

# Theory of Social Inequality: How Do I Envision Tomorrow?

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I have always been led to assume that my beliefs were concrete – unchangeable – and personally driven. However, after reading the text of “Black Bastards and White Millionaires” then I am becoming critical of a few of the ideologies I once held. I agree that there are two types of people who survive on this earth: those who exploit other people successfully, and those who do, but not as successfully. Who am I? It is in my human nature to exploit others from time to time, but never so successfully. It is not in my character to destroy the identity of others for self-success or to impede on others’ greatest strengths.

Empathetic emotions are what drive me to make sense of the world one day at a time, also within meeting one person at a time. Everyone suffers to a different degree with something in their life, but the standard must be set individually based on what each person can handle at a time and what their absolute limit is. I believe that the world can only hold these two types of people, and sadly feel swayed by a visible truth that the rich and the oppressors are the domination of this world.

My belief system on the ideology of power and privilege in our world has thus far been very influenced by the dynamics of American capitalism. I have experienced it within my own life, under the roof of family members who have been accosted the lifestyle of oppression due to rich power. I have seen within my own home community the weight that restrains individuals from breaking away from their generational poverty.

Perhaps some of my views have become more critical by reading “Black Bastard and White Millionaires”. I say this in the sense that

Charles Payne suggests that not everything in an oppressed individual’s life is all the system’s fault. I have been particularly impacted by Payne’s words “Even in these aggressively conservative times, it might over the long run be better to start raising the moral questions directly than to pretend that there are no people to whom they apply, or to continue constructing empirical questions, so that they lead to the moral conclusions we advocate and obviate those we fear” (p 27).

However, I disagree with denial theory in the manner of believing that the poor “have such-and-such a noxious characteristic and thus, at least by implication, deserve their lot” (p 27). Just because someone has been born into a life of laziness or allowed themselves to travel into a deep road of financial struggling, this does not mean that forgiveness and help should not be offered to them. I do not believe in someone “deserving” pain in turn for their mistakes. Perhaps this has much to do with my Christian upbringing – Jesus disciplined the idea that one should always be forgiven 70 x 7, meaning that infinite forgiveness is the rightful heart no matter who or what has been done wrong. This is the life I wish to pursue for myself in all the work and love that I share. Moreso, I believe it is a compassionate understanding that does not require someone to be religious under any context to understand or entertain.

One could argue with me that there is no agency left but this does not mean there is no room for creating emphasis on change or to new ways of thinking. Liberation is always a possibility. I believe that there is good in everyone’s heart, it just comes down to the inner working by those of us who have the

overcompensation of compassion and good will. Call me an optimist but that is just how simple my answer is. I have a strong faith in the ability to believe in change and I know that having belief among numbers of believers is enough to force that change to come into fruition.

I reconcile the majority of my blames for this disastrous society on the one percenters – the people who never worked a blue collar job in their life or had to understand the weight of being oppressed by someone half their age and with a quintupled salary and zero experience. It is people like this who have been allowed the sovereign control over our system of learning. They stagnate our growth, downplay the major accomplishments in impoverished areas as minor, and have made it their most personal life's work to detach the oppressed from the rest of society.

Why do I choose to blame these individuals? My life's perspectives have been shaped by standing within the realm of the oppressed and I confidently share that I am extremely determined and intelligent. In light of knowing these things then I would expect the system to realize my excellence and to give me advancements for my accomplishments. This would be the system's way of saying "We see that you are not lazy. We see you defying your odds." But no. Instead, the system rebukes my existence as equally as it did before I could prove I was not lazy or successful. How could I possibly grow the craving to destroying this mentality if I was not truly oppressed by it first? I feed into that craving every day by allowing myself to recognize that there are more people hurting in this world than there are living comfortably and in peace.

# Identity and Positionality in the World: What is Real?

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“Why are you always talking about school? Can’t we talk about something else? Life is more than just homework and learning, you know.” I can still hear myself whining these privileged words over and over for my poor mother to hear, words that I continued to repeat as I moved my way through middle school. I remember the gut-wrenching jealousy that I would feel as I would sit on my couch every afternoon and watch the school busses make their stops outside of my house. Lines of students would pile out of the bus every afternoon looking studious in their school uniforms and carrying their oversized and colorful backpacks. I saw these students as individuals who were experiencing life much more than I ever. Their ability to get on a shiny yellow bus and go to a brick wall building with the words “School” painted over the front door led me to believe that were learning so much more than I was - that I was missing out.

