



P E R S P E C T I V E S

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It is the best possible year for...

A time for personal bravery

Who was Martin Luther King, Jr? Why do we celebrate a “MLK Holiday” and is he still relevant in 2022? All great questions. Joyfully, the research to explicate those answers took a full day that I will be grateful for the rest of my life.

Many of us grew up in the Civil Rights era. To the Black community, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a powerful voice of inspiration. To the large majority of white southerners, he was the dark force they feared would upend their Jim Crow world who must be stopped by any means. To J. Edgar Hoover he was “the most dangerous Negro man alive.”

By the time of his death, the majority of Americans saw a man who inspired Blacks and whites alike with his soaring rhetoric, his total conviction to non-violent change, and his willingness to put his own life on the line. He proudly walked in the footsteps of historic civil rights activists like Abraham Lincoln who was shot for the same reason as King: he wanted people of color to be equal and free. Dr. King motivated tens of thousands of us to take a stand on principle even when it could, and did in many cases, cost us dearly including persistent violent beatings and even death. He simply was one of the greatest Americans who ever lived.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist preacher born in Atlanta who devoutly believed in his Christian faith and the principles of non-violence as articulated by his mentor, the extraordinary Mahatma Gandhi. He said his inspiration came from Jesus Christ and his “tactics” from Gandhi. He fervently worked until the moment of his death, at the young age of 39, to create what he called the “Beloved Community.” That term, first coined by philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, represented no lofty utopian goal but rather a “...realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy of and methods of nonviolence,” according to the King Center website run by his youngest child, Dr. Bernice King.

Quoting further, it's explained that the “Beloved Community was a global vision in which all people can share the wealth of the world...where poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it.”

What a vision! What a dream! Yes, it's good to stop and realize that Dr. King stood for, and accomplished far more, than leading the civil rights movement. He was a moral force. A force we need, now more than ever, to heed.

Dr. King was more than an abstract theorist. He knew what was required for us to conquer what he termed the “Triple evils of Poverty, Racism and Militarism.” For King, the only thing new about “poverty” was we could now end it; “racism” stood for all kinds of prejudice – from sexism to apartheid; and “militarism” stood for all the ways one person seeks to impose their will on another through violence – from war to child abuse. To defeat these three evils, he said, takes a nonviolent frame of mind achieved by living his “Six

Principles of Nonviolence”. With the Insurrection of January 6, 2021, fresh in our collective memory, it is worth our time to repeat his Six Principles here:

PRINCIPLE ONE: Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people

PRINCIPLE TWO: Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding

PRINCIPLE THREE: Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Nonviolence holds that suffering for a cause can educate and transform people and societies

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate

PRINCIPLE SIX: Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice

This last principle gave rise to that most famous of Dr. King’s speeches from 1968 at the National Cathedral entitled “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution”, where he re-phrased the 19th-century abolitionist and Unitarian minister Theodore Parke, holding that “We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Dr. King described the “Six Steps of Nonviolent Social Change” to actualize the nonviolent revolution as follows: 1) Information Gathering, 2) Education, 3) Personal Commitment, 4) Negotiation, 5) Direct Action, and 6) Reconciliation.

The reason we celebrate MLK Day as a National holiday on January 17 this year isn’t because Ronald Reagan signed it into law in 1983. It’s because the only solution to the national crisis we currently face that might end in a second Civil War is for the nation to refocus on Dr. King’s wisdom and begin the process of healing and reconciliation.

The Civil Rights movement Dr. King led only succeeded to the extent it did because tens of thousands of people had the courage to demand the political system fix what was “broken” in America’s deeply racist experience. The “demand” for change was accompanied by massive civil disobedience. It was punctuated by sit-ins, starting with the first in 1960, and involving more than 70,000 of us by that year’s end; by the thirteen initial brave Freedom Riders, led by John Lewis; by the jailing and beating of too many to count; and by the infamous March from Selma to Montgomery culminating in the bloody police riot on the Edmund Pettus Bridge where Lewis, again in the lead, was nearly clubbed to death while doing nothing to resist arrest.

Were Dr. King alive, he would say it is time for the personal commitment for millions of us to risk injury or even death in nonviolent “direct action”. He would remind us that the civil rights movement was not successful because some feared injury and death. It was successful for the same reason Gandhi was able to nonviolently liberate India from the British. It was the moral arc bending towards the light of justice.

If we are going to liberate America from Minority Rule, the time is again upon us. We must take to the streets by the millions to preserve our 250-year-old Democratic Republic from becoming an autocratic, despotic banana republic.

That’s why Dr. King is so very relevant. That’s why we celebrate this holiday. Yes, it is the best possible year to remember we cannot survive as a nation of merely “sunshine patriots”.

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