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# What is Social Justice: My Explanation of Social Justice

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What is Social Justice

My Explanation of Social Justice

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Under Direction of Dr. Myra Ann Houser

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## Social Justice

What is social justice? How do you define it, and what does it mean specifically to you? After this semester, getting more involved with the community, and being in this class I should have a knowledge/understanding of what this is now, right? Well, I do not fully understand, because this question is something that has many folds and is not easily answered or explained. So, what is it? It could be so many things, and yet we all have different defined examples of what is socially acceptable or social norms based on who we live with, what is going on in our world and how we react to individual situations. The idea of social justice is really just that, an idea. While it is difficult to define in general, it is unique to each person. There is no way to fully accomplish "social justice" because it is more of an ideal than of something that can actually be a reality.

When trying to create change or make a difference, there is never a perfect way to go about it. In ordinary everyday life, we assume that things that we need or are given freely in America are not the normal in other countries. The perfect example of this is whenever we read the book *Water*.<sup>1</sup> We assume that water is just a basic right of all humans and should be something that we are given without even a second thought, but is it? It is talked about a lot about how they have to work to get it, how everyone has

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<sup>1</sup> James Salzman, *Drinking water: a history* (New York ; London: Overlook Duckworth, 2017).

to put a ton of chemicals and stuff in the water to try and make it acceptable to drink and use. There is a current study researching “the health effects of the microbe *Helicobacter pylori*”<sup>2</sup> in our water, but so far it has only shown that it is harmful to the body and to any who drink it. There is not really fully a way that we can help with that in other countries. If we bring water here and try and help, it could end up hurting the local community and making things work not as well and not able to function in the way that they did previously and in the way that their civilizations or cities work. This could cause even more issues than trying to help.

Social justice really could mean almost anything. It could mean bringing justice or understanding to minorities or people who, as Americans and as white individuals, put labels on. When we call someone, who struggles with something “special ed” or we label someone with depression as “mentally unstable”<sup>3</sup> we aren’t treating them in a way that is human or something that every human being deserves. Us not doing things that are against the social norms but again that is possible that it doesn’t even fully exist. If we bring awareness and attention to the fact that we need to stop labeling people is that going to fix an issue, or is it still creating more of an issue? In Solomon’s book he talks about a family who has a child with Down Syndrome and how they “couldn’t leave the house without worrying what

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Solomon and Laurie Calkhoven, *Far from the tree* (New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2017)

was going to happen,.”<sup>4</sup> This is just showing how, yes, even if they have something that is seemingly not that hard, it affects their everyday lives and will affect everyone in that family. If we bring awareness to issues that’s great, we can help; however, is this us bringing attention to groups of people who don’t want attention anymore because of the fact that they have already had too much flack? Would they rather just stay in the shadows and not have people point out some of these issues? We never really know because of two reasons; we either don’t actually ask or try and figure out what it is that they are actually wanting, or we just assume that our ideas and ways of dealing with things is the correct way to go about these things. We think that our help is 100% justified and correct without giving a second thought to if the people we are helping actually want the help. There is really no way to fully understand what people are going through unless we talk to them and have that conversation. Most Americans would feel uncomfortable with this and wouldn’t want to have the awkward or weird conversation because this isn’t what is in their comfort zone but in order for us to get into situations to help we need to actually understand what goes into every day lives of these people. This has been demonstrated for the past few weeks with this whole Tully Borland issue, yes, we all have different opinions and beliefs; however, when we talk about it and try and figure out where to go and how to go about it, that is when we actually cause change. That is when

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. (217)

we can actually make a difference in our community and in the lives of those around us.

Whenever people invest in others' lives, there is a relationship built, and there is a comfortability that now allows them to ask for help and tell when they need something. Having someone come to you or feel that they have the freedom to actually say what they think or what they need is making a bigger difference in those individuals' lives than if they are just given a whole bunch of random stuff that they do not actually need or they feel that they are expecting charity and so they do not want to have to. There is never a moment when a man wants to admit that he can fight and provide for his family. It damages their pride and their manliness, and as has been shown in history over and over: once men or really human beings feel that they no longer have the ability to do their purpose, they give up and don't know how to even live any longer. Whenever the Holocaust began and the men and women were being forced to leave their homes and either move into the ghettos or flee for their lives that was hard for the men. Their lives and their senses of self-worth were in their jobs and their ability to protect and care for their family. When they were forced to leave they had to leave that behind. The women did not have to face that as much because their sense of self was more in the family and they took that with them. This goes to show that when there is no longer a feeling of purpose men and women both just no longer see a point in moving on.

