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“Choosing a Global Future”

To understand the concept of the “global citizen”, it is essential to come to terms with our history of exclusion. In other words, it must be recognized that “citizenship” has long been built through the alienation of non-citizens. The key to a collective determination of our global legacy must stem from the recognition of our imperfect past and a dedication to step beyond those confines. Looking at the legacy of the 20th century, we are assaulted with memories of unbelievable violence. The wounds left by two world wars never truly healed. Even today, the arbitrary borders in Africa and West Asia continue to be the source of endless grief for their inhabitants. Sudan, Libya, Congo, Cambodia, Bangladesh, each name represents a scar in our collective history, marring the myth of global peace and solidarity. Even when wars fade out of living memory, landmines remain ticking in the soils of devastated nations, claiming innocent victims long after the last peace treaty is signed.

Before the 20th century, suffrage was mainly restricted to landed white men without consideration for women, minorities or people in colonial holdings. Even today, we have not achieved universal suffrage, with Saudi Arabian women gaining the right to vote within the last three years. The value of a vote varies dramatically between Rwanda, Turkey and the United States. Yet beyond political enfranchisement and inherent birthright abilities to impact global affairs, I would like to argue that the will and commitment to world issues is what truly defines “global citizenship.”

Today, while international organizations like the United Nations exist to coordinate the actions of nation states, the true champions facilitating changes on the ground are the various constituents forming civil society, people around the world who act to uphold their beliefs. Behind every global health crisis declared by the World Health Organization, there are thousands of doctors on the ground from non-governmental organizations such as Doctors Without Borders (MSF) fighting epidemics like ebola and cholera. Medical breakthroughs for debilitating diseases like malaria and river blindness were funded by donors like the Bill and Melinda Gates and the Carter foundations. These initiatives were spearheaded by concerned citizens, not national governments.

While international commitments to nuclear disarmament and human welfare through are certainly necessary, the banner for humanitarianism and a better world has been carried by interested peoples. After all, the abolition of apartheid and slavery were not the results of sudden moral epiphanies in ruling administrations. Yet even with these obligations, it is too easy to fall into complacency and apathy in the echo chambers and bubbles of daily life. It's difficult to be concerned about poverty in both America and abroad when you're living on hourly wages. Even so,

one must recognize that by disengaging in global affairs, an individual essentially waives their right of choice towards setting the agenda for a better global future.

Growing up as a first generation Chinese immigrant with an educational background in both Brooklyn and Beijing, I've always grappled with what it means to be international, or a global citizen. While I may have received my secondary education in international schools with students from all over the world, that alone hardly makes me a contributing member to any society. What I did grasp from living abroad for eight years was the importance of observing different cultural norms. After all, thriving in a liminal space depends heavily on analyzing the historical context behind why a faux pas may get you shunned by the family.

Moving eleven times in my childhood between the urban and suburban layers of China and America, I've met people left behind by globalization across both sides of the Pacific. From the high school dropout staffing the corner store in rural Guangxi province to the semi-literate elderly immigrants in Chinatown, some do not feel compelled to join the dialogue, while others are unable to. Interacting with my own family, I am conscious of how natural it would be for me to forfeit my right to determine my own fate and follow a life planned out for me. In the same way, it is too easy to ignore all the festering issues that have plagued the international society. As such, I endeavor to remain engaged in contemporary issues so I can make an informed choice on my vision for our future.

Expanding on my early interest in current affairs as a member of Model UN for the better part of the last decade, I strive to diversify my knowledge beyond my own lived experience. By creating my major in Multidisciplinary Studies, I aim to examine the changes and continuities in global issues through a variety of different disciplines in the social sciences. In the last two years. From general courses such as "Global History and Geography" and "Global Social Problems" to specific regional specializations like "Isis and Middle East Politics" and the "Politics of Africa", I devote my education towards developing an understanding how we have reached our current state of affairs as an interconnected global society. Looking at specific case studies, I have also taken courses on topics such as warfare, mental health, the sociology of human reproduction, and mass media in politics, all of which may become future topics of interest across national borders.

In order to gain practical experience as a participant of change, I became a Class of 2019 Scholar of the JFEW-SUNY International Relations and Global Affairs Program, a two year program which aims to prepare young female leaders in the fields of international relations. Through the opportunities provided through the JFEW-SUNY program, I will intern at a non-governmental organization or think tank with a focus on humanitarian issues this summer. After a volunteer experience last winter for World Scholars Cup, an international decathlon with over 2200 participants from 53 countries,

I solidified my conviction on the possibility of creating a happier future through international collaboration.

Even when the international affairs seem so distant, hidden in the quotidian details of daily life, you can see the impacts globalization, from urbanization to gentrification, and the effects of an aging population. A stroll through a Brooklyn deli has a completely different vibe from the farmers' markets of Beijing, which lie hidden in the dusty corners behind towering apartment complexes. Currently, I may be little more than a student, one out of hundreds of millions. Although my influence as an individual may be lacking right now, I want to learn about the world around me. I want to speak for myself, to speak to people like me, to people unlike me. Even if I can not create a splash in the sea of our global consciousness, I want to contribute to the flawed yet breathtakingly beautiful community that has nurtured me. That is the type of global citizen I want to be.

