

A Dream of America with Justice, Equity and Inclusion

On this day commemorating the life of Rev. Martin Luther King, I reflect on his dream of a better America, where the country would be "...true to what you said on paper in the Constitution...honoring the Freedom of Assembly, Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press. All assuring the Constitutional right to protest for what is right!"¹ His words ring true for us today in so many ways. "When people get caught up with that which is right and are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping the outcome short of victory."² In the depths of the civil rights movement in 1962, he described the days of challenge to make America a better nation. His words and his passion for justice roused the conscience of our nation, and the world because he spoke to what is universally recognized. We are more alike as humans than different in race, religion, culture or even political persuasion.

Rev. Martin Luther King lifted up the need for strengthening the moral fiber of society to recognize and act on the racial injustice and poverty as a policy choice and war as an instrument of oppression.

There is a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers.³

This erosion of moral conviction has allowed our country to sink to the hands of a corrupt leadership that destroys the fabric of democracy. We are governed by the unwritten social compact that all are bound by consent to the rule of law., and the assumption that laws passed in a representative democracy operate to protect the public good, the public interest, and the common resources we share as a country. We are now confronted with an administration whose policy focus undermines and deliberately flaunts the rule of law for the benefit of those who contribute enormous amounts of money, and uses power in retribution to any opponents at home or abroad. Outrage has not yet reached the point where the due process of law steps in. When is it enough?

In the crisis point of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King said, "We have been forced to a point where we have to grapple with the problems mankind has failed to grapple with throughout history (racial injustice, poverty and war.) We no longer have a choice but to face the fact that we must have non-violence or non-existence."⁴ I would include in the definition of

¹ Martin Luther King speech to the Memphis Refuse Workers. April 3, 1968.

<https://www.npr.org/2024/02/07/1228320048/black-history-mlk-speeches-martin-luther-king>

² ibid

³ Martin Luther King. Nobel Prize Lecture. Netherlands. December 11, 1964.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/lecture/>

⁴ Martin Luther King speech to the Memphis Refuse Workers. April 3, 1968.

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violence as the destruction of the life support systems of the planet as well as the inhumane treatment of people inflicted upon each other by cruel interpretation of laws and orders.

Martin Luther King talked about his dream after describing the tribulations many had faced in marching to Washington for civil rights:

So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.⁵

I think about the dream of freedom and opportunity that brought so many people to America from all over the world. My own immigrant parents and grandparents, the children born here of immigrant workers, the people fleeing poverty oppression and war, the people seeking to grow and thrive based on equal opportunities offered for education and the assurances of "...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."⁶

Our country has become a barricaded bastion where racial profiling and indiscriminate arrests and deportation take place without due process. The system of processing people who wish to come to America may be terribly inadequate at this time. It may need reform. But, in the interim, we must not destroy our foundational principles in the process of enforcing the law. Adding resources to immigration processing personnel, adding legal assistance for people trying to navigate the immigration process, and supporting people who come here to work and build a better life would be far more effective than prosecuting and terrorizing innocent people, regardless of their citizenship status. Prosecute criminals, by all means, but within the law, with respect for due process and the legal rights of every person, granted under the Constitution, as is the mandate and practice of all trained law enforcement police..

Part of Martin Luther King's dream was for an America where his children and grandchildren would live in "...a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."⁷ We have been acting in the reverse. We have become a country that kills dreams. A country where children are torn from their parents and families are shattered without cause. A country where only the wealthy are deemed worthy of good education, good health care, and opportunities for economic advancement. A country where pardons for heinous crimes can be bought. A country where allies are threatened over a personal grievance of the President. This is not the America my Father fought for!

The division in our society is no accident but a deliberate policy choice perpetrated over decades now. The wealth gap has increased between a smaller and smaller class of

⁵ <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/king.dreamspeech.excerpts.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Declaration of Independence.

⁷ <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/king.dreamspeech.excerpts.pdf>

billionaires and the 98% of people increasingly struggling to make ends meet. This has been the result of policy shifts that keep wages low, amplify wealth for a few, and suppress upward mobility. The concept of shared prosperity is ridiculed. The concept of justice, equity and inclusion has been banned from federal consideration. The concept of protecting public health has been abolished from EPA considerations in favor of the absolute cost of environmental protection to the industry involved. Public lands and resources are up for sale to private industries.

We who came to America to pursue the American Dream, we who still believe in the America where liberty and justice for ALL is real, we who understand that freedom carries responsibility, we must stand up and call for accountability to those who are elected, appointed and hired to operate our government of the People, by the People and for the People. We cannot expect dreams to be put on hold indefinitely. We cannot be satisfied that for some, the American Dream is a mirage shimmering in a desert. We cannot stand silent wringing our hands as our government turns into a dictatorship. We must draw the line of justice, equity and inclusion as our stand for the rising of the true America. We must press for a society where shared prosperity and justice are reality for everyone. The America that inspired so many people over 250 years to bring their hopes, their dreams and their aspirations to this land lives in our hearts.

We must answer the call so eloquently expressed by Martin Luther King:

We must still face prodigious hilltops of opposition and gigantic mountains of resistance. But with patient and firm determination we will press on until every valley of despair is exalted to new peaks of hope, until every mountain of pride and irrationality is made low by the leveling process of humility and compassion; until the rough places of injustice are transformed into a smooth plane of equality of opportunity; and until the crooked places of prejudice are transformed by the straightening process of bright-eyed wisdom.⁸

In Solidarity

Patricia M. DeMarco

Mayor

Borough of Forest Hills, PA

⁸ Martin Luther King. Nobel Prize Lecture. December 11, 1964.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/lecture>