

A Step Toward Unity

Race in America has been a hot-button topic across the states and has persistently caused confusion, disunity, and outright hurt across the country. In the last half decade, it has been pushed even more into the spotlight, as social media has emphasized public protests and campaigns such as kneeling during the national anthem in the NFL, or the Black Lives Matter Movement nationwide. It seems to be a topic filled with sharp opinions, and thereby, causes much tension and division. Racial healing is a nebulous subject, both here at Jones High School and across the nation, but there are ways to bring understanding and reconciliation to people no matter their race, gender or political party. Three of the most important things that must be done involve first, being willing to speak about hard truths, second, changing popular narratives about other people groups, and last, staying in proximity to keep distance from allowing stereotypes to build up, to begin with.

One of the largest problems with racism is that people are often uncomfortable talking about it. It is impossible to come to a point of clarity and healing if we remain unwilling to drag the issue into the light. Too often, a sense of guilt pervades over such conversations, for actions the people holding the discussion did not commit. This leads to an unneeded defensive stance, which in turn leads to mistrust. Instead of this, a great step toward unity is to keep the end goal in mind when speaking on the topic of race: to mend a tear. No one enjoys being discriminated against, or accused, or put into a box, so naturally, people wish to avoid the topic when they feel that is what is about to happen to them.

Part of this is the (mis)understanding of the idea of inordinate racial advantages. The topic causes a lot of discomfort, largely because people, especially whites, feel as if they are being put into a box- indicating that they have never struggled in life, did not work for what they have, and are lazy, which is entirely untrue. The understandable defensiveness has claimed many conversations as casualties and has slowed progress tremendously. In short, it simply means that a demographic can live in a system of normal human interactions without being disadvantaged by their skin color, religion, gender, etc. It is not, as is popularly assumed, a condemnation, or a blank statement that life is easy for a given people group.

Seeing headlines such as 'violence in the middle east' or 'whales found dead off coast' put certain general ideas in people's minds, such as 'the middle east is a violent area' and 'whales are in danger'. This can also be true in the topic of race, and instead of watching popular stories of racial unrest and deciding that that is a normal way of interacting, going out and getting to know others that are different gives us the ability to decide for ourselves whether stereotypes about other ethnicities are true or not.

This is extremely important. Keeping close proximity to a diverse group of people makes it immensely harder to put a whole group in a box. Distance allows negative views to build up. Having friends who represent multiple races, religions, and nationalities, whenever possible, tells a more complete story about those often made out to be dangerous. It reminds us that people are people, 3 dimensional, complicated, wonderful human beings, with goals, dreams, and aspirations often much like our own. Each person is unique and brilliant, and being proactive about meeting different types of

people makes it much harder for our minds to be shaped by flat, cut-dry ideas about each other. Suddenly, racist jokes become not jests about some people 'on the other side of the tracks', so to speak, but stabs at our friends, our coworkers, great people who are not at all represented well by what could otherwise be seen as accurate or even funny otherwise. When we are proactive about diverse interaction, we make up our own minds, instead of allowing them to be shaped by others. This is an important part of unity, both nationwide and here in Jones, America.

Race has been a divisive topic in America since it's origin. It has been and will continue to be a tough topic to work through. It can, however, change. Some of the most important keys to healing are to first, being able to speak on the subject without guilt or shame. Second, being aware of how headlines can shape our views of others, and lastly, most importantly, being proactive about interacting with people of different religions, races, and nationalities. This helps us to realize that no matter what, people are people, and although we are beautifily different, we are all unified in that our want for acceptance and love is, really, the same.