

*"Why America **May** Go to Hell."*

The Truth and honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Just the mention of his name causes me to swell with pride, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His strength – nurtured by internal fortitude encourages many in times of trouble and disappointment whether in the past or present. His determination, fueled by what was equitable and what we were promised as American citizens, continues to push those within the Black diaspora well beyond what we can be physically seen. The greatest quality of Dr. King was his innate ability to move people towards faith, that is, the belief in things not seen or yet experienced. In today's world, Black people know, arguably more than most, how important having faith is more than ever. Rev. Dr. King's faith for a better day drove him to fight for others, many of whom he never knew. However, it is the decision and needed collaboration of the American people, particularly white people, as to whether the United States of America can heal from its stained history through efforts surrounding diversity, inclusion, and cultural awareness.

One of Dr. King's quotes that are quite profound to me is, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity". He was born to Christian parents who reared him in the church, thus he had the leaning or propensity to believe that God loved everybody and would want equity, and love, above all else, for His people. The Ebenezer Baptist Church had a history of being the center of the Black community and a beacon of hope. It was common then for white Americans to be taught the benefits of financial literacy/education while receiving opportunities to own and

invest in real estate. During the same time, many Black Americans were simply trying to survive after slavery, the Reconstruction era, and during Jim Crow laws. Dr. King was a witness to what I refer to as *racist terror* (the repeated abuse and maligning of Black people simply because they were Black.) Dr. King knew that he was not granted life, coupled with such gifts and talents, solely for himself.

On the day of Dr. King's death, April 4, 1968, he had just recently divorced himself from President Lyndon B. Johnson due to his inability to make radically progressive changes regarding civil rights. While sitting in his hotel room, Dr. King decided the title for his next sermon, "Why America May go to Hell". Why would a man of faith such as himself say such a thing – had he lost his way? had the dream of an equal and equitable society become a dream differed? These are the thoughts many Americans had after hearing this particular title. This sermon was neither inspiring, loving, nor warm, no. This sermon was true and hinted at the current state of the country back then, and, some could argue, now. The keyword, "may", emphasized the concern that if we as an American people do not begin the work of healing from the racist and prejudiced upbringing that is this country's history while empathizing and supporting those who continue to struggle underneath the heavy foot of oppression, then the soul of our nation will indeed "go to hell". God Bless America.

Dr. King was a man of loving character who poured his all into a nation that yet speaks of him outside of his birthday (which did not become a national holiday until 1983, fifteen years after his death) and the month of February, only referencing one of his many literary speeches time and time again. I believe he died empty – for he gave all that he had while he was here. An icon of justice, he is indeed one of the premier influences in the lives of Black people in America. However, not everyone subscribed to the same mentality as I. Shortly after his iconic "I

have a dream speech”, he was referred to as “*The most dangerous negro in America*” in a 17,000 paged file held by the FBI. The mission of the FBI was to disenfranchise the legitimacy of Dr. King's motives but failed. These false narratives of Dr. King and other African-Americans have traced back to the days of slavery something that civil rights attorney Bryan Stevenson says did not end in 1865 but rather, “...it just evolved”. Just like slavery, such negative stigmas of Black people being violent, dangerous, and unintelligent evolved throughout time and remains just as prominent today. White America was afraid of Dr. King for the same reasons Blacks revered him: he was brilliant, loving, bold, and strategic. During this time, Dr. King provided an alternative narrative contradictory to such stigmas by being charismatic, capable, and setting a solid and consistent blueprint for presenting oneself, whether verbally or physically, like professional attire. His life's work ensured that like-minded others were given opportunities as equitable as possible to their white fellow citizens. Dr. King armed Black Americans with knowledge, which in turn, strengthened their power and bravery.

When considering all that has happened in the years following Dr. King's death, it is important to remember the most important thing and haunting truth about January 18th, now referred to as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day – he did not sacrifice his life, rather, it was stripped from him without any opportunity of justice or vengeance. It is the habit of this country to make history honorable and digestible due to the fear that we may have to look at ourselves through a cracked mirror, essentially, an imperfect reflection, and change what has been our norm for centuries. Again, Dr. King did not sacrifice his life, neither did George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Atatiana Jefferson, or Ahmaud Arbery. Black Lives Matter, and if saying this makes you uncomfortable, you should ask yourself, “If I lived during

the civil rights movement, would I have supported Dr. King?”. Your honest answer may be shocking or hesitant with its forthcoming but one must understand the moral formula that is discomfort breeds growth and proximity breeds empathy. In recognition of his life and efforts, I call us to all grab one another hands, jump into the trenches together, getting our hands and feet dirty together and work to heal our nation. Happy Dr. King day.

Assassinated Civil Rights Leaders.

- 1. Thomas Sankaran- Politician, Burkina Faso, (December 21, 1949 – October 15, 1987)**
- 2. George W. Lee- Civil rights leader, USA (December 25, 1903 – May 7, 1955)**
- 3. Amilcar Cabral- Freedom fighter, Guinea-Bissau, (September 12, 1924- January 20, 1973)**
- 4. Leon Jordan- Politician and civil rights leader, USA (May 6, 1905- July 15, 1970)**
- 5. Sammy Younge Jr.- Civil rights activist, USA (November 17, 1944 – January 3, 1966)**
- 6. James E Chaney- Civil rights worker, USA (May 30, 1943 – June 21, 1964)**
- 7. Malcom X- Civil rights leader, USA (May 19, 1925– February 21, 1965)**
- 8. Patrice Lumumba- Politician, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (July 2, 1925- January 17, 1961)**

- 9. Fred Hampton- Member of Black Panther Party, USA (August 30, 1948 – December 4, 1969)**

- 10. Vernon Dahmer- Civil rights activist, USA (March 10, 1908- January 10, 1966)**

- 11. Agathe Uwilingiyimana- Politician, Rwanda (May 23, 1953- April 7, 1994)**

- 12. Martin Luther King Jr.- Civil rights activist, USA (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968)**

- 13. Lamar Smith- Civil rights worker, USA (1892 – August 13, 1955)**

- 14. Clementa C. Pinckney- Politician, USA (July 30, 1973 – June 17, 2015)**

- 15. Harriette Moore- Civil rights worker, USA (June 19, 1902 – January 3, 1952)**

- 16. Harry T. Moore- Civil rights leader, USA (November 18, 1905 – December 25, 1951)**

- 17. Medgar Evers- Civil rights activist, USA (July 2, 1925 – June 12, 1963)**

- 18. Jimmie Lee Jackson- Civil rights activist, USA (December 16, 1938 – February 26, 1965)**

- 19. Marielle Franco- Politician, Brazil (July 27, 1979- March 14, 2018)**