

MLK Statement by Rev. Charles Spivey
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What Would Dr. King Say To 2021 America?

Such an honor for me to issue this Martin Luther King, Jr., statement on behalf of the 11,000 members of my union, Local 8888 of the United Steelworkers. Dr. King's birthday (Jan. 15) and the federal holiday in his honor (3rd Monday in January) are more than dates on the calendar. For us, they open the opportunity to reset America's moral compass and make justice the new normal.



January 15th is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. Monday, Jan. 18, is King Holiday.

America has been plunged into an abrupt and perilous reckoning with violent domestic terrorism, fueled by racism and a twice-impeached president, who turned his back on the coronavirus pandemic to flip an election.

As the death toll from covid-19 has skyrocketed to an unimaginable level in America, where is the national outrage over the immoral leadership from the current administration? While nearly 70 million Americans — families, seniors, children — go hungry every day, who sees their desperation and daily struggle to survive? Who comforts the sister who has lost 5 family members during this deadly pandemic?

Indeed, America urgently needs a moral reset. And these are questions I believe Dr. King would ask of us if he was here today. As a fractured nation, we have reached a transformative moment.

Either we fight for a society where all would benefit and prosper or we surrender to hate and privilege and bigots who want to push us back into the segregated 1950s.

At an urgent moment like this, I wonder what Dr. King would say to the America of 2021. I believe Dr. King would say black lives do matter. He would say the names of Trayvon Martin, and Michael Brown, and Sandra Bland, and Admud Arbrey, and Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and other unarmed victims of police shootings.

Those who protest today in support of Black Lives Matter are protesting in the spirit of Dr. King. His daughter, the Rev. Dr. Bernice King, said recently that she believes her father would have been very proud of the protestors who have taken to the streets in the aftermath of George Floyd's public killing.

Dr. King understood that only social movements like the civil rights movement and the labor movement could muster the resolve and the power necessary to bring about peaceful change in America. We saw that power and unstoppable will displayed so courageously on Election Day in November and again on January, 6, when millions of Black voters in Georgia risked their health and defied suppression tactics to put Joe Biden in the White House and send Rev. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff to the U.S. Senate as true fighters for the people.

But Dr. King also knew victories in the voting booth would mean little if candidates were not held accountable after Election Day. That's why he advised labor unions to stay engaged in community organizing — to make sure the voices of the poor and working class communities could not be ignored.

Dr. King was a believer. He believed in the promise of a “beloved community,” which he gave his life to create. He said it was already enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Two weeks before his tragic assassination, Dr. King said this: “If a man does not have a job or an income, at that moment you deprive him of life. You deprive him of liberty. And you deprive him of the pursuit of happiness”

So, today, we offer Dr. King what he has asked of us. A relentless commitment to go forward, painful step by painful step. Creating a new normal of social justice. Believing that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness will ultimately be true for all Americans.