

I Have a Dream (Thandi Gamedze)

You worry about the disruption to the system
We worry about this rupture in the system
That allows the rich to live off the fat of the land
In a civilization built on the backs of the poor
And in an attempt to coerce us into leaving things as they are
You employ a façade of empathy
Suggesting that our methods for change will negatively affect us
Far more than they will affect you
And we acknowledge that in this present moment this may be true
But we press through in the hopes that it will have just enough impact on you
For long term change to take place
That the next generation would be better off than we ever were
Our ceiling their floor

You worry about the disruption to the system
Isn't it more of a concern that this disruption is necessary for you to take heed of our plight?
That our voices to you are silent
Until our cries push through the walls of your soundproofed lives
And inconvenience you
You, the self-proclaimed centre of the universe
You the sun, we mere planets
Revolving around you, dependent upon you
Stripped of significance outside of our relationship to you
According to you
Like all of the history books are according to you

Yet you divorce yourself from all responsibility for the current inequality
Spitting out words like 'we deserve this, we worked for this'
Somehow blind to the correlation between race and economic position

Refusing to acknowledge historical causation

Selective science

'Every action has an equal and opposite reaction

Except this one

Apartheid along with its effects ended in '94, and we will speak of it no more'

And this is perhaps the root of the problem

This thing of compartmentalisation

The separation of chapters from the entire publication

The erasure of connections, of cause and effect

Complaining about crime as if it is some separate issue

As disconnected from you as you are from reality

Your high walls and electric fences

Rendering you oblivious to the pain of human suffering

Protecting you from the effects of this inhumane inequality

That is quite easy to ignore if you can afford those gold-tinted glasses

That erase the unsavoury view of those not as privileged as you

But the time has come to remove those glasses and dare to see the big picture

Take off your armour piece by piece

And brick by brick tear down the walls that you have built

And look into the eyes of the ones you have purposed to keep outside

You will find that we are all more alike than you have assumed

That the chasm that you have construed from our differences is no more than fabrication

Yet has the potential to tear apart nations if it itself is not torn apart

For the consequences of your lack of compassion

Will destroy the next generation

The consequences of our lack of compassion

Will destroy the next generation

For I do not absolve myself of responsibility

I too have lived on the sheltered side of those electric fences
Been thankful for their protection from the unknown forces outside
Ignorant of the historical happenings that made them a necessity
But a reality for only those with the means
Simply content inside of their perceived safety
Yes, I am well aware of my privilege
The English that I grew up with
Rendering me more palatable to society
My black skin diluted by my half white genes
Making me seem less of a threat to the powers that be
I have always had food to eat
A bed in which to sleep
A roof over me
A fully paid education
A childhood filled with love
My home a temperate greenhouse
Facilitating thought, imagination and growth
No doubt I am privileged

And truthfully, privilege acknowledged, I'm still grappling to find the correct response
Or quite the meaning behind this so-called lottery of birth
But one thing I am sure of beyond any doubt
Is that with any privilege comes equal responsibility
And if my privilege benefits just me
I bear at least as much culpability for the deaths by inequality
As those who are driven to hurt and steal
By the need to feed their families

Acknowledge your privilege, engage in the pain of those born without it
Feel the weight without giving in to shame
For you are not to be blamed for the grave injustices that have taken place in times gone by

But we will all be held accountable for what we do with our current position
For as human beings residing in an unjust ecosystem
We have the responsibility of righting the wrongs done by generations gone before
For our humanity is inexorably tied to the humanity of every other person on the planet
And while injustice is still alive
None should be silent
Our every word and deed should be a knife in its back
Persistent and unrelenting until it breathes its last

For I have a dream that one day, every voice will be unified in decrying injustice
That the cries of the vulnerable would be amplified by those of the strong
That all would experience belonging, acceptance and love
That we would no longer run from the pain of our brothers and sisters
But embrace them in it, until it becomes our own
Unable to maintain our comfortable status quo
Until that option exists for all
Each taking ownership over the role they have been cast
While embracing their choice in the role that they will play
Choosing that of the liberator of the captive
The defender of the weak
The comforter of the broken hearted
The empowerer of the vulnerable
The amplifier of the cries of the silenced

I have a dream that circumstances of birth would no longer steal from human potential
But that the earth would be a safe environment for all the beauty of humanity to be expressed
That the intrinsic value of human life would be acknowledged universally
And the varied offerings of each, celebrated
That we would be a people quick to embrace, love, accept and forgive
That we would be propelled forward by belief; in each other, in ourselves, in goodness, in possibility
That in all things, we would embody kindness

And I forever will aim my life towards correcting the imbalance

Redressing the injustice

Repairing the breach

Adjusting volumes until all voices come out sounding equal

Money no longer a microphone

Poverty no longer a muffler

Race no longer a factor

A society where we no longer need to resort to disruption of a system to make ourselves heard

Because when we stand up and speak, our words are heeded

And we are acknowledged

Valued

Seen

Yes, I have a dream