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If America overcame Sisyphus

I would like to open with a quote: “the opposite of poverty is justice,” (Bryan Stevenson). I cling to this quote as truth and the reality of our society in America. America has upheld racial disparities with as much might as the push from Britain in the 1700’s. I believe that the best analogy to the attempts made in America to be a land of voice and equality is that of Sisyphus. He was the king of Corinth. Sisyphus believed, greedily, that he was exceptionally clever. He outsmarted the gods into giving him two extra chances at life. This endless but greedy struggle for life earned him his eternal punishment of endlessly pushing a boulder up a steep hill, only for it to roll down before he could get to the top. This reminds me exactly of American’s passion for life, but being confronted by injustice and obstacles. Justice will take a few steps but ultimately end up right back where we were. It is a constant struggle to make our way to the top because once we get one boulder nearly there, that one falls and we see another that needs to be worked on.

There are an endless amount of issues for us to focus on as a society to correct, but we are distracted by the next one or we do not make it far enough to receive a true outcome. This is how I see our democracy. Democracy is the ability for the smallest voice in a society to have a say and to be heard by their community in order to assist in the foundation and ruling of its country. America is an idealistic attempt at what a true democracy should be with injustice at the heart of it’s deterioration. Our paranoia with voting and the racial disparity issues being made worse by inadequate representation are two of my personal issues with American democracy. America is more concerned with the borders that exist and the ability to have differences rather than celebrating humanity and equality.

One of the main problems that can be seen is the understanding that Americans feel that their votes do not matter. They do not believe that they have a true impact on politics and how the elections turn out. They believe this is all out of their hands. Americans believe that “voting doesn’t matter or isn’t worth their time. In any given election, between 35 and 60 percent of eligible voters don’t cast a ballot,” (Ameliatd). This percentage is huge and it is definitely an incredible thought to think that every vote counts but this is a true presentation of what is happening. Although, the truth is that not everyone is allowed to vote. And this is where the injustice with even the most basic right and foundation of our country truly fails. We have citizens, that because of mistakes, mental illness, or addiction, they have their rights to vote stripped from them. As if their low moments in life definite the entirety of who they are and devalue them as American’s. Florida passed restrictions that stated felons must pay back fines and court fees to vote. Lebron James, and other athletes, banded together to pay off many ex-felons debts so that they could vote, (ABC News). The attempt to give every person a chance is significant and this is when humans act like humans. The compassion and understanding that a single life decision should not take away your right to vote to decide who leads or manages the country, state, and town that you live in.

Let us imagine that you get yourself into a legal situation, a wrong place-wrong time scenario. And you are to meet with your attorney that was just appointed to you at three in the morning. She comes in for a total of 5 minutes, tells you sentence after sentence of legal jargon and then leaves. And you do not see her again until trial day where she brings the wrong case file and calls you by the wrong name. The amount of cases a public defender has is incredible. A lawyer in Louisiana had 149 at a single time which was dealt out to be the work of at least 5 lawyers, (Oppel, Patel). He had 5 times his caseload and the expectation that these individuals are to be given adequate representation is impossible. “Mr. Talaska would have needed almost 10,000 hours, or five work-years, to handle the 194 active felony cases he had as of that April day, not to mention the dozens more he would be assigned that year,” (Oppel, Patel). There was

a study done with 5,200 cases in Ohio and the results are very alarming: “Hoffman concluded that you are not only more likely to go to jail if you have a public defender but you are also more likely to serve a longer sentence. Someone that hires a private attorney receives on average a three year shorter sentence,” (Chad Bank Law). The statistics and facts of this matter are everywhere. There are a plethora of cases done, essentially all showing the same finding, public defenders take on too big of a workload and are not capable of providing an adequate defense. It cannot happen but this is how our court system works. We have the right to legal representation, but that representation can be exhausted, overwhelmed and overworked.

I am unable to see how a public defender that cannot give each client the true fight for their life and rights that they deserve is democratic to our society. How are we proud of this as Americans? How are we able to know that there are so many poor citizens out there who have no other choice but to put their freedom in the hands of someone that cannot even remember what case they are currently working on? The 5 minutes to talk and then the day of trial should not be the only contact between an attorney and a client. And let's say that you are able to come up with money for an attorney. You sell your car and maybe some other items to afford decent representation. You get charged for the phone call at 2am, absolutely terrified that you did something wrong. You get charged for the email, asking what time the next hearing is. You get charged asking what a continuation is and how many more there could be. And then you get charged a bulk of money for trial, hoping that they prepared well enough and that they understood the truth of what happened and can truly be your legal advocate. There is so much to the world of lawyers and court that is unknown unless you live it and you have to learn all of your avenues fast. And you have to hope that you get that public defender that just started and has not been handed a stack of cases just yet.

I understand that these are details that do not directly deal with what may first come to mind when democracy is discussed. These issues are part of the foundational cracks of democratic America, though. These issues are ingrained in the struggles we face every day

where American children are terrified of law enforcement or where an innocent man loses his freedom because he went left instead of right and was mixed up in a gang fight. There needs to be accountability and equality in the blueprint of America. In what makes us, *us*. We need to understand that without freedom and true justice for all, we are not a society where voices are heard or where we have a say. Democracy is about equality and we are not there yet. One day we might get that rock over the hill and say we defeated that civil struggle but we will still have many boulders to go.

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