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A Question of Entitlement

What is White Privilege? That was the question that was asked at the 2015 Pace University Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Brunch on January 30. The keynote speaker was Jacqueline Battalora a lawyer, sociology and criminal justice Professor at Saint Xavier University. She is also a former Chicago Police officer and has a Ph.D. from Northwestern University. As we reflected on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr she spoke of the topic of white privilege and her book *The Birth of a White Nation: The Invention of White People and Its Relevance Today*. She helped us understand a message that King once attempted to inform America about.

Battalora spoke with a very strong powerful voice professing her view of what the problem is with American Society. She was adamant about spreading White Awareness training around the nation and said that if we are going to be able to understand race relations today, we must understand “where the hell it came from.” She looks at it as a piece of history stretching as far back as Colonial America. From the days of the first colonies in Maryland and Virginia, the goal was to grow Tobacco through farming. In order to farm, the colonies needed a supply of workers and replenishment of labor which created a population boom. This increase in population led to a gender imbalance, where there were more men than women and the white men held all the power in American society.

Battalora dove deep into the roots of the creation of white people and opened many eyes to things that no one thinks of regularly. She explained how the Socio Economic Ladder influenced the white people and their way of thinking. One example in history was the perception of interracial marriages. Originally they were accepted by the broader community but after the Socio Economic Ladder was created women were punished for marrying enslaved Negro men and any children from that marriage were enslaved for twenty years. This was a tactic to deter interracial marriage across the nation. White men began to feel a sense of superiority to all others who were not like them. In turn this created a even greater distance between those who were white and those who were not.

Many believe that White Privledge is not a factor in society and that we have accomplished racial equality. Battalora on the other hand, believed that many of the problems of white privilege still plague the nation today. Some white people still think of themselves as better than others because of their background or their upbringing. Some even see themselves as special in the eyes of the world. Battolora was very thorough about her views and conveyed a strong message of reflecting on who you are and how you view the world. The one thing caught the attention of the audience the most was the statement that we must be knowledgeable and not ignore. We must use it as a tool to make the world more knowledgeable and to educate future generations. If questions are not raised, then there will be no way to find out how people really think. As a nation we must be eager to learn more about our past and it is the only way we can have advancement in our future.

Overall the 2015 Pace University Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Brunch was a very powerful event that impacted not only the minority community of Pace but the student body as a whole. It was something that needed to be advertised more and spread around campus.

Jaqueline Battalora's message resonated within myself and others that attended the event. It opened up our minds in a new way and led us to feel differently about approaching the topic of race in America. As we reflect on the life and impact of the great Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., we must understand the path that he paved was not only for minorities but all people in the world and it still matters today. Women like Battalora bring his legacy back to the center of attention and show us how to use it in a positive way to impact the world.