

The Kids Will Remember This

By Fatou Diop

My family has spent years of work saving to buy into the idea of America as a land of opportunity with Texas a microcosm of that. My dad immigrated to the U.S. from Senegal for university studies and settled in Maryland. It could've been our home, but we couldn't afford it. Texas seemed like a shining star of cheaper land and upward mobility. My parents invested in my sister and I and in this dream where if we could just keep growing the business and keep moving up we could get the best education possible. We bought into the neighborhoods and into my sister's college and suddenly—we couldn't buy anything, anymore. My mom and I moved back to Senegal on the other side of the world, for the next 5 years, and Texas seemed a shell of what it once offered.

My mom had profusely refused the idea of moving back to Texas saying that Johnson, the school in my dad's neighborhood, was "ghetto". Everywhere I went—somehow, that was the first word out of people's mouths. I couldn't comprehend that because when I go to Johnson all I see are the things my school in Senegal doesn't have: a library, multiple sports venues, even a parking lot that my entire school could fit in. If my school is comparable to anything in Texas, it's Edgewood High School 60 years before.

In Senegal we aren't offered half the classes that are standard in America, so I've had to self-study all my AP classes. Our teachers are either egregiously unqualified or overworked (we only have two math teachers!). We don't have heat or AC and don't have a sports team except for a makeshift football one with a rolled-up paper ball. Some days our bus would break down and some kid would say "Wallahi, this would never happen at ISD!" ISD is this exorbitantly expensive private school that mostly diplomat kids go to. We'd be in this sweaty, reused, broken-down bus, and an ISD bus would roll by and all these rich white kids would just stare at us. I had escaped the racism in Texas to a country of people like me, only to still deal with white people looking at me funny. Shameless!

Let me make it clear: My country isn't to be pitied or made into a "poor Africa" stereotype. Sixties America saw the *Edgewood High School Walkouts*, but 60s Senegal had only just achieved independence. We picked ourselves up out of a horrific history and have progressed so much in a few decades. To this point, I see the key difference between America and Senegal. **Where Senegal's public education does the best with everything it's got, Texas has all it**



Fatou Diop (center) with her sister (left) and staff member Nonye Okoye (right), at the *Walk Out & Speak Up! Workshop* held at *Esperanza*. Photo credit: Xavier Reyes

needs, but withholds it, district by district.

There's such an insidious evil in educational disparity, it creeps into your mind. Education is at the base of any society. How can anyone dismiss the effects of telling a child, while they're already insecure about their place in the world, what they do or don't deserve to learn about and how. A month ago, I went to John Jay High School to take the *SAT*. I completely bombed it and in a state of self-disappointment, I left the exam room and became incredibly disoriented as I looked around. It's not like I hadn't seen an American school before—but after years in Senegal it was one

hell of a culture shock. Posters and paintings done by teachers who cared enough to make them, CPR dummies in classrooms, engineering tools and heavy equipment, statues of their mascot? I could've puked. I thought, "All this, for teenagers? This is so gratuitous and indulgent; how could we possibly deserve this?"

How could I buy into the idea for even a second that I and my peers don't deserve CPR classes or advanced STEM classes, or teachers who care and show it? How could the 60s have bought into the idea that Edgewood students deserved less, as if a cooking class and a future of manual labor, and nothing more, was all they deserved? Senegal would cry if it knew I had lowered my standards beneath me. America would smirk and tick a box off its checklist, planting its black and brown kids in the shade and letting them blame themselves for not growing taller.

But Edgewood students didn't blame themselves. In fact, a lot of us stopped blaming ourselves and recognized that no one has enough money to buy into these myths! I see a real opportunity in San Antonio, but not the same one my parents did. The resources for a proper education are here, and again the youth won't stand for it being withheld. San Antonio's activism isn't just a history, it's a legacy. It's another education passed down generationally, from strikers to Edgewood protesters to now, with students walking out and joining other schools for justice. We know what we deserve, and I see in San Antonio the clearest opportunity to take it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Fatou Diop* was a participant in a storytelling workshop, *Walk Out and Speak Up!* for teens inspired by the 1968 *Edgewood Walkouts* as depicted in the documentary, *The Walkout*. The workshop at the *Esperanza* was a joint venture with *Gemini Ink*, *H.E.B. Foundation*, *MACRI* and the *Esperanza Peace & Justice Center*.