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Proactive Politics

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"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." This beautiful quote from Anne Frank encapsulates a magnificent model for how the world should be run— a peaceful, productive, and happy existence. Unfortunately, it is also the precise opposite of how people tend to operate within politics, and rather than choosing to improve the world as soon as possible, one will instead put it off for as long as possible, or until it affects one personally. This way of approaching change can have many consequences, and overall is a very ineffective strategy to avoid suffering. Political change should not be a reaction to an unfortunate event, but rather a proaction to prevent it, due to the harm that befalls people in the absence of action. This can be seen through examples in both the government in Mumbai, as detailed by Katherine Boo in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers,* and the most recent presidential election in the United States.

In Mumbai, the harm that results due to the lack of proactive change can be seen most clearly in the times surrounding a terrorist attack. During the attack itself, government agencies were so slow at reacting to the ongoing attack that by the time they reached the location in question, at least fifty were dead and the killings had already stopped without their intervention. This is clearly a tremendous failing on the part of the government, and while the people of Mumbai are in no way responsible for the attack, unfortunately there are things that many could have done in order to prevent the failures of the government. Most affluent people were already aware of the government's general incompetence, but since it only affected the poor, it was something that they used money to get around, and subsequently put out of their minds. As

Katherine Boo records, "Rich Indians typically tried to work around a dysfunctional government. Private security was hired, city water was filtered, private school tuitions were paid. Such choices had evolved over the years into a principle: the best government is the one that gets out of the way" (Boo 216). Because they were not currently affected by government issues, people of higher classes did not feel compelled to change anything, and missed the chance to improve the situation before tragedy struck. Had they chosen to improve this useless system early on, the government may not have been so incompetent when it was needed. Additionally, the lives of countless people in lower classes would have been improved, or even spared. Despite the earlier apathy, though, a very different attitude appeared after the turmoil. Since the suffering had impacted the rich, the cause of government improvement appeared to be taken up with vigor. "Parliamentary elections would be held at the end of April, and middle- and upper-class people, especially young people, were registering to vote in record numbers. Affluent, educated candidates were coming forth with platforms of radical change: accountability, transparency, e-governance" (Boo 217). It appears that the rich citizens of Mumbai shifted their viewpoint completely following this tragedy, and although it clearly still would have been beneficial to make changes at this point, the amount of people who were harmed earlier, while the rich remained apathetic, is not insignificant. In addition, most of the upper-class voters did not even come through in the election, and nothing was changed in the end anyway. Even a terrorist event was not personal to enough people for change to happen. This further emphasizes the need to enact change even before the issue becomes personal, because if a terrorist attack does not meet the threshold for this group of people to take action toward improvement, then it would take a horrendous amount of suffering before enough people decide to do something.

Additionally, examples of reactive change and its shortcomings can be seen through the US election of 2016. The state of the country following this election could be described as "lacking" at best and "catastrophic" at worst, with discrimination, corruption, and inequality running rampant. When it comes to the administration in charge of (and one might say causing) this fiasco, many of the most outspoken critics come from the younger generations, and aptly so— it is their futures that will be most affected by current policy changes, and often their voices suppressed in the current political climate. However, according to the 2016 Census, a measly 46% of young voters participated in the 2016 election, totaling far less than the 58, 67, and 71% seen in their older counterparts (Brownstein 1). Like Mumbai's middle- and upper-class, many young people of voting age were not yet in a position of harm during this specific time, and thus did not see voting as imperative. This place of relative political comfort rendered many apathetic enough to bypass the effort of voting. And unfortunately, by losing interest in voting when all was well, young voters may have robbed themselves of the chance to keep things that way. As most Americans are aware, the 2016 election was far from a landslide victory in either direction. With Clinton winning the popular vote and Trump taking the electoral college, obviously the race was close enough to cause some contention. And regardless of any personal opinions of the electoral college and which candidate actually should have advanced to the White House, it is clear that the high percentage of absent young voters* had potential to influence the decision. By abstaining from voting, many young people may have inadvertently subjected themselves to four years of an administration that they would come to utterly despise. And just like in Mumbai, the idea of future change suddenly became very prevalent once the turmoil came (as opposed to making any attempt to prevent it in the first place). This is the state in which we currently exist,

where it is predicted that there will be an "enormous increase" of voters in the 2020 election, the likes of which could "shatter older records" (Brownstein 1). While it would undoubtedly be a great thing if this comes to pass, it should not be lost on the American public that they had the opportunity to make this same change four years earlier. Reactive political change is still political change, but in consideration of all of the harm that has come to multiple different minority groups throughout the last three years and might still continue throughout 2020 and beyond, it would have been almost immeasurably more beneficial to have chosen proactive change instead, just as it would have been in Mumbai.

In conclusion, enacting political change to prevent unfavorable events, rather than solely reacting to them after the damage is done, can save countless people from unnecessary suffering. By improving the world early on, it is possible to prevent harm, injustice, and tragedy before they strike. It is time to take a note from Anne Frank and improve society at the soonest moment possible, so that the world can become a more wonderful place for everyone.

Note: "absent voters" refers to those that had the ability to vote and chose not to, and is not targeted at voters of color or less affluent citizens who face many additional barriers when voting. According to government census data, 74% of non-voters were either people who registered to vote and didn't show, or people who did not register because they aren't interested in politics/missed the deadline (File 15). Assuming that these people were not lying about the reason they did not vote, that still leaves 40% (as opposed to 52%) of young people who could have voted, or about 13.2 million people.

Works Cited

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