

Martin Luther King, Jr., a “Committed Life”

(Editor’s Note: Republished as part of the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday.)



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On this day, we celebrate the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who sacrificed his life in the fight for civil rights. Just days after his assassination, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Two score later, Sen. Barack Obama was inaugurated as the 44th president of the U.S., becoming the first African American elected to this office and on Wednesday, Kamala Harris, the nation’s first Black, Asian and female will be sworn in as Vice President.

These historic elections of our first Black President and first Black and Asian woman Vice President were the result of the “committed life” Dr. King worked to leave behind. And his purpose-driven life has been hugely consequential for America and the world.

Two months before his death, when speaking to the congregation at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Dr. King said this is how he wished to be remembered:

“I’d like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I’d like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to

love somebody.

“I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. And I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

“Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major. Say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.”

Dr. King would be proud to see that the “committed life” he left behind has made him a role model for those who are committed to a civil society, and that his strategy of non-violent protest continues to be used effectively to secure civil rights for other marginalized people in the U.S. and globally.



Today's celebration of Dr. King is a reminder that we must continue to be vigilant, vocal and visible in protecting hard won civil rights that still need to be defended in the months and years ahead.

Taking our lead from Dr. King, if we start with the end in mind and determine our life's overarching purpose, it makes the decisions and actions we take going forward even clearer. Importantly, it focuses and galvanizes us to achieve that

which is most important for us to achieve in life.

In his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Dr. King said, “I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe that what self-centered men have torn down men other-centered can build up.”

And, being “other-centered” is the essence of a purpose-driven life, which involves leveraging our greatest talents, expertise and passion in service of others. This is Dr. King’s call-to-action to us when he says, “I believe that what self-centered men have torn down men other-centered can build up.”

Dr. King had a dream, which he shared on countless occasions, including at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Dr. King shared his dream so often that it was no longer just his dream. Today, it is the bright future that most of us envision for all Americans:

“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.’”

About the Author: *After an award-winning PR & Marketing career and co-founding three agencies, Patrice Tanaka started Joyful Planet, working with individuals and organizations to discover and actively live their purpose and unleash greater success, fulfillment and joy in their personal lives, workplaces, and communities. Joyful Planet is Patrice’s vision of 7.9 billion people living their purpose and leveraging their talent, expertise and passion in service of others. Life and*

organizational purpose are the subjects of Patrice's best-selling books, Beat the Curve and Performance360. She has been honored by PRWeek (Hall of Fame inductee), PRSA Foundation (Paladin Award), PRSA (Paul M. Lund Award for Public Service), New York Women in Communications (Matrix Award), among others. Patrice is on the executive board of the Diversity Action Alliance, a PR industry-wide coalition of 15 influential organizations committed to action on diversity, equity and inclusion.

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