SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NOVEL WRITING: AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY
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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project would be a creative work. It will comprise of writing a novel that tackles the major social justice issues in this country today including: racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, colonialism/colonization, immigration, refugees, whiteness, privilege, ahistory, colorblind policies, indigenous rights, threat of nuclear war, Christian privilege, islamophobia, heterosexism, transphobia, ableism, ageism, predatory capitalism, and the limits of a one-sided Western point of view. Through this work, I intend to build on a continuing work in showcasing instances where injustice occurs in this nation through literary fiction. The goal is to illuminate instances of privilege, show how ignorance is the true enemy of our country, and ultimately inspire people to be more educated and help enact social change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For too long, ignorance has reigned over the United States, ignorance of people ravaged by the detriments of oppression, obedience, control, and power. Ferber (2012) says our society is caught in the ideology of oppression blindness knowing that "it is not only race-based privilege that we actively render invisible today, but many other systems of oppression and privilege as well, including class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ability, age, and religion." It's time this nation seeks to rectify this ignorance and blindness. It's time to start working to make positive and effective change to better society for all citizens. We live in a country where some people have privilege and others do not. It's important for all individuals to come face to face with our country's ugly past and learn to confront privilege head on.

Now, people who suffer oppression come to have a unique experience on how they interact with the world. Young (2004) says "all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings." Because of power structures in our society, the voices of the oppressed tend to get diminished, drowned out, and ultimately not listened to. This is why it's important for people who have the privilege of having a voice to step up and enact change when they can. That being said, it's important to have a firm grasp of what exactly oppression is, and what it comes to mean for marginalized communities. Young (2004) says

> In its traditional usage, oppression means the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group . . . In its new usage, oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society . . . Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules.

Because of this, many people go through life ignorant that they may or may not be benefiting from the structural way in which hegemonic systems operate.

The many structures in our society have been carefully crafted to provide unseen advantages to some, including power, and not others. Lemert (1997) says "power is the means by which social structures do this not-exactly-fair work of sorting people according to the few or many life-chances they get. Power may simply, if incompletely, be defined as the social energy of structures. Power is the deterring force that causes some people to get less and some more of whatever is considered desirable in a social world." A group in power is able to dictate who has opportunities, who has resources, and who has the chance to succeed. Another concept of importance is prestige. Lemert (1997) says "prestige, that is, is the remarkable and systematic consistency with which nearly everyone in a society seems to agree that some person ought to be respected highly, others less so, and some not at all." This predicament puts many marginalized people in a tough spot. With no power, and no prestige, they have no easy way of making change and drawing attention to the needs their communities face.

In addition to marginalized groups suffering from oppression, these groups also face societal factors that can affect the way others perceive them as people. Lemert (1997) says "there is considerable evidence that we often view out-groups as homogenous, while we see considerable diversity within our own group." People like to separate into "them" and "us" categories. Often the "them" is seen as different, typically in a negative way. These negative views lead to things like stereotypes. Lemert (1997) says "the point is that our stereotypes prime us to interpret events in ways that confirm our expectations . . . not only do stereotypes affect how we store and interpret information, they guide our attitudes and behaviors. Because many stereotypes involve outgroups and we are motivated to enhance the image of our own group, many, if not most, stereotypes are relatively negative." If we stereotype a group as lazy, dangerous, and incompetent, every action they take will be interpreted in a way for the "us" group to confirm those stereotypes and thus boost the view of their own group.

There are other facets that can develop out of negative information. One of those facets is prejudice. Lemert (1997) says "prejudice is a negative attitude toward, or evaluation of, a person based on his or her membership in a group other than one's own." Prejudice develops not out of the actions or behaviors of a certain group, but simply because they happen to identify with and belong to a certain group. Lemert (1997) goes on to say that

> From this base of prejudice, discrimination is likely to follow. Discrimination is action taken to harm a group, or a member of a group, on a basis of membership in the group. In its extreme form, the combination of prejudice and discrimination can lead to delegitimization of a target group, determining that it does not deserve fair treatment according to a code of norms calling for proper and decent behavior. This view opens the door for the exploitation of the target group and even justifies resorting to violence.

Many marginalized groups in The United States have faced this cycle of oppression. They have faced the injustice of what comes with preconceived notions and uneducated judgments. It has led to their mistreatment and discrimination throughout history.

Yet in the face of this knowledge surrounding the realities of marginalized and minority communities, comes opposition from people of privilege in recognizing their identity. Watt (2007) explains a series of notions that people of privilege might undergo when confronted with reality, which include: denial, deflection, rationalization, intellectualization, principium, false envy, benevolence, and minimization. All of these tactics seek to ultimately refuse the acceptance of a privileged identity and seek to prevent the equity of marginalized groups in all aspects of society. My novel seeks to point out the gaps in our education surrounding history, social justice, and privilege, and highlight the positive effects that come from social change.

ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE

This is a project that will occur over the course of a one-year timeline. Throughout the Fall Semester 2018, I have already been writing and researching this project. By the conclusion of the semester, I will have 150 pages written of this novel. Over the Spring Semester 2019 I will have written a total of approximately 300 pages, having a fully complete novel. About 1/3 of the time I spend working is on doing research on settings, characters, social justice issues etc. as well as mapping and planning out the structure of the novel. The other 2/3 of the time is spent writing. During the Summer of 2018, I read well-written novels from the Western Canon of literature to learn about good writing techniques and find important tips on good writing from published authors to incorporate into my own work. I plan on doing more reading during the Winter Break before the start of the Spring semester to continue to enhance my writing.

Daily Activities

My daily routine involves getting up at 4:30 am five days a week, and writing, researching, and planning for approximately one to two hours each day.

Weekly Activities

My weekly activities include turning in ten pages each Friday, which my mentor reads, and having a reading partner provide feedback on the previous week's pages to take into account in continued writing. In addition, I meet with the Novel Writing class each week for three hours to discuss not only my own work, but other peers' work and different writing techniques and strategies.

Semester Activities

This includes having a chapter of my novel manuscript workshopped by a collection of peers and my faculty mentor with heavy review and feedback twice a semester. In addition, the week after my pages are workshopped, I have a one-on-one meeting with my mentor in order to gain valuable, constructive, and in-depth feedback on how to improve my writing and the content of the story.

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