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Luke Falco

What is Social Justice?

Over the course of this semester, I have studied society and the justice system that is connected to it. When answering the question, “What is Social Justice”, it is not something easily answered in just a sentence or two. Social justice is a complex matter that is ever-changing and being newly defined each day. In simple terms, I define social justice as bettering society through the laws and regulations set to the society itself. It is finding balance among those living in society. Obviously, it is not physically possible to please everyone, but the social justice system strives to accomplish this. As a whole social justice is finding the balance, regulating terms, and determining right from wrong in a given society.

Everyone has their definition and idea of social justice, and for the most part, everyone is correct. There is not a set definition for defining social justice. It is such a broad term that covers an entire society. Many issues within a society are being constantly produced and newly appear all the time. Social justice is a term that comes with an interpreted meaning. In other words, as time goes on, one's definition of social justice is changing. It is never a fixed set of words that define what it is. For example, at the beginning of this semester, I had no clue what social justice was. I honestly just took it because it sounded like an interesting class to take. I went into it with optimism and curiosity. As the weeks went on, my knowledge of social justice grew rapidly. I was opened to new ideas and interactions that society had. I was able to look at how others view the world. It allowed me to learn about the system and how so many people struggle to get by.

Before taking this class, I was mostly blind to the fact that not everyone is blessed with physical needs. They have to spend everyday struggling to make ends meet. I learned this quite

quickly while reading the book *Evicted*. It talks about several families who are struggling to live. Describing all the hardships and obstacles that they have to overcome on a daily basis. This book influenced me greatly on the topic of social justice. It broadened my view of society and how diverse everyone is. One example, in particular, focuses on how much people in poverty struggle to pay rent. Over the years, the cost of housing has come up substantially. Families are having to spend the majority of their income on just paying for rent. In chapter 2 of *Evicted*, Matthew Desmond writes about a character named Lamar. In this part of the story, he talks about the struggle it was for Lamar to pay rent. Lamar was doing anything he could do to make money to pay his landlord. The story states, "When Lamar found out, he figured Sherrena would need to repaint the unit. He asked her to let him do it (Desmond, pg 26)." This is just an example of how willing Lamar was. His cost of housing had gone up so much that he could no longer pay for it with his normal income. Instead, he volunteered himself to help his landlord out in exchange for rent. After reading this chapter, I learned so much about how impoverished people had to make ends meet. They struggled each month just to stay away from being homeless. The homeless people both in the book and reality face many challenges every single day. I would say this example from my takeaway is seen as both influential and problematic. The main source of influence came from me being able to learn more about the people in poverty and how they lived. It influenced me from an educational standpoint. However, I also come at this example from a problematic point of view. The problem is seen through the fact that humans are having to suffer to live. They do not even have time to worry about getting what they want. Instead, they spend all their time having to provide for their family and keep a roof over their heads. Yet, we as a society are not doing our part to try and change this. We know this is an obvious issue in our world, but we continue to live our lives just like nothing happened. From a social justice

standpoint, I do not see how this form of living is not seen as absurd. People are having to live their entire lives in these conditions and yet the system does not do enough to get rid of this problem. However, as a society people are not doing much themselves to fix this issue in their community. The books that I have read in this class have all been very informative in both positive and negative ways. Although not all the topics discussed in class were uplifting, I was able to take so much information from them. I learned about both the good and the bad within a society. The social justice system is so corrupt and needs to be reformed. Over the years, it has steadily gone downhill. The rights of humanity have almost gone extinct. People are no longer treated equally and it clearly shows within the system. The idea of social justice is quite extraordinary, however, to carry out those goals is another task itself. Workers in the social system strive daily to make society a better place.

After coming to an end with this class, one issue, in particular, I have learned is how so many people in society are treated unequally. It is not even based on one factor either. In the past, people of color received all the hate for problems dealing with society. However, in today's society, white people are now facing almost just as much backlash as others. Inequality can be seen in all societies whether it is mixed or not. Factors such as jobs offered, and opportunities within the society have slowly been limited to a certain group. This being the wealthy and better off group. They are often seen as more capable of success and given more resources than those that are less fortunate from a money standpoint. I do not see why it makes any sense for someone to receive more benefits and be given more opportunities just because they might have higher income levels than those around them. No matter the race, gender, or even economic class, people within the social system should be given equal rights and chances at success. Another issue that I have become more aware of through this semester is gender inequality. Although it

has gotten better through the years, it is still very prevalent in today's society. Social justice has shown me that females are given fewer opportunities in many things in life. Oftentimes, women are viewed as not being able to perform at such physical levels as men. Even though this idea has been proven wrong countless times, society has set this level of standard. I have even noticed this issue around the campus. Jokes are constantly being made about how men are "stronger" than women.

The social justice system is expected to eradicate and solve all these issues that are being brought up. The system is viewed as the problem-solvers of society. Social justice is such a complex level of systems that deals with countless issues. Workers within the society have one main goal which is to better society and how it interacts. This class has shown me how toxic society is as a whole. It is full of corrupt people that do what they can to bring others down. I feel like as citizens, we have our part to contribute to helping society through social justice. Although we are not all aware of every issue or how to solve it, we can still do our part to maintain a healthy society. We are capable of playing our part for the system by striving to stop issues from growing into something worse. As an example, my church in my hometown has started to give back to the community. Instead of being an independent church that only looks out for its members, we have instead put our needs last. Now, we do giveaways each year that allow us to bless the surrounding community. This allows us to grow closer not only with ourselves but with everyone around us as well. Through this, we are helping solve the problem of a toxic and self-centered society. We are working towards bringing everyone together.

