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The Danger of a Single Story

By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
2009

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian novelist, nonfiction writer, and short story writer. In this transcript from her TED talk, Adichie discusses her experiences with literature and the influence stories can have on constructing one's understanding of the world and its people. As you read, make note of the details that describe the impact that stories have on people.

- [1] I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story." I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader, and what I read were British and American children's books.

I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, (Laughter) and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out.

(Laughter)

Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.

- [5] My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was.

(Laughter)

And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.

What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable¹ and vulnerable we are in the face of a story,

1. **Impressionable** (*adjective*) easily influenced because of a lack of ability or knowledge



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particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.

But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.

- [10] Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.

I come from a conventional,² middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic³ help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So, the year I turned eight, we got a new houseboy. His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.

Then one Saturday, we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia⁴ that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.

Years later, I thought about this when I left Nigeria to go to university in the United States. I was 19. My American roommate was shocked by me. She asked where I had learned to speak English so well, and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my "tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey.

(Laughter)

- [15] She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove.

What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing,⁵ well-meaning pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way, no possibility of feelings more complex than pity, no possibility of a connection as human equals.

2. **Conventional** (*adjective*) in accordance with what is generally expected or believed
3. **Domestic** (*adjective*) relating to running a home or household
4. a palm tree native to tropical Africa and Madagascar
5. **Patronize** (*verb*) to treat with an apparent kindness that betrays a feeling of superiority

I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia. But I did come to embrace this new identity, and in many ways I think of myself now as African. Although I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country, the most recent example being my otherwise wonderful flight from Lagos two days ago, in which there was an announcement on the Virgin flight about the charity work in "India, Africa and other countries."

(Laughter)

So, after I had spent some years in the U.S. as an African, I began to understand my roommate's response to me. If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible⁶ people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family.

[20] This single story of Africa ultimately comes, I think, from Western literature. Now, here is a quote from the writing of a London merchant called John Lok, who sailed to West Africa in 1561 and kept a fascinating account of his voyage. After referring to the black Africans as "beasts who have no houses," he writes, "They are also people without heads, having their mouth and eyes in their breasts."

Now, I've laughed every time I've read this. And one must admire the imagination of John Lok. But what is important about his writing is that it represents the beginning of a tradition of telling African stories in the West: A tradition of Sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet Rudyard Kipling,⁷ are "half devil, half child."

And so, I began to realize that my American roommate must have throughout her life seen and heard different versions of this single story, as had a professor, who once told me that my novel was not "authentically African." Now, I was quite willing to contend that there were a number of things wrong with the novel, that it had failed in a number of places, but I had not quite imagined that it had failed at achieving something called African authenticity.⁸ In fact, I did not know what African authenticity was. The professor told me that my characters were too much like him, an educated and middle-class man. My characters drove cars. They were not starving. Therefore they were not authentically African.

But I must quickly add that I too am just as guilty in the question of the single story. A few years ago, I visited Mexico from the U.S. The political climate in the U.S. at the time was tense, and there were debates going on about immigration. And, as often happens in America, immigration became synonymous with Mexicans. There were endless stories of Mexicans as people who were fleecing⁹ the healthcare system, sneaking across the border, being arrested at the border, that sort of thing.

I remember walking around on my first day in Guadalajara, watching the people going to work, rolling up tortillas in the marketplace, smoking, laughing. I remember first feeling slight surprise. And then, I was

6. **Incomprehensible** (*adjective*) not able to be understood; not intelligible
7. author of the *Jungle Book*
8. **Authenticity** (*noun*) the quality of being genuine, real, or legitimate
9. **Fleece** (*verb*) to strip of money or property by fraud or extortion

overwhelmed with shame. I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject¹⁰ immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not have been more ashamed of myself.

[25] So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is “nkali.” It’s a noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another.” Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.

Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess¹¹ a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, “secondly.” Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story.

I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him that I had just read a novel called *American Psycho* — (Laughter)— and that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers.

(Laughter)

[30] (Applause)

Now, obviously I said this in a fit of mild irritation.

(Laughter)

But it would never have occurred to me to think that just because I had read a novel in which a character was a serial killer that he was somehow representative of all Americans. This is not because I am a better person than that student, but because of America’s cultural and economic power, I had many stories of America. I had read Tyler and Updike and Steinbeck and *Gaitskill*. I did not have a single story of America.

When I learned, some years ago, that writers were expected to have had really unhappy childhoods to be successful, I began to think about how I could invent horrible things my parents had done to me.

[35] (Laughter)

But the truth is that I had a very happy childhood, full of laughter and love, in a very close-knit family.

10. **Abject** (*adjective*) sunk to or existing in a low state or condition

11. **Dispossess** (*verb*) to deprive someone of land, property, or other possessions

But I also had grandfathers who died in refugee camps. My cousin Polle died because he could not get adequate healthcare. One of my closest friends, Okoloma, died in a plane crash because our fire trucks did not have water. I grew up under repressive military governments that devalued education, so that sometimes, my parents were not paid their salaries. And so, as a child, I saw jam disappear from the breakfast table, then margarine disappeared, then bread became too expensive, then milk became rationed.¹² And most of all, a kind of normalized political fear invaded our lives.

All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes,¹³ and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.

[40] I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.

So what if before my Mexican trip, I had followed the immigration debate from both sides, the U.S. and the Mexican? What if my mother had told us that Fide's family was poor and hardworking? What if we had an African television network that broadcast diverse African stories all over the world? What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories."

What if my roommate knew about my Nigerian publisher, Muhtar Bakare, a remarkable man who left his job in a bank to follow his dream and start a publishing house? Now, the conventional wisdom was that Nigerians don't read literature. He disagreed. He felt that people who could read, would read, if you made literature affordable and available to them.

Shortly after he published my first novel, I went to a TV station in Lagos to do an interview, and a woman who worked there as a messenger came up to me and said, "I really liked your novel. I didn't like the ending. Now, you must write a sequel, and this is what will happen..."

