

Writing: 5-8th Grade. 1st Place.

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What advice would Martin Luther King Jr. give me when I share my story of being yelled at by a person, asking me to go back to my country in 2018? In April of 2018, I was just sitting in the back of the car, drawing and listening to music in traffic. A driver had a road rage and hit our car. I rolled down my window to see what had happened and a driver from a different car yells at us. "You need to learn English and learn the rules. Go back to your country!" Learn English? English is my first language and I've been applauded for speaking well all my life. In fact, I was even invited to speak at The Seattle Times Ignite Education Lab as the youngest speaker, and spoke in front of hundreds of people without a single 'um' or 'uh'. Go back to my country? This comment was misguided because my country is the United States and I was born and raised in Seattle. Yet, I am judged by the color of my skin and not by the content of my character, as Dr. King has pleaded during his 1963 speech. Because of the ongoing racial tensions in the United States, I will continue the work Nobel Prize Recipient Wiesel advocated, "I [swear] never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. [I will] always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

I've studied about the history of Japanese American incarceration and how the Japanese Americans attempted to prove their loyalty and patriotism by following the rules that didn't make sense. I've read the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* and was able to relate to the character who struggles with dual identity. I've seen the Anne Frank's Let Me Be Myself exhibit and thought about what I would write about in the attic. I've been inspired to keep a journal after reading the Anne Frank's Diary but I have not written about limitations of my life because of my faith or racial identity. While I have learned about racism and prejudice from literature and history, I did not think I could be a victim in 2018. I read the newspapers and know about recent violence in schools and in ethnic communities. However, I did not think I would be a victim because we live in a suburban neighborhood and I attend a safe, welcoming school. Am I wrong!

I have been giving voices to Korean Americans by helping out with the voter registration campaign for the last two years. Because I am too young to vote, I have been educating our Korean American community about the importance of voting and helping elders with their voter registration forms. However, not for a single moment, have I ever doubted my identity as an American. In fact, when I met Hillary Clinton in 2015 and told her that I wanted to be the first Asian American female president, she didn't even question my ability to become an American president. She advised me to keep up the good work at school and assured me that I could realize my dreams. When I shared my dream of wanting to be a public servant to improve the lives of others at The Civic Learning Initiative Summit,

Justice Sotomayor shared her experience and committed to supporting my vision. As we remember the words of Martin Luther King Jr's speech after the 50th anniversary of his assassination, I believed we had made progress. However, there is still much work to be done and I will not be quiet. Through my personal experience, I've set a personal goal. I swear "never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation" through words and civic engagement. I hope this essay is one of the ways to demonstrate how I will begin to take sides of the vulnerable, marginalized population because "Neutrality [and bystanders] will help the oppressor, never a victim." I cannot be a bystander because "silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented" and I now know what it feels like to be the tormented victim. Even though it was one incident and no physical harm was caused, the words hurt. The words of the driver fuels me to use my words to speak up and to help the oppressor so no child is questioned about what language she speaks or what nationality she is. So, rather than staying silent for my humiliation and suffering, I will reflect on the wise words of Elie Wiesel's Nobel Prize acceptance speech. I vow never to be silent or be a bystander of bullying.

We are supposed to learn from our mistakes and history. Even after the holocaust and the Japanese incarceration, there is still work to be done and I must speak up. I need to be at the table to represent the voice of the voiceless. Speaking up will help the victim not the criminal. One issue I'm passionate about is stopping bullying. As a leadership member of the DC Bully Busters, we speak up about the importance of not bullying. Through our campaign, we are helping trying to say being a bystander is unacceptable. As Elie Wiesel stated, "neutrality" is still helping the oppressor instead of the victim. I don't blame the other drivers for being neutral but I wonder how the narrative would have changed if another driver spoke up, pointed out that the racial slurs are unacceptable and that we were the ones hit; we were the victim in the accident. If this was true, my essay may have been written differently. Until we achieve a harmonious world, "I [swear] never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. [I will] always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."