

“Bridge to Freedom 1965”

One of the first questions I asked myself when watching this film is: What would I do to get the right to vote? Would I march?

Yes. Would I protest and lobby politicians? Yes. Would I try to get petitions and be actively vocal about it? Yes. Would I march into a police line and risk getting beaten? I’m honestly not sure. I want to say yes now, but I’m not sure how I would act in such a situation. Would I risk death? This is even more tricky for me, but perhaps. Then I started to think about those who are disenfranchised today, both in de jure and de facto manners. In a de jure sense, felons are not allowed to vote. Yet there are no mass movements to enfranchise them, although people lobby for their rights, there have not been such mass demonstrations as during the civil rights movement. While I advocate for their enfranchisement, I do not think I would risk my physical health for them in the way I would for enfranchising minorities. In a de facto sense, working class people, people of color, and elders are effectually disenfranchised to an extent. With voting ID laws, unusual hours and (faraway) locations for polling places, and long lines at polls, some people just cannot afford to vote.

If these sorts of situations would produce mass movements where my physical health would be on the line, I think I would risk it. Furthermore, it was very strange for me to try to wrap my head around people who were so openly and publicly bigoted. The mayors and governors were very open and somewhat proud of segregation. Some even said bluntly, “I’m a segregationist.” Yet others tried to mask their bigotry on the grounds of “public safety,” but they failed to recognize that they were failing to protect the safety of all citizens, especially Black citizens. In studying history, no matter the country, it is still sometimes difficult to understand the mindset of these people. And even today, there are people who think like this — not only about race, but about ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, sex, ability, etc. While it rarely happens at MIT, when I step outside of the “bubble”(of MIT) I am overwhelmed by this closed -mindedness.

One of the quotes from the video really struck me, not only in its brevity and bluntness, but also in its truth: “If you’re not free, you’re a slave.”

Finally, I felt a sense of pride in the judicial and legal system when the judge passed down the decision of the people’s constitutional right to march, and the federal government decided to nationalize the State Army when the governor refused to protect the peaceful marchers.

As someone who wants to enter this legal and judicial system for exactly these reasons, I look forward to being able to make such a huge difference in progressive movements from this angle.

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

17.922 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. IAP Design Seminar  
IAP 2013

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.