(Laughter)

[45] And she went on to tell me what to write in the sequel. I was not only charmed, I was very moved. Here was a woman, part of the ordinary masses of Nigerians, who were not supposed to be readers. She had not only read the book, but she had taken ownership of it and felt justified in telling me what to write in the sequel.

12. **Ration** (*verb*) to allow each person to only have a certain amount

13. **Stereotypes** (*noun*) a common but often oversimplified idea about a group of people

Now, what if my roommate knew about my friend Funmi Iyanda, a fearless woman who hosts a TV show in Lagos, and is determined to tell the stories that we prefer to forget? What if my roommate knew about the heart procedure that was performed in the Lagos hospital last week? What if my roommate knew about contemporary Nigerian music, talented people singing in English and Pidgin, and Igbo and Yoruba and Ijo, mixing influences from Jay-Z to Fela to Bob Marley to their grandfathers?

What if my roommate knew about the female lawyer who recently went to court in Nigeria to challenge a ridiculous law that required women to get their husband's consent before renewing their passports? What if my roommate knew about Nollywood,¹⁴ full of innovative¹⁵ people making films despite great technical odds, films so popular that they really are the best example of Nigerians consuming what they produce? What if my roommate knew about my wonderfully ambitious hair braider, who has just started her own business selling hair extensions? Or about the millions of other Nigerians who start businesses and sometimes fail, but continue to nurse ambition?

Every time I am home I am confronted with the usual sources of irritation for most Nigerians: our failed infrastructure, our failed government, but also by the incredible resilience of people who thrive despite the government, rather than because of it. I teach writing workshops in Lagos every summer, and it is amazing to me how many people apply, how many people are eager to write, to tell stories.

My Nigerian publisher and I have just started a non-profit called Farafina Trust, and we have big dreams of building libraries and refurbishing¹⁶ libraries that already exist and providing books for state schools that don't have anything in their libraries, and also of organizing lots and lots of workshops, in reading and writing, for all the people who are eager to tell our many stories.

[50] Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign,¹⁷ but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity.

The American writer Alice Walker wrote this about her southern relatives who had moved to the North. She introduced them to a book about the southern life that they had left behind. "They sat around, reading the book themselves, listening to me read the book, and a kind of paradise was regained."

I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.

Thank you.

(Applause)

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14. a term used to refer to the Nigerian film industry
 15. **Innovative** (*adjective*) tending to introduce new ideas; original and creative in thinking
 16. to renovate and redecorate something
 17. **Malign** (*verb*) to speak about someone in a spitefully critical manner

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The Real Cost of Cheap Fashion

By Laura Anastasia

2017

In this article, Laura Anastasia explores fast fashion and its undeniable dark side. As you read, take notes on the relationship between working conditions and profit.

Many of our trendy, inexpensive clothes are made in places like Bangladesh, where workers — including children — toil under conditions that may shock you.

- [1] Young women hunch over sewing machines in a windowless workroom in Bangladesh. Elbow to elbow in the stifling¹ heat, they assemble jackets. Together, the women must sew hundreds of jackets an hour, more than 1,000 a day. Their daily wage is less than \$3.



"A colorful line" by Duy Hoang is licensed under CC0.

Just a week or two later, these same jackets will be labeled fall's hottest back-to-school item, selling to teens for \$14.99 each at malls across the United States.

The jackets are just one example of what is known as fast fashion: trendy clothes designed, created, and sold to consumers as quickly as possible at extremely low prices. New looks arrive in stores weekly or even daily, and they cost so little that many people can afford to fill their closets with new outfits multiple times each year — then toss them the minute they go out of style.

Chains such as H&M and Zara first popularized fast fashion in the early 2000s. It has since spread throughout the entire clothing industry. As a result, global clothing production has more than tripled since 2000. The industry now churns out more than 150 billion garments annually.

Long Hours & Little Pay

- [5] Fast fashion items may not cost you much at the cash register, but they come with a serious price: Tens of millions of people in developing countries, some just children, work long hours in dangerous conditions to make them, in the kinds of factories often labeled sweatshops. Most garment² workers are paid barely enough to survive.

1. **Stifling** (*adjective*) very hot to the point that it's difficult to breathe
2. **Garment** (*noun*) an item of clothing such as a shirt or dress

Fast fashion also hurts the environment. Garments are manufactured using toxic chemicals and then transported around the globe, making the fashion industry the world's second-largest polluter, after the oil industry. And millions of tons of discarded clothing piles up in landfills each year.

"A lot of what we're throwing away hasn't even been worn that many times," says Elizabeth Cline, author of *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. "Clothing has become a cheap form of entertainment."

Until the 1970s, most apparel worn by Americans was made in the United States. Then clothing production, like a lot of manufacturing, began moving overseas, where labor costs were lower. As recently as 1990, half the clothes sold in the U.S. were made in the U.S. Today, it's just 2 percent.

Most American clothing companies now manufacture their merchandise in developing countries³ in Asia (see map, below). Workers there earn a fraction of what U.S. workers make — and have fewer protections. The lower labor costs translate to lower prices for shoppers (who then buy more clothing) and higher profits for retailers. That's helped make fashion a \$3 trillion global industry.

- [10] Today, many of the world's 75 million garment workers live in China and Bangladesh, the top-two clothing producers. Workers often earn just a few dollars a day. Many are women in their teens.

"They're sometimes the first one in their families to have a real job, so the family is eager to get them into the factories as quickly as they can," says Michael Posner of New York University's Stern Center for Business and Human Rights. "It's a very tough existence."

Indeed, garment workers often toil in windowless rooms thick with fumes from the chemicals used to manufacture and dye clothes. If they dare miss a day because they're sick, they risk being fired.

For Taslima Aktar, that wasn't an option. The 23-year-old couldn't afford to lose her job at the Windy Apparels factory in Bangladesh, so when her manager refused last year to give her time off to see a doctor about a persistent fever she accepted it.

