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50 Years Later: Prejudice Remains, But Opportunities Abound

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Fifty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sealed his legacy on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial when he delivered one of the most memorable speeches in human history.

The 1963 March on Washington brought hundreds of thousands of people to our capital and demonstrated to our nation and the world that racial injustice cannot be tolerated. As he spoke the words of his now-famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. King drew from many of our country's founding and most iconic documents, including the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Emancipation Proclamation. He recognized that humanity demands that each of us stretch beyond our short-sighted prejudices to judge each individual on the content of his character rather than the color of his skin.

Today in America, our nation continues to suffer from bigotry based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and citizenship status. While some now judge individuals on their merits, still too many harken back to their darker demons and demonstrate bias based on physical or personal traits.

But although we still have a long way to go when it comes to equality, America is still the land of opportunity.

Our government can do much to help create opportunity and justice for each of us. And, in fact, over time elected officials have done just that. From the Civil Rights Act, to the Americans with Disability Act, to other anti-discrimination laws, the U.S. government has demonstrated time and time again its renewed commitment to fulfill the hope of our nation's founding document that "all men are created equal" in the eyes of the law.

Unfortunately, laws can't change hearts -- but they can help drive bigotry from government programs and funding, which is a tremendous driver for social change. And while laws can bring about equal opportunity -- that won't always lead to equal outcomes.

Hard work, commitment, and even some luck are also essential to individual success.

Take it from a formerly homeless Hispanic high-school dropout who grew up to become the Surgeon General of the United States: Life is what you make it.

Since the earliest days of humankind, people have faced challenges and adversities -- and we've overcome. We cannot allow racism or sexism, homophobia, or any other form of bigotry to become excuses that limit our individual effort at fulfilling our own potential.

Each of us have benefited from the successes of those who came before us. Each of us stands on the shoulders of heroes. We take the path they blazed, a path which allows us to go farther than they did.

Amelia Earhart flew across the Atlantic so Sally Ride could shoot to the stars. Jackie Robinson crossed the color barrier so Reggie Jackson could become Mr. October. And Martin Luther King, Jr. led a revolution so Barack Obama could lead the nation.

Each faced naysayers and doubters. But each of these heroes went forward, committed themselves, and achieved excellence.

Even with the best policymakers and the most enlightened thinkers, we'll never be able to legislate away racism and bigotry. Laws and regulations can help -- they can be a bridge, they can provide a more level playing field for the underprivileged, but they'll never take the place of a change of hearts. That is our call to action -- changing hearts and minds through respect for each person's dreams and achievements, and embracing the idea of what my grandmother, who emigrated to New York City seeking a better life used to tell me: "Every life has value."

Until we accept and live that fundamental truth, they'll need to be Beer Summits and Light Out Nights in communities across the country. And as that dialogue continues, we all must make the most of the opportunities that living in America brings.

In the United States, we're each tested, and we each make decisions that impact our own lives. The choices we make have lasting rewards or consequences. What's great about our country -- in large part due to the ideals that Dr. King dreamed of and that millions of Americans lived by -- is that we have the chance to build our own reality.

Steve Jobs said,

When you grow up you tend to get told that the world is the way it is... that's a very limited life. Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact -- everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you... shake off this erroneous notion that life is there and you're just going to live in it versus make your mark upon it.

We've all been blessed with skills, attributes, dreams, and desires that can lead to an enriching life. We shouldn't be shuttered by the darkness of others around us, but rather be the light that allows each of us to grow to our fullest potential. If, along the way, we each brighten our corner of the nation, before long the entire country will be illuminated. Then we'll see the world that Dr. King envisioned.

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Great words, Dr. Carmona. We wish you well

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 30 AUG 4:04 PM
- monicalanice**
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Thank God others are speaking out. Racism isn't only affecting blacks but all minorities. Every word he said was true. Stop allowing others to paint your path in this country off of decades of past history and the belief that they have the only answer. This country was built on many cultures and just as many people with greatness. Become your own greatest with a little bit of luck and a lot of hard work. I'm not sure how many can get the help or the luck but you sure can do the hard work.

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This makes me sad for those disabled by exposure to biocontaminants in water damaged buildings, including those who have died since January 2005 as people have laughed at them and their families for saying they were sick. Its never too late to admit error, especially when that error has aided prejudice and bigotry to continue to this very day. Sometimes silence is not golden.

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- SouthStJo**
256 Fans

"my grandmother, who emigrated to New York City seeking a better life"

She didnt emigrate, she moved from Puerto Rico. Unless this happened before 1917.

REPLY FAVE SHARE MORE 31 AUG 11:52 AM

dauidutzsr
57 Fans

No matter the race of a person, take note that people are always promoted to the level of their incompetence. That's when they stay at that level, and continue to screw things up.

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Dr. Carmona, you saved my brother's life when he was in a horrific motorcycle accident in Tucson back in the 80's. You were the surgeon who re-built his eye socket and cheek bones. We brought in a picture of him that you could work from. I never got to thank you. My brother went on to be a happy and healthy dad to four kids. Thank you for all you did for him. God bless you, sir.

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