



歷史裡我們學到了什麼？

What America *Yesterday* Can Teach America *Tomorrow*

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Editor's note: This article was the winning speech from the February's speech contest in Developing Virtue Girls School. The author has observed America's changes over time and analyzed today's society to pin point current problems with deep reflections that offers advices. As the middle generation between the young and the old, shouldn't we introspect and be a good model to carry on the past heritage and open up the future?

編按：本文是培德女中今年二月英文演講比賽第一名的作品。作者深刻觀察美國舊日與今時的變遷，繼而對當前社會提出針砭的分析與反省，頗具後生可畏之勢。身為後生前人、前人後生的中生代，豈不更應自我檢視一番，做好承先啓後的時代角色？

For the last 50-70 years, we as a nation have made many advancements in technology and science; the iPod, unfortunately the atomic bomb, and cures to diseases that killed populations centuries ago. We think of history as progress, but in terms of morals and psychology, we seem to have been going backwards for years now.

How many times do you hear someone say "Thank you" and know they sincerely mean it? This is a pleasure that many of us go without. People are no longer grateful, and think everything should be in their reach. They believe that whatever they want is at a hand's length away, when reward is really always preceded by hard work. This simple truth is something many people in America today refuse to admit or acknowledge. They have lost simple gratitude and have forgotten what it is like to have to really work hard for something good to come their way.

Education was not something readily available to many children in the past. In fact, many children today are still deprived of a

自然與科學，在過去的五十到七十年間有很多前所未有的進步與發達，像是蘋果公司的iPod，和導致戰爭爆發的原子彈，當然還有那些能治癒往昔無法醫治疾病的醫術等等。我們經常把歷史當成一種進展的過程，但是在人倫道理上，我們似乎沒有像科學那麼進步，反而比以前更加退化。

在現今社會當中，有多少人用真心對待身邊的人？又有多少人在說「謝謝」時，是真正充滿感恩的心？幾乎大部份的人都欠缺這項基本禮儀與道德。人們不再知恩圖報，並認為一切都應該是他們可以得到的。他們相信所希望的東西都是唾手可得，而實際上只有辛勤工作才能有所回報。這個簡單的道理，已經被美國人徹底地遺忘了。我們不但失去了感恩的心，也忘記了東西來之不易的感覺。

教育在過去是無法普及的，然時至今日，仍然



quality education. Every day more than 63,000 students are truant, undermining the access to knowledge and the vast global library of information. Migrant workers coming to America had to constantly work to provide even a simple education for their children, and the children were grateful. Now, children go to school and are less concerned with learning than with what their best friend is wearing or what their classmates think of them instead of school curriculum or the virtues the school promotes.

A child born into slavery during the American Civil War was grateful, just for the chance to peek over their young master's shoulder as he or she learned to read, write, and do arithmetic. They peeked because it was actually against the law to teach a slave to read and cipher. Learning was a luxury very few of them were able to experience, and each one who did was grateful for the chance to progress their learning.

As a young child, my parents dotingly taught me to prepare me for future learning. Yet, when I entered high school I regarded school as a playground for older kids. All that mattered to me was hanging out with my friends, having a good laugh, and not taking life seriously. I began to feel depressed, unworthy of life itself. I was like a paper cut to everyone around me, just there to inflict pain on them because I was a nuisance, completely unproductive. Because I performed so poorly at my school, I was transferred to an academically stricter school, and my grades soared much higher. Now I truly understand how important education is and how young people need to take advantage of the opportunities given to them, because they will be so grateful later in life.

Also, in this day of environmental turmoil, people continue to take their resources and the earth itself for granted. An example is our water resources. Many underprivileged people are grateful for one cup of clean water a day, whereas most middle class people in America freely dump it down the shower drain on a daily basis. A five minute shower takes more water than most average people in a developing country will use in a day. Our planet is suffering, and yet we have been so careless in wasting our resources and being ungrateful for the natural beauty that once surrounded us.

What we have done is not wrong; we did not realize in the past that industrialization and agriculture would be so detrimental to the environment. However, what we are doing now is wrong. We continue to harm our planet and the environment, selfishly wanting more and more for us. My father would say it is sort of a "god complex;" everything is available to us and seemingly all for us, but it's not. This is a truth we must realize in order to create a more sustainable society full of people who do not take the earth and life itself for granted.

Many people in the past took their parents into their homes as they

有許多人因不同的因素無法受教育。每天有幾乎六萬三千位學生逃學，拒絕接受應有的教育。而許多移民到美國的人，必須不停地工作才能換取孩子讀書的機會及資格；他們的孩子對於能受教育感到無比的感恩。但是也有很多學生，上學關心的多半是同學的服裝打扮，而不是學校裡所教的課程或是道德。

在美國內戰時，有一個生於奴隸家庭的小孩，因為能偷聽到家中少爺學習讀書、寫字、做算術，而感到無限的滿足，因為當時奴隸的小孩是不准受教育的。讀書對他們而言，是一項非常奢侈的事，只有極少數的人能有這個機會；當有這個機會時，他們個個心懷感恩。

