

How do you deal with the discrimination that exists in our society?

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In 1992, Erin Gruwell, whose dream came true, started to work as a teacher at a public school in the suburb of Los Angeles. But, what she saw there was that the students were in serious conflict with each other between races, and guns and drugs were rampant in the school—this is one of the opening scenes of the movie, “Freedom Writers (2007)”. The 1992 Los Angeles riots showed us a serious problem in the US: racial discrimination. Discrimination brings cracks to our society and deprives us of hope. Everyone thinks that discrimination is undesirable and opposes it. However, it has existed at anytime and in anywhere. Is it impossible for us to stop discrimination? No, we can decrease discrimination through analyzing and dealing with it, using sociological, political, and economic approach.

Sociological approach: Discrimination has been artificially made. It is important for us to recognize this fact. For example, in ancient Japan, The Yamato court called people who were not subordinate to his or her power “Emishi (蝦夷)” or “Kumaso (熊襲)”. Yamato’s people discriminated and often tried subjugating them because they were barbarians. In fact, this was only an excuse for which Yamato court justified his or her domination. Another example is that there were lowly people called “Eta (穢多)” or “Hinin (非人)” in the Edo period, who were out of the class system, “Shi Nou Kou Shou (士農工商)”. This was also means by which samurai (Shi), who was the ruling class, made farmer (Nou), craftman (Kou), marchant’s (Shou) complaint and dissatisfaction divert and turn them to the lowly people. Discrimination is artificial; therefore, it is not impossible to solve it by human being efforts.

Political approach: When some people or some gropes are discriminated, this means that they are excluded from power. They do not have power. So, discrimination is not paid attention to and continues to exist. Unless this power structure is changed, we cannot stop discrimination. For instance, in politics, there is a power structure called “Iron triangle”, which implies that a politician, a bureaucrat, and a local firm cooperate and share profit with each other through a secret agreement such as what is called “Dangou (談合)”

(in English “consultation”). There is no room for the other people or groups under this structure. They are discriminated in power and profit. Discrimination is nothing but measures which power holders take to keep their vested interests. However, this structure is waning after the change of government last year. Although a political power structure produces a kind of discrimination, we can also change the structure like this through politics.

Economic approach: Discrimination exists in any class. However, the strongest discrimination occurs within the poor. When they can find “common interest”, the discrimination between them would naturally decrease. Sadly, the fact in discrimination is that the socially disadvantaged discriminates with each other. There is always a problem of poverty and may be “ressentiment*” in a sense. Needless to say, the government should support them to some degree. To solve the problem like this, however, it is more important for them to find “common interest” by themselves. For example, if they can make a small market in which the poor are able to trade with each other, there will be cooperation. This is because they have an incentive to economic profits in cooperating. In other words, the actions of individuals perusing self-interest naturally result in decreasing discrimination, led by “invisible hand*”.

Unlike natural science, social science such as sociology, politics, economics, or law is a discipline to solve various problems in a society. It may be difficult to stop discrimination completely. However, we can analyze, deal with, and eventually decrease discrimination by using social science approach. In the view of economics, human beings are egoistical and selfish: that is, they are a creature who pursues self-interest. Indeed, both “egoistical” and “selfish” are negative words. But, our economy has developed on the very view of human beings. Similarly, we may be a creature who tends to discriminate. However, we will be able to solve discrimination only when we analyze and cope with it on this presupposition. Is it their duty and task for the students, who are lucky to get the opportunity and privilege to study in a university, to make our society better on their learning?

*ressentiment: is the term in philosophy. This is the French for word “resentment”, which means hostility to the society resulted from the sense of

weakness or inferiority.

*invisible hand: is the term in the classical economics, which is used to describe the self-regulating function of the market. This term was first presented by a Scottish economist, Adam Smith.

References

Wikipedia contributors, "Iron triangle", Wikipedia,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_triangle (accessed 2010-6-14).