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### The Fight

Chloe Morse

*Ouachita Baptist University*, [mor66405@obu.edu](mailto:mor66405@obu.edu)

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Chloe Morse

Dr. Houser

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### The Fight

For many, the word ‘justice’ brings up an image of a courtroom. A guilty man stands before a judge, ready to pay the price for his crimes and justice will occur when he receives his sentence. The term ‘social justice’, however, is more complicated. It goes beyond crime and punishment. Social justice is when the system works under the knowledge that all humans are created equally and should be treated thus. This involves allowing equal access to basic needs, opportunities, and resources to live and thrive. It condemns discrimination, prejudice, corruption, and extortion. Achieving social justice requires taking action.

As stated above, there are basic rights that every human should receive. However, one size does not fit all. What is needed to live a healthy life varies from person to person. It is for this reason that we have ramps, disability parking, learning accommodations, assisted living, and even urinals. The latter item may not be essential to living but it was still made with respect to the fact that there are gender differences. This is just one reason that social justice can be so complicated to achieve. There is not one simple solution.

In his book *Far from the Tree*, author and psychologist Andrew Solomon discusses the struggles of schizophrenics and their families. He mentions a specific group of people fighting for social justice on behalf of those diagnosed with mental illnesses. “The Mad Pride movement believes that self-determination is a basic human right that should be extended to people with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses” (Solomon, 335). Essentially, they are fighting against

the stigma that surrounds mental illness and the barriers that prevent those with schizophrenia from living normal lives. However, despite good intentions, no movement is without its flaws. Activist and schizophrenic David W. Oaks has chosen to embrace his diagnosis by refusing to take any medications, which brought detrimental side effects in his case, and rather focusing on “peer counseling, diet, and treks in the wilderness” and he encourages other schizophrenics “to defy the psychiatric establishment” (Solomon, 336). He appears to believe that everyone can manage their mental state simply through a change of thinking. As someone who takes medication daily for OCD and ADHD, I cannot deny that there are inconvenient side effects of medications but living with these side effects is often preferable to living without the medication. In his effort in fighting for social justice, Oaks has attempted to come up with a cookie cutter solution. He forgets that what he needs in order to function properly may not work for others with the same issue. A more effective method would be to simply fight for the right not to take medication rather than trying to get rid of it completely. In order to achieve social justice, we must recognize that humanity is extremely diverse.

Furthermore, to understand what each individual or group needs, it is necessary to be in community with them. This semester I became involved in the Arkadelphia community by joining Backyard Bible Club (BBC). Every Monday and Tuesday afternoon, a group of students goes to two different government housing areas and spends time with the children living there. Besides a short story at the end of each outing, there is no itinerary. For an hour each of these days, college students and small kids can be seen swinging from monkey bars, playing football, drawing on the sidewalk with chalk, and braiding each other’s hair. From a distance, it appears that nothing very special is occurring, but relationships are being built, and with each visit we got to know the kids more and more by simply spending time with them. I have a distinct memory of

a time when one boy was asked to leave due to bad behavior, and rather than returning to his home, he grabbed a baseball bat and began to hit it against the playground a distance away from our group. Eventually, he gave up on that and began to climb as high as he could on anything he could find and would make it appear as though he were going to jump. At first, I thought he was just letting out his anger, but every time I looked over, we would make eye contact. It dawned on me that he was simply trying to get our attention and it became clear that there was an emotional need that was not being filled for him. Simply by being in close proximity and paying attention, needs can be recognized. Just as Greg Jarrell learned through his experience of living among an underprivileged people group, we must learn “to see the hidden wounds” (Jarrell, 144).

After identifying the problem and determining the solution, action must be taken. Feed My Starving Children is a Christian nonprofit that works “with organizations and ministries across the globe to end hunger” (Feed My Starving Children). Recently, they teamed up with Tacos 4 Life to organize a mobile pack at Ouachita Baptist University. I had the privilege of being able to attend one of the sessions. Volunteers stood for two hours straight preparing and packing meals while listening to an assortment of Taylor Swift hits. Together, we packed 100,000 meals. The beauty of these mobile packs is that they are set up so that anyone can get involved. The process was simple and straightforward enough that children could be a part of it, and there were jobs that allowed older volunteers to work sitting down. Even though I came in sick and was unable to work with the food, they found me a position building boxes and labeling bags. By creating a simple procedure, organizations can work with My Starving Children to mobilize the community to be involved in social justice projects. This encourages participation and brings in more hands to provide a basic need for those who do not have access to it. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to educate and empower people. Volunteers are shown a video

at the beginning of the session to show them exactly how the food is taken to the hungry, and they are shown a video after the session which reports the large positive impact those few hours of service had. This allows the volunteers to feel as though they can make a change and it will encourage them to seek other ways to bring about social justice.

