

# Luther & I

By Previnash Wong

To the people of the New World, Dr. Martin Luther King was considered an American hero. However, that is a gross understatement. Rather, he was a globally influential figure to all peoples from all depths of the world who are victims of discrimination. I myself, being a young biracial teenager from a multi-ethnic nation from the Far-East known as Malaysia, have both encountered and observed racism in all of my lifetime. If you were to visit my nation, you would have a glimpse on how your great nation once was when it conducted systematic racism against the African-Americans.

Malaysia is a relatively young nation-state that is predominantly of Malay, Chinese and Indian peoples. Despite this, the Chinese and Indian people were looked as immigrants prior to independence. This led to a major uproar when the British decided to grant *jus-soli* based citizenship (citizenship based on the place of birth) to these “immigrants” who helped build the nation. Hence, this was then settled for a treaty amongst each representative of every ethnicity. The result of this was in-exchange of *jus-soli* status being granted to the Chinese and Indian people, a preferential status known as “The *Bumiputera* (literally: Land Son) status” was to be granted to the Malays and indigenous people. The *Bumiputera* status is essentially the Malaysian equivalent to “white privileges”. This status grants a “special position” to the *Bumiputeras* whereby they are given economical benefits, preferential treatment in scholarships, public service position and so on. To put the effects of this into perspective, my teacher once told our class a story about two of his friends who completed their college-qualifying exams with 2 very different results: one of his friend

was a Chinese who scored straight A's, while the other was a Malay who had only 1 A, however the Malay friend was offered a full-scholarship to a top-tier university while the Chinese friend was given nothing despite his superior grades. The worst part perhaps is that our so-called democratic country doesn't allow us to voice out against such an atrocious law as it is written in the parliament that the *Bumiputera* status isn't to be questioned by anyone of non-*Bumiputera* ethnicity.

This 50 year old law has become imprinted onto the lives of all Malaysians, both who enjoy the law and those who suffers from the unrighteousness of the law. Inevitably, I believe that this is a cause of the racial divide and hatred that still persists today due to the very nature of this law that proposes out loud and clear that "we are not equal". Many of us tend not to live together as one people, but rather a clusters of separate peoples divided by the colour of our skin and culture. As a young child, I absolutely hated this notion of the country, and I along with the rest of oppressed Malaysians felt helpless, since we are not in any position allowed to question this law. **"We will learn to live together, or we will live as fools"** was a quote by Martin Luther King that inspired me to realise the importance of racial harmony in a nation. It shed light on all the horrors that was slowly tearing the nation apart, from the racial slurs that are used amongst each ethnicity to the very teachings of our parents regarding the stereotypes of each people. It was this quote that changed my perception on racism entirely. I realised the evil in all the so-called racist "jokes" that preserved the existence of racism in our community. I realised the stereotypical mindset that unnecessarily blamed that innocent man just because he was of a certain ethnicity or skin colour. I realised that our unity and

harmony is greatly flawed as opposed as to what the government promote us to be : “an unified multi-ethnic country”.

**“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that”**. This yet another quote by Martin Luther King became a realisation for me that in order for our nation to be freed from an oppressive law, it cannot be done by force or aggression, neither can it by hating on one another for the mischiefs of this country, instead it can be done by freeing each other from the racist mindsets that exists in many of us through love and righteous teachings. Hence, I opposed every ‘jokes’ or statements made by friends, family, or even teachers that generalises, degrades or made fun of any ethnicity. More often than not, every time I opposed their actions, it would lead to an arguement that is almost like a debate. At times, it feels almost useless talking to these people as they can never learn or accept what is right, but the persistence that was demonstrated by Martin Luther King in his battle against racism reminded me that I too should never back down from what’s right, in this case is to put and end to this racist mindsets of the people in my country. In the process, I have quarrel with countless people including my own mother for her relentless disrupted perception on different ethnicities. It isn’t always easy I’d admit, but I am sure it’d be worth it in the end when a truly unified Malaysia is born through the teachings shared by the wise man, Martin Luther King.

Though American, his teachings and ideals has influenced a Malaysian at the other end of the world. What he fought for was not just for the civil-rights of African-Americans, but rather his ideals are universal for the equality of all people. He is also a testimony of God’s love striving through darkness and bringing light amongst all people.

With this, hopefully in this generation and the ones to come, there will be not just an unified America or Malaysia, but an unified world where we can all put aside our so called “differences” and start living as how God want us to be, together as one race: the human race.