

Junior Essay
First Place
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Treat Others as you Want to be Treated

When I think of John Feal and what he did on September 11, 2001, it reminds me of New York City and the Statue of Liberty. The Statue of Liberty inscription says, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." She is the beacon of light to people from around the world who come to America seeking freedom. Recently I had the privilege of helping an immigrant family, and this is what happened.

Over Thanksgiving break I travelled down south to Alabama to visit my family. On Black Friday we went to a shopping center. As we were leaving we saw a Middle Eastern immigrant family with a mother, father, and two young children, one still an infant. They held up a sign that said, "Can't pay rent, need money for food. Please help." My mother, sister, and I wanted to help them, but our relative was driving, and refused to pull the car over. My sister and I grew very upset, because we wanted to use our own money to help them. Irritated, the relative driving turned around. My sister and I gave our money to the immigrants, and they said with thick accents, "Thank you so much."

I felt great about giving them the money, and was so glad to have helped. My mood plummeted when my relative started talking badly about them. She said that they were probably fake and the children weren't theirs. She continued to say that they were filthy, even though they were dressed in clean clothes. My sister, mother, and I were appalled by her attitude. We had just helped someone in need, and all she could do was talk bad about them. It would have been much easier to not argue with her, save my money, and do nothing. I chose to do the harder thing, knowing it was the right thing to do.

Even now I am still trying to understand my family member's actions. She is a kind person and she likes to help people. Every year when we come for Thanksgiving we help her put together backpacks filled with necessities for poor children. She also makes mats out of grocery bags for the homeless so they don't have to sleep on the ground. I think what is influencing her is propaganda, much like the Holocaust and the Germans spreading rumors about Jews. I know she follows different news outlets than my family does, outlets that talk about building walls to shield Americans from immigrants. She believes that immigrants bring diseases across the border, just like regular German citizens believed Nazi propaganda about the Jews.

We need to make sure that this kind of propaganda doesn't influence our actions. I believe that we can stop this through small acts of kindness such as helping someone in need, believing in someone, or sharing an encouraging word. These are all things that we can do to help make a difference. Thinking back to the Holocaust, there were regular German citizens who chose to do the right thing, by hiding Jewish people from the Nazis, saving their lives. They could have chosen to be bystanders, but they took the harder road and did what they knew was right.

I think that our country is better when it has diversity and when we welcome immigrants from other countries. I knew that the right thing to do was to help this family, who may be just beginning their life in America. The only other person that I saw helping that family was a boy my age handing them bags of groceries. I think that my generation can make a difference. We can change our world one kind act at a time.

Thinking back to the Statue of Liberty, she welcomes everyone, no matter where they come from. New York City is full of people from all over the world, truly demonstrating what the inscription on the Statue of Liberty means. We should remember that, and not go against the principles that our nation was founded on. Above all we should try to be kind and welcoming to all human beings, no matter what they look like or where they come from. We will be better off as people if we do.