The Power of Words

There is no single greater freedom than that of the freedom of speech; the simple idea of a world in which one person doesn’t have the right to express their thoughts is not imaginable for those of us who have been born and raised in countries where open dialogue and discussion dominates our daily lives. All around us there are protests and debates, forums and conferences, family reunions that seem more like political rallies, and yet even with all this banter surrounding us, we still seem to forget just how many people live in fear as they remain silent and shelter their opinions and creativity. Just 90 miles south of Florida, there is an island where one may be imprisoned for expressing thoughts that counter those policies of an oppressive government. This silence is reflected in every aspect of Cuban life; from media to literature to politics, the ability to speak one’s mind seems to be missing in action. There are no political parties, the internet is restricted to those who can afford exorbitant usage rates, any literature critical of the government’s ideology is not accessible and from a young age Cuban students are brainwashed to believe that their country’s version of Marxism works, just as Cubans are starving to death or being arrested the next street over. Celebrities boost their status by taking expensive vacations to the tropical and manicured parts of the island, while the common people remain separated and kept just a few miles away. How can we, as a free and democratic country with a significant historical document binding us together, bring about change in countries like Cuba? The answer is simple: we must speak out.

How powerful are words? They have defeated swords and guns, toppled regimes and governments, stirred the pot for massive cultural upheavals that have brought together white and black in school and allowed Indians to gain their independence from a distant empire. There is no weapon on the face of the planet more powerful than words. We use them every day when we write or speak, and for so many of us they have become something that we take for granted. Every time a book is banned because of its’ content or a post is deleted on social media for being “offensive”, our freedom erodes just a little bit more. Fortunately, we are still lucky enough to be members of a society that not only craves knowledge and advancement, but also has the ability to capitalize on opportunities that result in the cultural liberation of others. By making our voices heard, we are able to draw attention to issues that some may not even be aware of. In the case of Cuba, it will take a revolution to reverse the course the country has been taking over the past half-century. If the world comes together to speak out against the type of human rights violations occurring on the island, a concerted effort could take place to free the Cuban people and the government would be under political and economic pressure to make changes. From Cuba to China to North Korea, there are millions of people that find themselves living under oppressive and powerful governments. The problem doesn’t lie with a lack of military action; the problem results from a lack of public concern, which begs the question: how exactly do we go about making our voices heard?

Our words should be used as a catalyst for change, and on an individual level this is a daily task. There are a million different methods and ways to speak out, but none will work unless we actually use them. Authors write, artists draw, bloggers type and presidents lead; every person with an opinion deserves to be heard and understood, whether by visitors to an art gallery or an audience of readers picking up a book. Talking to others about issues does, in fact, count as spreading information; every time you speak with a friend about real world issues, you are both practicing your intellectual freedom and also boosting cultural awareness of the world around us. Lifting or leaving an embargo in place won’t do anything to change the situation on the island of Cuba; until the world becomes aware of what’s happening, these types of situations will continue in different dictatorships and one-party states around the world. In the end, it all boils down to the essential concept of freedom of speech. Our founders knew how important this one fundamental human right was; having the ability to say anything (to an extent) ensures the preservation of the will of the people, and as long as those people are informed and aware, government can act as only a representative. In a world where political correctness and censorship are becoming dominant topics of discourse, Americans must bring to the forefront the importance of our society’s intellectual freedom so that we may once again be in a position to aid in the spread of universal human rights to every person, in every corner of the world.