

SPEARS: HELLO AND WELCOME BACK TO THE ONE BOOK ONE NORTHWESTERN PODCAST. I'M BAYLOR SPEARS AND WE'RE DISCUSSING THE THEMES OF THIS YEAR'S ONE BOOK -- HIDDEN FIGURES. IN THE LAST EPISODE, WE TALKED TO THE AUTHOR MARGOT SHETTERLY ABOUT THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK AND WHAT ITS IMPACT HAS BEEN. TODAY, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE THEME OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE OBSTACLES LOW-INCOME AND FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS CAN FACE.

SPEARS: WHEN DOROTHY VAUGHAN -- THE NASA MATHEMATICIAN-- WAS A STUDENT AND TEACHER IN SEGREGATED VIRGINIA DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION WAS MORE APPARENT THAN ISSUES OF TODAY MAY SEEM. SCHOOLS WERE SEGREGATED, AND WHILE BLACK SCHOOLS PROVIDED LOTS OF CULTURAL CAPITAL TO STUDENTS, THEY OFTEN LACKED ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND MONEY TO PROVIDE THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES.

EDUCATION -- DESPITE BEING HARD TO OBTAIN AT TIMES -- WAS A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE WOMEN IN HIDDEN FIGURES, THEIR COMMUNITIES, AND BLACK COMMUNITIES IN GENERAL. THE REASON FOR THIS SENTIMENT CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED IN A QUOTE FROM THE BOOK. IT SAYS:

SPEARS: "Education topped her list of ideals; it was the surest hedge against a world that would require more of her children than white children, and attempt to give them less in return."

SPEARS: THE QUOTE DESCRIBES WHY VAUGHAN -- WHO HAD A COLLEGE DEGREE -- WORKED IN A MILITARY LAUNDRY ROOM OVER THE SUMMER. IT WAS TO MAKE SURE THAT HER KIDS COULD GO TO SCHOOL BECAUSE SHE BELIEVED EDUCATION WAS A TOOL TO GUARANTEE SUCCESS OR A BETTER LIFE DOWN THE ROAD. THE DESIRE FOR A GOOD EDUCATION STILL EXIST TODAY, BUT SO DO OBSTACLES.

music

MANY OF THE ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION, TODAY, HEAVILY IMPACT THE EXPERIENCE OF LOW-INCOME OR FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE, I ATTENDED NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL POLICY -- OR SESP'S -- LOESCHNER LEADERSHIP LECTURE ON OCTOBER 23, 2019. DR. ANTHONY JACK -- A PROFESSOR AT HARVARD AND THE AUTHOR OF THE PRIVILEGED POOR: HOW ELITE UNIVERSITIES ARE FAILING DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS -- DELIVERED THE LECTURE TO A FULL HOUSE OF NORTHWESTERN STUDENTS AND STAFF. JACK DISCUSSED CAMPUS CULTURE AND HIS RESEARCH ON INEQUITY IN EDUCATION, SO LET'S TALK ABOUT IT.

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SPEARS: JACK IS A SOCIOLOGIST AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY, BUT BEFORE THIS HE WAS A LOW-INCOME AND FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT AT AMHERST COLLEGE. JACK SAID IT'S THIS BACKGROUND AND HIS EXPERIENCE WHILE READING ACADEMIC WORKS THAT MADE HIM NOTICE SOMETHING ABOUT HOW THE ACADEMIC WORLD DISCUSSES LOW-INCOME, FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS.

JACK 1: "Whenever scholars talked about first generation college students and lower income students in college, they spoke about them as a monolithic group. There was really no variation, but that did not vibe with what I saw as an undergrad and what I knew to be true as being from being an intern in the admissions office."

SPEARS: JACK SAID THE INCONSISTENCIES HE NOTICED BETWEEN RESEARCH AND REALITY MADE HIM WANT TO ANSWER A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS

JACK 2: "I set out to ask the question, how does poverty inequality shapes students introduction to school and how they navigate it?"

SPEARS: JACK OUTLINED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO GROUPS: THE PRIVILEGED POOR -- OR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS THAT ATTENDED PREPARATORY SCHOOLS-- AND THE DOUBLY DISADVANTAGED -- OR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS THAT WENT TO THEIR LOCAL AND TYPICALLY DISTRESSED HIGH SCHOOLS.

JACK 3: "On the social side of things, that dealt with the disadvantaged in particular, didn't know how to navigate the hidden curriculum. Those systems of underwritten rules and unset expectations that permeate higher education."

