

Recognizing the Roots: How to Solve America's Most Delicate Problems

Author Anthony J. D'Angelo once said, "When solving problems, dig at the roots instead of just hacking at the leaves." Too often, it appears that we attempt to solve problems without considering the root causes. This creates even more strife and conflict when a similar issue arises. Several issues still plaguing America today include racism, lifestyle diseases, food inequality, and environmental justice. Such issues interconnect in various ways. To solve major matters and grow "the plant of freedom", it is important that we recognize the roots and take time to understand them.

It is the responsibility of every individual to partake in environmental justice, but the negative effects that we have on the environment impose a greater impact on people of color. According to an article by Jim Erickson at Phys.Org, a United Kingdom science and research organization, "Certain communities are disproportionately burdened by environmental contamination and health risks. Like Flint, those places tend to be locations where poor people and people of color are concentrated," (Erickson). Flint, a city in Michigan, has been notorious since 2014 when concerns about water safety arose. Over half of the population is African-American, and over 40 percent of the population lives under the poverty line. This unfortunate reality was also noticed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who said in his 1967 Christmas sermon, "It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly ..." (Gilliss). Our actions, no matter how big or small, always have an impact on other people, animals, or the environment. Yet many are disconnected from the results of their actions, especially when concerning the Earth.

Furthermore, the healthcare system has aspects that result in different treatments for people of color. Amy Roder at The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Health's public health magazine noted, "The CDC now estimates that 700 to 900 new and expectant mothers die in the U.S. each year, and an additional 500,000 women experience life-threatening postpartum complications. More than half of these deaths and near deaths are from preventable causes, and a disproportionate number of the women suffering are black... African American women are three to four times more likely to die during or after delivery than are white women. According to the World Health Organization, their odds of surviving childbirth are comparable to those of women in countries such as Mexico and Uzbekistan, where significant proportions of the population live in poverty" (Roeder). As a developed and affluent country, the United States should be taking better care of those who bring new life to the nation. The article does go on to explain research and changes made to reduce the disparity in deaths and healthcare treatment.

Also, it is proven that, in both humans and animals, a quality diet decreases the risk of diseases and disorders. Yet many people of color live in areas referred to as "food deserts." According to the CDC, "Adults who eat a healthy diet live longer and have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers. Healthy eating can help people with chronic diseases manage these conditions and prevent complications. Most Americans, however, do not have a healthy diet" (CDC). In a food desert, there is very little access to nutritious or unprocessed foods and more access to unhealthy convenience foods. Also, the American Psychological Association states, "Among African American adults, nearly 48 percent are clinically obese... compared to 32.6 percent of whites" (APA). Obesity causes many other health issues but can also impact an individual's ability to partake in activities they used to enjoy. Preventing access to nutritious, whole foods is costly and harmful to those involved.

So what are we to do about these problems? There is no quick, fix-all solution. In an article for *Liberal Education*, Adrianna Kezar and Sharon Fries-Britt discuss the inadequate measures taken by institutions to create an equitable environment. The article states, “In addressing racial issues, administrative leaders often use a routinized approach--setting up a task force, collecting data, and developing a report with recommendations... Rarely do routine efforts create change; in fact, they can be destructive to campus communities that need authentic engagement in which leaders listen to and work on the ground with faculty, staff, and students. Leaders should focus on building trust and cultivating respect if they seek authentic engagement” (Kezar and Fries-Britt). It is important to remember that the best and most efficient solutions begin with the roots. One of the first steps taken should be to listen to those impacted the most about the issues they want to address instead of choosing issues based on an agenda. We should also be willing to learn. We may not understand, but we ought to remain open-minded and empathetic so that we can expand our understanding of these issues. Then and only then will we be able to solve these issues.

The “plant of freedom” is waiting for us, ensnared in the weeds of problems that have gone on for too long. But, like weeds, we cannot solve the issues on the surface, for they will worsen in time. We must dig deep, face the problems at the roots, and then begin to nurture and grow the “plant of freedom.”

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