Second Place

Noor Ismail

Pittsford Mendon High School

A Paradigm of the Past

 Over the centuries, the old adage has always remained true—history, inevitably, repeats itself. We’ve seen this in economic crashes, genocides, school shootings, shipwrecks, and even in pandemics. Often, these events are spurred on by mother nature, but are made worse by gross miscalculations and failures on the part of mankind. Thus, in 50 years, history *will* repeat itself, leaving the world in the same, if not worse, place. We will have great technological achievements and possibly a better understanding of the climate, but the issues beneath the surface—racial injustice, gender-based prejudice, economic inequality, and religious intolerance—will remain unsolved.

In the last year, our world has changed irrevocably. Starting with the COVID-19 pandemic, which was made infinitely worse by our country’s failure to understand its significance, and ending with an insurrection in our capital by White Supremacists, we, as a nation, have been through insurmountable changes. However, this isn’t the first time we’ve been through racial outbreaks. In the 1800’s, nations all across the world were awakened by movements, rebellions, and battles on the basis of race, because of the horrible segregation and discrimination that was happening to millions of people. Even in the US, which is typically considered a progressive country, a gruesome war that threatened to divide the nation broke out because of the racial injustices that persistently afflict the lives of African Americans. These problems remain even today. In 2020, the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor sparked mass protests all over the world and the Black Lives Matter movement, because of the innate racial stereotyping and discrimination that exists within governments, societies, and multitudes of people. Groups of people who wanted to incite change and lead our world into a better tomorrow led these movements and protests, but often, those who did not support these measures judged them for their actions and attempted to thwart their goals. Race issues aren’t considered insurmountable because of the lack of technology or education, they are considered impregnable because of human beings’ attitudes and the unwillingness to change. If we have failed, as a world, to change billions of peoples’ opinions on racial injustices in the last 200 years, how will we be able to completely transform people’s beliefs in the next 50?

 These same ineptitudes can be seen in gender-based discrimination, religious intolerance, and economic inequality. For thousands of years, women have been seen as the inferior sex, no matter the scientific evidence that has been presented or by the same jobs that women occupy (as men) that they often excel at. Women have been made increasingly aware of this issue by the wage discrepancies that remain since women joined the workforce, and the sexual harassment and abuse that endures in many workplaces, where women remain afraid to speak their truth. These issues aren’t just apparent between men and women—in the last few decades, where LGBTQ+ rights have gained more importance—people who act a certain way or seem to look different than what society considers “normal” are denied jobs, rights, and even kindness on the basis of their sexual orientation. In many countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Brunei, same sex-relations and forms of gender expression are illegal and criminalized, not to mention the judgment, stereotyping, and discrimination in nations where same sex relations and gender expression are *legal.* Moreover, nations across the world distribute their wealth on the same basis—gender. In many countries, such as the US, more women than men live in poverty—considering more women are denied jobs than men—not because they are less qualified, but because of the gender stereotypes and familial ideals—where the man provides for the family—that continuously impact the lives of women across the world. This doesn’t just pertain to women—members of the LGBTQ+ community face the same inequity globally.These gender-based discriminatory issues persist, and are impossible to overcome without complete overhaul of people’s emotions and thoughts towards gender that prevent them from accepting huge groups of people into society. Thus, humans’ inability to let go of past beliefs prevents us from gaining equality between genders—both in the present, and in the future.

Even religious intolerance for different groups endures today. During the Holocaust, which resulted in the genocide of approximately 5.8 million Jews, not to mention others who were unaccounted for and placed in internment camps, people refused to accept a large population of people because of prejudices against a large group of people. The same religious-based genocides are occurring all over the world, like the Uyghur genocide that has placed over one million Muslims in internment camps, where they suffer from inhumane and cruel treatment. Also, in the last few years, anti-Semitic hate crimes have significantly increased with synagogue shootings in California, an attack on an Israeli student for speaking Hebrew in France, the defilation of a Jewish Memorial in Prague, and more. Again, these issues have plagued our world from the beginning of history and they are based solely on failures of mankind, our inability to learn from the past, and our lack of understanding for groups of people that we believe to be “different.” There is no way to overcome the innate biases and prejudices that humans hold, making a “better world” completely unattainable.

 In the end, it is not a failure on any single individual’s part, but rather a failure as a community, as a nation, as a world, to evolve and grow as we delve into the future. There is no computer, phone, or microchip that can force us to alter our intrinsic prejudices or change how we perceive the world. Because of that, human beings will continue to repeat the past, failing to learn from their mistakes, resulting in a world that is immersed not in the future, but a paradigm set by the present.