

2019 Strong Men and Women Student Essay Contest

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Western Region Winner

The dictionary defines equality as the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. Having grown up in a rural, predominantly white, Christian area, I have never truly experienced what inequality feels like. My lack of experience, however, does not mean I am unaware of the reality of inequality in many aspects of society. Fighting for equality is a battle that has plagued humanity since the beginning of time and something that can be considered the root of all other issues. However, there are certain steps that I, as well as all of society, can take in order to move forward in this war.

One person who inspires me to promote equality is Melody Barnes. In 1995, Barnes began working for Senator Edward Kennedy, serving as his chief counsel, and helping shape laws including civil rights, women's health, and religious liberties. Specifically, Barnes was involved in the Initiative on Faith and Public Policy through the Center for American Progress, and was able to impact many lives and help contribute to reaching equality through her efforts. It is important to acknowledge that Barnes worked to improve issues that were close to her heart. As a society, we should all follow suit and fight against inequalities each one of us is passionate about, in order to enact a ripple effect. She said it perfectly in her speech during her induction into the Strong Men and Women of Virginia, when she said that leadership is inclusive, and we must all band together to enact change. We must strive to move forward in search of equality and peace by following the example of Barnes and others like her.

When I consider how I can embody equality, now and in the future, I find that the best way I can do it is by becoming an advocate for people—all people. Women cannot be the only ones fighting for women's rights. Black people cannot be the only ones who believe black lives matter. How can it be the 21st century and we still need movements like Black Lives Matter and #Timesup? How can we have the knowledge to send people into space, but we can't seem to figure out how to love others and demand equality? In order to promote equality, we must consciously embrace diversity. We must actively accept and advocate for others. Listen to those words—consciously embrace, actively accept, advocate. These are words of action, a call to arms. As much as we would like to believe that the world has moved away from forming blanket opinions of each other—we haven't. True equality will come when we become a world that sees people first for who they are, period.