Weeks later, Aktar passed out at work. After she was revived, her boss sent her back to her sewing machine. Shortly after, her heart stopped and she died.

- [15] "We know the same thing can happen any day, to any of us," says one of Aktar's co-workers, who told her story to *Slate*.

A Deadly Accident

Many people didn't give much thought to how their clothing was made until April 24, 2013, when the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh collapsed. The deadliest accident in the history of the garment industry, it killed more than 1,100 workers and injured 2,500 others. The factory, overloaded with too many floors, workers, and

3. Developing countries are those with low incomes and economies that rely heavily on agriculture.

equipment, had been making clothing for global brands such as Benetton, Joe Fresh, and Mango.

After the accident, many big brands pledged to improve garment factory conditions. About 200 major clothing companies partnered to create factory oversight programs in Bangladesh. In recent years, these programs have trained about 2 million workers in safety procedures. The companies have also hired independent engineers to inspect their factories.

In southern China, too, many factories now offer safer conditions and better wages than they did a decade ago. In some areas, the minimum wage for garment workers reached \$312 a month last year — 42 percent more than the previous year.

Better working conditions and wages come at a price, however. Some factories in Bangladesh have had to reduce their production capacity to afford higher employee pay and building repairs. That means the factories are less able to fill massive orders from big brands. As a result, big clothing companies may eventually shift their business to even poorer countries with fewer regulations,⁴ experts say.

[20] Other factories can't afford to make the major structural upgrades⁵ that are needed for them to be safe. (Of the 2,000 Bangladeshi factories that have been inspected so far, only 79 had passed final inspection as of March 2017.)

That's one reason unsafe working conditions persist. Last year, a garment factory fire in India killed 13 people. Another fire this past June injured more than 20 knitwear factory workers in Bangladesh. Some jumped out of third-story windows to escape the flames.

Environmental Toll

Fast fashion also takes a heavy toll on the environment. The industry consumes enormous amounts of water and other natural resources. Producing enough cotton for one pair of jeans takes about 1,800 gallons of water — the equivalent of about 105 showers.

Manufacturing polyester, which is made from petroleum, releases dangerous gases into the air. And farming cotton accounts for a quarter of all pesticides⁶ used in the United States. (The U.S. sends about 70 percent of the cotton it grows overseas, where it's turned into clothing.) Some of those pesticides can cause asthma and other health problems, and the chemicals pollute fresh water.

The damage doesn't end once clothing is made. Americans on average trash more than 70 pounds of clothes and shoes a year. Most are burned or piled in landfills, where synthetic⁷ fibers can take hundreds of years to break down.

4. **Regulations** (*noun*) rules adopted for how a company or group will conduct business with its employees and customers
5. This refers to improving the building's ability to handle heavy loads.
6. **Pesticide** (*noun*) a chemical used to destroy insects and other organisms from eating or harming growing plants
7. **Synthetic** (*adjective*) a substance or material made by a chemical process to imitate a natural product

[25] “A lot of the problems in the fashion industry are things that are happening in other places: air and water pollution in China, poverty and low wages in Bangladesh,” says Cline. “The waste is happening in our own backyard.”

Many big brands pledged to improve factory conditions

As more people have become aware of the ugly side of fast fashion, the push for ethically⁸ made clothing has grown. In the U.S., hundreds of start-ups are creating clothes out of recycled or organic fabrics. These companies use materials from U.S. factories, where they can better monitor working conditions. Big brands are trying to be more eco-conscious, as well. H&M, for example, offers customers store credit to recycle clothes at its retail locations.

“I think we’re going to see big fashion brands become leaders in sustainable⁹ clothes and make them accessible and more affordable,” Cline predicts.

But experts agree it will take more than just efforts by clothing companies to remedy the problems of fast fashion. Local factory owners, global retailers, and consumers must all play a role.

If teenage shoppers, to whom much of fast fashion is marketed, educate themselves about how their clothes are made and think carefully about what they buy, it can make a real difference, experts say.

[30] “It’s everybody’s problem,” says Posner, “and it’s everybody’s responsibility to come together and solve it.”

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8. **Ethically** (*adverb*) in accordance with moral rules; in a way that avoids doing harm

9. **Sustainable** (*adjective*) causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time

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Excerpt from "The Harvest Gypsies"

Article I

By John Steinbeck
1936

John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was an American author who won the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature. While Steinbeck was most popular for his novels, which often focused on agricultural workers in California, he also wrote a series of articles on migrant farm workers for the San Francisco News. In this excerpt, Steinbeck discusses the role of migrant workers in California's agriculture industry. PLEASE NOTE: The following text contains some outdated and offensive language that was considered acceptable at the time the text was published.

As you read, take notes on the common life and work experiences of migrant farm workers.

- [1] At this season of the year, when California's great crops are coming into harvest, the heavy grapes, the prunes, the apples and lettuce and the rapidly maturing cotton, our highways swarm with the migrant workers, that shifting group of nomadic,¹ poverty-stricken harvesters driven by hunger and the threat of hunger from crop to crop, from harvest to harvest, up and down the state and into Oregon to some extent, and into Washington a little. But it is California which has and needs the majority of these new gypsies.² It is a short study of these wanderers that these articles will undertake. There are at least 150,000 homeless migrants wandering up and down the state, and that is an army large enough to make it important to every person in the state.



"Migrant Worker and Cucumbers, Blackwater, VA" by Bread for the World is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

To the casual traveler on the great highways the movements of the migrants are mysterious if they are seen at all, for suddenly the roads will be filled with open rattletrap cars loaded with children and with dirty bedding, with fire-blackened cooking utensils. The boxcars and gondolas on the railroad lines will be filled with men. And then, just as suddenly, they will have disappeared from the main routes. On side roads and near rivers where there is little travel the squalid, filthy squatters³ camp will have been set up, and the orchards will be filled with pickers and cutters and driers.

