

## Preface

Understanding my social class was a subject I never thought about. There was a barrier that separated me from my world. I hated the fact that most of the people around me were ignorant and didn't want to be anything in life. They had a mindset of violence, giving up easily, and not wanting to learn anything. I felt like I needed a new experience, to be around people who cared and wanted to be successful. People would tell me that I would never actually learn until I was with a different class. I regularly heard my teacher talk about college and how we were going to have a different experience because we were going to be surrounded by smart *white people*. He wasn't trying to say that we weren't smart, just that our school teaches us differently than theirs. It was true. The difference between my mindset from home and the people from California was overwhelming, at times I felt like I couldn't keep up with these people. The way they joked around, what they ate, academically, it all seemed new to me. One of the reasons why I never wanted to look deeply into this subject was because the idea seemed too confusing.

In doing research I learned more, not just about my class but also one that was so different from mine. In my opinion, its the idea that makes us feel different, whether its race or class. We are so influenced by the people around us that we are no longer thinking for ourselves. In a part of my paper I share my experiences and thoughts about both groups. By doing this I am trying to understand and find answers to all of my questions. The purpose of this project is to learn about a lifestyle that I am not a part of but also to understand my own lifestyle and community that I've grown up in. I want to be able to show people how similar we are and that the only difference between us is the amount of power we have. There are so many twists and turns that involve a greater issue, the ability to *observe* instead of *see*.

## Introduction

There's always the possibility of things getting better. We try to make our country a better place. We all dream of having the nice home with the white picket fence. At least that's what I grew up striving for and believing that my dreams could come true if I tried hard enough. My parents came to the United States hoping that their dreams would turn into reality, but instead they were working in minimum wage jobs and didn't have money to pay to go to college. I knew that we had it better in America than in other countries, so there was no point in complaining, though there is still room for improvement. There was never hate in my heart for people who had millions of dollars because I believed they worked hard for their money. My question is "how does our background influence the way we view others?" of course we all grow up listening to what our parents have to say and from there, we create our own opinions. But one thing I learned is that we can never actually have an opinion in things until we've experienced in them.

I never understood how important my race and where I grew up was. If anything, I believed that hiding it would make things better. But I realized that hiding my race was the same as not talking about discrimination and racial issues. I saw my own people, hating white people because they thought they had it all. I was becoming numb to the insults that I received due to being half Latina. I began to believe those insults and lies that people were putting in my head.

When I came back to the Bronx from California I noticed something that I hadn't seen because I was so caught up in my world: it was the way people who didn't have food were

outside in the cold begging people for money or lined up waiting for charity from churches. There are some things we aren't willing to look deeper into. For example I've noticed that most people feel uncomfortable talking about racial issues and discrimination, especially if their race is represented. The truth is if we don't talk about it, the problem won't be solved. I read books and watched documentaries about high-class business people and also lower class, trying to get both opinions. I wanted more "we live in a ruling class system" But as I read these books and saw the documentaries I wasn't getting what I wanted to hear.

When I was younger I believed there was something that we were doing wrong in order to make these people want to take our health care, welfare programs, and try to shut down our schools. They said that we were *taking advantage* of the help we were getting. In some ways I believed it to be true mostly because I saw it happening. It wasn't fair to me that people who weren't looking for jobs or working for something better were taking advantage of the system, especially since there are other people in the streets asking for food or working minimum wage jobs. In some ways most of us settle down for conformity, we are sustained by the power of money. When we get the chance between having a career we would enjoy or a career that would pay a lot, we choose the money because money helps us have a better life. In reality, you are working 8 hours a day on something you don't love. In the documentary "The Queen of Versailles", David Siegel says, "Everyone wants to be rich. If they can't be rich, then the next best thing is to feel rich. If they don't want to feel rich then they're probably dead". Most people underestimate the power and effect that money has. Power and control is overtakes a person and makes them *need* this luxury lifestyle. It isn't a want anymore. It is a need.

## American Culture

Society has influenced the way we think.

There's a structure that we don't see because its been covered up, like the way the Constitution was set up only work to benefit upper class white men.

Who's in charge of most of our country anyway?

Forty-Percent of our money goes to these big corporations and every year they get bigger.

I would understand, If their products were healthy and high quality,

But we're paying double of what shoes and clothes should cost.

Many GMO's are our food without us even knowing.

Changing the way food is grown, processed and sold.

Hiding behind lies and advertising things that are **not** true.

The way there are way more local markets and Whole Foods in wealthy areas

But what about the people who can't afford or have time to cook for their kids because they have two jobs?

Fast food restaurants do the job for them.

We live in such a free and *fair* country that we can't even go outside without being discriminated against the kind of clothing we put on.

Then again, are we giving these people a reason to talk?

