

Conquering the Phobia

America seems to be suffering of a tremendous phobia— an inexplicable fear of expression and understanding of others, as well as the fear of listening to views contrary to their own. This phobia of trying to understand the people around you is increasing as more and more people want to be heard but are not willing to hear— it chills them to their core and evokes a shudder just at the horrific thought. This is the threat that diversity faces in this country and in this state. People would rather avoid speaking or acknowledging issues they are uncomfortable with as a means of allowing themselves the security blanket that is ignorance. And it extends to this very day, with very little change having actually been made as issues haven't gone away; some have only been reduced to murmurs. However, this is detrimental as it only decreases the importance placed on acknowledging diversity and having a diverse population. This reason is exactly why schools need to integrate discussion and debates into their curriculums in subjects where they apply. Subjects like History and English, where different texts and problems are taught and examined, would be perfect to help cure this phobia in order to help in the development of one's peripheral vision. In this case, peripheral vision being the awareness and acceptance of diversity different than one's own. Increasingly, the younger generation tends to have opinions on matters deemed to be taboo or insensitive to talk about. However, our needs to discuss with our peers and those around us about these issues, whether it's immigration, whether it's terrorism, whether it's racism, are also increasing.

Typically what happens is that we read and we learn, but our opinions and thoughts aren't a focus and are brushed over as the next lesson is taught. This commonplace occurrence in the typical Humanities subjects only adds to the issue we have of not hearing each other when we speak and neglecting diversity. Schools tend to boast about how diverse their student makeup is,

but don't take the efforts to actually increase diversity and the acceptance of it by creating discussion for this purpose. We are taught to only know the surface-value of our peers, to engage in conversation centered around school and our feelings about it, while ingraining in us that elaborating further into the beliefs of those around us so as to get to know them better is unnecessary. In a way schools are right: We are more than our race, than our views, than our religions, than our ethnic backgrounds. However, our views and experiences are based upon our religions, our races, our ethnicities and it is vital that schools acknowledge this and allow students the space to speak about this. Of course, these spaces need to exist within subjects of study in which they're relevant, meaning that in a subject like math, for example, this space wouldn't be effective and efficient, as math deals with calculations and has little leeway for discussion.

When I was learning about United States history during the 2016 Presidential Election, there were many instances where I wanted to discuss about the events occurring decades or hundreds of years prior and their similarity to the then current state of affairs. Occasionally, we did have debates in that class, one of them being about whether descendants of slaves should get reparations, which actually resulted in me changing my stance on the topic. I was initially in favor of it, as I saw that as being the only logical solution; however, I was placed in the team fighting against the reparations, which eventually changed my stance. Through the different points presented by both my team and the opposing one, I was able to realize that financial compensation does nothing: it just temporarily gives them money and doesn't actually correct the effects of slavery, while also implying that slavery is something we can pay off. An in-class debate that lasted only a few days was able to open my eyes to a completely different perspective I most likely wouldn't have considered otherwise. The presentation of diverse opinions and

perspectives allowed me to see things I maybe wouldn't have on my own, while giving me a platform to give my perspective and for others to give their in a respectful manner.

This panic and fear prevalent in our country is present in our state, and even in schools like mine where there is some diversity, some are insulted or mocked for having contrasting opinions and views—this means that most likely the same occurs in others in the surrounding New Jersey area. Having students sit in a controlled environment, where a teacher can interfere if disrespect is shown either verbally or in the refusal to hear another's words, is such an easily accomplished solution. Students would no longer have to argue with each other and their voices would be heard, accomplishing a truly diverse community. You don't have to change your views; you just have to be able to understand the other side that opposes your own. We are all different and our experiences in life have fostered differing perspectives; however, when these differences aren't truly celebrated or acknowledged in a destructive effort of diversity, true diversity suffers, as people aren't taught to see the influence of one's background in their lives and how it affects their mentality. You have to know and try to understand how I live and how where I'm from has developed my core beliefs so that I can try to do the same for you. The only true way we can celebrate diversity in New Jersey is by enabling and creating the opportunity for students to express their opinions with their peers through simply speaking so that they can be heard while also hearing others. It teaches us young that we don't need to be fixed in our views, allowing diversity to flourish as people contemplate thoughts they maybe never even considered, or would have allowed themselves to consider.