

## Beyond the Outskirts

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The outskirts are desolate places, where all the worst characteristics of humankind are present to a visceral, suffocating extent: an island, shrouded in darkness, with no hope on the horizon. The outskirts are a warped place where society banishes “unfit” people for perceived flaws and imperfections, such as their race. The outskirts fracture the world into loathsome fragments that seek to find deficiencies in others. No person should endure the pain of the outskirts and the indelible sense of inadequacy for what is outside their control and indeterminate of their character and worth. Fortunately, the world does not have to stay divided by an arbitrary system of division, and the ideals of acceptance and mutual respect can and should reign supreme.

Martin Luther King, Jr. foresaw this world, where future generations and his children were “judged by the content of their character” instead of the color of their skin. In today's society, inclusivity continues to be a goal for progress and unity. However, the generations since MLK, Jr. are still divided. Maybe the visit to the outskirts was on the playground, years ago, at a “friend’s” house, or experienced within a short conversation with a coworker. Almost everyone has experience with the dark hopelessness of the outskirts. These moments of exclusion undermine the inclusive future that would benefit all.

To truly be inclusive, people must be able to be themselves without fear of judgment. This means thoughtful action by individuals and communities, treating others with intentional kindness and respect, and passing on these values to the next generation. Through education and exposure, xenophobia can be eliminated and people can instead celebrate the beauty in the complexity of human culture and identities.

Memories of exclusion and loneliness from the outskirts persist for years, casting doubt on one's worth. Especially in the lonelier, post-pandemic world, inclusivity has become increasingly imperative to create a strong community where all feel valued and accepted, both locally and globally. Accepting people for who they are, including the color of their skin, allows people to be proud of their true selves, giving them the freedom to live fulfilling lives. As the next generation, we must achieve this vision to unite society and end the years-long exclusion and loneliness. It is important to push back against harmful stereotypes that belittle people over their identities and instead show kindness and respect to others, modeling the behavior for others to follow. No one deserves to be left on the outskirts of society. With thoughtful action and unabating kindness towards all, the next generation can be the change that brings society into the light of unity. With each action

people take toward inclusivity, we glimpse the unified future that Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamed of decades ago.