In the book *Far From the Tree* by Andrew Solomon, several issues within society are addressed. After reading this book, my eyes have been opened to so many new aspects of society. Although most of these are quite negative, I was still able to learn so much. One main

benefit of reading this book about societal issues is that I am better equipped to help. Instead of me having to sit back and watch these problems take place, I can make a difference in society. The skills I have learned from social justice have equipped me to be an all-around better member of my society. One chapter, in particular, was the one titled "Crime". In this chapter, Solomon discusses the issue of crime and how it is perceived in society. He gives reason for why it is both the parent's and the child's fault for these acts. He describes how these actions arise from how a child is raised. Society has such a significant effect on how a child is to turn out. This chapter taught me so much about how one's society shapes and grows a person into who they become. Solomon writes, "Having a child with physical or mental disabilities is usually a social experience, and you are embraced by other families facing the same challenges (Solomon pg 537)." In this example, it talks about the significance of society to a person and his or her family. It is used to create and teach a person how they are to interact with people. If society treats a person negatively, it often leads to mischievous behavior along with criminal acts. However, if the society he or she lives in is supporting and caring, more often than not, the child will grow into a successful human being. This aspect of social justice clearly shows how people grow and mature based on what is around them. They can either prosper or be held back, it all depends on what they are given to work with. Sometimes they are given equal opportunity to be who they want to be. While in other cases, they do not have the choice of controlling their own life. One main issue that I derived from this chapter was about how society often holds people back from their true potential. Instead of being supportive and equipping someone with the tools for success, these individuals are treated with unfair circumstances. It talked about so many prevalent issues seen in society. Societal matters affect so many people each day.

Another vital thing that I have learned about social justice is that everyone has the potential to make a difference. Honestly, to those that sit back and watch society drag itself down is making matters worse. This class has taught me that the system is focused on citizens in the society which is talking about us. An observation that I have made within my community at college is that people often do not notice the importance of certain issues. They have become so used to seeing these problems in society that they just shrug it off. This causes certain issues to grow dramatically and cause major problems for everyone. I have one instance, in particular, that was about the issue of the income gap. One of my other professors touched on the point about how she used to be a victim of the wage gap. At her old job, she held the same title as another man, yet she made much less than he did. She explained how at the time she was unaware of the issue. My professor did not even know that the wage gap was going on until years later. This issue honestly makes no sense to me of why it exists. The fact that men and women can have the same job but women are not allowed to make the same amount. According to what social justice means, it is about equality in any given society. Yet, issues like the ones I just talked about are being demonstrated regularly.

The people that have a voice and say in the matter are not doing anything about it. Instead, they are convinced of the mindset that since it does not negatively affect them in any way, they do not have to worry about whatever is going on around them. This happens all around the world. Oftentimes it is when wealthy or better off people do not even take the time to look out for others. They are so caught up in their own lives to care for others that are less fortunate. I have seen this example in my community happen quite often. As an example, there have been homeless people on the side of the road begging for literally anything, yet people with fancy cars just drive right on by. They do not even take the time to look at these people and offer them aid.

These rich people are so focused on their lives and where they have to get that they do not even pay attention to those on the side of the road. Another thing that I have noticed is that these people looking for money are appreciative of anything they are given. They are looking for anything specific, they are just grateful to receive anything that people give them. This example goes to show that as a community we should take the time to look out for others. Especially since beggars have been given situations that they have no control over. With this being said, as a society, we need to look out for one another and be willing to share what we have. In today's world, people have become so obsessed with themselves and what they have. Instead of having the mindset of looking to help others, people are just constantly looking to the future. If those that are more fortunate would give back regularly, it would allow not for there to be fewer homeless people, but it would also bring the entire community together. This would show everyone that the community they live in takes care of one another. It would be seen as a selfless environment that would be healthy.

Giving back is such a significant example of what social justice is. It clearly shows the values and morals a society has. It represents what the community as a whole stands for. They want the people they live with to enjoy life and be healthy both physically and mentally. Instead of citizens living divided and everyone having to fend for themselves, when people give back it shows that everyone cares for each other. It allows for equality to be more of a realistic idea instead of something that is not even a thought. Social justice focuses so much on bringing people together and allowing everyone in the community to be more at an equal standpoint. It does not look to spread society apart. Instead, it strives to grow a community and build each other up in a positive manner.

Another example that really stuck with me from my readings was another chapter in the book *Far From the Tree*. This time it was the chapter on “Autism”. Solomon wrote about several families with children who had autism. This chapter talked about identity and how it is perceived by society. This whole semester I have learned the importance of identity and how people often are judged based on their identity. With this being said, I learned that society seems to give people an identity instead of letting a person choose what they want to be. For example, in the chapter on autism, these children do not have the free will of being who they want to be. Right off the bat, they are given the identity of autism. Immediately, they are set apart from their peers along with the society they live in. This is a clear issue that needs to be dealt with from a societal standpoint. There is no equality or equal opportunity given to these individuals. Instead, the society that should be uplifting to them, is negating every opportunity. The normal privileges that a child has when they are young, is stripped away from those with autism.

Arguments can be made that social justice is not about how the system interacts or deals with certain issues. Instead of being about how society needs to be more equal, it can be seen as focused on more illegal acts. This being something such as breaking the law and the system coming in to fix the issue. In some instances, social justice can be seen as more court system based and less to do with society all around. Especially in today’s time, the system has less to do with giving opportunities and more about bringing justice to deserving people. Criminals are more prevalent in society today than ever before. This goes to show that the justice system does not have the resources available to help everyone in need. They must use what they have in other areas that are more pressing. As time goes on, social justice as a whole is changing and being used in different ways than in the past.

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