At the time, I was too young to realize just how blessed I was to have a family who understood the weight of my future and its very dependence on my education. Neither of my parents had the opportunity of attending further schooling after high school and both wanted to see my sister and I grow in maturity, intellect and morality in ways that they knew the school systems would not offer us. My mom sacrificed her job and my dad took on heavier work for the sake of homeschooling us to ensure that we received what they understood to be the best for us.

My family had every intention of seeing me graduate with a diploma from homeschooling but never expected to have two adamant daughters who would see that vision differently. My sister and I both saw those kids walk off that

school bus the same way, and eventually we reasoned with our parents enough to enroll us into private school. It was grade 7 for me at that point and I was a naive twelve-year-old, anticipating joy on the students’ faces as I thought they would greet this new student into their classroom. It did not take me long to realize, though, that every student was more concerned about everything that was going on outside of the school walls more than anything within them - including me. Gossip was more entertaining than memorizing math charts and the most important thing on everyone’s mind was when that damn bell would ring at the end of the day. I just didn’t understand it.

I continued to question this peculiarity and decided to transfer to public school in the tenth grade. Once again, I had the naive anticipation of being warmly welcomed by the students and openly immersed into active learning. Instead I was greeted by blank stares in hallways and surrounded by provocative behavior beyond anything I knew could exist at such an age. Except this time was much worse than the private school and, in terms of the learning, students refused to even attempt to answer questions that were literally written on the boards for them. *The answers were written in front of their faces and they still could not figure out what was being asked of them.* This was so bizarre for me. *Why do I have to ask to go to the bathroom? Why are so many kids sneaking out to skip school? Why are these teachers so exhausted and so rude?*

Those first few months were brutal for me and full of tears as I came back home every day, and eventually I had no other choice but to accept the emptiness that school had to offer. I

carried on but with a new sense of carelessness for my own worth ethics since the environment of uncritical thinking is so contagious. A few months into attending public schooling I came to start answering my own questions and the answers weren't anything that made me happy. I realized that the education I fought so hard to escape in my childhood was the only way to succeed and the system of bullshit that the government had to offer was more than a waste of time. I started to take more blame off of the students for their carelessness and placed more blame on the education system.

Because those students in my classes didn't go on merely as many field trips as I did while growing up; they didn't get to spend their Tuesdays twiddling their thumbs in the dirt and poking for fish in the river before writing their English essays. They weren't given the opportunity to pick their own arts and crafts projects or decide what chapter of history they wanted to explore on a particular day. They didn't get to break from their coursework to walk outside, sit on a swing set, sing unregrettably loud, all until they were content enough to try working again. Their teachers weren't given enough time to sit with them over cookies and milk to figure out why that one math problem just didn't make sense to them. But I had received all of that.

Once I realized this difference in myself from the others then I started to understand why they had no respect for their teachers or administration. It all made sense why there was a lack of motivation in them and an anticipation for breaking the rules. After all, they had been deprived of their rights to be human in the one place that held the responsibility of teaching them how to be human. In fact, the schooling I was blessed with for so many years was the real school and the school I was now being assimilated into was far from anything realistic.

Each person's social identity is a gift that needs to be understood by its beholder, since each of us is privileged with different layers of identity. My own life has transpired to be something I would have never dreamed of living four years ago, if I had not first begun to understand my social identity first. It comes

down to understanding that each of us are unique and must hone in on what it is that makes each of us useful and in a unique way. Originality would cease to exist in the world if we did not possess this quality. I view the importance of our personal experiences within the world as this: Once individuals start viewing their self-positionality within the world, this world will begin to make sense for all of us. Respect for each other would be heightened, honesty would grow when we start fighting for the things that fire us inside, fear would not hold us back because we would understand why it is that we are alive in the moments we are here. Above all, we would all understand each other a little more, and hopefully with that would also come a heightened peace in society.

I believe there is power in having the visual knowledge of multiple spheres in order to speak on behalf of those spheres' quantity and quality. Far too many individuals in the educational field have been deemed qualified to create change within the school system without visual understanding of the spheres they are affecting. My unique spread between the different school structures allowed me to understand a number of issues: my place as a Caucasian, female, working class individual, diversity immersion, understanding racial differences and religious beliefs beyond my own, the effective methods of pulling in another individual's attention through different learning patterns, as well as the ineffective methods, what education looks like as a teacher through the lens of different salary wages, etc.

