

Benjamin Lin

Ms. Sutton

Contemporary themes

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*The Forgotten Boys of America*

America, it isn't represented by a person, place, or a thing; instead, it is an idea, one that extends way past the borders at Canada and Mexico. An idea so big and so potent, that it often blinds people from the truth. In many first world countries, America is seen as the epitome of good, and the bringer of peace. To countries that have not been blessed with economic prosperity, America is seen as the bringer of troubles. As evident in the documentary, *God Grew Tired of Us*, Americans often times seek to help people, but often times go about it in the worst ways possible. This is largely due to the many beliefs, assumptions and values with which Americans are raised. This usually isn't a problem in American society and societies of other first world countries, however, when these are applied to every society, troubles start to arise. The film documents the journey of three boys: John Bul Dau, Daniel Pach, and Panther Bior, known as the Lost Boys of Sudan, as they traveled from a war torn country in Africa to the land of opportunity, America. In this journey, challenges presented to the boys exemplified the differences between the two cultures while illustrating problems in the method used by Americans to "help" others. The three boys are face the challenge of overcoming the belief that money solves all problems, the value of isolationism, and the assumption of the white man's burden by Americans as they seek to rebuild their lives.

In a fast paced society, such as the United States, the belief that money solves all problems is prominent in the culture. In a consumption dominated economy such as the United

States this may be true, money would do nothing to the refugee camp in Kakuma. Before the lost boys arrived in the United States, money meant nothing to them. They were raised to be self-sufficient, in a hunter-gathering society, things that they were unable to obtain themselves, they would barter for. This method of making a living allowed for plenty of leisure time, time to be spent with family and friends allowing them to share cultural traditions. Once these lost boys arrived in America, immediately they were expected to become self-sufficient through earning a steady income. They were forced to take up 2-3 jobs each and this essentially brainwashed them. Time for themselves, family, and friends was quickly evaporated by the torrential downpour of bills to pay. Every minute spent idle is another minute wasted. Although, this living style creates what is defined as success from the American perspective, it is a blatant statement of our ignorance towards other cultures.

“The White Man’s Burden”, a poem written by Rudyard Kipling, essentially encompasses the belief Americans have towards other races. According to the poem, it is the divine duty of Americans to rule over and promote cultural development of inferior species. Sadly this isn’t the case in any interaction between American’s and what they would call inferior species. Although the Lost Boys were taken from war and offered a place to live and earn a decent living, the process essentially destroyed their identity and their dignity. From day one, the American Government essentially owns their life. The Lost Boy’s are required to pay the government back for the expenses incurred by taking them here. In addition to being forced to live in debt to others, they are forced to live up to our social norms which include going out of their way to appease America’s inherent racism. This is exemplified when, shop owners complained that they were afraid when the 3 of them entered shops together. The idea that

Americans can help someone they are afraid of is proof that these Lost Boys are not being help at all. Instead, America is loaning out its services, which after a given time, needs to be repaid.

America is one of the most interconnected places in the world as evident by numerous technological startups that help people stay connected such as Facebook. Yet for all this connectivity online, Americans are out of touch with each other. As told by one of the group in the film, in America, a friendly attempt to visit one's neighbors can end up with a visit from the police. Economic prosperity leads to seclusion. As Americans interactions with new and unfamiliar people are rare as this value takes root even when helping others. Most Americans help charities through monetary donations, however, never by volunteering personally. By volunteering, American will be forced to meet others and interact with their culture as they try to help them through hardship. Sounds like a simple task, however, America's love for isolationism creates a challenge on its own for Americans wanting to help others.

The Lost Boys of Sudan may have ended up being the forgotten boys in America. After many years of holding down multiple jobs, living pay check to pay check, and being used as unskilled labor, the three of them managed to make a good living and return to Africa to help their family. Even with the challenges presented to them, they were able to prosper in this harsh new environment. Sadly however, with America's fast paced society and ingrained isolationism, most Americans have no idea how these boys turned out.

Works Cited

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