1. **Nomadic** (*adjective*) wandering from place to place
2. "Gypsies" refer to the Roma people, who are members of a nomadic ethnic group that originated in South Asia and migrated to Europe. Although the term is associated with nomads and migrants who move about often, it is a racial slur used against the Roma, and should not be used in a modern context.
3. people who unlawfully occupy a vacant building or unused land

The unique nature of California agriculture requires that these migrants exist, and requires that they move about. Peaches and grapes, hops and cotton cannot be harvested by a resident population of laborers. For example, a large peach orchard which requires the work of 20 men the year round will need as many as 2000 for the brief time of picking and packing. And if the migration of the 2000 should not occur, if it should be delayed even a week, the crop will rot and be lost.

Thus, in California we find a curious attitude toward a group that makes our agriculture successful. The migrants are needed, and they are hated. Arriving in a district they find the dislike always meted⁴ out by the resident to the foreigner, the outlander. This hatred of the stranger occurs in the whole range of human history, from the most primitive village form to our own highly organized industrial farming. The migrants are hated for the following reasons, that they are ignorant and dirty people, that they are carriers of disease, that they increase the necessity for police and the tax bill for schooling in a community, and that if they are allowed to organize they can, simply by refusing to work, wipe out the season's crops. They are never received into a community nor into the life of a community. Wanderers in fact, they are never allowed to feel at home in the communities that demand their services.

- [5] Let us see what kind of people they are, where they come from, and the routes of their wanderings. In the past they have been of several races, encouraged to come and often imported as cheap labor; Chinese in the early period, then Filipinos, Japanese and Mexicans. These were foreigners, and as such they were ostracized⁵ and segregated and herded about.

If they attempted to organize they were deported or arrested, and having no advocates⁶ they were never able to get a hearing for their problems. But in recent years the foreign migrants have begun to organize, and at this danger signal they have been deported in great numbers, for there was a new reservoir from which a great quantity of cheap labor could be obtained.

The drought in the middle west has driven the agricultural populations of Oklahoma, Nebraska and parts of Kansas and Texas westward. Their lands are destroyed and they can never go back to them.

Thousands of them are crossing the borders in ancient rattling automobiles, destitute⁷ and hungry and homeless, ready to accept any pay so that they may eat and feed their children. And this is a new thing in migrant labor, for the foreign workers were usually imported without their children and everything that remains of their old life with them.

They arrive in California usually having used up every resource to get here, even to the selling of the poor blankets and utensils and tools on the way to buy gasoline. They arrive bewildered and beaten and usually in a state of semi-starvation, with only one necessity to face immediately, and that is to find work at any wage in order that the family may eat.

- [10] And there is only one field in California that can receive them. Ineligible for relief, they must become migratory field workers.

4. **Mete** (*verb*) to dispense or give out
5. **Ostracize** (*verb*) to exclude someone from a society or group
6. **Advocate** (*noun*) a person who speaks or writes in support of a person or cause
7. **Destitute** (*adjective*) without the basic necessities of life

Because the old kind of laborers, Mexicans and Filipinos, are being deported and repatriated⁸ very rapidly, while on the other hand the river of dust bowl⁹ refugees increases all the time, it is this new kind of migrant that we shall largely consider.

The earlier foreign migrants have invariably been drawn from a peon¹⁰ class. This is not the case with the new migrants.

They are small farmers who have lost their farms, or farm hands who have lived with the family in the old American way. They are men who have worked hard on their own farms and have felt the pride of possessing and living in close touch with the land.

They are resourceful and intelligent Americans who have gone through the hell of the drought, have seen their lands wither and die and the top soil blow away; and this, to a man who has owned his land, is a curious and terrible pain.

- [15] And then they have made the crossing and have seen often the death of their children on the way. Their cars have been broken down and been repaired with the ingenuity¹¹ of the land man.

Often they patched the worn-out tires every few miles. They have weathered the thing, and they can weather much more for their blood is strong.

They are descendants of men who crossed into the middle west, who won their lands by fighting, who cultivated¹² the prairies and stayed with them until they went back to desert.

And because of their tradition and their training, they are not migrants by nature. They are gypsies by force of circumstances.

In their heads, as they move wearily from harvest to harvest, there is one urge and one overwhelming need, to acquire a little land again, and to settle on it and stop their wandering. One has only to go into the squatters' camps where the families live on the ground and have no homes, no beds and no equipment; and one has only to look at the strong purposeful faces, often filled with pain and more often, when they see the corporation-held idle lands, filled with anger, to know that this new race is here to stay and that heed must be taken of it.

- [20] It should be understood that with this new race the old methods of repression, of starvation wages, of jailing, beating and intimidation are not going to work; these are American people. Consequently we must meet them with understanding and attempt to work out the problem to their benefit as well as ours.

It is difficult to believe what one large speculative farmer has said, that the success of California agriculture

-
8. to send someone back to their own country
 9. an area of Oklahoma, Kansas, and northern Texas that was affected by severe drought and crop failure in the early 1930s
 10. any person of low social status
 11. **Ingenuity** (*noun*) the quality of being clever or resourceful
 12. **Cultivate** (*verb*) to promote or improve the growth of something

requires that we create and maintain a peon class. For if this is true, then California must depart from the semblance of democratic government that remains here.

The names of the new migrants indicate that they are of English, German and Scandinavian descent. There are Munns, Holbrooks, Hansens, Schmidts.

And they are strangely anachronistic¹³ in one way: Having been brought up in the prairies where industrialization never penetrated, they have jumped with no transition from the old agrarian, self-containing farm where nearly everything used was raised or manufactured, to a system of agriculture so industrialized that the man who plants a crop does not often see, let alone harvest, the fruit of his planting, where the migrant has no contact with the growth cycle.

