

First-Year Writing Seminar: The Podcast, Season 2

Episode Transcript: Kordelia Taylor on “Cultivating Self-Awareness and Integrity”

The Photo That Shook a Community

Intro Music - Waltz For A Cat by MondayHopes

This is Kordelia Taylor from “The Outside Looking In” podcast and today I’ve decided to set things up a little differently. I’ve decided to do an NPR This I Believe style of essay about the importance of cultivating self-awareness and integrity.

Transition - Piano Intro - Outro - 30 Seconds by JuliusH

I believe that no matter how you grew up, whether in a small Midwestern town or in a big city like New York, you will always have a chance to widen your horizons and be an ally to everyone you meet. I come from a small town in Iowa. We are about the size of Nevada, MO, and we aren’t very diverse. I moved around a lot as a kid but I would say that I wasn’t really exposed to other cultures unless it was through the lens of the people around me. Despite this, I consider myself to be a pretty self-aware person. I recognize that I have an advantage in my life because of the color of my skin. However, as I’ve grown older I’ve become more and more aware of the impact that my skin color has had on my life. I would say that my privilege became crystal clear to me during my freshman year of high school.

It was a fairly normal morning, I got up, I went to early morning band, and I went to eat breakfast in the cafeteria. I noticed there was a weird buzzing of energy coming off of everyone. I sat down at my usual table and one of my friends asked me if I had seen the news that morning. I pulled out my phone to look it up and my friend told me to quote, “act natural” because the teachers were patrolling. I asked him what the big deal was and he informed me that the teachers didn’t want us looking it up at school because they thought the story was bad for the school’s image. I didn’t understand but I complied and tried to “act natural” while I was looking up the news. I looked up the KCCI News website and it took me a minute to realize what exactly I was looking at.

There, on the front page of the website, I was looking at a picture replicating the actions of the Ku Klux Klan. For those of you who don’t know what the Ku Klux Klan is, they are a white supremacist hate group that mainly targets African-Americans and other minority groups. I couldn’t believe that something like this happened in my hometown, I mean, you hear about this kind of thing happening but you never think that it could hit so close to home. There were 5 boys dressed in white hoods, one was holding a confederate flag, another was holding a gun, and they were all standing around a burning cross. Through reading further I discovered that these were students that went to our high school. I walked the halls of this school with them every day.

As more information came out about them, we found out that they were a part of the football team. Now, this may not seem like an important part of the story but let me tell you how it relates. As a small Midwestern town, football was our lifeblood. We went out and screamed praise for them every Friday night. They were the kings of our town. Finding out that our “shining stars” did something this horrible was a hard hit for our community. Was this what our community was? Was this how we were to be represented? The fact that they were football players also complicated things because they were so well known around our town, this meant people were less likely to give them consequences.

As we all waited to see what would come of them we started to hear from the minority groups in our town. Even though we were a very white town, we did our best to amplify the black voices in our community, especially in light of this situation. We had a couple of black students on the football team and they were the most important voices to be heard, in my humble opinion. These students spent numerous hours with the 5 that did this horrible act. They were friends with them and relied on them to keep them safe while on the field. It was heartbreaking to see these students who thought that these 5 were their friends bring up such a horrible part of their history. Many of them didn’t even know they thought like this and felt betrayed.

Now you may be wondering how I come into play in all of this. This really shook me. I know that I am a white female so this action didn’t directly involve me but it opened my eyes to the world around me. In those days and weeks to follow, I realized how much privilege I actually had. I had the privilege to remove myself from the situation and lose track of what was happening with the story. I hoped they were getting punished of course, but I didn’t have to worry if I was safe on the streets walking home because of the color of my skin. I could feel confident that my skin color would keep me safe. A privilege that I had never really acknowledged before.

In that situation, I felt powerless to help. I felt it wasn’t my place to stand up and fight for those who needed help. I was 14! Nobody had listened to me before, so why would they start now. Looking back I am ashamed that I didn’t do more than talk about how horrible it was. I felt fake and sometimes I have to check on myself to make sure that I am helping because I genuinely want to help, or if I’m just doing it to make myself feel better. I always make sure that my actions have meaning behind them. As humans, we are meant to grow and change with the world around us. I recognize that I’m far from perfect, but I’m proud of how much I’ve grown.

That is why I believe that cultivating self-awareness and integrity is so important. We need to become more aware of our actions and how they can affect others. Just because you may not understand how saying something or doing something may hurt someone, doesn’t mean that it didn’t hurt them. I truly believe that while the actions of these 5 boys were horrific, however, I don’t believe they understood the ramifications of their actions. They weren’t self-aware and they hurt many people because of their actions. They were suspended for a short time, but the punishment wasn’t enough to truly make them regret their actions. Keeping an open mind about everything is imperative to breaking down barriers between races that have stayed in place for way too long. Thank you.

Outro - Waltz For a Cat by MondayHopes

Attributions

Waltz For a Cat

MondayHopes

<https://soundcloud.com/mondayhopes/waltz-for-a-cat>

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Piano Intro - Outro - 30 Seconds

Julius H

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