

“Two lumps of apathy with my Starbucks, please!” Quipped my friend’s husband as I sat with a cup of tea and wondered aloud about the general indifference of today’s college going population.

To war; To peace; To poverty; To race; To ethnic cleansing; To elections; To presidents; To relatives; Community; Family; Education; Marriage; Children; Countries, Continents, Earth...

Why do they not rise? Get stirred up? Stand on bridges? But wait, maybe they are busy- with Astronomy, or Geology, or Computer Science or football or with some one thing or another that their ever narrowing zoom has settled on as their career choice or future destination or even just current field of interest.

Because today’s twenty year old Americans can, in general, choose what they want to do. The privileged few, who indifferently walk in and out of classes and educational institutions that their peers in many other countries can only dream of. The education that their peers in the developing world rise in revolution for or immolate themselves in burning fires to achieve, due to lack of opportunities, is strewn in relative abundance around here.

So ultimately, maybe, it is all about the possession of opportunities. If you don’t have them- you think about the reasons, think about solutions, think about rights and wrongs, think about haves and have-nots. *You think*. Take out student protests, perform sit-ins, parade unflinching idealism untainted by age and circumstance, and sometimes take the entrenched authorities head on. *You act*.

And if you have them- then well, maybe it’s like old furniture in the house- always there. And maybe you think about adding a table or a chair or maybe just plain go buy a new one from the store. Maybe, it is that every thing that our mind reaches out for is today available at a store?

Maybe, the reaches of a young mind are today truncated and cauterized by the relative affluence and the boundaries of a typical American dream- a big cookie cutter house in the suburbia to hold many cars and if you are lucky, four people and a dog?

The individualism of a young American mind has probably never achieved such supreme status as today. Where in it is the space and time for reflection or thoughts about those dying in wars or surviving ethnic cleansing and famines in the world far away, when the immediate world holds you suspended between American idol, and pretend survivors in TV shows, and blogging about your own self to the world?

And if its not you or yours who’s gone to or been sent to a war zone, well then, its just news on television repeating itself endlessly like history, and who really cares about history?

So really, why am I surprised to not see college after college rising in protest against the war across the country? Why does it make me sad to see the election demographics where students just having achieved the privilege to vote, don’t even bother to show up at the polls? Why does it shock me when college students profess complete ignorance about the child soldiers in Congo or the ravages in Darfur or even the reason we invaded Iraq?

What must one expect after all from our children as we bring them up playing electronic games to fill up time and buy the next great thing after another to fill up their lives and minds?

Why should I be shocked if they take it for granted that life is only about them and their little circle of possessions and wants and complaints, when it is we who have failed them by imposing upon them our own limited boundaries and frustrations?

But sometimes, the surprise is beautiful, when I come across those same twenty year olds and find them thinking, struggling to find answers, rising up to demand effective change- not just to their own problems, but to their country's and to those of the world at large.

Then, I want to bow my head in gratefulness to those parents and those teachers who have shaped these minds to think, to tussle with solutions and not give up. Because tomorrow, I hope to vote for these thinking minds that are capable of concrete action.