

“Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On, Not a Day Off!”

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*“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”*

These words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are very appropriate on this twenty-first anniversary of the annual memorial to his life and works and the thirteen anniversary of the passage of the King Holiday and Service Act with its theme, “Remember! Celebrate! Act! A day on, not a day off!”

Yes, we should remember Dr. King and those who came before us with their sacrifices of blood, sweat, and, in some cases, their very lives. Their legacy of civil rights is the loom on which our lives are weaved and which has created a beautiful American mosaic that enriches us all. Celebration is certainly in order when we see the changes our nation has made and continues to make toward Dr. King’s dream of a diverse people connected together as one by love. It is only right to remember him as the architect of equality for all. We should honor his memory on this day, but how?

Act! Dr. King said that the principle of love was at the center of his campaign of non-violence, called altruism a creative endeavor, called selfishness destructive, and believed what you are doing for others is an urgent question.

The King Holiday and Service Act, which asks us to use this holiday in service of others, is a reflection of these ideals. Dr. King knew that freedom is a living entity and is fragile. Throughout the ages, from the Pharaoh of Moses’ day to today, tyrants have vanished in the dusts of time and then risen again and again to enslave peoples and take away the civil rights we sometimes take for granted. Ours is the freest country in world history, so we must be especially vigilant. Again, human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable.

Our best defense against falling into a national apathy that could cause us as a people to repeat a reprehensible past begins by following Dr. King’s advice to show compassion for others by serving them. America is made up of each one of us. Our actions affect each other and our nation either positively or negatively. They can also inspire others to repeat our example, just as smiling at someone you pass will cause them to smile back in return.

Acts of volunteerism can strengthen existing bonds with friends, mend broken bonds with our enemies, and create new bonds with others. They can also change the hearts of those still living with the blindness of bigotry, hatred, and ignorance. The choking weeds of intolerance must be vigilantly met today, just as they were during Dr. King's lifetime, with an equal amount of love, caring, and unveering determination. What better day to start this important work than on Dr. King's own holiday – a day off of our job that we can use to turn on others to Dr. King's philosophy with an example of kindness, compassion, and sharing to enhance the lives of our fellow life travelers.

In addition to helping others with the giving of our time and talents, we also help ourselves. Each person's soul is ravenously hungry for a connection with another and we all have an inborn need to help others. Our conscious will tell us this if we only slow down from our everyday distractions and listen.

Brighten up the day of an elderly person with a visit. Feed those less fortunate as you remember your blessings. Mentor a child. Although we may think our act of service is small and insignificant, it can be a precious treasure to the recipient. Remember that the Colorado River created the Grand Canyon over millions of years one drop of water at a time and that the light of the nearest star travels 39.9 trillion kilometers to get to Earth one beam at a time. Great things can come from our simple acts.

How fortunate we have been to be able to see the ideas planted by Dr. King bear the fruits of freedom. America has nurtured them and is keeping his charge well. Dr. King would say, "it's a good start" in regards to where we are now, but there's still much to be done. The road of our accomplishments stretches behind us, but also extends into the unknown future of great human potential for us and untold generations.

It is expressly important that Dr. King's ideas continue to burn brightly and we use this day to further the peace, love, and brotherhood he embodied. Keep Dr. King's moral compass on the path to justice by serving others not just on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, but every day. Starting today, add your own unique, indelible stamp to bring joy into another's life and keep Dr. King's dream not just alive, but thriving.

Dr. King did his part and has taken us this far on the journey. Is it now up to each of us to follow the example of service that Dr. King gave with his sacrifices. Take time on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day to remember the past with gratitude and thanks. Celebrate the potential of the new day and its possibilities. Keep this thought with you by acting in service to change a life to change the world. "Remember! Celebrate! Act! A day on, not a day off!"