Interviews that humanize, A documentary
United States of America
International House of Philadelphia
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Project website: https://www.veyesion.com/

Section I: Narrative

A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

The aim of our project was to film interviews aimed to humanize people from diverse backgrounds; interviews that highlight personal narratives from people in the diverse neighborhoods of Philadelphia.

How did you come up with the idea for your project?

The idea for our project arose from witnessing a rapidly growing dangerous political climate in the United States.

Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?

In this political climate, marginalized groups are increasingly being viewed as alien and less than human. The polarizing politics are hampering people from acknowledging the concerns and virtues of individuals from these marginalized groups.

Why did you choose your host site to work in?

We chose Philadelphia as the city of our focus due to its rich history and its diverse citizens. As students in Philadelphia, we are aware of the strong diversity of this city but also we are also aware of the struggles that some of their inhabitants face every day.

What was it like to work in your host site?

Filming in Philadelphia was a marvelous experience. This city offered us a great opportunity to find wonderful individuals that gave us great insights about themselves and the groups they identify with. Philadelphia was also a great location for obtaining background roll due to its historical and modern beauty.

We interviewed a diverse array of individuals. Each person had an opportunity to describe their background. They then answered wide-topic questions such as their dreams/aspirations, biggest fears, and their view on achieving peace. Many of the interviewees provided perspective through the positive aspects of their communities. Lastly, each interviewee was given a chance to address the rest of the world on behalf of groups they identify with. The answers were powerful and there were as many strong similarities as there were strong differences.

Common arching themes in the interviews included: the advice that we must learn more about another group of people before we judge them; the opinion that a large portion of our hate and prejudices arise from our self-insecurities; the importance on focusing on improving ourselves and our own communities before judging others. Large disagreements were observed especially in the opinions on how to achieve world peace. We uploaded a compilation of many of the individual's account and answers into a series of videos into a project website (LINK). Through an anonymous survey, we received positive feedback that shows how strongly the individual's answers resonated with the viewers. For example, in the "biggest fear" video, one viewer anonymously responded: "A fear of failure resonates to the point. There's times where I don't try something that is risky because I do not want to be judged on my failures."

Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?

We were fortunate to find fascinating people with amazing backgrounds, but these individuals had busy and fluent calendars that made scheduling the interviews incredibly difficult. These difficulties ended up limiting the choice of filming locations due to the required equipment set up time. We adapted by minimizing the shooting locations and offering our interviewees multiple shooting days and slots.

The difficulty in scheduling interviewees also made us fall behind film/editing schedule. This required flexibility in our overall plans. Our original goal was to combine all cinematic interviews into a 45-minute documentary, but we mid-way realized that high-quality editing for this length would take far longer than the time we had available. There was definite concern and stress that the project would not work. We adapted by continuing to prioritize obtaining high quality interviews in terms of video and content, but we decided to change the format of their presentation. We decided on developing the content through a high-quality website with the results mentioned above.

What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?

It was not trivial to communicate to people the goal, importance, and approach of your project. We had to continuously improve how we explained to potential interviewees why we were doing this project and what we hoped to accomplish. We were fortunate to receive feedback from our interviewees, which was incorporated to subsequent communications.

How do you define peace?

One of the questions we asked our interviewees was "How can we achieve world peace?" The answers were insightful but also incredibly different from each individual. In hindsight, we wish we would had asked, prior to the world peace question, "What is peace?" The wonderful answers we received for achieving world peace, and found in the [project website](), made us all question our own definitions of peace. Is it the absence of war? Is it the absence of social injustice? Is it the ability to put an honest effort to at least think of the concerns of the other side?

How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

We hope our project will contribute to peace in the short and long term by making an impact on people who watch the website videos as well as the film makers and the interviewees. We hope that the viewers see that there are similarities between people from every group. And that there are differences in opinion even within people from the same backgrounds. We hope these videos help to remind us that it takes effort and time to talk to someone to learn what they think, and what they are like; and that cutting corners by assuming their opinions based on stereotypes will only lead to erroneous conclusions. We want this website to be a long-lasting platform that demonstrates that people from all these groups share similarities in their values, concerns, and aspirations.

Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you? Please provide a 1-2 personal statement sentence, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammate's) for quote attribution.

Ammar Salah: "Working in this project was an encouraging experience. Not only did it push me to work with people but it also broadened my perspective on how people think differently"

Daniel Arenas: "Listening someone address the rest of the world, on behalf of any group they identified with, was extremely powerful. It made me realize how many of us desperately want to reach across to people different from us, but feel that we do not have the platform to do it."