

13th Documentary Reflection Paper

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Thorough reflection on

13th is a documentary about African American history and mass incarceration. It is an incredibly eye-opening film. Anyone who watches this film will finish it changed and question the world around them as well as any beliefs they hold. 13th honestly shows two sides of a story that many are not willing to hear. This class prepared me to be understanding rather than defensive. My mom watched parts of it with me. Her commentary was almost as eye opening as the film because at one time I would have probably felt similar. When the film talked about prisoner rates rising, she argued U.S. population totals account for the rise in prisoners. I thought this made sense until I looked into it. The percentage of the population in jail during 1970 was about .06% and today is about .6%.

What you learned

The movie said that the U.S. consists of five percent of the world's population and holds twenty-five percent of the world's prisoners, the highest rate of incarceration in the world. One in three black men and one in seventeen white men are likely to spend life in jail. There is a long pattern of whites suppressing blacks and them rightly fighting for their freedom in this country.

The emotions you felt

The emotions this movie brought up for me were overwhelming. Towards the end of the movie I felt ashamed that I even live in a country that has done/does so many horrible things, and thinks they are acceptable. During the beginning of the movie, I just felt shocked and saddened. By the time the movie started playing audio and video clips of Trump speaking, I felt disgusted and heartbroken. He is our president and misses the "good ol' days when "black men were just

carried out on a stretcher. They were treated “very, very rough,” and law enforcement reacted quicker.” I now understand the Black Lives Matter movement a lot better. No one has to argue that white lives matter. Most people accept this. The BLM movement is basically saying, “Hey, us too! We matter too, you know?”

I also felt somewhat hopeless. When someone commits a crime and pays for their punishment in jail, they are not given a clean slate. On applications for jobs, housing, insurance, etc. they have to say they have a record. This can really put a big barrier in front of them when trying to move forward with life. The only thing we make easy for them is go back to their criminal life again. It seems impossible for someone with a felony to ever have a common, easy life again. What can we do to allow people who have committed crimes to move on with their life? If the system was improved, recidivism would probably go down.

How the information impacts your knowledge or understanding of the group covered in the documentary

The documentary helped me understand why certain issues got to the way they are now. I can better understand how so many African American men ended up as jail statistics and how that stereotype came into existence. It truly is sad that our country paints this group of people with such a broad, dark brush. I now see cases like Trevon Martin’s in a different perspective than before. If a client comes in worried for their or their loved one’s safety in their neighborhood, I will be more understanding and empathetic of their concerns.

How might you use the information to bridge understanding and empathy for that group?

Besides fearing for safety, I can better understand how a client who has been in jail has a hard time getting and keeping a job, or housing, or simply having a normal life. When

applications and forms require you to put if you have ever been convicted of a felony just to rent an apartment or get a job, it is difficult to change your life and become a new person. How can we expect people who have “done their time” to move on with their life, if we as a society, will not let them move on?

Did it challenge any previous notions that you had?

I look at African Americans now with a completely different view. My dad is not fond of black people and I grew up seeing that and being told many negative things about blacks. I have not agreed with most of his opinions, but they were still engrained and some I did believe possibly because the media and personal experiences enforced the believes. Before watching this movie, I would have explained away these statistics by thinking black men commit more crime, but now I see that is not necessarily the case. I did not understand Black Lives Matter and I kept wanting to say that all lives matter, but that is not their point. Their point is that they want the country to believe they matter too. They should not have to tell others that they matter.

Many graduate students I have met describe being raised in a religious, conservative home, but they no longer hold the views they were taught. It seems like when we have the opportunity to meet others who have experienced varying difficulties we see problems differently. I have been taught many negative things about DACA children, but when I heard Lupe talk, it changed my thoughts about what I was taught. When I heard Noor talk about staying in detention, it changed my views on refugees and Muslims coming to America.

I am very grateful to have had these experiences in this class. I am so glad that I had the class with Dr. Robertson, David, and the students that were enrolled this semester. It has been a life changing class that will continue to affect the rest of my life. I would not have said this in the beginning of the semester, but this may be my favorite class I have ever taken.

References

U.S. and World Population Clock Tell us what you think. (n.d.). Retrieved April 28, 2018, from <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>