

Gabriella Salinas

Ms. Bombard

English 1000

13 February 2019

First

Being the youngest child is to be the greatest observer of all time. Watching, dissecting and regurgitating the world and lifestyle I saw around me. There was a time where I realized that I was watching the world around me so intently, that I did not know who I was in it. In doing so, I found myself learning and coming to a huge revelation that I am indeed a biracial, privileged girl in a world of oppression and miracles. This epiphany did not happen in a day but rather cultivated over time with the help of the people and experiences around me. Realizing that I come from two of the most suppressed backgrounds was something that brought me strength. My intelligence, appearance, and access was something to be seen as an obstacle to the systemic racism that I faced, yet it was something that came natural to me and I was blessed with. That was all the ammo I needed to want to succeed in this world.

It was not until high school that my knowledge expanded, not only about myself but about my cultural background. I came to the realization that I am made from a history of first's. Cesar Chavez was the first Mexican American to fight for the rights of my people in order to gain equality. My grandparents were the first to come from San Luís Potosí, Mexico to Kansas City, Missouri with their four kids, soon to be five and create a life that would be the foundation for who I am today. On the other hand, Maya Angelou was the first African American woman to become a household name as a poet, memoirist and as a civil rights activist amongst other things that would also allow me to live the way I do. My great grandfather was the first African

American postman in Kansas City, Missouri. He would eventually move his family across the notorious redline in the city to the 30's where blacks were unable to reach for so many years. The story of first's would continue with my own parents, as we became the first minority family in my neighborhood. In a place that was notorious for flashy items, competition, and not realizing that my father owned our big house on the hill by a lake and was not the gardener. With all of these great people surrounding me, raising me, and watching me grow, it was by no mistake that I have shoes to fill. This led me to thinking of who I am and as a result, my outlet into reading and writing. My purpose in life became more direct and relevant.

As a reader, the impact that books had on me growing up began to shape who I am. I was no longer reading just for fun but for intent. I came across many books in my last few years of high school to help me gain more knowledge about the world around me and the role that minorities and underprivileged people play into the United States. In doing so, I realized many things throughout those readings, one of the most memorable takeaways being from Savage Inequalities by Jonathan Kozol- a novel about the schooling system and its effects on communities in America. It is not a secret that minorities suffer from the hands of white America and the constant control and limitations placed upon us. To see that this system is so vicious towards innocent children who happen to be living on the wrong side of a school boundary was infuriating and disheartening. I read about the many young students who dropped out because they knew that getting pregnant and staying in their rundown neighborhoods was easier than even attempting to receive the same education as many people they saw at the top of the hill. It made me realize how important my own life is in the 2000's. The studies done in Savage Inequalities might be from the 1980's and 90's but those same stories exist and continue to happen even in my own city. Living in the suburbs my whole life was a completely different

lifestyle from many of my relatives; in doing so, it naturally set me apart and helped me get ahead; however it was also something that many students in the book could not do or were unable to receive. Understanding that I could take advantage of my opportunities drove me to create a documentary about my mother. The woman who was a teen mom and decided to put her education at the same value as her kids, the woman who told us that knowledge is the most powerful thing we could ever acquire, that no one could take away from us or use against us. For my knowledge and abilities to read and write was what was going to set me apart from the students I read about in Savage Inequalities and would fool some of the rich, close-minded people I lived in my neighborhood with. This documentary wasn't just an interview about the things I already know, but a message to the people that don't know about the importance of an African American woman moving to the suburbs with her husband and kids and creating a life some people only get to read about. I won first place for my documentary which placed me in line with my ancestors.

I am the first of my family to receive this high accolade that was sparked because of a book and my ancestral history. Literature gave me purpose. To be something bigger than myself and to live up to the legacy that I continue to walk in each day. My family is just the roots and foundation for the little tree that I am. I am still connected to those that came before me and I hope I can be the connection to the people that watch me grow.