

## **Divided on Diversity**

**(By Toshio U.-P.)**

Looking back at Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's activism in the years leading up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964—which sought to eliminate discrimination based race, color, religion, sex, or national origin—one should ideally feel inclined to support such efforts to promote a sustainable equality and an environment of inclusion in the world of today. While the word “woke” from “wake up” or “awaken” was originally coined as slang in the 1930s by African Americans seeking to motivate or inspire their enslaved community toward activism, it wasn't until 2017 that the Oxford English Dictionary finally added the term “woke” as signifying “alert to racial or social discrimination and injustice”. While the word continues to be used by anti-discrimination activists through modern online channels such as Twitter, it has more recently been appropriated by scholars, commentators and even politicians of the right, who use the term with negative connotations. For instance, conservative scholar Richard Hanania goes as far as describing wokeness as having “3 central pillars” in its faulty structure, which he thinks should be properly analysed and then gutted. Hanania's recent publication on the origins of woke has since been a rallying point for Republicans in the United States and other political parties of the right, who use his rhetoric to justify massive cut-backs in governmental diversity and equity programs. In a forest of diverse legislation, politics and culture, such a radical approach like clearcutting risks removing too many healthy and vibrant trees, thereby affecting the viability and resilience of the overall ecosystem. While Dr. King's vision of the “American Dream” continues to inspire his followers with its quest to undermine discriminatory legislation like the Jim Crow laws he fought through non-violent means in Alabama, other “woke” communities have since sought to expand the notion of inclusion into the realm of gender, sexual preference, disability and even neurodiversity. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and all of the safeguards and provisions in its wake may feel cluttered and in need of ‘rolling back’ to some, diversity is rarely a neat and tidy model. Community challenges for overall inclusion are sought through toil and activism with small gains made after much sacrifice. For instance, while some are altogether against the inclusion of a Trans gender when selecting candidates for a position in a workplace, a seemingly tidier binary model with only male and female options will in reality create a toxic culture that will result in the workplace decaying from within with its short-lived “anti-woke” values. Inclusion and diversity starts with total representation. If there are four different categories of objects to sort within a box, it is only logical to sort all of the parts accordingly and not leave any outside of the box. While some would prefer through their own biases to leave certain smaller categories out in their own selfish model, better leadership and influence would steer away from such exclusion, understanding the true merits of “woke” diversity.