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The Urgency of Global Awareness

Julius A. Amin

The 2020 Global Voices Symposium occurred at a momentous time in the world. During the Symposium there was chatter about the looming threat of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which already had ravaged communities in China. Few predicted its rapid spread. Less than a week after the Symposium, many governors and local leaders in the U.S. ordered K-12 schools and universities to close as a preliminary measure to curb the spread of the virus. Three weeks after the Symposium, eight states in the U.S. issued shelter-in-place orders for their citizens, and other states were contemplating similar action. Repeatedly, people were being told to wash hands regularly, cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing, and to use hand sanitizers. COVID-19 is a human-to-human infection and therefore the population was advised to avoid crowded areas. Globally, nations were placing travel restrictions.

Within the same period the World Health Organization's director, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, warned of the dire consequences of COVID-19 in developing countries. One by one, nations in the Global South regions took measures to curtail the spread of the virus. COVID-19 had turned into the most dangerous pandemic of the twenty-first century. In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent global environment, one that is notable for the ease with which people can move from one part of the world to the other, the virus spread quickly, forcing scientists and

academicians alike to realize that any viable therapy to the virus entailed collaboration across national and continental boundaries. In the daily briefings on the virus, scientists, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, repeatedly spoke of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's collaboration with scientists in other parts of the world to find better tests, a cure, or a vaccine for the virus. Clearly, the global response to COVID-19 has reinforced the importance of global consciousness. To be an informed person in the twenty-first century entails an understanding of the interconnected nature of the global community.

The speakers at the Global Voices Symposium used personal stories to emphasize that message. From the opening session, in which panelists discussed such things as just taking the time to learn how to pronounce someone's name, to working to empower immigrants, to the importance of student awareness of the various cultures which make up the Americas, the Global Voices Symposium stressed the importance of global awareness and consciousness. The students' session pointed to the transformative nature of foreign travel and to the ongoing impact of interaction with international students on college campuses. Those stories were important and reminded those in the audience that they too can—and should—engage in similar endeavors. For example, presenter Isabel Gerardino Ríos found the experience in Ecuador “strengthening” and most gratifying. Lizzie Henninger's experience at the Factoría Cultura, Spain, exposed her to the “stark contrast in wealth and poverty in all cultures, communities, and geographic locations of the world.” Veronica Halfacre's message was very persuasive, arguing that global consciousness does not occur only with foreign travel, that it is also developed on a college campus and within the local community. She concluded her presentation: “Although many of us may not travel the world, every decision we make and word that we speak has a lasting impact. So, we must speak up, stand against injustice, and be kind.” Emily Shanahan and Miranda Melone spent time in India and Zambia respectively. The experiences had a lasting impact on their development of a deep sense of global consciousness.

Miranda was transformed by Zambia, and so was Emily by her time in India. Along the same lines, Malon Hood's discussion of the role of the Black Action Through Unity (BATU) action plans to promote more inclusivity on campus represented an example that other groups can emulate.

Then the presentations by former Cameroon Immersion and Global Education Seminar participants emphasized similar themes about the transformative nature of foreign travel. Those experiences in fact shaped their professional careers and research in immeasurable ways. They developed a passion for social justice and a better understanding of the interdependent and interconnected nature of the global community. The Global South nations, despite ongoing challenges, continue to contribute immensely to the global community. Adanna Smith concluded her immersion presentation with the heartening observation that "Cameroon was a catalyst for me becoming the woman I am today. The experience changed my life and showed me how I could affect meaningful change. I owe Cameroon and the people of Cameroon endless gratitude. Cameroon will always be a second home to me." Themes of social change, involvement, activism, justice, and education dominated those presentations.

The lessons of global awareness are many and were well articulated at the Global Voices Symposium. At a time when the world continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are reminded of the preeminent role of global consciousness because it has become increasingly clear that the solution will come from collaboration across national, continental, and oceanic lines. The lessons of global involvement as discussed by the Symposium's presenters confirm that global understanding is enriching. And it is the wave of the future.



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