

REMEMBERING JUNE 16

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In 1966, Robert F. Kennedy spoke to South African students in Cape Town. “It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped each time a man stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others or strikes out against injustice. He sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest wall of oppression and resistance.”

South African children felt that call to stand up for an ideal on the 16th of June 1976. The number of people who died is usually given as 176, with estimates of up to 700.

The sacrifice may seem mundane but these children changed the course of how the fight for liberty was fought in South Africa. The world stood up and took notice.

Many white South African citizens were outraged at the government's actions in Soweto, and about 300 white students from the Wits marched through Johannesburg's city centre in protest of the killing of children.

Our former President Mbeki stated in I am an African, “The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender or historical origins.

It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.

Africa reaffirms that she is continuing her rise from the ashes.

Whatever the setbacks of the moment, nothing can stop us now!
Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace!
However improbable it may sound to the sceptics, Africa will prosper!

Whoever we may be, whatever our immediate interest, however **much** we carry baggage from our past, however **much** we have been caught by the fashion of cynicism and loss of faith in the capacity of the people, **let us err today and say - nothing can stop us now!**”

As we remember June 16th, we have to remember that we cannot rest on the laurels of those who went before us, and our fight for the ideal is relegated to vile, anonymous comments on the internet. We must be able to have the courage to be the change we want to see in our society. A quiet, introverted

man like Gandhi was the leader who became that change. It wasn't comfortable, but he knew what he had to do, and did not shirk his duty.

A few years ago, Martin Sheen spoke at a Youth Convention and he said, "No one has ever made a contribution of any real worth without self-sacrifice, personal sufferings and sometimes even death. The Irish share a story about a man who came to the gates of heaven and asked to be let in. St. Peter said, "Of course, just show us your scars." The man said, "I have no scars." St. Peter says, "What a pity! Was there nothing worth fighting for?"

Our land is a gift, our diversity is a gift. As we remember the scars of the past, may we fight for the beauty of our diversity and the ideal of a prosperous and united nation.