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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s visionary work must be continued and embraced

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s visionary work must be continued and embraced

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At the time of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968, the country was on the precipice of understanding how we had left large segments of society behind in ways we didn't fully understand. Dr. King helped us to see better. In the final months of his life, he launched the Poor People's Campaign, an economically-driven civil rights movement that linked all justice issues to a single common denominator—poverty in America.

Fifty-five years later, significant challenges remain. As we celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a federal holiday, it is imperative we re-visit his powerful words and dedicate ourselves to continuing his work.

Dr. King believed all people should have the economic means they need to live.

He called for a “revolution of values,” leveraging the powerful global platform he spent a lifetime building. He urged people to pay close attention to the greatest moral threat to the nation's security—the increasing poverty among America's children, youth and families.

Dr. King saw poverty as the intersectional issue of the time. He believed that economic insecurity leads to poor quality of life outcomes regardless of race, color, ethnicity, gender or religion. Numerous studies have shown that poverty-stricken individuals have limited access to health care, education, transportation, food and shelter. Dr. King witnessed this first-hand in every region of the United States.

Dr. King used the Campaign for the Poor to illuminate these profound issues. His insistence on giving a preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged was a testament to his ministry as a clergyman and his leadership as a civil rights champion.

The legacy of his work in 1968 is at the forefront of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work we are doing today: helping people see, reflect and act so they become aware of implicit biases and limiting beliefs and replace them with more humanizing attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets.

As we enter 2023 as a nation polarized, I encourage us to reflect on how Dr. King's influential voice impacted the nation to move toward a common good. He had a razor focus on the people who are most marginalized and vulnerable in society—no matter their birth or origin story—and inspired us to make choices that uplift people in kind and meaningful ways.

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