

# SHIFTING TIDES: A CLARION CALL FOR INCLUSION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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I would like to begin by recognizing that this is a celebration. Although only thirty-two years old, Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a celebration that not only commemorates, but has come to embody, all of civil rights history: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), and the 1978 revelation concerning Blacks and the priesthood.

While my message this evening will primarily focus on the symbolism of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision during the summer of 1965, I will look to create wider pathways of open discussion that will hopefully be fruitful, yet direct, and touch on the core of an unfulfilled dream. Therefore, I will be bold and attempt to demonstrate the strength of and respect we should have toward all civil rights activists—past and present—that have and continue to sacrifice more than I can ever imagine for *the* cause.

First, let me state a fact: systemic problems require systemic solutions. The twenty-first century has not freed us from the racial and social injustices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Second, I am not here to over-dramatize or overstate this deleterious condition that plagues so many areas in American life (e.g., poverty, economic disparities, and racial violence); however, the majority of African Americans

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today continue to solidly occupy the social and professional margins of the “land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Since 1965, King’s dream has been a contested one at best, and at worst, a perennial nightmare. This has caused the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to remain unrealized for the significant majority of Black Americans. True justice *must* be a reality for all of God’s children. Therefore, “inclusion” must be the calling card of this new and progressive civil rights era/movement.

Martin Luther King asserted that “it would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of [this very] moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. . . . Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.”<sup>2</sup> Colin Kaepernick’s autumn 2016 protest has proved less productive in bringing about the freedom and equality that King represents. It has ultimately shown that the United States is still not prepared to recognize the need for social change and justice, placing many citizens in a difficult position: searching for much-needed shade and protection from what was a harsh summer of discontented minorities facing oppression and violence. Similar to King, who fought for equal and fair relationships between all people, especially the oppressed and disadvantaged, Kaepernick, too, has not rested until people of color are justly treated as full American citizens, which is why this time feels so tumultuous to so very many. “The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge,” King concluded.

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2. “I Have a Dream,” address delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Aug. 28, 1963, The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>.

Will you be a cultural arbiter to change this tide? Change, but more specifically, inclusion, within an organization doesn't happen by default; issues of injustice must be addressed swiftly, systematically, and rigorously. Institutions cannot merely opt to face these issues; they ought to do far more than take the cover off the pool. They ought to drain the very systems that filled the reservoirs of abusive patterns of behavior and created an atmosphere where justice and inclusion sank to abhorrent levels.

Many times I have been asked by white students, "What can we do to help and make a difference in the fight for racial and social justice?" "What can we do to bring about positive changes when the public discourse surrounding race is so intense, and emotionally and politically charged?" I would caution us not to reduce or sanitize the memory of Dr. King: Remember, he was seen as a dangerous, bold, and radical humanist for a just society.

My response: stop tiptoeing around the subjects of race, inequality, and inclusion. Many well-intentioned white people in this country do not understand how the deeply rooted systems of racism and inequality function. Remember that you are *the* beneficiaries of a deeply entrenched system of racial inequality and oppression. So to begin the healing process, or at least be a greater antibiotic for the ancient wounds of white supremacy and racial violence, a good place for white people to start is with abandoning their collective innocence. White supremacy was invented by, and designed for, white people. This *peculiar*, and enduring, racial and social benefit has been handed down through generations of whites. The work of dismantling this social structure is, and will continue to be, a difficult task. Nevertheless, hundreds of social justice advocates have addressed critical elements of racial and cultural injustice that progressive communities can look to as ethical templates for propagating greater inclusion.

I believe that progressive white American communities have taken bold measures that have come to serve as engines of racial and social

equity: for example, the immediate removal of the statues and names of white supremacists in city and town squares, the immediate removal of the names of bigots and oppressors such as Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and other prominent US and religious leaders from university and college buildings. Progressive white communities must dissolve barriers that deliberately keep schools, churches, neighborhoods, law enforcement, and local governments, even in 2018, artificially “white.”

Furthermore, directly confront people—friends, family, roommates, and colleagues—who make comments born from a belief that white skin is some default setting or somehow synonymous with being a “true” or first American. Progressive white communities must not “fear to do good,” which means digging into the buried past (no matter how painful) and seriously investigating those questions that many comfortable white people hope and pray that no one will ever ask, specifically regarding how his or her community’s affluence took shape and flourished.

The wounds inflicted on many minority communities by whites are extensive and traumatic! It is naïve to suggest that the process of healing wounds from centuries will occur suddenly or without complication. Acts of public commemoration, remembrance, and atonement—such as this one—should never be seen as the end of our country’s public discourse, but rather, a way to finally begin a healthy conversation. Further, this will, in no uncertain terms, foster an atmosphere conducive to long-term systemic solutions. This is only possible in progressive-minded environments that are not fueled by elitists and passive-aggressive behavior.

I challenge you to get off the bench of social inactivity and go on the offensive! Stop saying to yourself, “I’m good, I don’t need to concern myself with injustice; it’s never going to happen to me; no one in my circle is prejudiced.” I’ve heard this from so many BYU students. Worse still, some attempt to speak for people of color with absolutely no historical knowledge of the plight of marginalized and underrepresented groups.