SPEARS: AN EXAMPLE OF THIS TYPE OF HIDDEN CURRICULUM HE SAID IS THAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHAT OFFICE HOURS -- A TIME FOR STUDENTS TO MEET WITH PROFESSORS TO ASK QUESTIONS -- WERE.

JACK 4: "They didn't know how to navigate the more personal interactions with faculty members that is really expected across the board for making ones' self known. They were not aware that that was a new metric in which they will be judged and how they would get access to institutional resources."

SPEARS: IN HIS RESEARCH, JACK ALSO FOUND THAT THERE ARE STRUCTURAL ISSUES STUDENTS FACE, WHICH COME FROM HAVING LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES.

JACK 5: "On the structural side of things, both the privileged poor and the doubly disadvantaged face food insecurity, not knowing what their next meal is coming from during breaks and recesses because the school assumes that all students depart for fun in the sun."

SPEARS: JACK SPENT TIME TALKING TO A HUNDRED OR SO COLLEGE STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES.

JACK 6: "I still keep in contact with many of the students who I interviewed. I keep in contact with their families. They're my friends now they are people who I love people who I want to see them thrive. And it was of the greatest joys but also one of the biggest responsibilities I've ever had in my life because a lot of their pain, I still carry."

SPEARS: SINCE THE BOOK'S RELEASE IN FEBRUARY, JACK HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED NATIONALLY FOR HIS WORK. HIS WRITING AND WORK HAVE BEEN FEATURED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE WASHINGTON POST, ON NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO AND IN OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

JACK 7: "The reception of the book in real ways has been beyond belief. I mean, this is my college tour, like, the fact that so many colleges are inviting me I'm in love with it because I didn't get a chance to do a college tour when I was in high school."

SPEARS: HE SAID ONE REASON HE BELIEVES THE RECEPTION HAS BEEN SO WIDESPREAD IS BECAUSE HIS WRITING STYLE IS ACCESSIBLE TO MOST AUDIENCES AND THAT'S SOMETHING HE KEPT IN MIND WHILE WRITING.

JACK 8: "If my mom who has a high school diploma, can't pick it up and read it then I don't want to write it. If it's so opaque that I'm only talking to people with other PhDs, or who are interested in the exact same things that I am, to me that's too narrow."

SPEARS: JACK ALSO SAID HE THINKS READERS CAN PICK UP THE BOOK AND SEE THEMSELVES AND THEIR STORIES. BRETT MAYFIELD, A SOPHOMORE IN THE SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS AT NORTHWESTERN, ATTENDED THE TALK AND SAID JACK PUT SOME THINGS INTO WORDS THAT HE HIMSELF WASN'T SURE HOW TO DO.

MAYFIELD 1: "Dr. Jack put everything you feel as a first gen low income student into words. And that's really hard to do because you can sit at a dining hall and have this table talk about like your experience, but you can never like fully say everything, and I feel like he basically touched on most of the things that you feel but don't like consciously know that you feel."

SPEARS: DURING THE LECTURE, JACK TALKED ABOUT HOW UNIVERSITIES SHOULD AIM TO NOT JUST GET STUDENTS TO GRADUATE, BUT TO SUPPORT THEM ALONG THE WAY. HE SAID THAT SCHOOLS HAVE TO KNOW HOW TO MEET THE NEEDS AND SUPPORT STUDENTS FROM THE CITY AND FROM RURAL AREAS. THE MENTION OF RURAL STUDENTS STOOD OUT TO MAYFIELD, WHO IS FROM RURAL OKLAHOMA, BECAUSE IT IS AN EXPERIENCE HE SAID IS NOT OFTEN TALKED ABOUT.

MAYFIELD 2: "He mentioned rural students, which I don't hear that much here, especially from professors like I've never heard it from a professor. So that was really comforting, because I feel like people don't talk about the crazy culture shock that happens from like the same amount of people live in your dorm as your hometown."

SPEARS: THE PRIVILEGED POOR HAS ALSO HELPED SOME UNIVERSITIES RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS SOME ISSUES LIKE MAKING STUDENTS AWARE OF THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM.

JACK 9: "I've been working with colleges across the country to help their faculty define office hours. And that has been tremendously helpful for students because it lowers the barrier to entry."

SPEARS: JACK SAID MORE THAN 10 UNIVERSITIES AND SCHOOLS HAVE ADJUSTED POLICIES AND DINING HALL HOURS TO HELP ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY STUDENTS MAY FACE.