And there is another difference between their old life and the new. They have come from the little farm districts where democracy was not only possible but inevitable, where popular government, whether practiced in the Grange,¹⁴ in church organization or in local government, was the responsibility of every man. And they have come into the country where, because of the movement necessary to make a living, they are not allowed any vote whatever, but are rather considered a properly unprivileged class.

[25] Let us see the fields that require the impact of their labor and the districts to which they must travel. As one little boy in a squatters camp said, "When they need us they call us migrants, and when we've picked their crop, we're bums and we got to get out."

There are the vegetable crops of the Imperial Valley, the lettuce, cauliflower, tomatoes, cabbage to be picked and packed, to be hoed and irrigated. There are several crops a year to be harvested, but there is not time distribution sufficient to give the migrants permanent work.

The orange orchards deliver two crops a year, but the picking season is short. Farther north, in Kern County and up the San Joaquin Valley, the migrants are needed for grapes, cotton, pears, melons, beans and peaches.

In the outer valley, near Salinas, Watsonville, and Santa Clara there are lettuce, cauliflowers, artichokes, apples, prunes, apricots. North of San Francisco the produce is of grapes, deciduous fruits and hops. The Sacramento Valley needs masses of migrants for its asparagus, its walnuts, peaches, prunes, etc. These great valleys with their intensive farming make their seasonal demands on migrant labor.

A short time, then, before the actual picking begins, there is the scurrying on the highways, the families in open cars hurrying to the ready crops and hurrying to be first at work. For it has been the habit of the growers associations of the state to provide by importation, twice as much labor as was necessary, so that wages might remain low.

[30] Hence the hurry, for if the migrant is a little late the places may all be filled and he will have taken his trip for nothing. And there are many things that may happen even if he is in time. The crop may be late, or there may

13. **Anachronistic** (*adjective*) not being in its correct historical or chronological time, especially belonging to an earlier time

14. a country house with farm buildings attached

occur one of those situations like that at Nipomo last year when twelve hundred workers arrived to pick the pea crop only to find it spoiled by rain.

All resources having been used to get to the field, the migrants could not move on; they stayed and starved until government aid tardily was found for them.

And so they move, frantically, with starvation close behind them. And in this series of articles we shall try to see how they live and what kind of people they are, what their living standard is, what is done for them and to them, and what their problems and needs are. For while California has been successful in its use of migrant labor, it is gradually building a human structure which will certainly change the State, and may, if handled with the inhumanity and stupidity that have characterized the past, destroy the present system of agricultural economics.

The Harvest Gypsies by John Steinbeck was originally published in seven parts in the San Francisco News, from October 5 to October 12, 1936. In 1938 the Simon J. Lubin Society published The Harvest Gypsies, with an added eighth chapter, in pamphlet form under the title, Their Blood is Strong. Copyright © 1936 by San Francisco News. After extensive searching, we have found no modern copyright holder for The Harvest Gypsies and believe the text to be available under an attribution, non-commercial copyright. If you are the copyright holder for this text, please contact us at info@commonlit.org.

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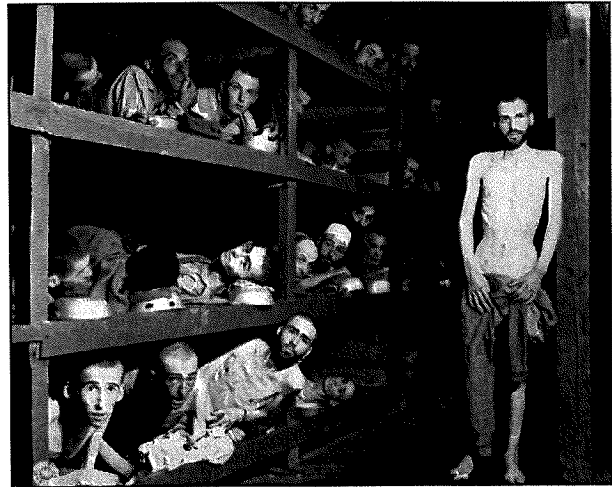
Elie Wiesel's "The Perils of Indifference" Speech

By Elie Wiesel
1999

Eliezer "Elie" Wiesel (1928-2016) was a Romanian-born, Jewish American writer, Nobel Laureate, political activist, and Holocaust survivor. On April 12, 1999, First Lady Hillary Clinton invited Wiesel to speak at the White House to reflect on the past century. While introducing Wiesel, Hillary Clinton discussed the parallels of Wiesel's experiences during the Holocaust and the events in Kosovo, which was experiencing ethnic cleansing at the time. In this speech, Wiesel discusses the consequences of indifference in the face of human suffering and his hopes for the future. As you read, take notes on the experiences that shaped Wiesel's perspective on indifference and suffering.

[1] Mr. President, Mrs. Clinton, members of Congress, Ambassador Holbrooke, Excellencies, friends:

Fifty-four years ago to the day, a young Jewish boy from a small town in the Carpathian Mountains woke up, not far from Goethe's beloved Weimar,¹ in a place of eternal infamy² called Buchenwald.³ He was finally free, but there was no joy in his heart. He thought there never would be again. Liberated a day earlier by American soldiers, he remembers their rage at what they saw. And even if he lives to be a very old man, he will always be grateful to them for that rage, and also for their compassion. Though he did not understand their language, their eyes told him what he needed to know — that they, too, would remember, and bear witness.



"Buchenwald concentration camp" by Private H. Miller is in the public domain.

And now, I stand before you, Mr. President — Commander-in-Chief of the army that freed me, and tens of thousands of others — and I am filled with a profound and abiding gratitude to the American people. "Gratitude" is a word that I cherish. Gratitude is what defines the humanity of the human being. And I am grateful to you, Hillary, or Mrs. Clinton, for what you said, and for what you are doing for children in the world, for the homeless, for the victims of injustice, the victims of destiny and society. And I thank all of you for being here.

