

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that [all men are created equal](#)...'" –
Martin Luther King Jr., March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 1963.

Most children are taught from a young age to admire and respect the great American civil rights leaders, but for many the reasons for this near-immortalization are not so clear. In the town where I come from, an affluent suburb of Hartford, Connecticut, where most inhabitants are Caucasian, wealthy, and don't have too many interactions with people of other races, the messages can be especially lost or taken for granted. Despite all forces that may have held me back from understanding, I still felt the influence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s declaration of rights and equality from that first kindergarten lesson on him. As the son of immigrant parents from India who work intimately with the diverse yet politically, economically, and racially polarized towns and cities of the greater Hartford area, Dr. King always modeled for me how a human could bring people together into causes for the greater good. Before I knew about Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the man who inspired King by bringing the British Empire to its knees without so much as killing a person and mobilizing the South Asian people of my grandparents' and great-grandparents' generations to form a collective nation (a goal that was not recognized with the official division of Pakistan and India), Dr. King was my personal role model.

The principles of determination through hardship, greater cooperation between all peoples, and using nonviolent means to achieve various ideals are principles for which I have the utmost reverence, and have since that young age. My application of such principles to the real world did not begin to have grounding in reality until I was about in

middle school and had to apply them to my every-day life. During this time, a short period of only two or three years, I had my perceptions of reality shattered over and over again. Though I suppose now that this was just an affect of the regular trends of adolescent emotion, I struggled during this time with issues of racial identity. In a town that, as I mentioned before, is largely white and homogenous, I found it very difficult to come to terms with my own heritage and, when that finally happened, place myself in the context of this town I had lived in for my entire life but never understood until that point. I also felt what were the first and most prominent examples of racism in my life as a bully, probably acting not out of racism but anger camouflaged as hatred, labeled me with racial epithets more commonly known through *The Simpsons* and *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*. As a lot of this also happened in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, I was further singled out by some of my more bigoted classmates as “one of them” (though now the absurdity of associating a Hindu and an Indian with Arab, Islamic terrorism sometimes makes me chuckle). Thus, the rapidly changing world combined with the strange new development of a racial identity that didn’t fit with the rest of picture-perfect Avon, Connecticut, put me in a position that often left me feeling disenfranchised and that I, really, did not belong.

So where do Dr. King’s philosophies come in to play? About at this point, as I became very interested in my ancestral culture and learned more about Gandhiji, I discovered that Dr. King’s methods of protest were a direct descendant from those of the Satyagraha philosophy. It became apparent to me that, through the same principles, I could conquer the oppression of my own insecurities and the naïve yet bigoted atmosphere around me. I have always maintained a pride in my culture, along with

understanding that its most prominent historical figure founded the nation in nonviolence (though the considerable communal violence that even he eventually succumbed to should not be ignored) the same way that Dr. King led a movement for equality of all peoples, that, unfortunately, the opposition end of claimed his life later on.

I learned a lot about how to deal with situations from Dr. King. His own sense of determination and hard work for a hopeful gain influenced me greatly in my desire to continue working hard in school, as well as the nonprofit work I do in the Hartford area to help the underserved, immigrants, and refugees, as well as raise voter awareness in the state among all population groups. His principles of cooperation helped me to reconcile my many friendships with people of other races with the way I felt as an Indian-American. His successes with the use of non-violence, in the face of growing physical violence amongst teens in both the malevolent and joking varieties, aided me through a period of physical and emotional bullying, as well as a lot of bigotry and joke-related violence from my friends. His insight opened doors into new worlds for humankind, and the application of this insight to my life has made all the difference between leading a mundane, self-serving existence and working to make the world a better place.

Upon the eve of my adult life, I know not the direction that the Earth will take, whether equal justice will be granted to all peoples or if oppression will reign supreme over the masses. What I do know is that Dr. King's message cannot and will not die, for it has left too strong of an impression on all Americans and people of the world, whether we realize it or not, that can never be ignored.