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Abstract

The Preservation of Marginalized Communities and Cultures

For many individuals who are marginalized both in their homeland, and in the United States, the American educational system often neglects to present a history that is defined by oppression. This is largely because these histories are deemed unimportant, or they challenge master narratives of progress and equality. In the United States, it has become the norm to represent a perspective from the position of privilege as a matter of individual achievement. That is, the perspective of able-bodied white heterosexual males, often of the middle class or higher, is the predominate voice of media and education.

Ignoring the past and present oppression of disenfranchised communities only fuels assumptions about the inherent inferiority of people of color, women, and anyone else who is unable to claim the benefits of privileged positions. Individuals who have suffered or continue to suffer under unjust systems must find ways to preserve their own collective memories, while simultaneously demanding that such injustices are taught and recognized. How do marginalized communities successfully overcome these challenges, while also enabling their voices to be heard, and awareness to be raised? What artistic mediums are used to bring individuals together in order to create a complex story that captures, empowers, and solidifies our identities both independently and as a collective?

By exploring various communities and narratives based in London, Cuba, and Ithaca, comparisons can be made to explore how these groups of individuals, who each lack the formal

validation of their histories and oppression, ultimately continue to suffer at the hands of inequality and injustice. Furthermore, a greater understanding of this international issue can have a profound impact on the opportunities and recognition given to such individuals. Once institutional systems represent and acknowledge historical disparities, and the ways in which they continue to affect contemporary structures, these same systems can be corrected to give way to a more equal and responsive structure.

In the coming months, I will be helping adolescents of the Burmese refugee family population in Ithaca, New York create a short documentary about their experiences as Karen-American youth. By doing so, I hope to gain a greater understanding of the message and cultural aspects that the students deem critical to share and represent with each other and the rest of the community. Ultimately, I anticipate to use this paper as a framework for our project.

Academia and media representation are among the two most important and influential mediums for communicating information to the general public. They are equally responsible for conveying the unfiltered truth, and for presenting information and history in its rawest form. Humanity cannot hope to advance towards a utopic and egalitarian society until the wounds of the past are acknowledged and atoned. Only then can communities be healed, and the inherent inequality and injustice of a discriminatory system can be addressed.