



RECOGNITIONS

A Letter Honoring Dr. King's Legacy

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Today, the Barnes & Thornburg family will take a break from the business of law to reflect on the accomplishments and sacrifices of the once in a lifetime transformative leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many will simply treat this day as just another day off. Given the holiday hangover and less than ideal weather in most of the cities in our firm's footprint, I understand your propensity to revel in the reprieve from the minutia of a typical Monday in the office. That said, as the honored recipient of the firm's 2018 Camille B. Conway Diversity Award, I have been afforded the opportunity to address you – my B&T family across the nation. This clarion call, asking all to dig deeper and honor Dr. King through action is my humble offering.

There is an undeniable temptation to draw inspiration or subject from the text of Dr. King's famed "I Have a Dream" speech or "Letter from Birmingham Jail", whenever an opportunity arises to reflect about his amazing legacy. Surprisingly, I resisted and instead searched every book I own that even mentions Dr. King's name, looking for direction. I even watched some films addressing the civil rights struggle of old and the injustices that have become common place for many of us in the 21st century. Ultimately, it was a fleeting reference to Dr. King in our fraternity's history book that led me to the foundation of my remarks.

On a Saturday evening in August 1956, in the wake of an historic victory in the Montgomery bus boycott, Dr. King attended a banquet in celebration of The Golden Anniversary of Alpha Phi Alpha, Fraternity, Inc., where he would receive our fraternity's prestigious "Alpha Award of Honor" for his leadership in the cause of first class citizenship for all mankind. After taking the podium, Dr. King delivered a keynote address

entitled, "The Birth of a New Age" (which eerily sounds like he time traveled from the future to prepare his audience to overcome many of the same issues we face as a nation today). Dr. King remarked that those living in the 20th Century were privileged to live in one the most momentous periods of human history. He suspected that some would disagree and consider the pervasive racial tensions from the tail end of the Jim Crow era indicative of retrogression as opposed to progressing. True to the form of a southern Baptist preacher, Dr. King alleviated the skepticism of those struggling to believe with a simple, yet profound sentence:

"It is both historically and biologically true that there can be no birth or growth without birth and growing pains."

Next, he demonstrated growth and the birth of a new age by reminding his listeners that even the Supreme Court of our nation had grown from the inhumanity of the "Dread Scott Decision" in 1857 (which declared people of color non-citizens and merely property) into the Court that unanimously ended the 58 year run of the infamous "Separate but Equal Doctrine" in 1954. Dr. King then challenged his audience, in spite of the growing pains of desegregation, to transition in the new age where people of all colors would be united in their quest for freedom, justice, and equality by: (i) rising above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns, with a broader concern for all humanity; (ii) preparing ourselves in every field of human endeavor; and (iii) entering the new age without bitterness.

Dr. King's words ring as true now as they did in 1956. As such, I challenge each of you (us) to emulate the tenacity of Dr. King, and remain strategically focused on obtaining freedom, justice, and equality for all. It will not be easy. Growth takes time and there will be setbacks along the way. In spite of those setbacks, we must all have a broader concern for the issues that plague our fellow man. Without broad support, none of our individual quests for justice and equality can be sustained. Additionally, we must be the best at whatever we are. In the words of Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, "whatever you do, strive to do it so well that no man living and no man dead and no man yet to be born could do it any better." Progress is impossible if we are unwilling to put in the hard work today to face the challenges of tomorrow. Finally, more than ever before, we must resist the temptation to perpetuate the narrow-mindedness of the past. Instead, we must conquer our fear of those things we perceive to be foreign or strange with a love that is forgiving and understanding of all humanity.

In closing, I remind you that Dr. King's legacy of sacrifice extends beyond the work he did in the black community. Dr. King marched with white auto workers in Detroit, linked arms in solidarity with Mexican farm workers in California, and died on the eve of his greatest cause - the "Poor People's Campaign." He used his gift of leadership to help all who were downtrodden. In that vein, I challenge each of you, on this MLK Day, to utilize the great resources of your education and wealth to help our respective communities "emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daylight of freedom and justice."

Happy MLK Day!!!