

Name: Juliet Chattaway
Grade: 6
School: New Canaan Country School
4th Congressional District

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a chance to reflect on Dr. King's dream, his work towards justice and equality, and his success at creating a movement. Though it's been 53 years since his death, his dreams, speeches and courage are still inspiring millions of people today. Dr. King dreamed of racial equality everywhere — in education, voting, neighborhoods, laws, jobs, even buses. I can see much progress from the time of Dr. King – black children do join hands with white children, black people and white people do sit down to talk about race issues, and a black man even became president of the United States. Surely things must be equal now, right? Wrong!

Last year, my mom was buying clothes for my cousins who live in Detroit. They are half a year older than me, and also half black. My mom was talking on the phone to my great aunt about things like sizes and color preferences. My great aunt said that although the boys love hoodies, my mom shouldn't send them any because she was concerned for their safety. As I was hearing this story from my mom, I stopped her and asked why. She told me to google Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin was a seventeen year old black boy. He was visiting his aunt in Florida, and he went out one night to buy a bag of Skittles. He was wearing a hoodie, and a nearby neighborhood watchman thought he looked suspicious. Trayvon Martin ended up getting shot and killed by the watchman.

Hearing about that story makes me feel terribly angry and sad. But mostly confused. It makes me wonder if Trayvon was white if he still would have gotten shot. It makes me wonder how else my cousins' experiences are different from mine. How else are things unequal between different races? Does a store clerk look at black people more closely than they would me? Is it more likely for a black person to get pulled over or arrested when driving? If a black person gets hurt on the street, are they less likely to get help? Do people eye them suspiciously as they walk by? And most of all, do all these experiences end up changing their own character? And yet, there is no law that black people can't wear hoodies, or that they should be suspected more in a crime. It seems as though the laws are equal, however, in many ways they actually aren't.

That left me with one question ringing in my head: how do we change this? Which brings us back to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King is an example of how one person can change millions of other people's lives. Through his speeches, peaceful protests and writings, he showed how one person can change many other people's ideas and perspectives. One of my favorite quotes from Dr. King is "Be a bush, if you can't be a tree. If you can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be the sun, be a star. It isn't by size that you win or you fail." That makes me think that it doesn't matter how big of a change you are able to make, as long as you try, that's good enough. It makes me think that maybe, like Dr. King, I can use my words to make a difference. Maybe a person who thinks there are no more racial injustices and inequalities will read my essay and realize that things still aren't fair. Things aren't equal.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an intelligent, eloquent, and brave man, who changed the lives of millions. We have to keep pushing for his dream. The experience of a white, eleven year old girl in Connecticut should not be different from a black, eleven year old boy in Michigan, because of their skin color. We have to keep pushing for equality everywhere, in all aspects of life. If enough people become bushes, trails or stars, we will achieve Dr. King's dream. Everyone should feel safe wearing a hoodie.