

MARIO POLLARD SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



MARIO POLLARD

is a senior at Cleveland School of the Arts. He loves movies and music. His goal is to become a renowned filmmaker who raises powerful issues with his films. Mario hopes he can help improve life in Cleveland through his art. He plans to attend Bowling Green State University School of Art.

As Americans we unknowingly practice a severe form of discrimination every day. We practice discrimination in the form of cultural ignorance. In terms of discrimination, we often do not consider it culturally significant. However many are unaware that cultural discrimination links to and even often attaches itself to the stigmas of racial and socio-economic discrimination as well. I'm hoping to open people's eyes to become more aware of this growing problem.

This concern really struck me on one day when I was riding on the RTA rapid transit towards University Circle from Downtown Cleveland. As the operator announced my approaching stop, I along with a woman of Middle Eastern background gathered our things and prepared to exit the car. She was dressed in customary and traditional attire with a veil draped over her face. There were two men, possibly college students standing near the doors chuckling. As the woman approached the door and me behind, they stunningly began to block her path and making extremely derogatory remarks. "You can't get off unless you let us see your face." Eventually the woman forced her way through the door as they shouted an additional comment as she was leaving. "Here in America, we look each other in the eyes!"

Exiting immediately after, I caught up to the woman and gave her an apology for what the two men had said. She said nothing and quickly scurried away from me down the platform stairs. I was hurt just as much as she was and I began to think about the idea that people seem to judge what they don't understand. Witnessing this incident struck a tender nerve, as I myself am a Pacific Islander ethnically and culturally, however most of the people I associate with do not know a single fact of what my culture is like and what it represents. This incident finally made me realize how serious this type of discrimination and ignorance is, and I decided to do something about it starting with my school.

I felt bad about not being able to help the woman, but I realized I could start locally by raising the cultural awareness of students at my school. I gathered a few of my friends together in a Japanese animation club and went to our art teacher and asked for assistance in starting a cultural awareness group in our school.

Our art teacher backed us and now, our cultural awareness group researches a different culture every two weeks. With the information we find, we put together presentations for our art classes that teaches them about the cultures and their significance to the people in them. We are very successful and we are being requested for presentations at public libraries and other schools. A sociology major, I find this subject socially important. I believe in America, it's important that we as a people understand and become aware of the cultures that help amalgamate and make America the great country it is today.

