

2019 Strong Men and Women Student Essay Contest

William Lee Williams

Eastern Region Winner

Within all humans there exists a capacity to love and to hate; within hate, the capacity to discriminate, alienate, ostracize, and belittle our fellow man exists. The groups discriminated against become marginalized members of society; specifically, elitists use their white race as a means to justify hatred and social inequities against African-American individuals. More often than not, the oppressed harbor an internal animosity towards the oppressor, which can show itself in fear or anger. It is easy to hate those that hate you, but it is hard to love those that show hatred towards you, and it is here that we find the definition for equality. Equality is the subversion of hate and the ability to love each person as a human being. There is no person who embodies this more than Fannie W. Fitzgerald.

Fannie Fitzgerald was an African American who came from a poor black family of 11 children. She grew up to attend Virginia Union University and get her teaching degree. Afterwards, she taught in a series of black schools that were so poor that they didn't have plumbing, a cafeteria, or more than one schoolroom. Ironically, the school where she taught, Antioch-McCrae, was situated near wealthy white-only schools. When Fannie was offered a position to become one of the first four black teachers to teach wealthier white children in Prince William County, she immediately accepted the position. Instead of holding anger towards the white children for having a better schooling environment than her own daughters, Fannie saw them as equals and taught them purely as individuals. To Fannie, "Children are Children. It doesn't matter what color they are." It is her resolve to treat the children of her oppressor with respect and reverence rather than with anger that makes her an exemplary model of equality.

Fannie's strength to overcome her own internal conflicts is truly remarkable. I aim to embody this same strength in my daily life by conversing with those who have a differing point of view. I will encourage having discussions with the students in my classroom who support the current social rollbacks of Donald Trump from my liberal-minded, lower-socioeconomic perspective. By having conversations in an open and honest way, similar to how Fannie brought her perspective to the children in Prince William County, I will be able to strive for equality and understanding in my generation.

