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January 15, 2021

MLK Day Edition:

**Building the
Beloved Community**



**“We still have a choice today:
nonviolent coexistence or violent co-
annihilation. We must move past
indecision to action.”**

– Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King



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International

For Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Day this year, we reflect on his vision of a Beloved Community and discuss how it relates to our world today. Many of the impediments to the achievement of MLK's dream persist, among them economic injustice, racial discrimination, militarism, and the threat of nuclear war.

He believed that embracing our common humanity instills us with the potential to overcome all manner of adversity and become a more harmonious and peaceful global community.

The unprecedented cooperation and scientific collaboration over the past year as we battle COVID-19 is a testament to collective human capabilities. How can we harness this vigor to prevent nuclear annihilation and climate collapse?

Taking inspiration from MLK and his legacy, this edition of our *Making Every Day Earth Day* (MEDED) series focuses on particular essential elements and tools we need to

manifest a collective destiny based on inclusion and non-violence and move back the hands of the Doomsday Clock.

MLK's [Beloved Community](#) is a global vision of people led by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood with faith that love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred, and peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

The core value of the quest for the Beloved Community is agape love, which is love seeking to preserve and create community. MLK said, "Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes" and "makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both."

One expression of agape love in the Beloved Community is justice for all people. MLK felt that justice could not be parceled out to individuals or groups; rather, it is the birthright of every human being in the Beloved Community. In this vision, human decency does not tolerate poverty, hunger, homelessness, racism, or any form of discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice; international disputes are resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries instead of military power.

MLK recognized that conflict is an inevitable part of human experience. However, he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully, and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, needs to erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with the reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

As he said in a speech at a victory rally following the announcement of the U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery's buses, "the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. This type of understanding goodwill will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men."

The barriers to realizing a beloved community are many, and can feel intractable. Congress not only fails to represent the majority support for radical policies like the Green New Deal and universal healthcare, it actively opposes them. They are aided by a media landscape in which a few corporate conglomerates own 90% of news organizations, and a social media landscape which silos and divides us to such a degree that many question whether, despite their clear potential, they are a net negative force on democracy and social cohesion. Economic inequality and poverty sap people's energy and resources, while gentrification and the militarisation of the police serve to atomise and control individuals and communities, which inhibit the growth of an alternative vision.

Nevertheless, we have seen green shoots of hope. Spontaneous protest and that mother of invention—necessity—have seen the wonders of modern communications technology utilized for an emergent good that would have been difficult to predict. For example, the Occupy movement spread to over 90 countries within two weeks, with innovative tactics and practical help to spread virally around the world. In disaster relief, too, the power of networks and autonomous organizations has been glimpsed, as in the unofficial yet most effective response to Hurricane Sandy in New York: OpSandy. Covid-19 has also been a catalyst for change, leading to a broad acknowledgment of the need to #RecoverBetter, as described in our [first edition of MEDED](#). (August 1, 2020)

Meanwhile, Big Tech appears to have accepted responsibility for its part in our current collective predicament, though the idea of Facebook and Google taking a more active role in the moderation of communication hardly instills confidence. While they may be taking steps to disrupt plans for white nationalist violence and insurrection, it is sadly inevitable

that an increase in censorship and surveillance will fall equally, if not harder, on those fighting systemic injustice.

The lack of democratization and accountability within the media means we must look to new models and platforms to connect the local to the global—to encourage and facilitate more respectful and constructive conversations, and develop a robust sense of common purpose and solidarity. At a global scale, this will mean looking beyond the borders of the U.S, and the English language even, and embrace with an open mind those who cry for peace, against which popular culture has long propagandized.

In 2019, over 1000 participants from 95 countries [met in Cuba](#) to discuss U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Organized by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), the meeting brought together a diverse group of organizations (including the MLK Memorial Centre), as well as activists, peasants, politicians, intellectuals, workers, women, and indigenous leaders. The event sought to deepen international solidarity with Cuba and their fight against the U.S. economic blockade and [insist on](#) protecting both people and the planet from the dangers of imperialist capitalism.

Building on this movement, the World Conference Against Imperialism was held in Caracas, Venezuela in 2020, although travel restrictions enforced by the U.S. ultimately [hindered many](#) from attending in person. Within the text of the conference's [final declaration](#) is the conclusion that militarism and capitalism are grave dangers to humanity. The demand "to build a more just international order that...allows the development of social inclusion and justice policies to overcome the enormous social and economic inequalities that prevail among the nations of the world."

