

January 15, 2019

## **A Birthday Wish for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.!**

### **Celebrate a National Day of Racial Healing with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation**

*By Thurman V. White, Jr., Chairman and CEO, Progress Investment Management Company*

Today is the birthday of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Although Dr. King's Holiday is celebrated on Monday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, today is his actual birthday. Birthdays are always a time to celebrate – *Happy Birthday Dr. King!* In Dr. King's case his birthday also compels us to reflect and re-commit.

I must admit as a teen growing up in racially segregated Oklahoma City in the tumultuous 1960's, I didn't fully appreciate the many dimensions of Dr. King's civil and human rights leadership. Like many young African Americans of that era I was torn between the more militant Black Power ideas of Stokely Carmichael and others (and later the Black Panthers) vs. Dr. King's non-violent civil disobedience. While I admired Dr. King's gospel-based oratory and shared in the racial pride of his Nobel Prize, I felt his methods were often too timid and lacked boldness. In the early 1980's as a newly minted young federal government attorney in Washington, D. C., I took a day off from work on a brutally cold and snowy January 15<sup>th</sup> to join many thousands of others in the streets. We marched to the rhythms of Stevie Wonder's "Happy Birthday" tune to urge then President Reagan to make Dr. King's birthday a national holiday. But even then, I still didn't fully understand the scope of Dr. King's impact upon America. In fact, it's only been later in my adulthood that I've appreciated how much courage, discipline and strategic focus drove Dr. King's organizing. And it's only most recently, as I've matured spiritually, that I recognize the prophetic visionary nature of Dr. King's social justice goals and philosophy – especially in the face of hostile White supremacists and reactionary politicians. The Civil Rights movement and Dr. King's legacy resulted in, among other things, landmark legislation – the 1964 Civil Rights and the 1965 Voting Rights Acts. This legal framework provided and still provides today, 50 years after King's assassination, the foundation upon which many tangible societal improvements have occurred in the U. S. And these have positively impacted millions of people – including me, my family and Progress Investment Management Company (now near its 29<sup>th</sup> birthday in June).

Dr. King's legacy must be acknowledged by those of us in business today in our industry. Dr. King's fight for equal opportunity for all is largely the basis upon which we advocate for greater diversity, equity and inclusion in financial services and investment management. The opportunities for diverse and emerging managers, and women/minority-led businesses, we enjoy today bear witness to how impactful and sustainable Dr. King's views are for our world. What I didn't understand as a teen is how the more secular and militant views of the 1960's could not withstand over time the onslaught of racism, militarism and economic injustice. But what wins in the end is simply hope, faith, love and the power of the human (and Holy) spirit to inspire change – in systems and in the thinking of people of goodwill. What also persists is the responsibility we share to help others – especially the least and the left out.

One of my favorite Dr. King quotes is this:

***“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is what are you doing for others”?***

On Dr. King’s birthday, let us celebrate his life and legacy. But let us not be complacent. As we reflect on Dr. King’s impact upon our world, let us also reflect upon and re-commit ourselves, and our firms, to offer hope and provide meaningful opportunities to others – employees, interns and students we mentor, vendors and business partners, and of course our clients. Let us also re-commit to make a positive impact in our communities through our charitable giving, civic engagements and volunteer initiatives, and in our Country and in our world. Dr. King’s question is an urgent call to action as well as a metric to measure our own value(s). AUM and earnings growth are important business measurements. But measuring how much we change people’s lives for the better is an equally important way to evaluate our individual and business leadership.

One of our Progress clients, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, has begun an annual process to celebrate and honor Dr. King’s legacy – Declaring a National Day of Racial Healing as part of its Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation initiative. This year, the Kellogg Foundation and others are celebrating the National Day of Racial Healing on January 22, 2019 (the day after Dr. King’s national holiday). We can’t think of a better way to wish Dr. King a happy birthday than to join with the Kellogg Foundation and others throughout the U. S. next week to honor Dr. King through our service to others and the various ways to experience a National Day of Racial Healing. And truly, any day is a good day for racial healing, so our attention to this important initiative shouldn’t be limited only to January 22.

You will find information about the Kellogg Foundation celebration, and ways to participate in your own local communities at the Kellogg Foundation site: [www.healingourcommunities.org/day-of-racial-healing.com](http://www.healingourcommunities.org/day-of-racial-healing.com). Please tag any of your activities with #HowWeHeal.

Happy Birthday, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We celebrate your life and legacy by recommitting ourselves to helping others. May your spirit live eternally in our work, lives and service.

**\*If I Can Help Somebody** (The rendition of this old Spiritual by Mahalia Jackson was one of Dr. King’s favorite songs)

*If I can help somebody, as I pass along,  
If I can cheer somebody, with a word or song,  
If I can show somebody, that he's travelling wrong,  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*

*My living shall not be in vain,  
Then my living shall not be in vain  
If I can help somebody, as I pass along,  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*

*If I can do my duty, as a good man ought,  
If I can bring back beauty, to a world up wrought,  
If I can spread love's message, as the Master taught,  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*