

The Beauty of Differences

It is 6:00 in the morning, and the night sky is just beginning to glow with the approach of dawn. Usually the campus of my high school is silent but for the occasional chirp of a sleepy bird and the ambience of early cars on a distant freeway – but not today. Rounding the corner, you hear voices in hushed excitement only a second before you see it – *colors*. Flags, of every country in the world, proudly hung in a row from the ceiling of the gymnasium. And under them, multitudes of students, preparing for the day; dressed in the decadent reds and greens of Hmong traditional dress, saris of rich blue and purple, traditional Pacific Islander hula skirts. Today is the Multicultural Assembly. There is palpable excitement in the air.

Today is the day that we join together in a schoolwide celebration of cultures, traditions, and diversity. This is the day that we shamelessly stand in front of our peers and share with them a bit of ourselves, the day we celebrate what makes us different. This is the day that our diverse generation comes together in song and dance and illustrates the beauty that comes when all of these people stand as one. Here are the future leaders of our world, and we understand this. Today, we dance. Today, we show what makes America beautiful.

As every student in the school watches, each multicultural club comes up and performs for the assembly. Students every year look forward to the epic Escrima battle, to the Tinikling dance subconsciously familiar to anyone used to hearing their bamboo sticks echoing every day after school. No matter what is going on with the world outside, as the Bhangra or salsa or traditional Japanese music reverberates in the gymnasium, the entire student body is joined in one consensus: diversity is beautiful. Diversity is exciting. Diversity needs to be celebrated.

I am very fortunate that this mentality is not just one day at my school – it is a way of life. As the country around us simmers under racial turmoil, my school remains an oasis where cultural differences are accepted and celebrated, not stigmatized. In attending such a diverse high school, I have learned the vital importance of different cultures in my own life as a global citizen. My social groups include people of all backgrounds – all races, all religions, all political leanings. Going over to my best friend's house to celebrate Diwali; hearing another friend talk about his parents' experiences immigrating from Vietnam; having candid discourse in classes where all viewpoints are brought up and enrich the discussion – all of these experiences have opened up my worldview and have made me so grateful for having been raised in this oasis of inclusivity. Having learned the power of celebrating different cultures, I am so incredibly sad for those who choose to close their eyes to the beauty of difference. However, I remain hopeful that my generation can usher in a new era to our country where just as at my high school, all perspectives are heard, diversity is valued, and our differences are what make us stronger, together.