

Ambassadors of Hope~ Letter From Birmingham Jail~A Call To Action By Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 1/19/2020

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On April 16, 1963 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. penned the now famous letter from Birmingham Jail on the margins of a smuggled newspaper while in solitary confinement. He was writing in response to an article by eight white clergy who denounced Dr. King's protest movement as "unwise and untimely" in a published piece called "A Call to Unity". In the article, the White Clergy recommended that "Negro Leadership"/Dr. King, an outsider, should've just waited for Justice to move.

Let's review the history. Dr. King was arrested on April 12, 1963 for leading a peaceful nonviolent protest of the abhorrent conditions of African-Americans or Negroes as they are referred to in Dr. King's letter. This was a time of great unrest. Dr. King was invited and planned to come to Birmingham which at the time was the most segregated city in the South~really in the US. He wanted to help bring awareness of the harsh treatment of African-Americans, and to promote social change in Birmingham and subsequently, in the nation. It was Tremaine T. Sails-Dunbar's undergraduate Case Study analysis research¹, called Dr. King's protest in Birmingham "a purposeful tactic of activism". Why? As Dr. King writes: To spread "the gospel of freedom" because "Injustice" was there.

As I studied the contents of his letter, I wondered, how Dr. King was able to have such hope that change would happen in Birmingham when it looked like a hopeless cause especially with Bull Connor firmly in Charge. I encourage you to read his letter in its entirety. It is a manifesto of what nonviolent direct-action protest should be. It is all there: fear, despair, discouragement of and hope to improve the Black experience~waiting was not an option. It is as relevant today as it was in 1963.

Hopelessness or Despair in 1963 in Birmingham	Hopelessness is still here~Today
Largest Unsolved house & church Bombings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bombings replaced with church & school shootings
Highest Lynching of Mothers & Fathers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • replaced by
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Genocide of Unarmed Black, Latino/a/x Men, Native American & Women by Police Brutality (e.g. Sheriff Joe Arpaio)
Drowning of our sisters & brothers, children-Emmett Till	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every single year!
Kicked, Dog Attacked & Killed African Americans	
Dr. King says “Smothered Airtight Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty Still Exist Today for African Americans
Segregation (Outlawed in 1954 by the Supreme Court) still existed in 1963	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slavery & segregation has evolved into Racialized social control in the form of mass incarceration of Black & Brown people-The New Jim Crow. (Michelle Alexander & Atty. Bryan Stevenson)² • SF evictions of African American homeless with tanks!!!³ • Includes School to Prison Pipeline • Caged and separated Latino/a/x families in detention facilities. Hatians denied entry; Puerto Rico in Crisis with little attention and aid • Ice Raids!! • Our Church Split based on doctrine-whose again?

- The public execution of unarmed black men and women to name a few:
 - Jamarion Robinson shot with 76 bullets for not opening the front door;
 - Sandra Bland,
 - Freddy gray,
 - Tamir Rice,
 - Oscar Grant,
 - Mario Woods,
 - Andy Lopez,
 - Tanisha Anderson and
 - **more recently Michael Dean**-police raid,
 - **Atatiana Jefferson** just by looking out the window.

2016: By age 15 to 34 black men or nine times more likely to be killed than any other group; 34% of those killed in 2016 unarmed⁴

According to The Pew Research Center~In the Prison Industrial Complex: 2017 Data (decline from 2007)⁵

- approx. **33% Black/African Americans are incarcerated**
 - yet only make up **12%** of our U S population
- **Latinos make 23% of the prison population**
 - but only **16%** of the us population
- **Whites make up 30% of the Prison population**
 - but **64%** of the us population

Dr. King’s writings are a cacophony of racial injustice alarms, nonviolent action playbook and hope.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” We are interdependent and share interrelatedness of all communities and states. [We are] ‘tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.’”⁶

What can be learned from his letter about Hope? Dr. King was optimistic and full of expectation. It is what he said: “Jesus was an extremist for love...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you...use you...persecute you.”

Womanist Preacher Pastor Traci Blackmon⁷ of United Christ Church (and a former United Methodist Preacher) in her critique of American Nationalism states that blatant

- erected walls of indifference, educational Inequalities, religious intolerance, economic injustice, an unjust legal system, inefficiency, [separatism] is combated **with Love**.

Pastor Touré Roberts of Potter’s House L.A. & Denver states that

- we walk in “**Godfidence**”⁸ having God’s strength to do what we are Called to do.

How do we have hope, walk in Love and Godfidence, with Direct Action?

2 Chronicles 20: 15-16 “Fear not, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours! Tomorrow Go ye down against them (Take Direct Action Steps)...