從小到大，我的父母就灌輸我教育的重要性，也提前讓我知道要規劃未來。可是當我一進高中時，我把學校當成大孩子的遊樂場，整天在乎的就是和朋友交往，吃喝玩樂，從來沒有認真地看待生命。後來我開始感到沮喪，我找不到生命的意義。那時的我，就像一道被紙劃破的傷口——起不了什麼大用，只是個帶給周圍人痛苦的討厭鬼。因為表現太糟到必須退學，所以我轉到一所很嚴格的學校（培德女中），我的成績大幅提升。如今，我深刻地體認到教育的重要，更發覺到年輕人必須善用得到的機會，因為將來我們會知道它們的珍貴。

另外一個現象是，正當全球環境亮起紅燈之際，人們仍肆無忌憚地濫用自然資源。就拿水資源來說，很多未開發國家連一杯乾淨的水都得不到，但在這個國家，很多人隨意地把水浪費在每天的沖涼上。五分鐘沖澡所用的水，遠遠超過開發中國家人民一天的用水量。我們的地球受傷了，可是我們還是這麼恣意地浪費地球資源，從來沒有對大自然心存感激。

過去人類做的並沒有錯，我們只是沒意識到，工農業的進步會給環境帶來不利的影響。然而現在人類的行為卻是不對的，因為大家只顧著滿足自己的慾望，無所節制地使用有限的資源，不斷地傷害地球。父親時常對我說，這是一種「上帝情結」，認為一切都是提供給我們的，並且全部都是我們的。但事實並非如此。我們必須認清這個事實，才能夠創建一個可持續的社會，其中人人都不把地球和生命當作是理所當然的。



reached old age. This was their way of expressing their gratitude to their parents for raising them, and providing money for their childhood and education. They did not leave their parents all alone, suffering from old age, to fend for themselves. Instead, they set an example for their own children, and showed how thankful they were for their parents.

Shipping the elderly off to a nursing home is selfish in most cases. They feel isolated and excluded, unable to make their own decisions. Nursing home abuse is not a rare thing, and only about 20 percent of these incidents are reported, mostly due to the fact that the elderly don't have the mental presence required to report them. My own grandmother lives in a nursing home and is in stage six of Alzheimer's disease. I would be livid if I ever found out she was treated in an unsuitable manner. Yet, who would be to blame? The nursing home or the people close to her? It goes against morality to stand by and watch something so dreadful happen to a powerless individual.

Sallust, a Roman historian said, "Ambition breaks the ties of blood, and forgets the obligations of gratitude." There we have it: a major American problem! We have so many people aiming for the top, and they never look down to the people before them or the people without opportunities. They forget that these are the people who led them to where they stand today. Yes, progress and improvement is never a bad thing, but for selfish reasons it loses its purpose. We have people now, who seek out instant satisfaction and who miss the feeling of achievement produced by delayed gratification.

Our forefathers did not work so hard to create a nation for ungrateful citizens and immigrants alike! You can draw from pools of knowledge, but who will actually do something? Our nation needs to learn from the past how to be grateful for what we have here and now, drawing an irreplaceable sense of gratitude from our ancestors. By doing this, the U.S. will finally have found a nationwide community of people that can be a true model for the world as we have been in the past.

以前的人會將父母接到家裡共住，讓父母有一個安祥的晚年，也藉機回報父母的栽培養育之恩。他們不會遺棄父母在養老院獨自面對老死之苦；相反地，他們奉養父母於終老，以身教為兒女樹立一個良好的榜樣，讓他們懂得感恩與孝道。

大部份的情形，把父母送到養老院都是一種自私的行為。父母送進養老院後，他們等於就是跟外界隔離了，自己也做不得主了。研究顯示，養老院內經常發生虐待事件，而且僅有百分之二十的案例會被提報，很多時候因為老年人的精神狀態不良，所以無法控告那些機構。我的奶奶患了第六期的老年癡呆症，如果我知道我在養老院中的奶奶被虐待，我一定會抓狂。可是當我仔細一思考，發現就算我的奶奶被欺負了，我能怪誰呢？養老院，還是她身邊的人？目睹一個老人遭受虐待而袖手旁觀，這是嚴重違背道德良知的一件事。

羅馬歷史學家沙陸斯特說過：「野心使血緣關係破裂，並使人類忘記感恩原來是一種義務。」這個就是美國人最嚴重的通病。這個社會到處是一心只想成為頂尖人物的人，他們從不去關心以前的人或是沒有機會的人。他們忘記正是這些人幫助自己擁有今日的成就。求好、求進步絕對不是壞事，但若是出於自私的理由而耍手段，進步就失去了它的價值。現在的人，僅僅尋求即時的滿足，不再能夠體會延遲滿足的成就感。

我們祖先辛苦建立這個國家，不是為了一群不知感恩、自私自利的後裔子民。人類可以從知識庫獲取知識，但實際上誰會這樣做呢？我們必須向歷史、向先人學習，對於現在所擁有的都要飲水思源，對先人們常懷無比的感激之情。這樣我們才能如往昔在這個地球村中，成為其他國家效法的典範。