



Physicians for Social Responsibility
10 Dumfries Court
Sacramento, California 95831
www.sacpsr.org • info@sacpsr.org
916-955-6333

2020 High School Scholarship Essay Contest First Place Winner
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Priya Sharma
Christian Brothers High School, Sacramento

The Forgotten Soldiers

Those who fight for justice never find satisfaction. The world is constantly changing; for every cure and solution developed there is another crisis emerging just beyond the horizon. There are multitudes of social issues that last beyond war. When Rigoberta Menchu Tum addressed each of these problems by name in her statement, she brought light to a startling truth: there is always more work to be done.

Tum was active in creating peace in Guatemala for her whole life. It was her dedication and contributions that brought a Peace Treaty to the Guatemalan Civil War in 1996. Although the war had ended, she did not stop her fight for peace. The systems she fought against ran deep through her country; the war she spoke about could not be ended with pen and paper.

What was within Tum rests inside all great advocates for justice: resilience. Any person could become weighed down by the troubles that lie in the small country of Guatemala, let alone the rest of the world. However, there is a growing army forming, far outnumbering the troops with guns that line borders. It consists of peacemakers and protesters, of believers and dreamers. Across the globe, there are people who notice these poisons in society, and use their platforms to respond to the hidden war Tum speaks of that burns all around.

America has a history of glorifying the traditional definition of soldier and warrior. There are statues erected with men in helmets and holding guns, praising those who risked their lives for peace. But the forgotten war heroes are those who stood before soldiers and offices in the midst of protest, fighting for the same universal hope. There are small battles for peace occurring in courtrooms and on street corners just as critical as the ones displayed in movies and paintings. There are people deserving of just as much praise for taking action against enemies that are far less glamorous.

History has left countries with broken systems that have lasted centuries longer than either World War. There are not simply individual persons to fight, instead nations are plagued by stigmas and social structures. People live without shelter on local streets and children are bullied in classrooms for the color of their skin. Even when news stations highlight “Peace for our Nation,” the absence of war only further uncovers systematic oppression.

When Rigoberta Menchu Tum gave her illuminating statement, she made it a call to action. There must not be a time to rest, to retire one's fighting spirit, because the battle is ongoing. Advocates for justice, in whatever form they might take, respond to messages like that of Tum's. They recognize the absence of peace even when the world's weapons are quiet. As Tum so greatly emphasizes, people must maintain this resilience. Although the treaties have been signed and the bombs stored away, there remains small battles everywhere. She calls on those brave enough to see these battles and fight them.