

ARE YOU REACHING MOUNTAINTOP?

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become reality. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word". – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holds a position in history as perhaps the best-known and most respected freedom fighter. In a deplorable assassination that shocked the world, Dr. King was shot and killed on April 4, 1968. Today's date is December 2, 2001. Thirty three years, two hundred forty-two days, and some three hours have passed. White men in Texas are still lynching blacks. My friend Tiffany's entire repertoire of jokes is comprised of solely those that begin with, "An American, a Chinese man, and a black man are in a boat..." She seems to think that it's acceptable. It's not. It is indeed tragic that, in thirty years, America has not matured enough to handle a difference in skin tone.

Yes, it is said that America is the country of progress, but only last year a black man in "Seattle was murdered by a policeman on account of his race. There is something very wrong with that. The root of the problem goes deeper than just race. America is a place where it's common for teenagers to bring guns to school and slaughter their classmates; where the media is full of nothing but sex, violence, and frugs, and yet we are shocked when the mere mention of the word 'Islam' sparks vengeful tirades from the most demure and peaceful people? Are Americans that naïve? I myself am no exception. On the night of September 11, I talked to a New Yorker friend of mine, whom I met in Massachusetts. Peter is a mild-mannered, good-humored sophomore who lives in Bayside, Queens, and who wants to be a magician for a living. He told me about how he had beaten up an Islamic kid who goes to his school that day. For all my silly pretenses of maturity and sophistication, I cried. This is the same Peter who wouldn't show me how to work his magic tricks, who taught me Spanish slang, who folded me an origami heart out of pink paper the night before we both had to return to our homes. It's been nearly five months since I've seen Peter, but I didn't think that he had that sort of malice in him.

Peter is one of the two people I wanted to talk about. I wanted to talk about him because he is one of the people I really care about. I greatly respect and admire Peter, but I can never see him in the same light as I once did. How can he live his life with the delusion that because someone worships at a mosque he must be directly responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center? I don't understand; I just don't. The other person I intended to discuss was me.

As I mention before, my father is Chinese, and my mother is American, subsequently, I am American. Actually, I think being half of each makes me less of both. I can't simply pick one culture to be more of. There are aspects of American culture that I hate, like Peter beating up Islamic kids, but the same goes for Chinese culture. I won't be treated like a worthless burden because I was born the last girl in a generation almost completely devoid of boys. When you're in the middle of two sides of the world, you're not one or the other, it makes you a special breed that people exclaim over, saying they've never met someone half Asian before! It's true; for all the world's growing diversity, there are very few halfAsians. I know only one other 'halfie' like myself. He's Japanese and American, but he's so immersed in American culture that it seems he's only pretending to be Japanese. How can he ignore the folds we each have in our eyelids? Maybe he's decided his race, but I have yet to determine mine.

Firstly, I'm Chinese. My closest Chinese friend, Vivian, explained to me the workings of Asian slang: how my father looked like a 'FOB' (Fresh off the Boat), how she is an 'ABC' (American-Born Chinese), and what 'eggs' and 'Twinkies' are. Someone 'white on the outside, yellow on the inside' is an 'egg'. A 'Twinkie' is just the reverse. So what does that make me? A lemon meringue pie?

Secondly, I'm not American. I do not look at the flag and see a hallowed symbol of a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. The words of the Pledge of Allegiance do not give me goose bumps or instill within me a special bond with George W. Bush. Last year, when I took the WASL test, I discovered that Washington State categorizes me as 'multi-racial.' Why does the state ask the race of a test-taker? How many points do they get for answering correctly?

On the other hand, I'm not going to pretend I'm a righteous pillar of racial objectivity. Just as Dr. King, I try as hard as I can to judge people not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, but trying isn't enough; it just doesn't cut it. When it comes to a matter that men and women have died for, a feeble attempt labeled, 'Integration' doesn't make it all go away. I wish it did. I would rather recall Peter as the kid who folded the origami heart that's sitting on my desk than the kid who hit an Islamic boy just because he could.

After all this discussion, here's what I have to say. At the funeral of Dr. King's mother, shot at the organ of her church by a white supremacist, Reverend Martin Luter King, Sr. said five words that epitomize his son's dream. "I cannot hate any man". That is the mountaintop, the bright daybreak that Dr. King can see flickering faintly on the horizon. I admit it: I'm not there yet. I can't comprehend the mountaintop, hard as I try. There's no in-between place on the mountain, only the valley beneath, and the summit. I'm not at the summit. Tiffany isn't. But I am reaching for it, and that is what makes the difference.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- King, Rev. Martin Luther, Jr. Stride Toward Freedom, New York: Harper & Row, 1958.
----. Strength to Love, New York: Harper & Row, 1963.
King, Rev. Martin Luther, Sr. Daddy King: An Autobiography, New York; William Morrow & Co. Inc., 1980.
Biographical Outoine of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. 29 November 2001.