At a local scale, we need organizations that elevate communities, not individuals. BLM co-founder and community activist Alicia Garza [learned this](#) as the movement she helped create morphed into something commodified and sanitized, leading her to step back and focus on real on-the-ground community organizing. Garza grew frustrated by the way social media has allowed "celebrity activists" to chase followers instead of justice, and how many are still "looking for the [next] Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when, actually, the leadership of movements today looks more like Lena Waithe and Laverne Cox." This is no longer the time of Great Men, however great they may be. Today is the time of humanity in its full diversity: black women, LGBTQ communities, indigenous peoples, everyone. To not recognize that is to miss it happening in real-time.

"I, like a lot of people just as humans, especially being black in America, I've been experiencing a lot of trauma...as humans continue to let black people suffer...I've been emotionally debilitated, but I got an opportunity to get back into the studio to talk about or to create lyrics that... keep us moving forward and remind us that things are changing."

[Song: "Turntables" by Janelle Monáe](#)

-- Janelle Monáe (September 8, 2020) [Variety](#)

Black Lives Matter (BLM)

From May until August of last year, an estimated 20 million people marched for Black lives in the U.S. at over 7,500 protests. BLM became the largest movement in our nation's history; in its diversity, many have seen a manifestation of MLK's vision, a seed from which real change can grow through non-violent means.

However, it is important to differentiate between BLM the organization, and BLM the movement, and in so doing, learn an important lesson about the challenge facing any

emergent movement that truly threatens the status quo. When Michael Brown was shot by a police officer in Ferguson in 2014, the resulting protests elevated "Black Lives Matter" into the public consciousness. As the local community came together to organize and educate each other, another group sought to elevate BLM further as a professional organization that could work nationally with the media, politicians, and corporations keen to be seen as responsive to questions of racial justice. Six community leaders from the former [wound up dead](#) in suspicious circumstances, whilst the latter's social media leaders became icons.

KRS-One is a hip-hop legend, and in this track titled "Murder We Just Saw" from his new album "Between Da Protests". It showcases a powerful and increasingly-held perspective on the likelihood of violent systemic change.

[Murder We Just Saw](#)

The conditions fuelling the BLM protests that broke out in May of last year have only gotten worse since. While it's hopeful that radical ideas like heavily defunding police forces and redirecting money to social uplifting and welfare became part of public discourse, there is very little appetite for anything approaching this particular demand within the halls of power. Meanwhile, the threat of fascism appears to have significantly ratcheted up in the wake of Trump's election defeat; and with the worrying prevalence of white nationalist belief among US police forces, the forecast for spring really does not look good.

The violence seen at many of the protests generated much debate in public discourse, with many people shocked by videos of heavily armored police using batons, teargas, and flash grenades on peaceful protestors. Where violence was mutual, the resulting property damage was inevitably sensationalized and demonized by opponents and condemned by others who had much more to say to Black people about "optics" than they did to the police. Such "moderates" were a problem for MLK too. He called those who were more devoted to order than justice the "great stumbling block" to freedom.

MLK's nonviolent principles were born of morality *and* reason, judging that nuclear weapons meant that humanity's options were now either nonviolent change or co-annihilation. While he acknowledged that violence had been used successfully for liberation in the past, he also saw how it perpetuated a cycle of violence that continued to his day.

The scale of the task facing nonviolent movements right now is even more daunting than it was in MLK's time, with the fear of nuclear weapons joined by untenable levels of accelerating inequality, climate change, and mass extinction. The scale of the *ask* is correspondingly vast: to have faith in our society's capacity to realize an unprecedented mode of nonviolent systemic change in the short time we have left to avert fascism and irreversible climate change.

"We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts."

--Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stokely Carmichael once said, "In order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience. The United States has none". For non-violent change to succeed, and we must still try, we must become that conscience and follow MLK's lead in refusing to be drawn

to judge the direct actions of the oppressed. Similarly, we must not perpetuate the role of "moderates," identified by MLK, all the way to co-annihilation.

While we remember the generations of peaceful efforts already attempted, we may also have to recognize that nonviolence will not be enough. In the words of John F. Kennedy, "Those that make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable." We need to keep our focus on those with the power to force change on *their* methods of societal, economic, and political control. They are the ones with the ability to *choose*.