We are on the threshold of a new century, a new millennium. What will the legacy of this vanishing century be? How will it be remembered in the new millennium? Surely it will be judged, and judged severely, in both moral

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a German writer and politician who lived in Weimar, Germany.
2. **Infamy** (*noun*) the state of being well known for some bad quality or act
3. a German Nazi concentration camp

and metaphysical⁴ terms. These failures have cast a dark shadow over humanity: two World Wars, countless civil wars, the senseless chain of assassinations (Gandhi, the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Sadat, Rabin), bloodbaths in Cambodia and Algeria, India and Pakistan, Ireland and Rwanda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Sarajevo and Kosovo; the inhumanity in the Gulag and the tragedy of Hiroshima. And, on a different level, of course, Auschwitz and Treblinka.⁵ So much violence; so much indifference.

- [5] What is indifference? Etymologically,⁶ the word means “no difference.” A strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness, dusk and dawn, crime and punishment, cruelty and compassion, good and evil. What are its courses and inescapable consequences? Is it a philosophy? Is there a philosophy of indifference conceivable? Can one possibly view indifference as a virtue? Is it necessary at times to practice it simply to keep one’s sanity, live normally, enjoy a fine meal and a glass of wine, as the world around us experiences harrowing⁷ upheavals?

Of course, indifference can be tempting more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person’s pain and despair. Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbor are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the Other to an abstraction.

Over there, behind the black gates of Auschwitz, the most tragic of all prisoners were the “Muselmänner,” as they were called. Wrapped in their torn blankets, they would sit or lie on the ground, staring vacantly into space, unaware of who or where they were — strangers to their surroundings. They no longer felt pain, hunger, thirst. They feared nothing. They felt nothing. They were dead and did not know it.

Rooted in our tradition, some of us felt that to be abandoned by humanity then was not the ultimate. We felt that to be abandoned by God was worse than to be punished by Him. Better an unjust God than an indifferent one. For us to be ignored by God was a harsher punishment than to be a victim of His anger. Man can live far from God — not outside God. God is wherever we are. Even in suffering? Even in suffering.

In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred. Anger can at times be creative. One writes a great poem, a great symphony. One does something special for the sake of humanity because one is angry at the injustice that one witnesses. But indifference is never creative. Even hatred at times may elicit⁸ a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it.

- [10] Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response. Indifference is not a beginning; it is an end. And, therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor — never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees — not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity, we betray our own.

4. “Metaphysical” refers to abstract thought or subjects.
5. two Nazi concentration camps in occupied Poland
6. the study of the history of words, their origins, and how their form and meaning have changed over time
7. **Harrowing** (*adjective*) extremely distressing or difficult
8. **Elicit** (*verb*) to draw or bring out

Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment.

And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil.

In the place that I come from, society was composed of three simple categories: the killers, the victims, and the bystanders. During the darkest of times, inside the ghettos⁹ and death camps — and I'm glad that Mrs. Clinton mentioned that we are now commemorating¹⁰ that event, that period, that we are now in the Days of Remembrance — but then, we felt abandoned, forgotten. All of us did.

And our only miserable consolation was that we believed that Auschwitz and Treblinka were closely guarded secrets; that the leaders of the free world did not know what was going on behind those black gates and barbed wire; that they had no knowledge of the war against the Jews that Hitler's armies and their accomplices waged as part of the war against the Allies. If they knew, we thought, surely those leaders would have moved heaven and earth to intervene. They would have spoken out with great outrage and conviction. They would have bombed the railways leading to Birkenau,¹¹ just the railways, just once.

- [15] And now we knew, we learned, we discovered that the Pentagon knew, the State Department knew. And the illustrious¹² occupant of the White House then, who was a great leader — and I say it with some anguish and pain, because, today is exactly 54 years marking his death — Franklin Delano Roosevelt died on April the 12th, 1945. So he is very much present to me and to us. No doubt, he was a great leader. He mobilized the American people and the world, going into battle, bringing hundreds and thousands of valiant and brave soldiers in America to fight fascism,¹³ to fight dictatorship, to fight Hitler. And so many of the young people fell in battle. And, nevertheless, his image in Jewish history — I must say it — his image in Jewish history is flawed.

The depressing tale of the St. Louis is a case in point. Sixty years ago, its human cargo — nearly 1,000 Jews — was turned back to Nazi Germany. And that happened after the Kristallnacht,¹⁴ after the first state sponsored pogrom,¹⁵ with hundreds of Jewish shops destroyed, synagogues burned, thousands of people put in concentration camps. And that ship, which was already in the shores of the United States, was sent back. I don't understand. Roosevelt was a good man, with a heart. He understood those who needed help. Why didn't he allow these refugees to disembark? A thousand people — in America, the great country, the greatest democracy, the most generous of all new nations in modern history. What happened? I don't understand. Why the indifference, on the highest level, to the suffering of the victims?

But then, there were human beings who were sensitive to our tragedy. Those non-Jews, those Christians, that

9. "Ghettos" were areas of a city where Jewish people were previously required to live.
10. **Commemorate** (*verb*) to recall and show respect for someone or something in a ceremony
11. a Nazi concentration and extermination camp
12. **Illustrious** (*adjective*) well known, respected, and admired for past achievements
13. a political system headed by a dictator in which the government controls business and labor, and opposition is not permitted
14. Kristallnacht, also known as the Night of Broken Glass, took place on November 9-10, 1938. Conducted by Nazi paramilitary members and German citizens, Kristallnacht resulted in the destruction of numerous Jewish-owned businesses, buildings, and synagogues, as well as many deaths.
15. A "pogrom" is an organized massacre of a particular ethnic group.

we call the “Righteous Gentiles,”¹⁶ whose selfless acts of heroism saved the honor of their faith. Why were they so few? Why was there a greater effort to save SS¹⁷ murderers after the war than to save their victims during the war? Why did some of America’s largest corporations continue to do business with Hitler’s Germany until 1942? It has been suggested, and it was documented, that the Wehrmacht¹⁸ could not have conducted its invasion of France without oil obtained from American sources. How is one to explain their indifference?

