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Global Citizenship Project Essay Contest

## **LOOK AT THE FUTURE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST**

We look at the past with the eyes of the future, with the conviction that we are not like the people and/or events we read about: slavery, wars, colonization. We look at the past with the eyes of the future, with the conviction that we are better now, that we have moved on from the dark ages, and that our ways have completely separated from the archaic manners of our ancestors: sacrificing people to make rain fall, or just to please a god, for example. We look at the past, however, sometimes with the eyes of the present, living for the today and now, gloating over things that don't really matter, ignoring the fact that our ancestors, our own past, come from different places. We look at the past with the eyes of the present at times, ignoring that our future is dependent on how we look at the past in the present.

This is where global citizenship starts: with the knowledge that none of us are *purebred*: through our veins course decades, millennia of history, of stories from the dawn of creation that make us who we are today and may tell us what we can be. We are not derived from merely one lineage that has remained stable and untainted for generations. In science, we descend from a common ancestor whose phylogenetic tree evolved over many generations to give way to humans today; it is not any different from our citizenships. For me, being a global citizen means thinking about more than myself. It means that we realize that we're all connected to one another. We are bound to others, past, present and future, and as such, help others have a voice; not turning a blind eye to other people's problems is not only beneficial and helpful for them, but for us as well.

When I was living in the Dominican Republic, I felt that something was missing. In my mind, there was something lacking, something nagging me, pushing me to seek more; but I didn't know what it was. I found myself signing up for the Model United Nations. I didn't know what to expect. The first meeting our president talked about what the UN was, its purpose, and how the meetings were going to be handled. Next, we were assigned our countries. I will never forget this day because it was the first one I have ever heard my new country's name: Sweden. After the meeting I asked my president "Well, don't you mean Switzerland?" The names sound fairly similar in Spanish (Suiza, Suecia), and I was sure that he had made a mistake. He said to me "No, I meant Sweden." Dumbfounded, I went home and started to research my new country. I was surprised. I kept reading about its history, its policies, its people; what made Sweden, well, *Sweden*. I was so proud of my country and I felt ashamed of not having heard about it before. I was so proud to be the *voice* of this country. It became a part of me. I too was Sweden.

About two years later I moved to the United States, to New York. When I was walking out of the plane and into the airport I was welcomed by a sea of faces, some as excited as I was and some as terrified as I was to be in a new place. I was plunged into this new life as a teenager, and I had to leave my family behind; the only things I knew and the place that watched me be born and grow up and learn about globality for the first time. I was pleasantly surprised to find that people in New York were people like me: Americans and immigrants, searching for a better future, surviving the day to day.

When I started college, I didn't know what to do, whom to speak with. I didn't even have two years in the country and I was starting my college career without knowing what I wanted to do. I explored for a while: journalism, music, theater, psychology. I knew I didn't want anything to do with numbers. Until I met this theater professor, who was finishing her master's degree, and I sat down and talked to her. I will never forget what she told me. "You need to do something that makes you happy; *you* and no one else. You don't want to get stuck in a job, and a career, that will make you miserable. It will haunt you." Later that day I declared my Theater Arts major, my Psychology major, and my Creative Writing minor. I was happy. But there was still something missing. I wasn't satisfied with being in New York only, and my feet and hands were itching for something. So I decided to go on exchange to Sarasota, Florida, and it allowed me to understand a little more of what was missing: perspective, voices from other parts. The U.S. is all one country, but its areas are highly different, rich in their own culture. And it took me immersing myself, not just reading about it, to understand it.

I applied to the Jewish Foundation for Education of Women (JFEW) International Relations and Global Affairs Scholarship, a program that prepares women for a career in the international sector. I never thought I would get in, but I did. I had the pleasure to work at the Ford Foundation as part of my internship site, and work in the Disability Inclusion Project (DIP), an initiative that seeks to bring inclusion in the workplace by modifying infrastructures and workplace etiquette. I also met individuals dedicated to bringing social justice to the world. Consequently, my love for social justice and globality increased.

I spent a semester abroad in Florence, Italy. Living and interacting with the locals was a completely different experience. The experience was different. For starters, it reminded of home, *my* home. The culture is very similar to mine, as well as the language. The customs, the beliefs...it was as though I had never left the Dominican Republic and had simply taken a detour to a more private, hidden part of my island.

Inside of Stony Brook I serve as a Success Coach for the Educational Opportunity Program, mentoring three young female students because I know, and believe, in the power of mentorship. I talk with them about global issues and opportunities, like my time working at Ford and being part of JFEW and meeting so many different people. I talk with them about my time abroad and how I myself was mentored in high school through a program called iMentor, and my mentor and I still work together, 5 years later. I am a witness of the power of mentorship, and I want to continue changing people's lives just like mine was changed.

Being a global citizen doesn't just mean to be aware of what's happening in the world, but trying to change things, starting by the lower, local level. It means starting with yourself. In my search for my own global citizenship, the Ford Foundation allowed me to take some steps towards the creation of my organization, The Voice of the Diaspora, an environment for the arts of immigrants, who are often looked over and dismissed when it comes to their writings, paintings, and drama skills and performances because of their status. I am looking at the future with the knowledge of the past gained in the present.