To achieve social justice, certain organizations work to fight against extortion. Love Justice International specifically endeavors to end human trafficking. According to their website, they focus on prevention using a 9-step transit monitoring method. This involves staff members monitoring bus stops, train stations, and other transit points looking for signs of trafficking. They question potential victims and, if it becomes clear that they are being trafficked, they separate them from the captor to further the interviews. Once they are able to confirm that their suspicions are true, they contact the police and take the victim to a shelter. At the shelter, they will be interviewed, and the staff will fill out a Case Information Form before returning them to the safety of their family. So far, they have prevented 20,000 persons from being extorted in this manner (Love Justice International). When Libby Swenson visited our class and spoke about Love Justice International, I was astonished. Although it was encouraging to know that they were implementing an incredibly successful strategy to fight for social justice, it was disturbing to think about people who earn money selling other people. It wasn't until she started talking about human trafficking in the country where I grew up that I started to cry. In Malawi, if a rich family needs to find an organ match for their sick child, they will pay people to go find and round up children from poor areas. These individuals will go into the poorest communities and offer to give children jobs and send the money back to their homes if they come away with them. The families, often just barely getting by, readily agree. The children are taken, and if one is found to be a match with the rich child, their organ is taken, they are killed, and the rest of the kids are

sold into slavery. If social justice is based on valuing the humanity of others, human trafficking is the complete violation of one's right to social justice.

Unfortunately, sometimes extortion is legal. In North Carolina, inmates awaiting trial are required to pay a fine for every day that they spend in jail (Ewing). This is unjust because, in some situations, these people are in jail because their poverty led them to commit a crime. Therefore, the state is asking them to pay money that they do not have. The state has become dependent on this money and has taken steps to discourage judges from waiving fees, such as requiring them to release an account of their "history of waiving costs" and "to notify, via snail mail, every affected agency every time he or she issues a waiver" (Ewing). The first method is to humiliate the judges, the second is meant to be a hassle that they will want to avoid. A group of district judges, however, has decided to fight back against the pressure. Together, they agreed to use a "bench card" which can be used "to thoroughly assess a defendant's ability to pay before setting a fine or fee, as well as which ones are waivable or can be reduced on a sliding scale" (Ewing). This means that the judges will be able to keep things in perspective when they are deciding on a fine.

As much as we fight for others, it is also necessary to empower people to fight for themselves. One simple way to do this is to facilitate the feeling of dignity. At First Baptist Church, Arkadelphia, there is a section of the building that is dedicated to storing children's clothes, toys, and other necessities that people have donated. These items will go specifically to foster kids. As needed, foster parents may go to the church and pick up whatever items the child they are taking care of will need. However, the director does not accept just anything. On two occasions I offered my time to sort through clothes that had just been donated and to sort through the old clothes again. They were to be categorized by season and age, and anything that did not

look new was to be passed on or thrown away. The latter instruction confused me in the beginning because, having grown up in East Africa, I am used to seeing children running around in clothes that are in less than ideal condition. The leader explained, however, that she did this in an effort to make the kids feel normal. She didn't want them to go to school in tattered clothes and stand out or be made fun of. This was her way of ensuring that they walked around with dignity. This will give them a good self-esteem, and that in turn will encourage them to work harder in class. This empowerment will enable them to be more successful in life because they know they have self-worth.

Social justice is not merely a person receiving what is due, rather it is working towards equality and allows equal access to basic needs, opportunities, and resources to live and thrive, while simultaneously fighting against discrimination, prejudice, corruption, and extortion. In order to achieve this, one must be in community, take action, and empower others to do the same. If we claim to want good in this world, then we need to step forward, link arms, and fight for social justice.

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