

## PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Finalist

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John Lennon imagined it. No countries, a life unattached to material possessions, nothing to kill or die for, no need for greed or hunger, living life in peace. But here we are, 45 years after John Lennon wrote the song, we are so far from this vision. Our world has made so much progress on so many fronts but we are far from world peace. Even in our own country, the United States, which is at the forefront of technological progress, we see greed, hunger, environmental degradation, and inequality.

We are plagued with severe inequality both domestically and internationally. The poorest half of the Earth's population owns 1% of the Earth's wealth. The richest 1% of the Earth's population owns 46% <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-mo-oxfam-world-economic-forum-income-inequality-20140120-story.html> of the Earth's wealth.

Is "equality" a good indicator of peacefulness? It seems so. Geopolitical peacefulness as published by the Global Peace Index rankings, can be observed by nations with the least dispersion of incomes or lowest Gini coefficients representing the least unequal societies. This correlation can be observed in countries such as Iceland, Denmark, Austria, New Zealand, and Switzerland. "Political freedom" appears to be another good indicator of peacefulness according to Freedomhouse.org. Countries such as Afghanistan or Libya with "Not free" political rights scores and low civil liberties scores, have very low peacefulness scores. Like many countries in the Middle East, Afghanistan is recovering from many decades of conflict. A majority of the population suffers from lack of shelter, clean water, jobs, and medical care. Human trafficking and modern-day slavery are very prominent in countries like these, because of the lack of funding for security. Furthermore, violent political movements that are threatening world peace and geopolitical stability are emerging from these "not free" countries. Examples of these movements are ISIS, the Taliban, and Al Shabaab.

North Korea is another example of a "not free" country inciting global instability. The leaders attempt to retain their legitimacy among a starving population with highly dangerous military antics.

But economic inequality is persistent even in the United States. The US "equality score" or Gini coefficient is substandard as well as its ranking in Global peacefulness. According to the US Census, the Gini coefficient calculation demonstrates worsening inequality in the US since 1970. Is the cause of this inequality lack of economic growth? Senator Sanders says even if the US experiences more economic growth, the economic spoils will go to the top 1% anyway, so who needs it. Is it our institutional structures that breed inequality? Is it global trade or globalization that has worsened US inequality?

We need to find the answers to these questions. We should start in our own backyard looking to reform our institutions with the goal of fostering equality, strengthening human rights, enhancing political freedom, and providing everyone with a decent standard of living. Only then can we better imagine John Lennon's vision of world peace.