

## Scholarship

"Only the Oaks Remain" is the rallying cry of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition.

Tuna Canyon Detention Station was the site of the unjust World War II incarceration of Japanese, Germans, Italians, and others. We wish to preserve these important historical events and seek to educate by encouraging creative art and writing so that we can reflect on our past and become better people. Marc Stirdivant, for whom this scholarship was established, believed in the power and effectiveness of diverse coalitions as well as preserving places which remind us of the importance of social justice for all.

We thank all students that submitted entries, and proudly  
share with you the winners of the 2021 and 2022  
Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice Contest.



2021 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice – ESSAY  
1st place: **Sofia Nowell Palacios**  
Whitney HS Cerritos, CA

Stop Being a Bystander, Really

As stated by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, diversity is "the state of having people who are different races or who have different cultures in a group or organization." However, I would like to argue that diversity isn't just a "state," it is a way of living where different races and cultures come together to form something new and complex. Think about it, arguably the main factor that impacts an ecosystem's success rate is its diversity in species. If you have too much of one species, you break the balance, sending all species to chaos. The same can be said about our society today. The only way to have a balanced world is through diversity. All cultures and races contribute a big part when it comes to shaping the events of the future. Like a puzzle, you can't see the whole picture or finished masterpiece until you involve all pieces. But as we all know, the only way we'll stick to a group is by believing we belong. This brings me to my second point.

Place is sometimes considered an abstract idea. I mean, is it ever possible to always feel like you belong and are wanted and needed. Sure, we all have some moments - either created in our heads because of awful past experiences or because of experiences we must unjustly go through day by day - when we feel the need to leave. To create a community and world where diversity forms one of the core values, we must ensure that everyone feels welcome, and at the same time called upon so they stay. Part of creating this feeling of "place" is by, again, not tolerating other cultures and races, but celebrating them. Tolerant just means you aren't bothered, or at least pretend you aren't bothered. Celebration, on the other hand, means you care to hear their thoughts and ideas. A second part of this comes from not just "not doing" things like racism but taking a stand making sure yours and the victims voices are heard when someone or some group decides it's okay to hurt other people just because they don't look or act like them or just because they feel like it. We can't be bystanders, because as shown throughout history, bystanders only support the perpetrator, even if they say they don't. Concentration camps, like those in Europe and the lesser-known ones like the Tuna Canyon Detention Station were only possible because people decided to be bystanders instead of proactive loving neighbors.

Finally, to wrap this up, the first step you and I can take to make diversity and place a true reality is to first take at least five minutes of quiet time to reflect over our past actions and think about, not what we could have done, but instead what we can do now. Even if we weren't the perfect role models yesterday, we can all take one step forward and transform ourselves into the role models of tomorrow.



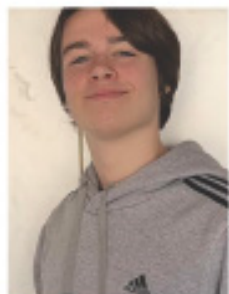
2021 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice – ART

**1st place: Mateo Djolakian**

School: International School of Los Angeles - Burbank, CA







# 2021 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice – ESSAY

**2nd place: Dylan Mathis**

School: Richard Gahr High School - Cerritos, CA

Racial injustices are a common problem in today's society. For example, the Tuna Canyon Detention Station (TCDS) in WW2 included the unacceptable incarceration of Japanese, Germans, Italians, and others due to their ethnicity. Injustices unfortunately still exist today. However, the American people today have the power of diversity, which is the benefit of a diverse nation, and the power of place, which is the effect of geographical location on one's beliefs, and these powers can be used to prevent injustices such as what occurred in the TCDS.

America is an extremely diverse nation, seen in the 2020 census, which shows that 4/10

Americans identify as a race other than white. Connecting the diverse cultures in America brings the benefit of increased problem solving skills. Jarya Kotyleng, an experienced digital marketer with a law degree, states, "Additionally, research suggests that teams with racial diversity perform better than teams with minimal diversity when solving problems". Diversity increases problem solving skills because a diverse team offers multiple points of view from different cultures and beliefs. These problem solving skills provide major benefits that can support businesses, schools, and movements, which can help prevent injustices in today's age.