These understandings have developed my sense for calculating some of the most effective ways of learning by combining what I have learned within each sphere. I was raised by a home that taught me that things public school students are taught as being impossible, are actually very possible. The level of how far we dream as individuals has a limitless capacity for opportunity and growth. I was raised with the mindset that confidence is everything and the word "No" does not mean no, it simply means to look somewhere else until it sounds like "Yes". Not many people share this ideology which I am shaped by

# Theory of Social Change: What is Positive Social Change?

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The boundaries between establishing equitable versus equal educational opportunities must be changed, and this is where I feel deeply led to make stride in. In seeing the disparities that are spread so far between each school institution, I notice the growing list of issues as you move along the spectrum of teacher to student ratio. (From homeschool, to magnet, to private, to public). Less students are capable of thinking critically, less teachers are allowed the ability to use their autonomy, and higher rates in students' success after graduation are declining.

In order to understand equitable education to bring about change, there are relative issues that connect in the schemes of education. There is not enough or updated data to prove the numeric or visual differences that separate higher performing schools from lower performing schools. I believe this is why change has been so limited and parents have not begun a national fight against the Federal Government for failing their children of success. There are thousands upon thousands of students attending the public school systems every day, learning knowledge a little less and learning to hate the classroom a little more. This is not what education was intended for and this is not what education should stand for now.

Issues such as taxing to fund schools within a town can become problematic if the funds aren't as necessary as they are by a city next door, or if the funds are overpiling from the town wallet. More importantly, standardized testing should be the last- considered method being used to define and quantify a student's brain capacity. I want to petition for more economically-diverse classrooms in every city

and town, higher wages to be cut from the Annual National Budget towards education, and to improve the quality of education board decision-makers so that teachers and students, nation-wide, are given the opportunity to thrive within their own autonomies. Generations have been affected by these devastating truths that our children continue to face today, and the truths must be exposed in a deliberate and liberating political stance! The American school system is enduring a national crisis. This is a part of my responsibility to change, now that I have been given the eye-opening proof of its severity.

My positionality depends on three things: the experiences I have been exposed to, the privilege I have been born with, and the knowledge I have been given. As a researcher in the field of schooling, it should be a constant reflection of myself and how I should play a role in the life of other students. Being taught with much of a one-on-one education teaching style transformed me into the open thinker that I am today, which I have come to understand as being my asset as a public speaker and imaginative thinker. This is what has allowed me to create a space that does not tolerate the terms "no" or "maybe" - I believe that my understanding of this concept will be integral to my part in helping others, and my great hope is that it will affect others in a way so much that they will be convinced to take large chances in life as well.

I was privileged to be born into a white, American, Christian household, which provided me with morals, a color of skin that is not subjected to segregatory or racial conflict, and the freedom to live as I would like. Rather than to use these as stepping stones for myself, I turn

back to the reflection process I spoke of earlier, and strive to incorporate my privileges into the world of people I want to assist and inspire. My understanding of privilege has become a large part of the research that I do within schools, since my personal upbringing felt so limited and difficult. However, my further engagement within communities outside of my own have proven to me that the issues I thought were difficult, even though they are considered difficult compared to some places, are actually very fortunate. It should always be a question in my mind, as I work with and for others, how my positionality can be used to help elevate them.

Positive social change occurs when the work that is being done has visible effects and the minds of the people being affected by the social change are being moved by your efforts. What do I mean by this? When teachers start labor striking, students start sharing, tweeting their frustration with the system, parents refusing to send their kids to school on standardized testing days, seeing the youth participating in petitions for change. Activism is the loudest sign, to me, that your message is being delivered effectively, because you can see the passion rising up out of people.

However, the safety of people engaging in social change is not always secured and the obliteration that many individuals face for defending their beliefs can be brutal. Students could be denied access to colleges for petitioning their schools and teachers could easily be replaced and go jobless. Parents could lose interest in fighting for the social causes if they start to see their children getting embarrassed by their efforts or being torn apart for their political standing. Doing what is right is never intended to be easy and this is a critical issue for followers to understand. I refuse to tune out the passion that is knocking at my walls every day, that I have been given the heart and ability to lead people in the revolution against this war on kids.