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2020 High School Scholarship Essay Contest \$1,000 Award Winner

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*How We Define Peace*

To believe that peace is merely the absence of war is naive. Coming from poverty, and losing her family members to torture, rape and ultimately murder, Nobel Peace Prize Winner Rigoberta Menchú could not accept that definition of peace and we should not either.

Every day, guns end up in the wrong hands - the hands of an unsuspecting child, a disgruntled partner with a history of domestic violence, or a depressed individual in a desperate state of mind. Each year, 35,000 people are killed with guns and 100,000 are left with life-altering injuries (Gun). Bullets fly in sacred classrooms, churches, and neighborhoods. This is not peace.

27.5 million Americans live without health insurance, praying their common cold does not escalate to an ER visit, and millions do not have access to essential medication due to costs (US). Glass skyscrapers tower over hundreds of thousands of homeless individuals and heroine needles strewn along the streets. Families can't make ends meet while the top 0.1% hold the wealth of the bottom 90%. This is not peace.

Powerful women make history and move crowds to tears, but people focus on what they are wearing rather than what they are thinking. Women, more particularly of color, are often excluded from board rooms, CEO positions, world leader posts, and the Oval Office. This is not peace.

Shamefully, the color of one's skin, not ability, determines their fate after high school: college or prison. African American males are five times more likely to be imprisoned than their white male counterparts and young children escaping violence in South American countries enter the land of the free, but are met with cages. This is not peace.

Fires ravage through forests, dislocating millions while disintegrating life. Pollution smothers the lungs of every individual and the ice caps melt away at an alarming rate. Species are disappearing at a faster pace than they are being discovered, yet our leaders answer with inaction. This is not peace.

We must refuse to accept an inadequate definition of peace, and demand better conditions for all people on Earth. How we define peace now will set a standard for what we deem as acceptable in

the future. Rigoberta Menchu astutely recognized that peace is built upon every action we take, vote we cast, and decision we make about the treatment of others and our planet:

“Peace cannot exist without justice, justice cannot exist without fairness, fairness cannot exist without development, development cannot exist without democracy, democracy cannot exist without respect for the identity and worth of cultures.”