Around the world, people are treated differently by their governments. This shows that location affects the treatment of people, emphasizing the power of place. This power can be seen in the opposing governments of the United States and North Korea. North Korea is ranked the most authoritarian government in the world by Insider, with their civil liberties ranked at 0/10. Yoon Ji, who escaped the country in 2017, said "I couldn't say a word about the government. They'd drag me to prison if I did". The fact that these people believe they will be locked in prison just for speaking out for what is right shows the lack of respect for human rights present in the North Korean government. The United States however allows its citizens to speak out against the government. This freedom was seen in the recent Black Lives Matter protests. No matter how you stand on the issue, it is clear that American citizens have the right to speak out against their government. The opposing treatment of citizens in America and North Korea, as Americans are given the right to protest while the human rights of North Koreans are not respected, is a clear example of the power of place and how it empowers the American people.

The appealing points of view that increase problem solving skills brought by the power of diversity and the rights of Americans given by the power of place both give the power and opportunity to improve issues today, such as racial injustices. The problem of injustices is still present to this day despite the presence of these benefits. But you have power because of these benefits. You can speak out against these problems and injustices. Your country has the power of diversity. You have the power of place. Use your power to save lives.



# 2021 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice – ART

**2nd place: Milo Kyselak**

School: Highland Hall Waldorf School - Northridge, CA





2022 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice - ESSAY

1st place: **Ella Tai**

School: Cerritos High School - Cerritos, CA

"To prevent a historical event from happening again, we must first truly examine its root cause. Only then can we start to take measures to prevent recurrence of wrong. By educating ourselves, taking the initiative to recognize our own implicit biases, and using arts and media to educate others, youth can work to ensure that civil rights violations, like those that occurred at the Tuna Canyon Detention Center, will never happen again.

Due to the lack of information about ethnic minorities in U.S. history textbooks, the story of internment is often only touched upon. Rather than sweeping its wrongs under the rug, the United States must provide accurate information about the 'hard history' of its past. The Tuna Canyon "Only the Oaks Remain" traveling exhibit serves to tell the story of what the U.S. did to Japanese, German, and Italian people. By visiting the exhibit and hearing about the hardships the interned people had to endure, we can begin to understand the weight of the events that occurred there.

When analyzing the motivations for internment, xenophobia lies at the foundation. The fear of Japan during WWII caused the U.S. to paint all Japanese-Americans as the enemy. Today, everyone carries invisible backpacks. They contain all of our preconceived notions about certain groups of people, which are accumulated subconsciously. When these implicit biases turn into prejudice, they weigh us down and cause us to formulate unfounded judgments about people, leading to events similar to internment. To fight against our prejudices, we must actively push ourselves to learn more about those who are different than us. The more we understand about others, the less likely we are to discriminate against them. High schools across the state are beginning to offer ethnic studies courses. In my high school's course, daily discussion questions push us to break down barriers by learning about others. It is classes and activities like these that allow us to address and eliminate our implicit biases.

Youth today have a unique, unmatched influence in society. We dictate media, trends, and pop culture. Because of this, we can educate the world in more creative, eye-catching ways. A recent indie film titled *No No Girl* tells the story of a Yonsei Japanese-American girl and her family as they face the repercussions of the incarceration of their ancestors. It is currently reaching a wide audience through social media and film festivals, bringing awareness of the Yonsei experience to various communities. Through projects like these, youth push towards a society that will not repeat history. While we cannot undo events of the past, there are many avenues we can take to ensure that they do not happen again. Education is the most effective way we can combat xenophobia and racism in our current society, whether it be educating ourselves or educating others. Though only the oaks remain, we must keep the stories alive in a united effort to ensure that no other ethnic group suffers these injustices faced at Tuna Canyon."



2022 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice - ESSAY

2nd place: **Nishita Vadella**

School: Whitney High School - Cerritos, CA

In the darkest times, when no man-made device could guide them, sailors trusted the North star to pilot their voyages. For so many of us, our community is a source of guidance, hope, and vitality; it is our North star. But what happens when our community is struck by tragedy and injustice, do we remain lost forever?

The answer to that question is determined by individual choices and actions. The US was presented with this very dilemma in the midst of World War II and our government made the wrong decision to immorally detain thousands of innocents. This was a choice made out of fear, an intangible thing that drives the most malicious acts of humanity. The question remains, however, will we continue to live in fear? Or will we preserve those memories and prevent history from repeating itself?

