

The Continuance of Dr. King's Fight for Justice

By Alexandra Melishkevich, Arlington High School

In 1964, an African-American pastor and Civil Rights movement leader accepted the Nobel Peace Prize “on behalf of all men who love peace and brotherhood.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. impacted the globe with his desire for true implementation of the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness dictated by the Declaration of Independence and full application of these ideals to all citizens of the world. He began his journey for equality on a city-wide level, and gradually his passion for unity among “all of God’s children” blossomed in different areas of the country. Eventually support for his nonviolent protests led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting racial, religious and gender discrimination in America. Even after this act, Dr. King continued to publically speak in favor of equal treatment of African-Americans and all minorities. Unfortunately, the end of Dr. King’s life came much too soon upon his assassination in April 1968; however, Dr. King’s legacy has persisted. He acted as the necessary catalyst to spur the nonviolent and passionate protests for the ultimate goal of equality, brotherhood and peace. Dr. King’s legacy has significantly advanced since the first Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, yet many inequalities remain, especially in parts of the world under oppressive leadership. As a community, it is necessary—now more than ever—to continue Dr. King’s dream of global peace and unity by beginning, just as he did, with a localized movement within our own city that can actively promote equality and continue outreach efforts to a greater network of cities.

The vital first step in any effort to incite change is the distribution of truthful information to garner support. This could be through any variety of methods. For example, we can post fact sheets on public bulletin boards or ask local businesses to display informative sheets describing the inequality faced by minorities economically, politically and socially, such as the fact that there are no African-American Senators currently (and only nine in all of American history), even though African-Americans constitute about 14% of the U.S. population. Statistics such as these use the rhetorical appeal of logos, a method that Dr. King himself employed very often in his speeches to convey the numerical disparity within the population.

Logos effectively educates the community on the indisputable facts that prove the continued existence of inequality in America and efficiently begins the long process of gathering help from the community. Communal understanding about and passion for equality can be increased through emotional approaches to the issue as well. Pathos as a rhetorical device creates the necessary emotional response to unjust racial situations and can be utilized extremely persuasively, just as Dr. King did in his works; he combined loaded words with figurative language in such a way that his words remain immortal almost half a century later because of their enduring and permeating emotional intensity. Such language usage could be incredibly efficient at spreading a unifying comprehension of the effects of inequality to the community. This could be done by adding emotionally powerful statements, either original or derived from Dr. King's words (for example, his powerful quote stating that political leaders "often have a high blood pressure of words but an anemia of deeds" when it comes to actions against injustice) to the posters scattered throughout local, popular businesses. In addition, these words could be dispersed through verbal demonstrations as public meetings, open discussion nights at local cafes or businesses, or other areas of gathering. Whatever method is chosen, change can only be achieved with a basis of truthful and stirring information to influence the public.

Another issue that must be addressed is the concept of the "myth of time" that Dr. King often mentions in his speeches and writings. Essentially this refers to the perceived notion that time will solve any inequality issues without the need for direct action against the problem. However, in Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," he rebuts clearly that "freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor." Human beings are inherently selfish, and when the oppressors have an advantage because of their "superior" position or because they feel that the issue is not a true problem, then the oppressed and supporters of the oppressed must act for equality. Without action, equality would never be attained. A similar situation occurs today: an unjust legal and social system that works against minorities lies as an undercurrent of society, and if no action is taken to rid the system of this flaw, then the injustice will cement itself into the community. Just as professed in protests of the 1950's and 1960's, the myth of time must be eradicated in the present. This can occur through media outlets and social

networking, so long as the facts are kept as the primary aspect in the argument for equality. The society must comprehend that peace and unity cannot be achieved without first ridding the world of inequality, and we cannot wait for this to happen naturally because we will wait in vain. As King said, “human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.” Our community has no better time to act against inequality than now.

Once these ideas are expressed publically, it would be extremely beneficial to incorporate younger members of society into the discussion and fight against inequality and the promotion of brotherhood. Dr. King supported this method of younger generation education, too, as seen in his commencement address to Lincoln University graduates in 1961 encouraging them to control their own future and protest injustice. In our town, elementary schools should better disperse knowledge of the continuing fight for rights and the effects of inequality; the Civil Rights movement did not end in the 1960’s, as there is not yet full equality between citizens of different minority and majority statuses. If students are able to understand that even a seemingly innocent joke that uses a stereotype of a certain race or gender as the punchline can perpetuate the unjust culture surrounding us, then they may learn to stop generalizing statements about others altogether, especially based on race or gender. The sooner students are able to comprehend the consequences of behavior that stereotypes others, the sooner they can begin calling others out on behavior of the same sort until eventually such cases are few and far between. The best way to achieve this outcome is through informative and entertaining demonstrations at the younger level and educational discussions about national and international inequality for older students. Elementary students could, for instance, watch a skit dedicated to the consequences of inequality on students their age, while middle, and high school students could participate several times a year in an assisted discussion regarding injustice and inequality found in current news. Whatever the educational choice may be, the need for students to receive proper education on world injustices must be met for a future generation of unity to be attained.

Finally, the most important way to advance Dr. King’s dream of brotherhood is to support those already fighting injustices throughout the globe. Recently there has been a

resurgence of protests and even riots regarding a lack of justice in areas such as Ferguson, Missouri, Hong Kong and New York City, all regarding social and legal inequalities. Dr. King supported all civil and justice related protests that remained nonviolent because he understood the need for equality internationally, even referencing Mahatma Gandhi's approach as well as the Hungarian freedom fighters of 1956 in his works. Dr. King desired international brotherhood, with countries and citizens genuinely supporting each other and remaining peaceful. To further the movement that Dr. King spearheaded, protests that remain nonviolent and support a positive cause should be applauded and aided. Monetary aid could be sent to the protesters when physical presence is not possible, and simply reflecting on the protests and discussing the merits and potential effects of such protests publically can help contribute to the global movement as a whole. Verbal and tangible support are extremely important in the fight for an international community.

King once said, "We have made of this world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual development we must make of it a brotherhood." A unifying brotherhood of peace among nations and equality within nations has yet to be attained, but the quest for such an optimistic future continues. However, these ideals can only be realized with support from communities. If one city starts aiding the cause, other cities will as well. We have the potential—through the dispersion of knowledge about local and distant inequality to the public, acting rationally in the present, and supporting movements occurring on a larger scale—to create change not only on a local level, but also on a national or even international level. Through a continuance of Dr. King's own methods in contemporary times, we can propel forward his dream of tranquility and unity and thus uplift our world altogether.