I saw a video about Mexican-American protesters rioting about the way they were being treated

Burning the American flag

screaming and cursing

at police officers.  
I tried hard not to think of what I was feeling  
But instead tried to understand how upset they were.  
I couldn't help but to feel  
Embarrassed and angry  
Not just at my own people  
But at the people who made them do these things.  
On Cinco de Mayo a couple of students brought their Mexican flags to school but  
things went wrong  
A couple of White kids brought the American flag to school too,  
They were interviewed by CNN and said  
"They felt out of place by the way these Mexican American teenagers were waving their  
flags around".  
No respect.  
Everyone has the right to have pride,  
it isn't a sign of superiority  
Misinterpret the situation without even thinking.  
Can't ask, "How do I feel about this situation?"  
In time they become the same person that everyone else is  
No power to stand up,  
to be their own person.  
You hear things about your race  
You start to believe  
And change  
and Become part of the American culture.

## Can We Talk?

We should be able to confront and be confronted about difficult situations or they won't be solved. People try to be politically correct, but it comes out sounding like we can't say anything anymore or we'll offend somebody. There are ways to say offending others, but to not say anything at all about social discrimination issues is ridiculous. I've encountered people who have said, "let's not talk about this; it's not appropriate". But people overreact, even if they are not implied in a bad way. In an ideal world, making racial comments wouldn't be a big deal. But in order to do that, we would have to fix the underlying issues. Upper class people are not willing to talk about these issues casually. The fact that they do have better opportunities prevents them from changing the system. The documentary "The One Percent", it was obvious that upper class people didn't want to think about how the lower class didn't have what they had and why they were treated differently. I think the big issue here, is not thinking about oneself but the way we're affecting people around us. For example, when Jamie Johnson, (Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical company) tried to record meetings that his dad was having about his financial stability, his father responded by telling him to stop recording because he was going to risk his family's wealth by exposing their the whole world. They had money that would last them for 3 generations and more! What Jamie Johnson's dad thought was that things were more complicated than what people made it out to be. There are definitely two sides to the story.

The way these people are keeping so much money to themselves is not fair. There are people (Work hand) but aren't financially stabled that need help too. What about the way people are being kicked out of their homes that are made into lofts and better looking buildings? The upper class owns nearly half of the countries wealth but that isn't enough. They still want more. Some people believe that in order to make the income of the lower class grow; you need work on the growth of the top first. It frustrates me to know that there is some truth in this but there are other ways to stop these big corporations from having power over our government and us. At times I end up feeling confused like Jamie Johnson's dad felt throughout the interview, mostly because there are too many issues that would take years to fix. Then again, it might not be about the years, it takes, but the people who are willing to change.

### Fairness in Life

They say when everything is equal it is less valuable.  
Is that why we try our hardest to be different in society?  
Because something that is different and hard to get is what we all want?  
Then there comes the power of money  
That some of us can't get.  
When we're kids we're taught to get a job  
That will pay us a lot  
In order to get everything we want  
What if money didn't matter?  
We would all be doing things we loved.  
There's always someone that's going to tell you  
"That's life. So deal with it".  
Is it life?  
Or are we building a system that's separating us into categories?  
If you don't go to college you are a 'low life' in society.  
College isn't for everyone  
We are still trying to figure out the person that we are.  
Having a support system is really important  
Something that most people in the lower class don't have  
They are trying to follow a path and  
some don't even make it half way  
You're working so hard to get this money  
But in the end you haven't even lived life.

Jacqueline Siegel said, "One of my co-workers told me that when he retired, it was the day he would start to live life". David Siegel worked almost all day and didn't spend enough time with his family. It was almost as if he felt like a failure without money. He didn't come from a wealthy background. A person that has never had much money can lose themselves by trying to get it.

Tina Barney grew up in the opposite circumstances. She was a photographer that only takes pictures of high-class people because she was from that lifestyle. She captured the style that so many upper class people had: the way they all posed with pride in their faces.

Success is important to everyone and it's something that people want. I might say that money isn't important in my life but in reality it is what keeps us going (besides our family and friends of course). Once a person comes close to something they've never had before they hold tight to it because of its value: For a poor person, that would be friends, family, and education; for a billionaire, it would be money, family, and friends.

When I was a little younger, I remember my parents working almost all day to try and pay for our home, put food on the table, and buy us things that we wanted. I clearly remember the gifts that my father would bring us whenever he returned home. But one day the money wasn't there anymore, and neither were the presents. I became so use to getting things from my father as a sign of 'love' that I felt empty without them. He couldn't stop buying things either; he was buying a lifetime of things that he was never able to have when he was a kid. We were in so much debt that we almost lost our home. I never felt like I was being a brat by wanting all of these things that I couldn't have, but I knew there was more to it. I had a hard time letting go of these things because they had become big part of my life. They made me happy. Until this day whenever I see something I like in a store and I feel the *need* to get it I stop myself. I never want to feel like my happiness relies on an item.

I try my hard to view situations from all sides instead of only the perspectives that I am surrounded by. There are so many back and forth arguments and no one is actually listening. I was trying to look for an answer to why things were so unfair and I started to believe that we were all doing something wrong. But what I got was sympathy, for everyone in poverty. Being in the upper class and of the white race was the ideal life of an American. I also realized that people who came to the United States were trying to escape persecution, find better jobs, and find freedom in this country. But throughout the years there has been a ruling class that people are not able to easily see. The One Percent controls all our food, funding, taxes, economy and much more. They are trying to fix things in all the wrong ways. When one person makes a mistake everyone is blamed for it. Whether it's race or class, our background influences every bit of our mindset.