

A Message to the Price Community”

We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail, April 1963

Dr. King suffered many setbacks in his quest for equal rights for African-Americans. He was jailed in Birmingham, Alabama on April 12, 1963 after defying a judicial injunction intended to shut down civil rights protests. He wrote the [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#) in response to several white Southern clergymen who criticized him for encouraging and promoting nonviolent marches and sit-ins. They asked Dr. King to engage in more negotiation and less confrontation. Dr. King’s response was that growth and change meant accepting a “tension in the mind” as promulgated by the Greek philosopher Socrates “... to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.” Dr. King’s stance was that negotiation would be brought about by direct, timely action: “We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right,” he wrote.

King noted that it was continued pressure that had brought about gains in civil rights. It was determination, hard work and consistently demanding accountability for unjust behavior and policies that won the day for the civil rights movement. Dr. King bluntly expressed his disappointment in those advocating a more moderate approach: “I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice; who constantly says ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action’ ...” He knew the movement had passed a critical point, where stepping back was not an option. A year and three months later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed by the U.S. Congress.

Equitable treatment is a nonpartisan issue. It is a basic tenet of human rights and social justice. A look through history demonstrates that it is not handed to us. We earn it by pushing back, even when it’s uncomfortable to do so. We earn it by not resigning to the unacceptable when the journey tires us. When I think of Dr. King sitting in that jail, enduring harsh conditions and the opprobrium from all corners, even from well-meaning citizens, I think of the courage it took for him to continue the pressure to achieve freedoms that today cannot be taken for granted.

Since the campaign and election on Nov. 9, there has been a rise in the number of

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reported incidents of hate speech, hate crimes and anti-immigrant sentiments throughout the United States. Officials in New York City reported a [35 percent increase in hate crimes](#) between Nov. 9 and Dec. 5. The Southern Poverty Law Center recorded [more than 1,000 verified cases of harassment and intimidation](#), with 125 reported in California.

This troubling trend is a reminder of the work to be done in creating a society that shows zero tolerance for unprovoked insults or mistreatment of people targeted to their race, ethnicity, immigration status or gender. More than 50 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement fought for equality, human dignity and social justice, we're still fighting. In the current climate, some feel resigned to accepting the unacceptable, while others who might step forward fear the discomfort of speaking their minds and taking action to do what is right in the face of opposition.

To those who are reticent or fearful, I encourage you to look to Dr. King's courageous example, and hope that we are all willing to stand up to oppression and for what is right.

With Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jack H. Knott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jack H. Knott, Dean