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Mrs. Somerville

English 11H: Personal Narrative Essay

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priv·i·lege

/<sup>1</sup>priv(ə)lij/

Power to the people? More like power to the White people. This is the democracy seen in America today—a country politically designed to advantage Whites and disadvantage Blacks. *The 1619 Project*, created by Nikole Hannah-Jones and published by *The New York Times Magazine* in 2019, provides two examples that show how Black Americans are treated in America: White privilege and the lack of Black political figures. In the essay, “America Wasn’t a Democracy, until Black Americans Made It One,” Nikole Hannah-Jones recalls when, as a child, her dad would wave the American flag. She questions, “How could this black man, having seen firsthand the way his country abused black Americans, how it refused to treat us as full citizens, proudly fly its banner?”<sup>1</sup> Hannah-Jones expresses that no matter the amount of love a Black American may show for his country, it will never love him back. On top of that, Nikole Hannah-Jones states, “They laid the foundations of the White House and the Capital, even placing with their unfree hands the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol dome.”<sup>2</sup> Blacks constructed our country all while being deprived of freedom. Additionally, the United States wrote the Declaration of Independence announcing freedom to the country, yet one-fifth of the country was not included in this declaration. Hannah-Jones communicates, “Throughout

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>

centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country live up to its founding ideals.”<sup>3</sup>—the ideals being, “all men are created equal.” Black Americans are the founders of American democracy, yet they are not the ones benefiting from this significant endowment.

Although America has come a long way from slavery and has improved as a society, the idea that Blacks are less than Whites still thrives. This concept is known as White privilege. White privilege comes directly from slavery and creates racial inequality. For example, when a White person is accused of a crime, they are less likely to be sentenced to years in prison or death, and more likely to be proven innocent.<sup>4</sup> While not uncommon, White people are often unaware of their White privilege and this frequently correlates with a person's political party and their level of education. According to *Pew Research Center*, Whites with a higher level of education who are also members of the Democratic party, are more likely to have an understanding of their White privilege. 72% of Whites with a bachelor's degree, 52% of those with some college years, and only 43% with a high school education or less, are aware of their privilege. Additionally, White Democrats are twice as likely (78%) versus White Republicans (38%) to believe White privilege exists. This further emphasizes the lack of understanding White people have of White privilege. Surprisingly, 22% of White Republicans feel that being White is a disadvantage in society, while only 3% of White Democrats agree with that statement.<sup>5</sup> These percentages and data confirm that education and political parties have an influence on White people's awareness of White privilege.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/04/09/views-of-racial-inequality/>

White privilege makes it more difficult for Blacks to acquire political positions. Currently, there are 100 people in the Senate and 435 members in the House of Representatives.<sup>6</sup> At the moment, there are only 53 Black Americans in the House of Representatives<sup>7</sup> and three Black Americans in the Senate<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, there have only been ten Black Americans in the Senate. Furthermore, out of the 45 United States Presidents, only one Black American,<sup>9</sup> Barack Obama, was elected, in 2008. The lack of Black Americans serving in leading political roles in the United States exemplifies the idea that Blacks are not fully a part of the United States democracy. The United States democracy has certainly grown in terms of diversity but still has much farther to go.

Even though the United States democracy was built by Black Americans, some believe otherwise. There are White Americans that would agree that politically Blacks and Whites are equal and given the same rights. As stated by *Pew Research Center*, about 44% of White Americans believe that the relations between Blacks and Whites are good and 42% of Whites concur that slavery has no effect on the position of Black Americans in society today. More than half of White Americans, 63% to be exact, feel that the United States has done enough with giving Blacks and Whites equal rights. Also, looking at political parties, 31% of Republicans think that the country has gone too far with giving Blacks rights and 59% of Republicans would say that the historical outcomes of slavery have zero effect on Black Americans' lives.<sup>10</sup> Although many Americans have these viewpoints about the equality of Black representation in politics, the numbers tell a different story. As mentioned before, only one out of 45 presidents

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.senate.gov/reference/reference\\_index\\_subjects/House\\_of\\_Representatives\\_vrd.htm](https://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/House_of_Representatives_vrd.htm)

<sup>7</sup> <https://pressgallery.house.gov/member-data/demographics/african-americans>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.senate.gov/senators/leadership.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/19276?ret=True>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/>

has been Black and only ten senators have ever been Black. The combination of White privilege and the history of slavery is evidence of the continual inferior treatment toward Blacks.

Black Americans deserve to be treated equally in American society because they built it. White privilege continues to urge Whites to both believe they are better than non-Whites, Blacks in particular, and abuse their privilege to benefit themselves. This privilege makes it harder for Blacks to fulfill their aspirations to political office because they are obstructed by more than racial discrimination alone. Hurdles and networks built through White privilege continue to present real roadblocks to success. The United States must change “Power to the White people” to “Power to all the People” in order for Blacks and Whites to be truly equal.

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