We already have our examples: Leaders today walking as Ambassadors of Hope!

Ambassadors of Hope: Leaders and Allies of (Co-workers with God)

- Black Lives Matter Movement
- The MeToo Movement
- Women’s Marches
- Climate Change Movement ~ The impact of global warming-Australian fires, fires here in California
- Presidential Protest Movements
- The Pride Marches

Hope is here! I believe that we are on the precipice of great social change Again.

We are Alive to do the *unfinished and unapologetically deliberate business* of continuing the fight for Social Justice.

We are Called to be the embodiment of Hope Revealed. Attorney Bryan Stevenson demonstrates his hopeful optimism in his work of over 30 years to free falsely incarcerated African Americans through his Equal Justice Initiative depicted in the movie Just Mercy – Go see it!! I plan to see it when with my girls.

Human progress requires a “Now is the Time” “Direct-Action!”

Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.⁶

Now is the time to take back the real promise of democracy and combat authoritarianism.

Now is the time to faith it (Pastor Cora Jakes Coleman)⁹ believe that the 8 years of the dream realized in President Obama’s election and what Dr. King and others fought and died for can happen again with our young people.

Now is the time to dismantle systemic racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia/transgender oppression, classism, ableism, heterosexism, antisemitism and xenophobia.

Now is the time to vote: This is the 150th anniversary of the Black Vote¹⁰! The Black vote is critical in preserving our democratic ideals. Black & African Americans must vote now! It is also the 100th anniversary of the Women’s Right to Vote¹¹ . Women must vote now! We must continue to fight for social justice and not the “just-us” (Rev. Blackmon), and for equality and equity.

Now is the time to join our young people who will go to the polls and vote in November. Our oldest daughter, Jzenae, is looking forward to casting her vote for change for the first time. Aaliyah can’t wait until it is Her Turn!!

NOW IS THE TIME! AMEN!

Benediction:

May our God teach us to Be Ambassadors of Hope- To Live Out The Faith Of Our Calling~Doing What Is Right In God's Will Than Sit Idle Doing Nothing on Human Relations Day!

- Dr. King was,
- Our Young People are and
- We Must Be-every place we find ourselves: in the workplace, school, our church, community, organizations, homes, in the criminal justice system, place of play and rest, when we shop and when we Vote! Amen!

“Better is Coming!” (Bishop TD Jakes)¹²

Children's Time Words of Hope:

Have hope! Do Good, Help and support one another!

When someone is down or having a hard day or someone is treating them meanly-be supportive, help them believe that things will get better and they will have a better day. Help them by studying with them, being a good friend, helping them get up if they fall down. If you see something that is not right, say something to someone you trust who will listen to you. If you are down or feel like something you are doing is too hard don't give up! Ask for help. If you make a mistake, have hope! Try again!

Be an Ambassador of Hope!

Sermon References:

¹Sails-Dunbar, Tremaine T. (2017) "A Case Study Analysis of the “Letter from Birmingham Jail”: Conceptualizing the Conscience of King through the Lens of Paulo Freire," *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 14 Available at: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol8/iss1/14> (See Attached!)

²Alexander, Michelle. **The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness.** New York: The New Press, 2010.

³Rachel Swan, Alejandro Serrano and Michael Cabanatuan Jan. 14, 2020 **Homeless mothers evicted before dawn from Oakland house, highlighting crisis** Updated: Jan. 14, 2020
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/crime/article/Homeless-mothers-evicted-from-Oakland-home-in-14973659.php?cmpid=gsa-sfgate-result>

⁴**Young Black men killed by US police at the highest rate in year of 1,134 deaths**
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/31/the-counted-police-killings-2015-young-black-men>

⁵Incarceration Trends in America

<https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

⁶Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16th, 1963. (See Attached!)

https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

⁷The Gap Between The Number Of Blacks And Whites In Prison Is Shrinking

BY John Gramlich

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>

⁸Pastor Traci Blackmon

https://www.ucc.org/commentary_traci_blackmon_if_these_walls_could_talk_01212019

⁹"The Gift of Confidence" - Touré Roberts (Jan 5, 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmt0tWVBUEk>

¹⁰Bishop Jakes & Cora Jakes Coleman: "Faithing It"⁸

Nov 16, 2015 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7E_2F0DI_A

¹¹Faithing It: Bringing Purpose Back to Your Life! Paperback – April 18, 2017

by [Cora Jakes Coleman](#) (Author), [T.D. Jakes](#) (Foreword)

<https://www.amazon.com/Faithing-Bringing-Purpose-Back-Your/dp/0768409101>

¹²The Backside of Better - Bishop T.D. Jakes [January 19, 2020]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbjgaezTjgA>