

INJUSTICE

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[Assignment: Respond to our readings and class discussions by writing a short essay that makes a point about education.]

(1) That morning began like all the rest. I struggled to get out of bed at seven o'clock to begin my morning ritual. Trying to wipe the sleep out of my eyes, I stumbled towards the bathroom to take a shower. As usual the cold piercing jet of needles succeeded in waking me up. I still hadn't gotten used to the fact that we didn't have hot water. I hurriedly dressed into my gray uniform, swept my hair back into a ponytail, and took a peek at myself in the mirror. There were dark circles under my eyes, the result of long hours of studying the night before in order to keep pace with my fellow students. The dark circles represented to me what calluses on the hand of a successful farmer represent to him: long hard hours of work that make a victory all the more pleasant. Little by little, I began to understand and share the pride and devotion that my fellow students in Peru, South America, felt.

(2) I grabbed a quick breakfast and began my long walk to school. A mile stretched out before me and during that walk I had a great deal to contemplate. I thought about the changes I had experienced since I had arrived in Peru. So many things were different. Yet the biggest difference of all was in education. Not only were the methods of education different but also the attitude of the students. I began to grin when I realized what I had probably been doing a year ago. I would have gotten up at six o'clock or earlier in order to complete my morning tasks. I needed to shower, dry my hair, curl my hair, put on make-up, and spend an hour deciding what to wear. I usually had dark circles under my eyes but they weren't from studying all night, but rather from talking on the phone (most likely about which guy I currently liked). Very rarely had I ever really been concerned about class. I received good grades because I had to--not because I wanted to. Yet less than a year in Peru had changed all that. I began to follow the model of my fellow Peruvian classmates. Our simple uniforms and our all-girls school made us less self-conscious about how we looked and more aware of the real reason we were in school--to learn. My mindless days of primping and preening were over.

(3) Not only was the atmosphere different, but also the schoolwork. Every day was a challenge. We had a large variety of subjects with a total of twelve classes as compared to the six classes I took in the U.S. We didn't have any textbooks and therefore had to pay special attention to what our teachers said. Because of this, we treated our teachers with a great deal of respect. One day Diana, a girl in my class, was caught cheating on a test. Not only did she receive the

disrespect of the teacher but of the entire class as well. All these memories rushed through my head and slowly began to fade as the approaching sight of my school brought me back to the present.

(4) My school was nothing more than an old remodeled house. It was small but it served its purpose. I walked around to the back to a big field where we lined up each morning to sing our national anthem. It was a ritual that we observed, without fail, each day. I had arrived just in time. As I took my place the music began and all eyes became fixed on the red and white flag of Peru. Every person in the field knew the words to the anthem, from the young first year students to my graduating class, and everyone sang with as much pride as she could muster. I always thought that since they sang the same song each day, they would eventually lose the vigor of those first days. Yet this never happened; each day the song was as bright and full as the one before. I realized that the last time I had heard the American anthem in school, aside from football games, was during third grade. I can still remember listening to the old scratchy record play over intercom as some students in our class sang the parts of the song they knew. There had always been a few kids in our class who never sang at all. Perhaps because they didn't know the words to the anthem or perhaps because their religion wouldn't permit it. As I finished the last lines of the Peruvian anthem, I began to feel a sense of pride and this in turn made me feel ashamed that the sixteen years I spent in American schools had never made me feel quite that way. I wondered why this simple and poor school had brought out so much pride and devotion in me. It had very little in comparison to the rich and "superior" schools of the United States. There were no computers or thick textbooks, no fully balanced meals served to us for lunch, and no psychologists or counselors to study us or counsel us. Yet I rarely longed to cut class. I longed to learn. Getting an A on an exam seemed more important than getting asked out by some guy. My values had changed and become similar to those of my fellow students.

(5) When I walked into the classroom, I noticed that Natalia's desk was empty. This was unusual as she had never missed a day of school. When I asked her best friend Frescia if she were ill I saw sadness in Frescia's face. She told me that Natalia had to drop out of school because her parents could no longer afford to send her; they needed her to stay home and help out around the house. I couldn't understand the injustice of it all. Natalia was a wonderful and intelligent student who had hoped to go to college and get a good paying job to help out her family. Now all her hopes were washed away. I thought about the conversation I had had with a fellow student in the United States during my sophomore year. Her name was Kim and she was like many of the kids in my

class: bored and unmotivated. One day she came up to me to tell me good-bye. When I asked her where she was going she told me she was dropping out of school. She had been working at Burger King part-time and had decided that she'd rather start working full-time and make more money than go through two or more years of school. "Besides," she said, "by the time you graduate I'll probably already be an assistant manager and making lots of money." At the time her remark had seemed quite ordinary to me; lots of kids were dropping out. But now that I was here and thinking about Natalia, who would have given anything for the chance that Kim threw away, I began to get upset with the stupidity and carelessness of some of the American students, like Kim, whom I had known. Why had I been so blind? Why are they so blind? Why can't the United States, a country so powerful and rich, do anything about it? These questions plagued me all day long.

(6) It was a day like all the rest. We sang the national anthem, we sat down in our tiny bare rooms, we studied and we aspired to complete our goals. Some of us, with hard work and devotion, made a tiny step towards our goals; others, like Natalia, were pushed miles back. It was a day like all the rest. Many students in the U.S. listened half-heartedly to the national anthem at a football game, sat behind the console of a thousand dollar computer system, and with a uninterested stare, vaguely tried to plan for the weekend. It was a day like all the rest.