I challenge you to hasten social justice! I dare you to do so! Hastening racial and social equity *is* the work of God; simply “seeing” others through his eyes is not enough; we must also *treat* all his children as he would. This is at the center of King Benjamin’s message of service: we must be active stewards in setting the proverbial table of equality for the downtrodden, the widowed, and the less fortunate.<sup>3</sup>

Let us cease to be reactionary as so many people in positions of influence are and more proactive like our Father in Heaven who has established the correct standard of action and focused leadership. He is not reactionary, he never has been and never will be, and those who are, are not true hearers of his vision and message of divine inclusiveness.

In 2006, then Church president Gordon B. Hinckley declared, “no man who makes disparaging remarks concerning those of another race can consider himself a true disciple of Christ. Nor can he consider himself to be in harmony with the teachings of the Church. Let us all recognize that each of us is a son or daughter of our Father in Heaven, who loves all of His children.”<sup>4</sup> With this declaration, President Hinckley officially endorsed the guiding principle of “inclusion” not only among Latter-day Saints but also among all God’s children! If that was not clear enough, in early 2012, the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints unequivocally condemned racism, which includes any and all past racism by individuals both inside and outside the Church.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, cultures that foster beliefs of perceived racial superiority and social and cultural inferiority will always fail to gain full membership in the Lord’s kingdom.

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3. See Mosiah 2.

4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Need for Greater Kindness,” Apr. 2006, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2006/04/the-need-for-greater-kindness?lang=eng>.

5. “Church Statement Regarding ‘Washington Post’ Article on Race and the Church,” LDS Newsroom, Feb. 29, 2012, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/racial-remarks-in-washington-post-article>.

So, are you like unto Captain Moroni? “Yea, verily, verily I say unto you, if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto [Captain] Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” (Alma 48:17). Will you fight against the evils of racism and for principles of inclusion and equality? When I look at you can I apply these very words? Have you lived up to expectation and provided hope in a tumultuous world? Or have you allowed the moment to pass?

Will your life reflect and serve as a warning for good to those who seek to fulfill the dream of Dr. King or serve as a cautionary tale, similar to the lives of Laman and Lemuel?

Are you metaphorically “A City Upon a Hill” as the Puritan leader John Winthrop described to the emigrants on the *Arbella* as they embarked to create the first settlement in New England? Are you a standard-bearer of safety and inclusion for others to find peace and harmony in these socially tumultuous times?

If you are, is your light safely guiding the many who are trapped in the all-consuming quicksand of racial and social injustice?

Make a declaration to yourself:

Declare all-out war that you will not be allergic to extinguishing hatred and bigotry.

Declare all-out war that you will bring hope into the lives of others, that you will no longer be a liability to those striving for greater equality.

Declare all-out war that you “fear not to do good,” that you will face fear with faith.

Declare all-out war that you will live a principle-centered life, one that promotes justice and allows for freedom to ring uninterrupted.

I dare you to live a life of impeccable integrity, and not one of convenience. I dare you to live a life above reproach and take full responsibility for your actions. *Right now* is your awakening. *Right now* is the urgency of *now*! It is unacceptable to live as a mediocre member of society, one

who simply defaults on the words and promises of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence by failing to acknowledge white supremacy.

By your own actions, you will either validate white supremacy and social inequality, or not. Dr. King proved that in our most trying times, God is there, yet he is quiet. He has not abandoned us; he is watching us, and we are proving to him whether or not we are ready. You cannot simply be willing; you must act!

Don't let others hold you back from pursuing charitable and just activities because of their personal feelings! The scriptures make no mention of associated promises based on one's personal feelings; however, with every principle there is an associated promise (e.g., Moroni 10, D&C 89). On the final day, it will only be *you* standing before the judgment bar of God, not mommy, not daddy, no one else. Just you! Can the world count on you to never abandon those most in need? Will you be able to say, "not on my watch!"

Stop looking to others for answers. Look to God. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1: 5–6). Find the answers yourself! Often it is those who are closest to us that misguide us because they use cultural or traditional ways of evaluating life and interpreting the word of God, which typically are misinformed and incorrect, so be very careful.

This doesn't mean you can't seek guidance, but decide today that it will be you and only you who will retain responsibility and accountability for your own actions in breaking ground to pave the way for more extensive inclusion and social equity.

Again, Dr. King looked forward to a day of perfect justice. He looked forward to a day when issues such as race and status would fail to divide us. His hope and vision were that God's multi-ethnic family would unite together in spite of our differences.

In closing, as devout followers of Christ, you are each blessed and highly favored. The Redeemer's atoning sacrifice is what gives us all hope;

it stabilizes our faith and cultivates our trust in the unifying message of our Eternal Father. I finally challenge each of you this evening to be democratic torchbearers of inclusion and social justice, ready to stand tall during the most severe times of challenge and controversy.

We do not have the luxury to look the other way or bite our tongues to spare the comments or feelings of bigots, sexists, and racists; we cannot further silence the minority through inaction! We are too gifted, too educated, profoundly fortunate, and favored of God to do so. Therefore, the time is *now*! So, will you continue to allow the flickering embers of injustice to flourish or will your actions extinguish the flames of intolerance?