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### Breaking Barriers With Language

Although protests have been marched, laws have been passed, and voices have risen, racial injustice is still the grey cloud which looms over today's society like a governing tyrant. It divides us, and deceives us into believing that we are all different from one another, simply due to the shade of skin we have on our human bodies and where it originated from.

Racial injustice is more than just a blemish - it is an epidemic sweeping the entire globe, this pale blue dot we call home sweet home. One could even be wealthy enough to buy the most advanced medicine, and yet, would be ravaged by the brutality and prejudice from individuals who are blind. Not blind in the literal sense; blind in the sense in which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. tried to open the nation's eyes to. He yearned for everyone to take a good look at one another, and notice them for who they were, for what we all are - people. People with talents, dreams, emotions, personalities, and potential, living on the same planet Earth. "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character," the reverend proclaimed to the thousands of people watching him on August 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. It was recorded to be unusually hot and humid for that particular day, with temperatures ranging from 63 to 83 degrees. But what was hotter than the temperature was the blazing passion for justice that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. exuded, and the spark his speech produced as a catalyst for societal change.

Three decades later, the pleading echoes from 1963 eloquently roared through the words of African-American novelist Toni Morrison, who recited her acceptance speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize in 1993. With an equally bellowing and tender voice, Morrison spoke about the importance of language in society. She noted how "sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of

the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas.” Born and raised in an integrated neighborhood, Toni Morrison did not witness racial injustice until she enrolled at Howard University in 1949, where she noticed the slew of racially segregated restaurants and buses surrounding her. Though she never outright admitted that this past experience was the inspiration for her Nobel Prize speech, she knew that misconceptions, ethnic bias, and fear of another ethnicity caused further ignorance and prejudice associated with racial injustice. Impacted by the effects of this, Toni Morrison hoped to change the story of mankind by using her own voice to speak of love and acceptance, and dispel the bigotry and hate towards people of other nationalities.

You see, language is how we cure the plague known as racial injustice. It’s what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Toni Morrison, Gandhi, and modern-day activists for racial equality such as eight year-old Havana Chapman-Brown and the Bronx-based protest group Students of Color Matter have exemplified, without using weapons or committing acts of crime. These notable visionaries only used their mouths - and yet, the words uttered from their lips were powerful enough to have the entire world listening. We do not need to be wealthy, famous, or have a certain education to simply speak to others the way we should, with dignity and respect. The pigment of skin or the ethnic background does not determine the intelligence of a person; nor does it accurately pinpoint the behavior, capabilities, or the specific amount of success a person will achieve in their lifetime. Unfortunately, individuals too often use language to measure one’s worth in society, and become blinded by their own ignorance and hatred. Instead of questioning and degrading an individual’s worth, we should uplift one another by using words of encouragement, praise, and acceptance.

“We are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are,” American writer and theologian Thomas Merton once said. Humanity is not forever lost; it can transform for the better, but only if we harness language

for its' true purpose - to connect. It's what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did best to reach the ears and open the eyes of society decades ago, and what we shall continue as a testament to his fight for justice and equality.