

## “Can Society Function Without Respect?”

731 words

In today's society, it is not the individual who possesses the privilege of determining their own identity. It is a fact stamped on to a human being by the outside world, molded through the whispers of prejudice. An individual's color is placed above their ambition, their gender above their skill, their faith above their kindness, their sexual orientation above their ability to love. It is human nature to label one another. We do this to find peace in our own existence, to create organization in a society of unraveling clutter. But more often than not, humanity itself is lost underneath the labeling, the stereotypes, the one-word identities. Our attempt at organization only creates chaos, polarizing and pitting humankind against one another. If we wish to escape this black hole of hatred and ignorance consuming our society, we must take a step back. We must reach beyond the labels and see one another as an entire person, not only “good,” certainly not “evil,” but a human being with both triumphs and failures. We need not understand those who contradict our morals, nor do we need to accept their beliefs as our own. But if our global society wishes to progress beyond the chaos, we must value and respect one another as human beings.

It was Germany, early 1930's when laws restricting Jews from participating in daily society began. The charismatic leader of the soon to be dictatorial state easily painted a coat of blame over the entire Jewish people. They were labeled as vile, greedy, and villainous beings, adorned with a yellow star on their lapels to signify their evil doings. Propaganda perpetuated the idea that Jews were no longer people, rather a scapegoat to all the injustices in the world. Once viewed as power hungry individuals, they soon became gaunt, helpless prisoners, their fate residing in ashes. The moment a label was placed above humanity, the world tilted towards destruction. When individuals no longer saw their neighbors as humans, people fell into a state of war and genocide. The lives of six million Jews were savagely taken, as was the humanity of all those who did nothing to stop it.

Launching his campaign, Donald Trump introduced his platform by calling illegal Mexican immigrants rapists and criminals. On more than several accounts, he has objectified and crudely disrespected women by calling them “gold diggers,” by grabbing them nonconsensually, by sexualizing his own daughter. This is a man who left behind respectfulness and honor many years ago, and yet the country elected him to the most powerful position in the world. These bitter words ring with familiarity, reminding us of a time of destruction where humanity was lost under the harsh winds of prejudice. But today there is a hopeful battlecry heard between the tidepools. You can see it in the distance, slowly rising above the water. The soldiers are embellished with pink hats and tall posters at nonviolent protests, with skin of all colors and hearts of genuine compassion as they band together across the nation. They are ordinary people from ordinary towns who witness hatred and speak out. They are those who see immigrants, women, the disabled and the poor as human beings, as individuals with both triumphs and failures, as more than the label society has assigned them. They peer through the thick fog of ignorance and challenge their own instinctive thoughts. Though they do not always understand what they have not experienced, nor accept beliefs contradicting their own, they have the courage to respect those who are different from them, seeing them in a clearer and fuller light.

In a society without empathy, without dignity, without respect, humanity stands without legs. Those without the power to fight for themselves are dehumanized and defaced, made into offensive caricatures. Without those who stand up and fight for morality, society falls. Today, it so often feels as if we are trapped inside an unending storm, a period of darkness in the most progressive era of history. But there are those who fight back, who stand up for themselves and strangers alike, and they do so with utter respect and honor. They do so by standing side by side, by placing the fate of their community before their daily routine, by finding strength in diversity. They are the peaceful soldiers, ensuring the long arc of the universe will bend towards justice (Theodore Parker).