The Past Continues to Guide Us into the Future

By Sasha Parrish

There are some eras and historical events that irrevocably change the world as we know it and the future going forward. The US Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s is one of these. In addition to the global influence of this movement and the way it's strategies and leaders have been referenced in other global civil rights/ humanitarian campaign it has also majorly influenced the generations that followed. To many Gen Z Americans, the injustices being combatted by this movement were historical concepts that seemed far removed from our realities. As I grew up and educated myself on Black History and the history of racism in thick country I came to understand that the work had not been finished, and once again looked to the leaders of the past for how to proceed into the future.

From them I learned what it meant to invest in community and use my voice for change. I learned that silence, and passivity were the antithesis to progress. I learned that the only way to move forward was to stretch a hand back and pull others up with you. And I learned to be steadfast in my advocacy for myself and others. These were lessons imparted on me, not only through classes and documentaries, but through my parents and family who were born at the end of the civil rights movement and carried those lessons forward. The late Jesse Jackson was among these leaders who inspired the generations ahead. When he appeared as a guest on "Sesame Street" and taught a group of children from various backgrounds how to assert their dignity with a recitation of his poem "I am Somebody", he reminded all of us of the value of our own dignity. Subsequently an entire generation followed this lesson (GenX) and taught me I could be anything I wanted to be, so long as I put my mind to it.

> "I am Black! Brown! White! I speak a different language! But I must be respected! Protected! Never rejected! I am! God's child! I am! Somebody!"- Jesse Jackson

As the loudest and most influential of today's political leaders continue their push to return to an era built on mistrust, division and discrimination, it can be incredibly disheartening for those in my generation who were raised with opposing values. The leaders we looked up passing away while their work is being dismantled is unsettling to say the least. Jackson, who channeled cries for Black pride and self-determination into corporate boardrooms, passing on amid a political and corporate push for the opposite contributes greatly to this feeling.

But, if there's one thing my generation (the generation of instant gratification) must recognize is that the lack of immediate results doesn't mean you give up. Jesse Jackson and his

contemporaries dedicated their lives to their causes. They carried their values into every room they walked into, book they published, speeches they gave. The push for progress has always come with setbacks by those interested in maintaining the status quo, but the work doesn't end.

The work persists in how we live our lives, and it still has impact. All around the world today there are young people using their voices and platforms to draw attention to the issues facing the world around them. All around the world today, people are touching people's hearts and expanding their minds. All around the world today people are choosing connection over division. And that message carries forward. "I am Somebody" is going viral on social media. Black history is being told and remembered.

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