningful part of the global community.

Nowadays, surrounded by technology and led by the desire for success, people are often blind for each other’s character and emotions. They rush into their stressed daily routine and follow the stereotypes enforced by society. We have already made up our minds and there is no need to go any further, no time to go any further. Then arises this misunderstanding and even hatred of certain groups of people. The constant competition for acknowledgment makes individuals easily angered. They need a buffer to spill their tiredness and stress onto, and these minorities are the perfect way to do that. It is much easier to just say people with darker colored skin are ignorant then to actually try to get to know someone and then judge him. This comes from the natural instinct to hold on to your own social environment and to be afraid of new “arrivals” who can take your positions. Xenophobia is an example of such fear. However, new perspectives can bring positive changes with a beneficial outcome for everyone. For this purpose one has to take the time to try to understand the “new way”. Another very important factor has led to a different form of discrimination has been the development technology, which has led to something well known in our modern European society: estrangement. Having machines which are able to do so many things which in the past were exclusively human tasks, one forgets about the value of the real human being. Once this has happened it is shockingly simple to put a stigma on somebody. Ray Bradbury’s famous *Fahrenheit 451* explores a fictional future society of numbness. People seem more like emotionless robots than alive beings with feelings and dreams, which shows that the relationships between individuals are problematic. In Bradbury’s text, conversations are a taboo. The environment is very well organized, and the standard of life is high, thus people must be happy. After all, they have the money to do whatever they want to. Despite that the reader can see that something is missing. For example, Mildred, a main character, tries to commit suicide. On the surface she is described as a woman who has all of the advantages which the society has invented, but once one looks closer they can see that she is just empty. Nothing excites her, and nothing shocks her even, tragic death: “We burned a thousand books. We burned a

woman” says Montag. “Well?” replies Mildred. This apathy is caused by the fact that there is no diversity in her world. Each and every day is the same, and all of her friends are the same, and she is indeed just like them. The book shows clearly how a phenomenon like discrimination and the denial of different points of view can dehumanize people and eventually lead to a cruel and cold society. The past is another no less significant agent because it is the one that defines one’s self-consciousness and national identity which in many cases is strongly influenced by prejudice, and that eventually leads to closed groups of people who deny to accept the past “enemy” as a possible friend. In the years of the great geographical discoveries new lands were found and thus opportunities new arose, but with them came new cultures and traditions. Because of greediness and confusion this lead to great issues between the invaders and the natives. With time, the more advanced Europeans became more and more aggressive. This caused slavery which itself lasted for decades. Unfortunately, such events were not unique to the New World and irrational events such as apartheid in South Africa, the genocide in Rwanda, and the ethincal cleansing in Australia are all examples of the extend to which prejudice can harm people.

There are a lot of ways in which the awareness regarding these problems can be raised, but one book really changed the world with its deep though hidden analysis of the causes and effects of discrimination and its forms. Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* sends a strong message of hope to the reader. It shows how real courage is to face the issues, knowing that you are the losing side, but keep your dignity and moral. The book also highlights that in order to have a well-functioning society people must be ready to try to see the world from a different perspective, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it”. To understand one means to move from your comfort zone and dive into the unknown. One grows and lives having established norms and rules of behavior. He is taught from an early age that he is from a given nationality or group. Therefore, he accepts it as the proper way of living your life, and when another person comes he has exactly the same attitude toward his own culture. If those two are not ready to comprehend that different does not mean wrong or bad they will never see eye to eye. However, if they consider and respect each other’s habits, a better and more understanding society will result. People must learn to live in harmony with each other because this will always bring positive results. There are millions of different groups of people on this worls and if we do take advantage of the differences and judge individuals by their qualities we will go forward.

Humans can be oblivious of other’s suffering and pain, and these trends can be passed from generation to generation to become even stronger. However, there are always strong willed individuals to face the problems, name the issues, and speak up to fight against such cruelty and dehumanization. The society listens and, sometimes after a conflict, realizes its mistakes. People go through the hard adaptation to the different culture together. They work hard to make it work, and most importantly they believe that united humans are better. The kind, rational, sympathetic part of the human soul wakes up and destroys these irrational social paradigms. Even though this process takes a lot of time and strength it can really happen. Once people believed it is impossible, but here it is the American president is African-American. This is one of the peaks of human understanding. It is also a proof that all problems have solutions as long as there is someone to taka a stand. Martin Luther King, Jr. hoped and believed in the beauty of the human soul. He dedicated his life to opening the nation’s eyes saying, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” and indeed he and people like him made it happen. Our generation is on the way to making this dream reality.

In the end, no matter of our race, religion, age or other characteristic, we *all* seek happiness, development, and love. We *all* have dreams, and we *all* have fears. In our history there have been examples of discrimination, and today its forms still exist. There have been though positive changes which are happening right now too. Together, when we step on our common nature we can accelarate even more the rates with which global society unites. Because to be a human means to love, to help, and to see all of the possibilities.