Entry Number: 28

Division: Junior

Essay Title: The Fight for Justice and Equality

Throughout American history, people of color have chosen to stand up against the racial inequalities facing their community. These activists have each had a moment in their lives that galvanized them to take action against the structural racism they faced daily.

At an age where most kids are just learning about the many inequities and injustices we face in our country, Freeman A. Hrabowski was arrested after participating in a Children’s Crusade protest for racial equity in schools. At just twelve years old, he was thrust headfirst into a dangerous and cruel world at a time when he wasn’t even old enough to drive. As a Black American in the mid-1900s, Hrabowski was made aware at the young age of the segregation and racism he faced as a person of color. Despite his parents’ best efforts to keep him sheltered, the blatant discrimination eventually became clear to young Hrabowski. As he grew older he noticed the many ways in which Black Americans were denied their rights and treated as less than human. One thing that struck him most was the discrimination in the education system. Hrabowski’s household valued education above all else, and he was troubled by the persistent disparities among races and economic groups in the education system. These convictions would eventually drive Freeman A. Hrabowski to take a more active role in the pursuit of equity in the education system throughout his life.

Minoru Yasui was one of four Japanese Americans who fought their way to the Supreme Court to challenge the exclusion and detention facing Japanese-Americans during World War II. He was outraged by the injustices that innocent Japanese-Americans were facing after the bombing of Pearl Harbor such as the forced removal from their homes and into internment camps. Minoru used his background as a lawyer to fight his way to the supreme court to challenge the legality of the exclusion Japanese-Americans were facing. Despite his hard work and determination, he lost his case in the supreme court and spent nine months in solitary confinement before being transferred to camp Minidoka until the end of the war. Despite having failed to win his case, his determination to fight for Japanese Americans wasn’t dampened in the slightest. He spent the years after the war in Colorado participating in Japanese-American organizations and fighting against discrimination beyond just Japanese-Americans.

Both of these amazing men were faced with injustices, but they chose to persevere and continue the fight against racism in different ways. Minoru Yasui stayed in Colorado after he was released from the detention camp and decided to open another law firm in Denver. However, he was denied admission to the state’s bar exam because of his wartime criminal record. Yasui appealed to the supreme court and when he won his case he was finally admitted to the Colorado bar. After opening up his law firm he continued to be an active participant in Japanese-American organizations like the Japanese American Citizen League and the Japanese Association of Colorado. Outside of these organizations he also fought for African American rights and helped found the Latin American Research and Service Agency which was a Hispanic civil rights organization. Due to his involvement in many types of advocacy, he was appointed to Denver’s Community Relations Commission and became executive director in 1959. His connections with many minority groups helped prevent race riots and violent protests during the turbulent civil rights era of the 1960s.

Similar to Minoru Yasui’s choice to enact change through his passion for law, Freeman A. Hrabowski utilized his zeal for STEM to fight for equity in the education system. Hrabowski graduated from Hampton Institute with high honors in mathematics. He received his M.A in mathematics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and four years later his Ph.D. in higher education administration and statistics. He eventually went to work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), which was a relatively new school at the time. He became president in 1992, and over his almost three decades as president, he emphasized STEM education and co-founded the Meyerhoff Scholars which promotes minority achievement in STEM fields. During his time as president, more Black students have graduated with degrees than at any other non-historically Black school.

In this day and age, the fight for racial equity has become even more pressing. The consequences of failing to stand up to discrimination have played a crucial role in the recent incidents of police brutality. By failing to raise a red flag and fight against racially biased police officers, we have given them the power to create long-lasting damage and the safety to get away with it. Like Freeman A. Hrabowski and Minoru Yasui, I will use my passion for underprivileged youth to create greater equity and change. I will use my power for good to help underprivileged youth that have come from abusive households receive a quality education, access to medical care, and a sense of belonging and comfort wherever they might be. In the spirit of Freeman A. Hrabowski and Minoru Yasui’s work, I fulfill these duties by volunteering at an organization that helps foster youth and running a charity golf tournament.

Works Cited

Hrabowski, Freeman A., Interviewee, Joseph Mosnier, and U.S Civil Rights History Project. Freeman A. Hrabowski oral history interview conducted by Joseph Mosnier in Baltimore, Maryland. 2011. Video. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2015669131/>.

"In Black America; Beating The Odds with Dr. Freeman Hrabowski." 1998-10-01. KUT Radio, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (GBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC. Web. February 28, 2022. <http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-529-nv9959dk5d>.

Knezvich, Alison. "'A powerful and frightening experience:' UMBC's Hrabowski recalls King's call for the Children's Crusade of 1963." *The Baltimore Sun* [Baltimore], 15 Jan. 2018, www.baltimoresun.com/education/bs-md-co-hrabowski-mlk-20180112-story.html. Accessed 27 Feb. 2022.

"Minoru Yasui." *Densho Encyclopedia*, 5 Oct. 2020, encyclopedia.densho.org/Minoru%20Yasui. Accessed 27 Feb. 2022.

"Minoru Yasui." *Densho Encyclopedia*, 5 Oct. 2020, encyclopedia.densho.org/Minoru%20Yasui. Accessed 27 Feb. 2022.

Nagae, Peggy. "Minoru Yasui (1916–1986)." *Oregon Encyclopedia*, 28 Sept. 2021, www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/yasui\_minoru\_1916\_1986\_/#.YhwQzS1h0dU. Accessed 27 Feb. 2022.