

“Does the election of President Barack Obama represent the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream or is it only one milestone along a longer road to full equality?”

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### One More Step Towards Full Equality

On the 4th day of November 2008, the world stood awestruck as they watched Barack Obama become the first African American to be elected the President of the United States of America. A seemingly insurmountable feat, a momentous occasion many hoped for but never thought would be attained in their lifetime. An occasion that the father of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr. would be immensely proud

of. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, the once shackled black race charged forward and proudly accomplished yet another milestone on our path to full equality.

Many were shocked, some pleasantly surprised at the turn of events in the 2008 elections but one resolute, optimistic civil rights activist predicted this 46 years ago in an interview with Bob Mackenzie of the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC). Martin Luther King Junior said that there are, “negroes who are ... qualified to be president of the United States and many who are qualified in terms of integrity, in terms of vision, [and] in terms of leadership ability.” Martin Luther king Junior believed in the intelligence and competence of the black race and he had absolute certainty that we would overcome the barriers facing us and go on to accomplish the unthinkable, to dream the unimaginable and to conquer the insuperable obstacles in our path.

He saw and predicted an ideal that many would have laughed at condescendingly back in 1964. In 2008 his seemingly idealistic and unrealistic vision came to pass. Martin Luther King Jr. already knew the capabilities of his people, he knew of the brilliant minds being ignored and the talent being suppressed. He simply hoped that one day the world would realize that every one of us possessed such talents and most importantly that every one of us was equal.

On that legendary day in August in the sweltering heat in front of a crowd of over a million at Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C , Martin Luther King Junior pleaded for a nation to not judge one another by the colour of their skin but by the content of their hearts. So even though a great hurdle was overcome and an immense victory won when an African American was elected President, there is still some distance to traverse on our journey to full equality. Many blacks still face incredible discrimination and undesrved prejudices today. Incredulously, even in this day and age, many racial slurs and bigoted statements were heard during Barack Obama campaign trail .Not to mention the constant injustice a black person faces while simply applying for a job or patronizing certain stores. I vehemently support the ideal that unless the battle for equality is won for every one of us, it is won for none of us.

This is not , to in any way undermine the gargantuan feat that Barack Obama has fulfilled but while there are still segregated proms in Georgia, police brutality towards to innocent young blacks and the raging active Klu Klux Klan, we cannot in all earnest say that Martin Luther King's dream has been fulfilled.

Our news is bombarded by events like the arrest of a prominent Harvard scholar outside his own home because he was presumed to be a burglar .We hear news reports like that of the teen violinist who was severely beaten by the police in Pittsburgh on January 12,2009. News stories like the Whites Only Basketball league to be opened in Georgia. Horrific tales like the death of Eutisha Rennix because New York's EMTs' denied medical attention to a pregnant black teen. While these horrendous stories are still frequent in the news we must admit that there are still many difficulties to triumph before Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous dream can finally become a reality.

Remarkable steps have been made since Martin Luther King Jr's day. No longer do we have to go to separate schools, nor do we have to eat, play and laugh in different neighbourhoods. No longer do we have to feel inferior or cower in fear. There are black people striving and being successful in every arena. There are parents who can now truly say with utmost confidence to their black children that they can accomplish anything they put their minds to. But the point still has to be made, even though we have certainly progressed in comparison to yesteryears, there is still some significant way to go.

Lingering effects and the social repercussions of slavery and segregation are still evident in everyday life. There is disparity in blacks wages compared to whites. Studies show wages for black and white workers are considerably lower in professions with a high density of black employees. The disparity in income can be traced back to school systems where racial inequality is unmistakable. In America, prominently black schools often receive less funding. Research has shown, some employers subconsciously or otherwise pay less attention to resumes with culturally black names than those with orthodox names. Even a Justice Department study shows that more black felons than their white counterparts receive prison sentences for nearly all offences. They also receive longer maximum sentences for the same offenses. The same study conducted

shows that blacks not only get stopped by the police more often but also get searched more often. These instances provide an insight into a social atmosphere that is still racially charged. Prejudices and unfair treatment still exist and often the colour of one's skin often affects people's snap judgments of each other and even their long-term treatment of each other.

The evidence of racism again reared its head during the monumental presidential campaign which was stained by racial remarks by Senator Harry Reid who saw no offense in repeatedly using the N-word. We sat silently and watched as the Republican national Party refused to acknowledge that their jingle "Obama the magic negro" was in any way offensive. Nothing could be done about the anonymous flyers that circulated in North and West Philadelphia claiming that voters with outstanding arrest warrants or having unpaid traffic tickets could be arrested if they go to polls. A flyer aimed at deterring the minority vote. Not to mention the cartoons negatively depicting the president and his wife published in respected newspapers such as the New York Times. Some 64 years later, President Barack Obama still currently faces the same verbal abuse Martin Luther King Jr. had to endure.

However it is my fervent hope that the election of president Barack Obama will stir the change he advocates so passionately. Not only change to legislation and laws but also the mentality and mindset of the public. To revolutionize the way we treat each other, to think twice about premature judgements and stereotypes. I hope his election is the catalyst for upliftment and recognition of each other's talents and to embrace the smorgasbord of cultures around us. Martin Luther King Jr. once so brilliantly and aptly stated, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." Changing the mentality of a people is an instrumental and fundamental step in ensuring lasting and genuine equality.

This begs the question? What does the full equality look like? What does the fulfillment of Martin Luther King's dream entail? Is it a utopian ideal, can it ever truly be accomplished? Martin Luther King jr himself answered in his stirring address:

“We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

He promoted and campaigned for an end to the denial of essential and basic rights. We can now happily lodge where we wish, integrate with whites, and vote. Not only can we vote, but we definitely have something to vote for! But has the Negro's mobility changed? Are there still not down-trodden and neglected ghettos? Sadly new problems have arisen and replaced the old ones and the battle for equality continues.

We do however have the template of Martin Luther King Jr and his lessons and all the wisdom he so generously shared. And we have the inspiration in the form of Barack Obama and with these tools I will outline what the fulfillment of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream entails.

Equality will reign when black students, white students and Hispanics have the same level of education regardless of their neighbourhood, income or social status. Equality exists when a person's income is based on their skills, merit and education rather than their outward appearance. Equality exists when it isn't at all strange to see a black president. It exists when his policies are judged solely on its content and validity. Equality exists when the same opportunities are afforded to everyone in all walks of life without prejudice, bias or reference to skin colour. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream becomes a reality when we *all* become colourblind.