And yet, my friends, good things have also happened in this traumatic century: the defeat of Nazism, the collapse of communism, the rebirth of Israel on its ancestral soil, the demise of apartheid,¹⁹ Israel’s peace treaty with Egypt, the peace accord in Ireland. And let us remember the meeting, filled with drama and emotion, between Rabin and Arafat²⁰ that you, Mr. President, convened in this very place. I was here and I will never forget it.

And then, of course, the joint decision of the United States and NATO²¹ to intervene in Kosovo and save those victims, those refugees, those who were uprooted by a man, whom I believe that because of his crimes, should be charged with crimes against humanity.

[20] But this time, the world was not silent. This time, we do respond. This time, we intervene.

Does it mean that we have learned from the past? Does it mean that society has changed? Has the human being become less indifferent and more human? Have we really learned from our experiences? Are we less insensitive to the plight of victims of ethnic cleansing and other forms of injustices in places near and far? Is today’s justified intervention in Kosovo, led by you, Mr. President, a lasting warning that never again will the deportation, the terrorization of children and their parents, be allowed anywhere in the world? Will it discourage other dictators in other lands to do the same?

What about the children? Oh, we see them on television, we read about them in the papers, and we do so with a broken heart. Their fate is always the most tragic, inevitably. When adults wage war, children perish. We see their faces, their eyes. Do we hear their pleas? Do we feel their pain, their agony? Every minute one of them dies of disease, violence, famine.

Some of them — so many of them — could be saved.

And so, once again, I think of the young Jewish boy from the Carpathian Mountains. He has accompanied the old man I have become throughout these years of quest and struggle. And together we walk towards the new millennium, carried by profound fear and extraordinary hope.

16. non-Jewish people who risked their lives to save Jewish people from the Nazi Party
17. The SS, also known as the Schutzstaffel was a semi-militarized organization that was controlled by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.
18. the armed forces of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1946
19. “Apartheid” was the system of racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa.
20. referring to the first face-to-face agreement between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization
21. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is an intergovernmental military alliance, in which member states agree to a mutual defense in response to an attack by an external party.

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From Princeton to Prison: The Rise and Fall of My American Dream

By Mahmoud Reza Banki
2016

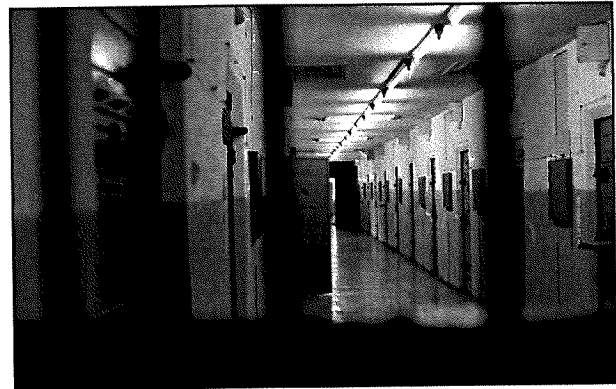
Incarceration in the United States is one of the main forms of punishment for felonies and other offenses. The United States has the largest prison population in the world, and the second-highest number of prisoners when compared to its national population. This text is taken from The Moth, a live storytelling event. In his story, Mahmoud Reza Banki describes what happened when he was imprisoned.

As you read, identify evidence that answers the question: "What is Mahmoud's purpose for sharing his story?"

[Applause]

[1] Thank you.

As a fearless and ambitious teenager in Tehran, I believed I could do anything if I was given a chance. I wanted to be shoulder to shoulder with the best and the brightest. I wanted to be in America. My family lived through the Eight Year War in the 1980s, when Saddam Hussein¹ attacked Iran. Looking back now, the red alert sirens in the middle of the night, Iraqi missiles and fighter jet assaults, getting into bunkers as a child — all seemed routine and normal. I didn't know another world.



"Untitled" by Matthew Ansley is licensed under CC0.

I left my family and came to the US when I was 18. I learned how to speak English from my tutor, David Letterman,² every night on CBS.

By the time I graduated from UC Berkeley, I felt like I finally belonged. I went on to Princeton to get my Ph.D. in chemical engineering and biotech. I became a US Citizen. I took a job at a top consulting firm in New York City. I fell in love with a Canadian theater actress. I was on top of the world.

[5] And then one day, I got a call from my mom. My dad was having an affair. The more I learned, the more I was upset and ashamed. I wanted to do whatever I could to help my mother. Divorce for women in Iran is traumatic.³ Usually the man has the final say over what happens to the woman. My uncle, my mom's brother,

-
1. the dictatorial president of Iraq from 1979 to 2003
 2. the host of a late night television talk show

and I did everything we could to preserve some dignity for my mother after a 34-year marriage and sent the money my uncle and his son secured for my mom to me in the US, where it would be safe.

January 7, 2010. 6:30 a.m. My girlfriend wakes me up. She asks if I hear the loud banging. Half asleep in my underwear, I walk to the front door of my apartment in New York City. As soon as I open the door men in black SWAT gear, guns drawn, rush into my apartment. They slam me against the wall and handcuff me. They bring me a pair of pants and rush me off into a minivan. I am in shock. No Miranda Rights,⁴ no attorney. No explanation.

They take me to an interrogation⁵ facility. By 3:00 p.m. I'm locked in a cage outside a courtroom when an agent hands me an indictment.⁶ I flipped through it frantically. I was being charged with violating the US sanctions⁷ on Iran. Minutes later, I'm before the Judge and I plead not guilty.

They then lock me up in maximum security isolation. When the solid metal door closed behind me the gravity of my new surroundings started to sink in. Concrete walls, an eight-foot by eight-foot cell, a metal bunk, and a metal toilet. I was freezing in my orange jumpsuit.