In the spirit of MLK, work to create networks of mutual aid. Get out into your community. Organize your workplaces. Create networks of mutual aid. Use this unprecedented social and technological environment to force peaceful systemic change and usher in the emergence of a beloved community.

Events—MLK Day 2021

"Where Do We Go From Here?" Documentary Film Festival and Webinar – January 15th–18th

For this year's King Holiday, the Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University will host a free, [four-day webinar and film festival](#), from the evening of Jan. 15 through Jan. 18, 2021. The festival will feature over 15 documentaries as well as musical performances and panel discussions that speak to Dr. King's unanswered question: "Where do we go from here?" The webinar will take place throughout the weekend via Zoom with the institute's director Dr. Clayborne Carson, who will speak with registrants on a variety of subjects [Register here](#).

Fallon Forum MLK Day Program with Dr. Maureen McCue and Dr. David Drake of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) – January 18th, 2:15 pm (CST)

The discussion will include the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entry into force on January 22nd, and PSR efforts to "ban the bomb."

Visit [The Fallon Forum](#) website for information on how to listen to this radio program.

2021 King Holiday Observance Beloved Community Commemorative Service – January 18th, 11:30 am - 2:45 pm CST

This commemorative service is the culminating program of The King Center's weeklong celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and legacy. This event, with keynote speaker Bishop TD Jakes, will be live-streamed on multiple platforms, including Facebook and The King Center web page. [Register here](#).

"Recognizing Dr. King's Vision of a Beloved Community" – January 18th, 1 pm CST

This year, the Milwaukee-based Martin Luther King Justice Coalition will celebrate its twentieth Annual Justice Gathering via Zoom. This year's event honors, among others, "the Great Gatherings for Black Lives Matter and the diverse marches to end police violence brought together black, brown, white, old and young, gay and straight by the tens of thousands across the country and around the world to demand justice and respect for our Black brothers and sisters." The celebration will include speakers, a compilation of video footage from past events, and music performed by local actors and musicians. [Register here](#).

African American Museum of Iowa's Martin Luther King JR. Celebration – Monday, January 18, 2021, at 7 pm CST. (Cedar Rapids, IA) \$1 general public admission; Free for members and children under five.

This year's annual celebration will be an evening of learning, with music and reflections. Visitors can explore the museum's two current exhibits: "[Endless Possibilities](#)" and "[Unwavering: 21st Century Activism.](#)"

The latter of these is open through August 7, 2021. It examines how BLM and #MeToo movements are entwined in the lives of African Americans throughout the country, with a special focus on events that have sparked activism in Iowa. Visitors learn how technology has shaped modern movements built on the work of earlier black activists. They also have the opportunity to reflect on ways to create positive change in their own communities.

Please note that all visitors over the age of two are required to wear a face-covering and capacity in all areas of the museum is currently limited. More information about the museum's current [visitor health and safety guidelines](#).

"Beyond the Dream: A Call to Conscience" – January 22nd, 4-6 pm CST

This Veterans for Peace MLK Day webcast will feature speakers, music, and a round table discussion focused on remembering Dr. King's legacy to stand up and organize for a better today and tomorrow - not just on his birthday but every day. Topics covered will include the intersectionality of people's struggles to include addressing racism, heterosexism, poverty, male supremacy, and nuclear weapons.

January 22nd, 2021 was chosen for this special edition of *Stand Down: Veterans For Black Lives Webinar Livestream* as it is the date that the UN has chosen to take a stand against nuclear weapons - and this was also a message of Dr. King's call for people to mobilize and organize for change. [Register here](#).

Learn More

[The King Center](#) [website]

["Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Legacy"](#) [webpage] *Veterans for Peace*

["Black Lives Matter's Alicia Garza: 'Leadership today doesn't look like Martin Luther King'"](#) by Arwa Mahdawi (October 20, 2020) *The Guardian*

[2020 Doomsday Clock Announcement](#) (January 23, 2020) *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*

["Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Beloved Community"](#) by Gabrielle Dean (January 21, 2019) *Johns Hopkins University*

["Remembering Martin Luther King Jr.'s work to end the nuclear arms race"](#) by William Lambers (January 17, 2019) *The Des Moines Register*

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Physicians for Social Responsibility - Iowa Chapter



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