

With the playfully blissful laughter of children, the gentle hum of roadside conversations, and the faint smells of cookies in the air, growing up in Brookings has been incredibly peaceful. However, it is this very serene life Brookings offers us that shields us from a nation—a world—filled with fear, division, and injustice. Although it is difficult, it is imperative we look beyond our sheltered communities and fight for unity, inclusivity, and peace. In the words of the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, it is “Together, we craft the tapestry of justice, weave the threads of inclusivity, and sow the seeds of peace. Our collective actions forge the path towards a brighter tomorrow.”

This fight will never be easy. Only through our collective efforts and active involvement can we bridge the social division we see throughout the country and the world. Divisiveness has become intricately woven within our society. In recent years, the world has been entangled in conflicts that challenge these very pillars of a peaceful society—justice, inclusivity, and empathy—we hope to achieve. There is a recent rise in the hatred against immigrants, anti-semitism, islamophobia, and intense animosity between left and right-wing political groups in the USA. Anti-semitism, historically ingrained in various societies, has seen a resurgence in recent times, opening the scars of holocaust. The tragedies of the 2018-synagogue shootings in Pittsburg, desecration of Jewish cemeteries, and discriminatory policies serve to underscore the persistent nature of this prejudice. Similarly, over the last few months, Islamophobia, mainly fueled by misconceptions, stereotypes, and fear has gained prominence in public discourse and actions. It is this intolerance that would lead to explosive conflicts we see throughout the world—from the conflicts between Shia and Sunni muslims in Yemen to the raging war in the Gaza strip, and even the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar. Across the globe, generations have suffered at the hands of these raging conflicts, rooted in hatred, structural oppression, and intolerance.

Socio-political tensions, economic difficulties, and misinformation propagated through social media amplify existing prejudices against already marginalized communities, fostering an environment conducive to discrimination. Extremist ideologies amplified by certain political narratives further exacerbate these issues, causing division, distrust and hostility within our very community.

It is only through collective efforts to systematically dismantle ignorance and injustice that we can bridge the social division we see throughout the country and the world. We must strive to create safe spaces where diverse perspectives are not just heard but truly respected. Education plays a pivotal role in dispelling stereotypes and promoting understanding of other cultures. Schools and communities should prioritize comprehensive education about diverse cultures, religions, and histories to foster empathy and appreciation for differences.

I am committed to fostering these dialogues and learning about the diverse cultures and religions of the world. Let's all pledge to discover one or two facts about different cultures and religions every week. Use the power of social media to spread the truth in the fight against ignorance. It is through fostering an environment that honors and values these differences that we can move closer to an inclusive and just society. Most people don't believe that the world will change, but the people who changed the world, always believed. Through amplifying and listening to all voices, not just the loudest ones, I believe together, we can, in the words of Dr. King, "forge the path towards a brighter tomorrow."