

Discuss how Humanist principles could be used to address such issues as the “Black Lives Matter” and “#MeToo” movements

All student names in this essay are pseudonyms in order to protect their identity and privacy.

My family turns on the four o'clock news in July of 2015. A White woman on my television screen lists the names of Black people murdered by White police officers from the last three years. Sandra Bland, the last name on the list stated with exhausted finality. This is the first time I understand what it means to be Black in America. It is the first time I witness the genocide of Black bodies and culture. How stories such as these are plastered across media platforms for the masses to politicize, demonize, and dehumanize Black identities.

In October 2017, my phone buzzes with a *New York Times* headline pop up: “Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades.” Impulse compels me to read the article in my seventh period class. I read that for decades women have been paid by Weinstein to stay silent, to not speak their truth. In my mind this translates to: women’s experiences are invalid. This story becomes an inflection point in the way Americans discuss sexual harassment toward women in the workplace. Both the Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movements are systemic inequities that originally motivated me to join Cleveland’s racial equity leadership class, the Cleveland Alliance for Racial Equity (C.A.R.E.) Leadership.

A year later, I sit in a circle among Black, Brown, and White students in C.A.R.E. Leadership. C.A.R.E. is a student-run class aiming to promote racial harmony and equity through

discussion, research, and action. We in C.A.R.E. recognize various intersectionalities between the different types of inequities prominent within society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, et al. As a student of color, a feeling of belonging swells inside of me; C.A.R.E. is a space where all identities are acknowledged and valued.

During the months of January and February, several students outside of C.A.R.E. come in to voice their concerns. Christina confides her recent sexual assault, and how her rapist stalks and follows her in and outside of school. Sarah reports that a boy during the homecoming game verbally harassed her, calling her crude names. Joseph, a Black student, shares he continues to be questioned and monitored by White staff and teachers when he asks to leave the classroom. Eliza, a Jewish student from Cleveland's Jewish Student Union (J.S.U.), describes the sickening feeling of reading "burn them in the ovens" on the back of a J.S.U. poster. None of these issues have been met with adequate initiative by my school to resolve them because of the systems established by the school district that fail to prioritize students' rights. We in C.A.R.E. realize that Portland Public Schools has denied its underrepresented and marginalized students an inherent right: safety.

A single voice, action, or passion can act as the catalyst for social change. However, it requires multiple voices to better understand the interconnectedness of each inequality, and the consequence of complacency in a status quo that refuses justice. My school, a microcosm of American society, mirrors systemic issues that plague America. We are the young Black lives that matter, the women who are the #MeToo movement of now and the future, the strings woven into the fabric of America's history. We are the youth whose rallying cry for social change echos, remaining unheard. Our voices count, and yet are muted.

Denial or aversion to change halts the fight for truth and ending injustices. Humanist principles of science, reason, and critical thinking must guide our discourse and actions to solve injustices afflicting marginalized communities. C.A.R.E.'s methods of discourse and action employ Humanist values and foster Humanist mindsets. In collecting school-wide data through the use of surveys or anecdotal evidence from students, C.A.R.E. combines both theoretical research and scientific thought to analyze the issue. Critical thinking is applied in creating short-term and long-term solutions, and evaluating the effect it would have on school communities. Lastly, reason is utilized to effectively communicate our research to audience members in and outside of school. Confronting issues parallel to Black Lives Matter and #MeToo at Cleveland High School, such as school safety, requires the adults in authority positions to consider how their actions or district policies may reflect the inequities present in society.

Although data analysis is a crucial component to understanding the complex systems that uphold inequity, it is paramount to value and show compassion for each human experience that is shared. This leads to reaffirming the innate worth of human life. It is saying “me too,” “you matter,” “your experience is real,” “your life has value.” In having conversations between adults and students, we hope to bridge the daunting gaps that divide our experiences and unite. It is our attempt to humanize our strength, beauty, and struggle while seeking equity and truth.