The term social justice can be applied in basically any context and you can get something out of it. Such as if you take the *Assassination of a Saint*, there was nothing done on the Romero case for 20 years before these gentlemen, Matt Eisenbrandt and one of his colleagues, got involved in his case, but when they did they began actually creating change. They pushed, and yes there was push back, because it was the policemen who killed him and planned the entire thing. The people who were there during the shooting while the funeral was going on had no way of getting closure because they didn't have policeman getting involved. They were not having any involvement and when they tried to pursue it nothing happened. So, where was the justice in this situation? It did not come until twenty years later when two American lawyers got involved and tried to bring the people who killed him to justice; however, this is just one instance where there was not justice brought about and there was a crime committed. There have been so many issues and things throughout our society that just go unnoticed that would count as "social injustice". What do we do about the homeless veterans? How do we handle that? These are the men and women who fought for our freedom in war but they are not treated as heroes. In fact, many people think that they are a burden and are weighing down the population as we care and protect these people who did the same for us.

When we try and make a difference or make an impact, there could always be a negative outcome as well. As we saw in the movie *In the Time*

*of the Butterflies* there is stuff that we can do to cause social change. We can get involved and try and get things to change and often times we do. There is never a time when us getting involved isn't going to help, but there is also a risk when we put ourselves out there. Normally, there are two options. Either we create social change and finally get things to change, or we end up going down with the process and as much as we do not want the latter of the two; sadly it is often the case. There have been many times where people who try and get involved have ended up dying for it but often times when that does happen that is the turning point in the times and that is what actually sparks change and begins the end.

Are all of the social injustices things that we should try and fix, or are these things out of our control? What happens when we try to fix things, and how does this affect our everyday lives? Well, what I have been realizing more and more is that when we try and fix things that are out of the country or that are even here we end up causing issues in other areas or when we are trying to fix a problem there is always collateral damage. So, again the question is, are we creating justice when we tried to fix or at least mend the racial differences? All we ended up doing was creating more issues now. We finally got rid of the Jim Crow laws and the segregation within schools (slightly), and yet we still have this prejudice that goes around and a very large racial difference. There is a difference between people, but it is where we like to deny it. It's a difference of generations, which I do understand



that it was not this generation; however, that does not give anyone the right to use certain terms, derogatory comments, or names that were used back in the time. I think that justice is such a fine line between what is right and also how it becomes enabling. It's a fine line that people must walk but it is one of the most necessary ones that we must walk as well.

Furthermore, there is always the side of justice that is just pure helping, and there is no other motive besides making a difference. Take the 5k that we helped with. There was nothing in it for us besides the fact that we ran it and had fun as a group doing so, but it was still just a community service opportunity that just goes into bettering our local community and trying to make it a safer and more enjoyable place for our families. Also, within our community we can help with Elder Serve, and tutoring that makes a difference and creates an impact on the younger generation. At this point, the younger generation is looking toward us to see how we react to things and how we handle our lives and the choices we make, so how are we going to do that? Be a generation of judgement or be a generation of love and change.

Throughout this class, I have learned that there are a lot of situations where we have the ability to help but we either turn our backs or we just do not do it to the fullest extent that we can. Getting involved with the 5k is actually something that I really loved. I am also kind of disappointed that we did not get the chance to help with the playground. I was really looking

forward to helping and trying to impact the community. I know that it is the little things that we do that can really make an impact, and I have loved not only working with the 5k but also getting to go to the Child Safety Center and getting to see their office and getting to hear what all they do in the community to bring about change and impact the lives of so many families. I cannot imagine the difference that a place like that could have created for me when I went through so many of the things I did when I was little.

Social Justice is forever something that people will struggle with, and fighting between us, is this something that we can fully put in place in the world, or is this something we will never be able to comprehend or act upon. Yes, it is an ideal and something that we can only dream become a reality, but how do we go about enacting small changes that actually make a difference in the life we know at Ouachita Baptist University? Well, last week we spoke up and sent letters and told the faculty that we were not okay with the words spoken by one of our professors and those words and actions that we had made a difference. We had meetings, letters going around to start change, and faculty getting invested in more of our lives in order to make sure that we were okay while so many things were out of our control they wanted us to know that they understood and that they had our backs. That is what social justice is. It is doing the small things even when we do not know what all we can do. It is creating conversation and making our opinions known and doing so in a constructive way so that yeah, people

know what our opinions are, but we are not shaming others for theirs. That is not the way to try and create change. That is the way that we create even more issues than is already in place. So yes, social justice is just an idea and a hope and dream for our reality but creating small change that can eventually create a whirlpool that hopefully can make a larger change in the future is not something that is a dream. That can be our reality as we are seeing day to day on our campus and in our lives. We got people involved. We spoke up and we made a change, even if it was something small and what seemed to be little. This still showed that when we stand together and try and make something change for the better that we really can be a generation of justice.

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