JACK 10: "To me, that's one of the biggest wins that I have seen because that requires money and investment, right. Food is a very expensive thing, but many colleges are saying 'you know what, like food insecurity cannot be a problem here,' and they've said 'thank you for showing just how prevalent it is on our college campus, even though it's residential, even though we have the meal plan. These gaps were not on our radar'"

SPEARS: NORTHWESTERN HAS HAD TO CONFRONT SOME OF THESE ISSUES ITSELF. REVEREND JULIE WINDSOR MITCHELL, CAMPUS MINISTER FOR UNIVERSITY CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AT NORTHWESTERN SAID THE ISSUES DISCUSSED BY JACK REMINDED HER OF WHEN NORTHWESTERN ANNOUNCED ITS 20 PERCENT BY 2020 INITIATIVE IN 2016. THE INITIATIVE -- WHICH WAS REACHED THIS YEAR -- AIMED TO HAVE 20 PERCENT OF NORTHWESTERN BE PELL GRANT ELIGIBLE BY 2020. THIS MEANING THAT 20 PERCENT OF THE UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION WOULD QUALIFY FOR FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID GRANTS.

WINDSOR MITCHELL 1: "I remember thinking at that time, there's a lot of things about bringing that many people here that I wonder if the university has really thought about. And he talked about all those things tonight."

SPEARS: WINDSOR MITCHELL SAID NORTHWESTERN'S MEAL-SWIPE SYSTEM, WHICH USED TO LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF TIMES SOMEONE COULD GET INTO THE DINING HALL PER WEEK, AND CLOSURE OF DINING HALLS DURING BREAKS WERE SOME OF THE THINGS CAUSING FOOD INSECURITY FOR STUDENTS.

WINDSOR MITCHELL 2: "Once myself and the other campus ministers became aware that many students were struggling with food insecurity, precisely because of what he was saying

about dining halls being closed over breaks, and people not having access to enough meals per week. He didn't mention that, specifically, but like enough swipes in the dining hall. They would have to ration how many meals they had per week. That was the kind of thing that made me feel like this is just there is an ethical imperative here, the university has to do something, and we have to advocate for change within the system."

SPEARS: ONE WAY SHE AND OTHER CAMPUS MINISTERS ADVOCATED FOR CHANGE WAS BY CONNECTING WITH STUDENT ENRICHMENT SERVICES TO START PURPLE PANTRY, WHICH IS THE ON-CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY. IT WAS AFTER THIS SHE SAID WHEN SOME INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES CAME INTO PLACE.

WINDSOR MITCHELL 3: "There was a systemic change in that, now, dining halls are open over break so students have access to meals whereas before nobody had any access to meals. Same thing for the Meal Swipes like now that there's the two year live on requirement all students have unlimited Meal Swipes if they live in the residence halls for the first two years."

SPEARS: WINDSOR MITCHELL SAID THERE ARE STILL SOME ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE WORKED ON.

WINDSOR MITCHELL 4: "Specific issues like Purple pantry is still being run out of the Sheil Catholic center, so it's still localized within the campus ministries. I would love to see the university take on that responsibility and provide resources towards purple pantry."

SPEARS: NORTHWESTERN ALREADY HAS SOME SEPARATE PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE THINGS LIKE ACCESS TO WINTER COATS, A LAPTOP FOR SCHOOL, AND THE ABILITY TO JOIN CLUBS. WINDSOR MITCHELL SAYS THAT SHE'D LIKE TO SEE THAT BECOME A MORE COHESIVE RESPONSE.

WINDSOR MITCHELL: "I know there are initiatives working on all of those things. But the problem I see is that each one of those things is isolated. There's not a holistic response on the part of the university and that's my ultimate vision and I believe that that would be a real vision of true justice."

SPEARS: AS THESE ISSUES CONTINUE TO BE ADDRESSED BY UNIVERSITIES, DR. JACK SAID THAT ONE PIECE OF ADVICE HE WOULD GIVE TO STUDENTS IS TO...

JACK: "Never ever be afraid to ask for help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness isn't as it is, at its most fundamental a sign of strength. I cannot stress it enough. Yes, you have to knock on 20 doors at times before the first one is before the first one is answered. But trust me when I say asking for help and building a network of people who are invested in your future and your success will be instrumental to anything that you want to achieve in life."

SPEARS: THAT'S ALL FOR THIS EPISODE OF THE ONE BOOK ONE NORTHWESTERN
PODCAST. THANK YOU FOR LISTENING AND BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE NEXT
EPISODE. THANK YOU TO MY EDITORIAL ADVISOR DR. AVA THOMPSON GREENWELL.

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