I stood in my prison cell and for hours at a time, I asked the guards if I could make one call to an attorney. Why were they treating me this way? By the third night, 24-hour isolation was wearing away at me. I laid down on my metal bunk and quietly, I cried. Not because I was scared, cold or hungry. I cried because I could not be heard.

[10] Four days after my arrest, the marshals took me to a room where I sat on one side of a metal mesh screen. My hands were cuffed behind my back, and on the other side sat a man who told me he was my attorney. And that my bail hearing was in 30 minutes. He started, "So tell me, Reza, when did you come to the US? Where did you go? And what did you do."

My heart was racing. How could this man who knew nothing about me represent me? I didn't have time to ask questions. I started unloading information about myself as fast as I could. The transfer of Mom's divorce settlement from Iran to the US had set off an investigation. The indictment charged that receiving this money was a violation of the sanctions. I knew the law, and I knew family money was an exception.

Even though I had no means of escape, no passport, assets all frozen, prosecutors claimed I was a flight risk. The judge said, "I see no combination of circumstances that will ensure Mr. Banki's presence. Bail denied." No bail means the deck is stacked against you. It means you're stuck in a maximum and high-security prison. It's tough enough to stay sane, let alone fight a court case.

We found out the prosecutors had been investigating me for two years. They'd been monitoring me. They searched my apartment, my laptop, cell phone, bank accounts. They questioned people who knew me. They

3. causing an emotional shock that could have a deep and lasting effect on one's mental and emotional life
4. rights given to people in the United States upon arrest
5. **Interrogation** (*noun*) questioning or examination
6. **Indictment** (*noun*) a formal written accusation presented by a grand jury to a court for prosecution of a serious crime
7. **Sanction** (*noun*) an action taken by one or more nations with the purpose of forcing another nation to obey laws or behave morally

had access to my entire life. By the time we got to trial, we got the discovery, all that evidence: the ledgers, list of customers, an underground banking operation, an international money broker network — it didn't exist. So months after I was arrested and right before trial, prosecutors added false statement charges. They claimed in these new charges that I misrepresented where Mom's money came from. I had said my uncle and his son. The prosecutors claim this money came from my father.

Back in the 80s, my parents had invested in a company that was run by my cousin and my uncle, my mom's brother and his son. This was the only asset not under the control of my father, and the only reason Mom got this money. I didn't understand how prosecutors, who had never spoken to my family, hadn't seen a bank statement from Iran, didn't know the details of the divorce, were so sure of my family circumstances. My attorney believed the new false statements were prosecutors salvaging a case that they all but lost.

- [15] On the last day of trial, my attorney came to see me at my cage outside the courtroom. I felt like I could be free soon, that this nightmare may be over. The Sanctions Law has an exception for family money. The judge did not think this was relevant⁸ and kept it out. We also found the former director of the sanctions program in the US from 1987 to 2004. He agreed to testify on my behalf. The judge would not allow it. This man sat down with President Clinton and wrote the very law they were prosecuting me on. His testimony alone could have cleared me.

The jury went into deliberation not knowing that under the law, family money transfers of this kind are permitted. Deliberation took four hours. I sat at the defense bench with my attorney by my side. The courtroom had a tall ceiling and two tall windows to match. I looked out the window at the skyline, at the buildings that seemed so far away, and wondered when I would be part of that world again. The judge asked us all to stand as the jury foreman read out, "We the jury find a defendant guilty." And then each individual juror confirmed their guilty verdict.

The room was spinning. I sat and put my hands on the table. I couldn't feel my arms. Before all the faces and standing figures in the courtroom, my world had just collapsed. My life flashed past me and I had no say in it. I knew that no matter what, my life will never be the same again.

After nearly two years of incarceration, I finally won on appeal. The appellate court ruled that the sanctions charges could not stand and they were overturned because the jury did not get the family money exception to the law. But the prosecution tactic with the false statements to salvage a win worked.

These charges about who sent the family money — uncle, cousin, or father — these charges that were not in the original indictment, I didn't win. Essentially, I lost the he-said-she-said battle to the government.

- [20] These false statement charges did not carry a prison term, but they remain on my record. And for that I am a felon for life.

On the day of my release, my friends came to get me. I stood in the prison parking lot in my prison shorts and T-shirt with a plastic bag of books and notes. On my first drive in two years. I didn't want to talk. I wanted to stare at all that I had missed. The Open Vista, cars, roads, *people walking free*.

8. **Relevant** (*adjective*) related to what is being discussed

I just won on appeal. I was out of prison. I should have been happy, but I was crying. *Why did it take so long?*

Prison is no rehab. People don't get out of prison any better than they went in. I didn't. I tore through job applications and interviews. I knew it would only take one company. But 250 job applications and about 100 interviews later, that one job, that one chance never came. One interviewer told me your resume is stellar, but then he asked me what I'd been doing for the last two years. I started to explain, but I couldn't speak fast enough to ease his growing discomfort. He turned around and googled my name, he turned red, started sweating. He looked back at me and told me to get out of his office. I may as well have been wearing that orange jumpsuit.

Over the last four years, credit card companies have closed my accounts. Eleven banks have closed my bank accounts. I can't get a loan or a mortgage. I don't have equal voting rights and on and on.

[25] This nightmare is a constant disqualifier. I am not equal.

Prison at some point ends. The punishment never does.

My family insists that I should leave the US. Mom says she would have never stayed in a country that wrongfully imprisoned her or made it so difficult to move forward. She asks why I insist on staying in the US. Right now, with no success to speak of, it's a tough question to answer. My attorney says the only path I have in the US, the only way I can restore my life, is a Presidential pardon.⁹ I have thrown everything I have at this remote shot.

My odds are less than 1%. If I don't get a pardon, I may be left with no choice but to leave the US. But I still want to believe that my country, that the United States, will eventually come through. Thank you.

[Applause]

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9. the power granted to the President of the United States to forgive or excuse a person convicted of a federal crime