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**The Income Divide**

In “Class in America-2003,” Gregory Mantsios states that the median SAT score for poverty-level students is in the range from 871 to 907. According to the most recent SAT score break-down put out by the United States Department of Education in 2003, the average score for poverty-level students is now at 830. This means that the average score has dropped 40-70 points since Mantsios’ essay. Mantsios wrote his essay in 2003, so that means that the score has dropped very rapidly within just three years. This truly is a heartbreaking fact. It even further exemplifies his point that the lower class does not excel academically like the upper class does. This also gives yet another statistic that could prove his point that the class that you are born in is the class that you stay in. It shows that the lower class is not growing academically, which means their economic and career opportunities are even less than the generation before them.

When thinking about this statistic, I think about my good friend Eric Ingram. Eric and I grew up together in Cornelius, North Carolina. We went to elementary, middle, and high school together. We lived not far from each other and even rode the same bus to school and back. Eric lived in a low-income household. His mother was a cafeteria worker at our middle school and his father was absent. With only his mother’s single income it was very hard for them to make ends meet and to provide even the basic necessities. Eric had two brothers as well. They were a very close-knit and loving family, but needless to say, his mother was stretched thin with raising three boys by herself. Accompanying the low-income, his mother could not pay for any type of tutoring or any kind of supplemental academic activities.

They differed very much from my family. My family consists of my father, mother, and sister. Both of my parents have full time jobs. We are considered, like many other Americans, upper-middle class. We have a family vacation every year, my parents pay for me and my sister to participate in sports and afterschool programs, and we live in a nice neighborhood with several other families like ourselves. My parents instilled in me at a very young age that education is the key to doing anything that I want in life. She ensured that my sister and I had every opportunity available to us. We went to an afterschool program that made us do our homework and offered study sessions in courses we were having trouble with. The academic programs, coupled with the constant support that my parents gave me, made it possible for me to excel at school and consistently perform well in all aspects of life.

Eric and I scored about the same on all of our exams and classes throughout elementary and middle school. We would compare scores with each other and would constantly have a competition going to see who could score the highest on a given test. We stayed neck and neck throughout middle school. Having his mother at the middle school as a cafeteria worker helped him to stay focused and made it easier for her to find out about his progress in classes. After we left middle school and the safety net of his mother on campus was gone, Eric and I began to grow further apart in grades. His grades began to slip and I consistently scored higher on assignments than he did. One major difference that could have led to this was that I attended the afterschool program that he did not have access to because of his family’s limited amount of income.

This exemplifies what Mantsios is trying to show in his essay. Since Eric did not have access to the types of academic support that I had, his grades slid and he did not perform as well as I did. The ultimate test came when the SAT rolled around. We both were required to take the test so that we could hope to earn scholarships and other merits based on our scores. We both took the SAT on the same day in December. My mother took me and Eric to the SAT site. We wished each other luck as we walked into our assigned rooms to take the assessment that would determine how our futures played out. We didn’t get our scores back until late January. The scores were both exceptionally well and above the average. The only thing that nagged at Eric was that he scored about 300 points below what I scored. Both of our scores allowed us to receive scholarships and to earn a seat at the college or university of our choice, but why did Eric earn less than I did?

Mantsios would argue that the low income and having access to less academic support would lead to the score difference. His view can be further expanded to say that the broken family home and the lack of available help and encouragement from home contributed to this too. Since the broken home and single parenthood led to the low income level, it is easy to see how those effect student’s SAT scores.

The next obvious question is; how do we fix this? Is it possible to fix this? We have targeted and determined what the problem is, but is there any way to systemically fix this problem and to help students achieve no matter what type of economic background they come from? There are several ways to fix this it seems, but none of the solutions can be applied as wide-scale and mainstream as the problem is. Some solutions are that teachers step up and become more involved with student’s success, the government provides more monetary support to families in need with the hopes that the higher income would boost academic achievement, or that these students find some sort of inner motivation and some type of support network outside of their family to rely on for encouragement and for help when they need it.

This truly is a complex and massive issue to get a handle on. There are so many possibilities of how something can positively change a student’s academic success. Therefore, the possibilities are endless and there is never a ‘quick fix’ to the problem. With what Mantsios outlines in his essay and what the illustration of Eric and I shows, it is clear that low income leads to poor SAT scores. The only thing to do from here is to determine how to change it to where all students, no matter who they are, what their family’s income, or what kind of home they come from, have an equal opportunity at success in academia.