**The Path to Equality**

By Aryial O’Neal

“What is unity?” This seemingly simple question left me puzzled for days on end, required me to clear some misconceptions, and address my true feelings. It echoed in my head until I finally narrowed it down.

A union of like minded people that will break all residual chains from previous oppression and colonization; is the true definition of unity. The hope for the future; the world’s blanket solution for all strife. Unity does not discriminate. All races, backgrounds, and genders can become unified behind a cause. Unity ​is​ harmony but is ​not​ an all-encompassing compromise. It is not​ forced cooperation, yet ​unity is equality.

Exploring what unity means to me, I began with the heavily circulated concept of “world peace”. Like most, upon hearing this five-letter word, my mind immediately jumped to people of all colors, holding hands, singing “kumbaya”. Yet, after numerous drafts with this hopeful, joyous concept, I had a total of 3 sentences; one of which was my title. My brain physically could not expand this concept. As I came to realize, this was due to the fact that unity is *not* blanket happiness. In our world's current state of reconstruction, pushing for an all-encompassing compromise, would be as useless a flimsy band-aid for a headache. National unity cannot be implemented until equality is fulfilled.

Not equality in the form of performative activism from companies trying to prevent the loss, or in the way of ending every post with #BLM. Instead, demolishing every social standing that encourages inequality. Continuing in the fashion of defeating racially charged bills like Proposition 20, or demolishing no-knock warrants. Unity will cease to exist until everyone in the nation is on the same playing field.

Malcolm X described the racial discrepancies best when he said, “​Sitting at the table doesn’t make you a diner unless you eat some of what’s on that plate. Being here in America doesn’t make you an American. Being born here in America doesn’t make you an American”​. The literal translation of this quote played out in our society is the sole determinant behind a lack of unity. Truly​ achieving intercultural harmony, requires gaps between Americans and those with the ending American label , to be demolished. Only then, will the discussion of unification be entertained.

When socioeconomic status, ​method of arrival to this country​, or simply physical appearances, no longer holds power. When those with brown skin, stop being murdered by our police officers under the guides of “fear”, *then* we can have unity. When the living conditions of falsely accused “rapists'' stop resembling zoo animals at our nation's borders. When anyone with an olive skin tone and dark facial hair stops being harassed in our airports as a cover-up for deep-rooted racism, then our world would benefit. When my sister can style my 5-year-old nephew's hair without considering future police profiling. When conversations with those with pinched eyes stop consisting of obnoxiously raised voices and mockingly slow speech. When the opinion of those with white skin stops being treated as unwritten law, then we can have unity. When the killers of George Floyd, Trayvon Martin, and Breonna Taylor have received their just due. Only after, will unity be attainable.

No matter how daunting, it can be done. The year 2020 demonstrated the power within unity. Covid-19, had our world leaders by their necks, killing 10,000+ people a day, but our frontline of defense was composed of African-Americans, young people, Asians, the elderly, and all in between. They were all joined together to protect the community. To continue, the death of Los Angeles royalty, Kobe Bryant and Nipsey Hussle, brought opposing gangs under one roof under the guides of human decency; regardless of superficial, meaningless labels. The world had a front-row seat to the “largest movement in the country’s history” as BLM protests erupted for all to see, where all races, religions, backgrounds, and genders mixed into the sea of uproar (Buchanan). People around the world joined in arms with our fellow Americans to fight for change and bring justice for the victims' families.

In each of the aforementioned examples, from local support to civil advocacy to national chaos, interracial and intercultural unity arose to restore justice. It is up to this next generation to continue it. Not to unilaterally settle, but to work in harmony with people you never knew existed. Not to grudgingly relinquish your upbringing but to take the necessary step towards equality for all, because that’s what unity is truly about.

Works Cited

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