

THIRD PLACE

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Nadir to Culmination

Any number of historic moments in the civil rights struggle can be used to identify Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—the prime mover of the Montgomery bus boycott, the keynote speaker at the March on Washington, or the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate, even. In retrospect, however, single events are less significant due to the fact that Dr. King, and his policy of nonviolent protest, was the dominant force in the Civil Rights Movement during its decade of greatest achievement; and, the subsequent influence that his ideas have had will linger on for many generations to come.

Living in Milford all my life—a predominately white community—I have never known what it is like to be discriminated because of my ethnicity. Perhaps I am just naïve, but I would like to think that it is not present at all. I am half African American and half Caucasian, a result of an interracial coupling so frowned upon in times not so distant as people think. Forty years is not enough time to erase the scars that racism has left on our society. But, in this era, we are fortunate to not have to deal with this issue to the degree that our predecessors did. To most young adults today, racism is an entirely foreign concept, like a book one would read and think it was “just a story.” One day, the realization will hit that it was not.

Today, people of my generation show little respect for the great man that Dr. King was, and have even less of an interest concerning his ideas of interracial unity and peace among man that he gave his life to protect. It may seem to my generation that these events happened long ago, but did they happen so long ago as to not have any

significance anymore? Of course not, and for one to entertain such shameful thoughts shows more disrespect than my generation's ignorance could ever entail. Time has indeed been long, in this aspect. It has been nearly four decades since the tragic death of Dr. King, but this is no excuse for the negligence of such visionary ideas.

Dr. King's concept of "somebodiness," which symbolized the celebration of human worth and the conquest of subjugation, gave African Americans and people suffering poverty hope and a sense of dignity. His philosophy of nonviolent, direct action, and his strategies for rational and non-destructive social change, galvanized the conscience of our nation and reordered its priorities. His wisdom, his words, his actions, his commitment, and his dream for a new way of life are, today, fully intertwined with American life.

"Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars...Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." The first step toward accepting and loving others is to love one's self, a freedom that I and many others like me are privileged enough to have due to Dr. King's efforts. It is thanks to his influence that I can go to school with my white classmates, and that I can befriend those of Caucasian descent without fearing for my wellbeing. It is only thanks to Dr. King's efforts that I have no problems with being who I am, and for that I am eternally grateful.