

**“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly”** -- one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. most famous statements, emphasizing the connectedness of society and the importance of justice for all in his letter from Birmingham Jail on April 16, 1963. The core values of a country cannot be conditional--conditional values are not values at all. Whether it may be through gender, race, ethnicity, wealth, or disability, discrimination in any capacity is simply unjust. In our country, founded for the people *by* the people, we hold values of equality, democracy, liberty, and autonomy close to our hearts--it's what has made our country prosper over the hardships of history.

These principles are deeply intertwined with our identity as Americans; yet, we have a considerable way to go. We cannot truly call these universal values if they don't really hold to be universal when applied in the real world; the only way to do so is by standing up against the injustice that compromises these core values. The United States, throughout history, has encouraged and prospered from individuals speaking up against injustice--Dr. King being a role model in this effort. King's statements on this day continue to inspire us--they drive young social activists to speak up about injustice in their communities, just as Dr. King did in his. King's words inspire us to confront injustice not only in our community but across the globe.

Injustice often starts in an isolated incident--whether it may be from an individual or a small community--yet, if left unaddressed and denied, it spreads like wildfire throughout the system. Systemic injustice leads to a spread of racial violence, examples of which we have recently seen displayed against African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and many other marginalized communities. Hate knows no boundaries--the only way to fight hatred is through

challenging the system which enabled the violence rather than simply fighting the individuals. Fighting systemic injustice was what Dr. Martin Luther King stood for. We have an obligation as a society, from individuals like you and me to congress and private corporations, to fight back against injustice in our system--injustice that has degraded the very values we hold fundamental in our country.

Injustice anywhere threatens justice everywhere. Racial inequality and injustice is not isolated problem. Throughout history, gender inequality and racial inequality go hand-in-hand in several ways. Women of color, throughout history, have faced discrimination based on their race and gender. They have been denied opportunities for advancement in society--from education to employment--leading to significant economic and social inequality. The lack of opportunities for women can cause poverty and social exclusion because women may struggle to support their families or themselves financially. This leads to a lack of representation and minimization of a woman's perspective. A notable example is a disproportionate treatment by the criminal justice system of women of color. Women of color are disproportionately affected by police brutality and are more likely to be arrested than white women. Once in the prison system, it becomes very difficult for them to succeed in their careers after their sentence and become financially independent.

Additionally, the legacy of slavery has marginalized women of color across the world, decreasing their ability to influence policies and decisions that affect their communities. Throughout history, this lack of representation has led to further low access to resources and opportunities to succeed. By bringing more attention to these inequalities, we can ensure women, especially women of color, have equal access to opportunities and representation in decision-making processes.

Traditionally, social activism against injustice has been through boycotts, marches, or speeches. In fact, the African American community has consistently fought against inequality and injustice--the Black Panther Party being a key example. However, with social media becoming a major force of connection between people, fighting injustice through the “#” (hashtag) has become equally if not more effective in achieving social justice. An effective example is the recent social movement around the globe against violence against women in Iran. On September 16, 2022, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died in the custody of Iranian police for an alleged violation of “improper” hijab- a head covering worn in public by some Islamic women. Women and girls in Iran and many other Islamic countries have faced decades of systemic oppression. The tragedy was met with widespread outrage, inciting nationwide protests. Importantly, social media (*Ex #Mahsa\_Amini* hits millions of tweets) became a major weapon of protest that published the atrocities to the rest of the world. The international pressure has led to the dismissal of moral police in Iran and a panel review on the hijab rule.

Though Dr. King warns us that our society is caught in an “inescapable network of mutuality” it is this very network that, in today’s increasingly connected world, strengthens movements that fight for structural justice. It is through using the power of social networks that even kids like us can truly make a difference and stand up for justice in our own community. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” King’s statements on April 16, 1963, continue to inspire us all every day--they drive young social activists to speak up about injustice in their communities and collect voices together, just as Dr. King did in his.