

PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest First Place Winner

Peace Begins at Home

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"Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free. The Dalai Lama believed that because we all share this small planet earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. While his work received worldwide recognition, the Dalai Lama never lost sight of his ultimate goal - to gain freedom for his native land.

While the United States plays a vital and pivotal role brokering peace around the world, we have issues of respect, hunger and individual freedoms to address at home. According to Human Rights Watch, our criminal justice system, plagued with issues of racial and sentencing disparities, has the largest reported prison population in the world. The U.S. Department of Justice reports that unarmed African Americans died at the hands of armed White police officers at the rate of nearly two per week from 2005 to 2012 giving rise today to a national movement dubbed #BlackLivesMatter that has taken center stage during recent Presidential debates. Women around the world struggle for basic human rights while it took an Act of Congress to pass the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 to give women in the United States increased rights to sue for fair and equal pay. Sadly, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that 16 million kids, 1 in 5, live in households without consistent access to adequate food. Finally, according to studies by University of Alabama's Professor Adam Lankford, "there are more public mass shootings in the United States than in any other country in the world, resulting in over 600 deaths since 2012." As a nation, we must ask ourselves, "are we doing enough to secure peace within our own boundaries?"

Today's small planet is made even smaller due to the prevalence of the internet, social media and up to the minute news, thus, our own inadequacies are being played out on the world stage. The U.S. as a nation is known for its democratic principles, however, voter apathy is on the rise and voter turnout is at an all-time low. In this 2016 election year, however, while there is increased interest in the overall election, the level of diplomacy amongst the contenders for the highest office in the land has reached a deplorable low point. If the U.S. is to continue as the standard bearer for peace worldwide, we must address our shortcomings and challenges. Though recent polls conducted by Pew Research indicate a growing isolationist sentiment with nearly half of those polled expressing that America should "mind its own business" internationally and let other nations work out their problems. We must not retreat, but must instead, as the Dalai Lama stated in the closing words to his Nobel Lecture:

"For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I (the U.S), too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world."