

Beal College

A Place at the Table:

How Do I Feel?

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The movie assigned was named “*A Place at the Table*”, us students were asked to watch this documentary, and write a review on our feelings towards it, summarizing what we thought was most important. I will mention that I have never felt so emotionally connected to a documentary - the realness of this video will stick with me for a long time. I believe my connection to this film is associated with my way of life as a child, and the struggles my own parents had with food insecurity. The United States is the wealthiest country in the world, yet 50 million Americans are hungry; does that make any sense at all?

The United States government is in denial regarding the American hunger crisis, and I believe they have shown little interest in acknowledging the poverty and hunger association. There was a bill passed by congress in 2010 named the “Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act” which called for an additional 4.5 billion dollar increase over the span of 10 years to ensure all children were given the nutrition needed to become healthy adults. What’s ironic about this bill, is that nearly half of the funds needed to support it, were paid for by cutting food stamps. This was absolutely mind boggling to me - there was a statement a woman made that really stuck to me: “You can’t push one half of the potatoes to another side of the plate and say okay we’re feeding you.”

\$2.68 in government reimbursement is given to the school system per child meal, now normally this would sound like a decent amount, but taking away for fuel, electricity, janitorial services, and administration, schools have reported that around 0.90 cents to \$1.00 is able to be spent on one child’s meal. This number is so low, that providing healthy, nutritious meals is nearly impossible; resulting in obesity numbers rising. A study performed in 2015 stated that only 25% of young adults ages 19-24 are eligible to join military services due to obesity and being overweight. From my understanding, if the numbers are that high, shouldn’t we be

focusing on healthier meals for children? Thus preventing future obesity in an attempt to utilize the younger generations in our military services? It's all a domino effect. Poverty results in unhealthy eating because it's all Americans can afford, unhealthy eating results in obesity, resulting in less active military personnel, so on and so forth - yet SO much military funding is approved (721.5 billion to be exact).

With that being said - why are processed foods so cheap whereas healthier foods such as fruits and vegetables so expensive? This really all began in 1980 when the prices for fruits and vegetables increased nearly 40% and in contrast, processed foods dropped 40%; thus resulting in the obesity epidemic. The answer is that the USDA subsidizes commodity crops such as cotton, wheat, corn, rice, and soy from large farm industries making up about 84% of investments; 15% dairy and livestock, 1% in fruits and vegetables. Processed foods are sold to USDA for cheap, making them extremely profitable for the food industry to invest in.

As of today, we estimate nearly 37 million US citizens are hungry, and are living with food insecurities. In 1980 there were an estimated 200 food banks over the whole United States, and now, there are over 40,000 food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens all being utilized by low and middle class households. Charity is a wonderful thing, and has benefited many people all over the world - but this should not be our solution to the United States hunger crisis. Children are going without, decreasing their abilities in academics, and increasing their rates of infection and sicknesses; an example being that 1 in 3 children born in the year 2000 will be diagnosed with Type II Diabetes.

To me, the question is not if America has enough food, because that is not the case at all, but why are we allowing so much to be wasted, when Americans are starving. To be approximate, it is stated that 80 billion pounds of food is WASTED each year in the United

States. That amount of food is equivalent to 161 billion dollars in wasted product; how much a year does the government spend on hunger and food insecurity? 167 billion. Why do we waste such precious food? Food that doesn't need to be thrown away. Food that could be donated. How could we better utilize our materials and in the end LOWER government funding? These are questions I would love answers to. I believe this assignment not only educated me about the food crisis in the United States, but has given me the ability to better educate others, and somehow make a difference.