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### A Soliloquy Caught In A Dialogue

I remember being a small child, stumbling around the legs of giants. One of the many activities I enjoyed in my naive youth was basketball, and I cherished each time my relatives would come to watch my games. The last game I had was a particularly special one, as my aunt and uncle were coming up for the first time to see me play. I remember the moment my uncle walked into the room, a true gentle giant. While I smiled widely, I noticed that the others around us weren't as enthused. They stared at him, watching his every movement, as he slowly made his way to the bleachers and sat down. The people surrounding him shifted away in their seats, clearly uncomfortable. At the time, I couldn't understand why they acted that way towards my uncle, to one of the kindest people I had ever met. Then, in a moment that I'll never forget, one of my peers, one of my teammates, one of my friends came over to me. They spoke in a confused, disdained tone and asked, "Is that *your* uncle?" I, of course, responded in affirmation and asked why they would propose such a question. They replied, "Well because you're...you know? And he's not...you know?" It was then I understood what they meant by their statement. It was then I understood why the people were staring at my uncle weirdly. It was then I understood why the people moved away from my uncle, clutching their bags and were continually shifting uncomfortably. It was because my uncle is black and I am white.

I tell this story not to merely elicit sympathy from individuals, but to rather illustrate an example of the modern racially-fueled prejudice that still permeates our society. While those people at the basketball game did not explicitly state their personal issues with my uncle, it was written in their actions. Their steel-like,

dehumanizing gazes looking at my uncle with disdain. Their scurries away from my uncle, as if he were some form of unknown entity. The clutching of their personal belongings in fear of being victimized, when in reality it was my uncle they were victimizing, were dehumanizing, were morphing into the “other.” At the basketball game, my uncle was a soliloquy caught between everyone else’s discriminatory dialogue.

Based on the previous example alone, I do not believe that the communication between races has improved to Martin Luther King’s ambitions. It is true that modern society no longer explicitly states that one race has subjugation over the others, and emphasizes that all people from all aspects of life are wholly entitled to natural rights. However, this hasn’t stopped people from “othering” people based on their race. This hasn’t stopped people from denying others privileges and freedoms based on their race. This hasn’t stopped people from dehumanizing human beings on an institutional scale, both explicitly and implicitly, based on their race. This hasn’t stopped people from unjustly killing others solely based on their race. The belief that bigotry against other races has truly ended in the modern era is the color-blind ideology at its work, at its finest, and at its most destructive.

It is clear that there is much work left to do, and this is why Martin Luther King’s words are still so important and relevant today. His words of opening up the monologue of races and turning it into a dialogue is an imperative portion of creating harmony through peaceful means. To truly have peace, we have to dismantle the echo chamber of both ideology and modeling, as hate isn’t only systemic from fear of the unknown. The forms of hate and disdain are often taught to the children by those prejudiced parents. Thus, the hate spreads throughout generations regardless of legislation or social changes.

Now, the only question left unaddressed is how to approach this sensitive topic effectively in modern society. I believe that for social change to truly be effective, it must first start with the self. The individual must no longer sit idly by as

those around them are being oppressed, they must be active in their effort to make change. This begins by letting go of judgement and trying to see what brings humanity together rather than what separates us. This involves learning to be an upstander rather than a bystander. This involves taking Martin Luther King's words to heart and opening the channels of communication. From the self, we can make the soliloquy into dialogue.