

CPCS Honors the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King

How can we, as individuals or in groups, defeat the systemic racism that harms Black people in Massachusetts and across the United States? This question continues, from slavery to the present, reaching a boiling point in these recent years that is fueled by terrible killings at the hands of law enforcement and private individuals, denial of equity across the spectrum of life and mass frustration over the lack of change. There is of course no magic fix, no simple cure and no special moment that will end the manifestations of racism in every facet of life experienced by Black friends, colleagues, families and individuals across every social strata.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King taught us a way, one that led him to make ultimate sacrifice of his life to show what commitment means and how critical it is to the ineluctable need and right for Black people to be free and equal in society. Dr. King's visionary thoughts, his advocacy of nonviolent protest and his strategic focus within the civil rights movement proved that through truth, hearts and minds could be turned away from bias, hatred and fear of Black people, and toward respect and embrace.

In this time, change is challenged by an unrelenting pandemic and threats to our system of democracy that are discouraging, but the need remains for each of us to think and act differently in support of equality for Black people. Should we join or support groups seeking to end hate, can we learn more and collectively leverage our understanding or can we better challenge our own biases and prejudice and live our lives for change? The short answer is yes, we can do these things and so, so much more that can shape the future. Unfortunately, it is too easy for people to forget, for priorities to shift and for indifference or malaise to overcome good thoughts or intentions. A further challenge has evolved in how the MLK holiday has been converted into a day for consumerism on a broad scale, with shopping and buying blurring the opportunities to share in community to honor Dr. King.

Another challenge on this day stems from Dr. King's impact being condensed into sound bites and images from his stirring "I Have a Dream" speech during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. There are dimensions to this good man's life and vision that speak volumes to overcoming loss, doubt and monumental barriers born of racial prejudice and hatred, to the meaning of non-violence and to the relationships he built, bridging people across lines of race, poverty, faith, sexual orientation and so much more. This is the heart of MLK's contribution to society, leading to his receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, among many other accolades, but which also led him to success in a movement that opened doors – doors we are challenged to make wider, more inclusive and more welcoming.

Ultimately, it is in the broadest reflection about this leader that we can grow and not fall into the easy way out that allows change to become elusive, and for frustration to mount and take control over real opportunities for equality. Please consider these thoughts and how you might do one or two things differently in honor of Dr. King and the Black people in our lives who have given so much to the fabric of American life through today, but to whom so much has been denied. Happy Birthday, Dr. King!