

“No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at his present place.”

-Maya Angelou

Americans live in a fast-paced world where equality is tangible for everyone. All United States citizens over the age of eighteen are eligible to vote. However, in the early nineteenth hundreds, women did not have the right to vote and were not always treated equally. Strong individuals in our country's history fought for their beliefs through conflict, committees, protest, and compromise. Although women today continue to fight for equal pay, they now have countless job and educational opportunities that were unimaginable to women in the early 1900's. Patrick Henry once said, “I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience.” Past situations and experiences are the hands that mold us into our present state of being, and define our values and goals.

Change and evolution, such as fighting for suffrage, require time and patience. Without the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, Susan B. Anthony, the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and abundant protests and unfaltering spirits of those who supported the cause, women's suffrage would not have been achieved. The sacrifices and struggles of past activists led to the passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, granting women the right to vote. The suffragists of the early 20th century endured hardships such as being ostracized from their communities and in some cases, imprisonment. Americans should be aware of the past and how it impacts the current values and policies our country enjoys.

Historical figures such as George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson did not become president from sheer desire. They took decisive actions that guided their country

through revolution and illustrated their strength and commitment to the fledging United States. Their past sacrifices and actions led to their future as president. Likewise, from years of hard work and dedication, Marie Curie earned her recognition in history as one of the first influential female scientists in chemistry and physics. Her contributions were not handed to her, but rather were the result of failure and success. In contrast, Adolf Hitler is the quintessential symbol of evil due to his use of sinister propaganda that resulted in the annihilation of millions of innocent lives. People do not attain goals or notoriety immediately; these conclusions evolve through time and experience.

Holden Caulfield, in The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger, spends most of the book evaluating who he is. He runs away from the problems he faces with school, his family, and other relationships rather than confront them head on. His distrust and lack of passion commenced after the death of his brother, Allie. On the night of Allie's death, Holden lashed out by smashing the windows in the garage. Holden never fully recuperated after the traumatizing experience of losing his brother, so it constantly haunted him. After living through years of despair and depression, Holden decides to return home to make amends with his family, receive the help he desperately needs, and possibly return to school. Although he remains a sensitive and emotional boy, he learns to cope with his loss. Through experiences, mistakes, and time, Holden is able to make strides toward a more fulfilling life that is not controlled by the pain of his past.

I am not the smartest student in my grade, nor am I the strongest runner on the track team, but I do know that my consistent hard work and perseverance set me apart from most people. In school, I take many honors and AP classes, and I struggle through them. After school each day before practice, I am in my teachers' classrooms getting help and working my hardest to understand the concepts, mainly in physics. Then, during practice I am usually the last person

to leave. I stay late in the weight room finishing difficult workouts in hopes of eventually making sectionals, though it is unlikely for me. I have been working my absolute hardest in school and on the track team since freshman year and I don't plan on giving up. Although receiving an A+ in physics and making sectionals will most likely not happen, I have learned to be happy and accept the small victories like scoring well on a test or earning a personal best in running. I have developed a spirit of perseverance and goal setting. Learning this about myself has guided my decision to become a medical doctor. My hard work has taught me that I have an immense amount of self-discipline and a sense of pride in my work. These conclusions about myself took time and many experiences to develop. My past experiences have helped me learn things about myself and decide who I want to become.

Although our pasts do not define us, they do influence our mindsets and goals. Women today have suffrage because of the strength and determination of certain historical figures that endured the conflicts and struggles necessary to bring change. Holden determines the changes he wants to apply to his life after living through years of depression. My personal experiences have helped me to discover the person I want to be. Success and change do not occur overnight. Without victories and failures, how can people or countries decide what is best for themselves or their people? Individuals must learn and reflect as they grow, rather than make important choices in haste. Only through experience can people learn who they want to become.

“You can never plan the future by the past.”

Edmund Burke

- ❖ History tends to repeat itself. Knowing the past and reflecting upon prior events have not helped to prevent these situations from reoccurring.
- Genocide continues to occur. Knowing the horrors of past genocides has not prevented new occurrences. The Holocaust, during the 1940's, was a systematic killing of over six million European Jewish citizens. The Nazis responsible for the atrocious event were tried in Nuremburg and found guilty for crimes against humanity, yet the Cambodian, Armenian, Bosnian, and other genocides followed.
- Conflict is inevitable. However, violence continues to be a dominant form of resolution in our society. Awareness of the destruction caused by the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War, World War I and II, Vietnam War, Korean War, and the Cold War have not prevented the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, civil conflict in Syria, or violent disputes over Israel.
- Economic collapses occur all over the world. Experiences from the Panic of 1837 and the Wall Street Crash of 1829, which led to the Great Depression, have not aided in the halting of the euro's decline, the early 2000's recession, or the plummeting of oil prices in Saudi Arabia that are destroying American energy companies.
- Poverty has been a problem since the beginning of time and there continues to be poverty today in many villages in Africa and Asia. Knowledge of the Irish potato famine in the 1840's and the Chinese famine in 1907 did not lead to current prevention.