The Tuna Canyon Detention Station has chosen to remember, to educate, and to enable. Once the site for unjust crimes that could have been erased from history, it is now a North star for thousands of individuals who choose not to remain lost any longer. It allows the public to walk in the footsteps of those who were unjustly imprisoned there, to see the permanence of history, and in doing so, it shines a light on those civil rights violations that must not be forgotten. One by one, it guides individuals to the truth, individuals who will in turn spread that truth, and one day we will all remember. We must remember.

You don't have to be fighting on the front lines to make an impact. By simply doing research, finding the courage to learn more, you are already sparking change. First within yourself and then within others, because once you remember, you can not forget and the insatiable desire to remind others will grow within you. In this digital age of social media where graphics can be reposted without a second thought, taking the time to truly dig deeper and educate yourself is an act of courage.

We are all a collection of memories and history lives within each of us. So don't be scared to ask the questions that others will not, to advocate for those who do not have a voice, because you never know who's listening and learning from your courage. Ensure that tragedy like this will not happen again by educating and enabling future generations, by becoming a North star for your community.





2022 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice - ART  
 1st place: **Abigail Cordero**  
 School: Cerritos High School - Cerritos, CA



2022 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice - ART  
 2nd place: **Valentino Alba**  
 School: Gahr High School – Cerritos, CA



2022 Marc Stirdivant Scholarship for Justice - ESSAY  
HONORABLE MENTION  
**Alexander Uribe**  
School: Gahr High School

#### A Safeguard Against Injustice:

The preservation of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station site will prevent future human rights violations by keeping alive the memory of, arguably, one the greatest gross civil rights violations in the history of the United States. Given the relative obscurity of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station (and the unfortunate lack of historical buildings on the site), continued, passed-on awareness, and the teaching of compassion to new generations, is necessary to ensure the internment of Japanese Americans is not remembered as a mere cold statistic.

For one thing, I personally wouldn't really remember even the name of the detention station, let alone the history behind it, if I were not part Japanese. Unlike the pragmatic Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who can claim that her Asperger's autism is a superpower and gives her a sense of urgency in speaking on climate change and its dangers, I can't claim any "superpower" behind my fresh remembrance of the Japanese internment camps -- I can just claim that I have faint generational trauma. For a broader young audience that does not have such a personal connection, the effort must be made to learn racial compassion ("racial tolerance" is not enough, besides carrying a negative connotation), and to preach social justice for when injustice rears its ugly head.

If we as youth do not reach a level of interpersonal, and interethnic, compassion, we find ourselves in a dark world with constant persecutions, as described by Nazi-sympathizer turned vocal anti-Nazi critic, pastor Martin Niemöller's, enduring quote: "First they [the Nazis] came for the socialists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a socialist... Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Jew... Then they came for me -- and there was no one left to speak for me." If we never speak out against injustice, we find ourselves complacent about it happening: and eventually, like Niemöller, we may find ourselves in a targeted group of freshly persecuted individuals.

That's why knowing the past, and understanding that impassive bystanders (an idle majority of individuals) to injustice comparatively do more harm than the actual perpetrators (a very small, hateful minority of individuals), we can secure our democratic institutions, ourselves, and our future against legal or otherwise forms of injustice. I find it heartening that survivors of the Japanese internment camps were some of the first individuals to raise alarm bells when the U.S. government rounded up approximately 2,000 individuals of Arab or South Asian descent following the September 11th 2001 attacks. The hysteria, the racially-charged outrage -- what has really changed? Racism always seethes beneath the layers of our melting-pot society. But what has changed is that we have the precious gift of passed-on hindsight, of being educated on a grave injustice against an entire ethnic group. And these lessons can only be taught if we pass them on as dearly as if they were our own memories.



**Carole E. Brennan**  
(She, Her, Hers)

**CEB ENTERPRISES**  
6278 E. Kildree St.  
Long Beach, CA 90808  
562/208-3445  
info@cebebalance.com

Balance for Non-Profits  
©CEB Enterprises, 2016

**Christine Iso**  
REALTOR® | COMMERCIAL BROKER

ISO = INTEGRITY • SERVICE • OPPORTUNITY

cell 818.644.1022 | fax 818.380.5101  
Christine@IsoRealty.net  
www.IsoRealty.net

*i treat you like a gem!*

Each office is independently owned and operated.

