



2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Art, Essay, & Multimedia Contest

The Importance of One's Voice

In the sad reality of America today, injustices are performed towards minority groups all around. American history, though, has shown great leaders that prove voices, especially those belonging to the many minorities of America, will not be silenced. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of those unbelievably moving and inspiring voices that influenced America and gave us more of a reason to be heard.

As a 10-year-old Immigrant, newly arrived to the small town of Liberty Township, cultural shock had hit me harder than me or my family expected. I had come from a place where my hair, my skin, my dark, and hairy features, my long nose, and thick brows were a normal thing to see on the streets of Jordan. I was completely shocked when I got made fun of for my unkempt messy uni-brow and was pointed at when I didn't know how to recite the pledge of allegiance that early morning in the 5th grade. For a decade of my life, I was never a minority. Around that same time, ISIS' horrific attack on Paris was the newest and most tragic event to go down on the news and of course, many kids in my majority-white school took this chance to point out my background and the negative stereotypes that come with it.

For many years to come after that, I was scared to state my religious beliefs and ethnicity in fear of getting asked why I don't wear "hood" over my head, or if I was a terrorist. As I grew, I learned that pushing my culture and beliefs away didn't make me fit in. At some point I learned that I can't change the way I look and I'm okay with that. I had finally come to terms with the way I look and what I believe in. Nevertheless, I look around and see the young youth and others my age still believing their different and unique qualities inherited from their colored ancestors make them less than someone who fits the European beauty ideals and standards. I look around and I see people afraid to speak up and express themselves and their beliefs.

Though I'm only a teenager living in suburban Ohio, I refuse to let my voice go silenced, still, some might want to shut me down. After reporting the multiple racist things that were said to me to my school, nothing seemed to happen to any of the kids that would bother me daily. Eventually giving up on trying to teach them a lesson through adults, I decided that the only way these kids, who have never had any interactions with someone of my faith and ethnicity, can grow and learn is by letting myself speak up and educate them. Many injustices go ignored every day and the only way we as humans can better that for future generations is by bringing awareness to the issue and teaching them to do and say the right thing at a young age. So even though I'm not a known and well-respected civil rights activist like Dr. King, when I need to do so, I will not be afraid to defend those who face any type of discrimination.

In conclusion, strong and powerful men and women did not die in the name of justice for us to keep carrying on the things they preached against. As a woman of color and also the future of this nation, I refuse to let my kids grow up in my environment and hear the words I heard. I refuse to let them be told how to look or what language to speak and the only way to accomplish that is by educating the youth and the generations to come afterward. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be proud to see how far we have come but would be deeply saddened to see the injustices that we have yet to abolish.

Joud Kiwan
9th Grade Essay Winner
Lakota East High School, Liberty Township
Roxanne Begley, Teacher
Rob Burnside, Principal

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