



## The Legal Community Honoring Dr. King's Legacy on His Holiday ... and Every Day

"The thing that we need in the world today is a group of men and women who will stand up for right and to be opposed to wrong, wherever it is. A group of people who have come to see that some things are wrong, whether they're never caught up with. And some things are right, whether nobody sees you doing them or not."

—Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>1</sup>

Holidays that commemorate anniversaries all too often come and go with little fanfare beyond gratitude for a day off work and school. Let's do better this Martin Luther King Jr. Day by reflecting on—and, more importantly, acting on—Dr. King's legacy. As legal professionals, we are in a privileged and powerful position to champion access to justice and equity and inclusion for all—work that is just as vital now as it was during the civil rights movement.

While Dr. King was not a lawyer, he was a masterful activist, political organizer, and public speaker whose work, leadership, and inspiration were major contributing factors in the passage of landmark laws such as the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. As we continue to wrestle with moral and legal interpretations of these laws, the themes of Dr. King's speeches have an uncanny relevance to today's headlines. In his "Where Do We Go from Here" speech, he examined the historical moment that surrounded him and realized the connectedness of wealth and poverty to his vision for a brighter and more equitable future:

I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's marketplace. But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised. And you see, my friends, when you

deal with this you begin to ask the question, "Who owns the oil?" You begin to ask the question, "Who owns the iron ore?" You begin to ask the question, "Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that's two-thirds water?" These are words that must be said.<sup>2</sup>

Sentiments that are still at the forefront of our national politics and social conscience, no? So let's take a look at how far we have come since the 1960s and what lies ahead.

### WHERE WE ARE TODAY

While there has been much growth and progress, culminating in a recent election ushering more diversity—of race, religion, experience, and age—than ever before into Congress and leadership positions, many of the injustices Dr. King fought against persist. The below represents a small snapshot.

#### Economic Inequality

- In 1965, CEO pay was 20 times worker pay; in 2016, it was 271 times greater.<sup>3</sup>
- Black men earn about 73 cents to every dollar white men earn; black women earn 65 cents to every dollar white men earn.
- For every \$100 of white-family wealth, black families hold \$5.04.<sup>4</sup>
- Wealth is on the decline for black and Latinx households (a 75 percent decline between 1983 and 2013 for black families, and 50 percent for Latinx families). During this same time, white families saw a 14 percent increase in wealth.

#### Racialized Violence

- Nationally, hate crimes have increased 17 percent, and have been increasing for three straight years.<sup>5</sup>
- Law enforcement agencies reported 613 hate crimes in Washington in 2017.<sup>6</sup> In Seattle, reported hate crimes have almost doubled.<sup>7</sup>
- Groups identifying as white supremacists and other extremists have killed far more people since Sept. 11, 2001, than any other category of domestic extremist.<sup>8</sup>

#### Institutional Violence

- A significant number of people—and a disproportionate number of black, brown, or mentally impaired persons—are killed at the hands of police each year.<sup>9</sup>
- An alarming number of people incarcerated in Washington are dying.<sup>10</sup>

Our nation is also facing increased tension over policies about and treatment of immigrants and refugees, including questionable tactics such as separating children from parents.

The WSBA Board of Governors called out these types of disturbing trends of societal attacks on equity and inclusion in a 2017 statement called "WSBA Denounces Recent Acts of Violence and a Reaffirmation of Equity and Inclusion Principles":

We share a duty with government leaders to speak up when injustice occurs in order to reassure our communities, including those communities that are minority or historically disadvantaged, that we



# THE BAR BUZZ

will use all resources at our disposal, including legal resources, to protect the rights and safety of everyone. It is incumbent upon us, given our unique role in society, our understanding of the practice of law, and our ethical commitment to serving the public that we clearly and forcefully not only denounce violent, divisive, marginalizing, oppressive and inequitable behavior; but that we step into any void created by those actions regardless of where it originates.<sup>11</sup>

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As legal professionals, our skills and knowledge make us powerfully situated to be the group of people who stand up for right and oppose wrong. History has proven that justice and law improvement does not happen within a vacuum and benefits greatly from the oversight, involvement, and expertise of those trained in the law. WSBA, in particular, holds a deep commitment to its stated mission of serving the public and the members of the bar, ensuring the integrity of the legal profession, and championing justice. Our service to members of the bar and the public is a function that must be conducted with the broad and deep lens of equity and inclusion. We exist to regulate the practice of law AND to serve our members and the public as a professional association. It is in service to our members and to the public that we emphasize our commitment to an equitable and inclusive society.

Toward that commitment, we encourage you to seek out opportunities to advocate for justice not only on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday ... but every day.

Foremost, let's make a collective pledge to not stand silent when such passivity lends credence to hate and misinformation. As an example, the WSBA Board of Governors is currently developing a statement of solidarity to support leaders of Oregon's specialty and minority bar associations who received threats of physical violence, intimidation, and

harassment after issuing a statement against the violence in Charlottesville. (The statement is on for action at the January board meeting.) Our commitment demands that we clearly articulate a resolute stance and support of non-violence. Our democracy's political ideology can—and should—encompass many viewpoints, but there is no path toward a better future through intimidation and violence.

Here's one easy way to speak out as a legal employer: Sign and share the ABA's pledge for Disability Diversity in the Legal Profession at <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/disabilityrights/>.

Ready to take the next step? Check out the many public-service opportunities continually updated at [wsba.org/connect-serve/volunteer-opportunities/psp](http://wsba.org/connect-serve/volunteer-opportunities/psp).

Specific to the holiday at hand, here is a list of resources to connect with causes Dr. King advocated for that are still in need of legal champions today:

- Voting rights and ensuring all citizens have the right to vote with no unnecessary barriers. Learn more: [aclu.org/issues/voting-rights#act](http://aclu.org/issues/voting-rights#act)
- Criminal justice reform that makes sense at all levels. Learn more: [columbialegal.org/advocacy/institutions-project](http://columbialegal.org/advocacy/institutions-project)
- Disproportionate discipline in schools, the opportunity gap, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Learn more: [brookings.edu/research/disproportionality-in-student-discipline-connecting-policy-to-research/](http://brookings.edu/research/disproportionality-in-student-discipline-connecting-policy-to-research/)
- Wealth disparity, including assisting with legalities of companies reinvesting in communities. Learn more: [inequality.org](http://inequality.org)
- Human-rights violations with incoming immigrants and refugees, including asylum applications and non-parental custody cases. Learn more: [nwirp.org/](http://nwirp.org/)

In memory of Dr. King, now is the time to recommit ourselves to justice, for, in his own wise words, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."<sup>12</sup>

A hive of information, just for you.



## MEMBER BENEFITS



## NEW MEMBER BENEFIT

The new year brings you a new option for saving money on legal research. The WSBA will soon offer members access to Fastcase, an innovative legal research platform that uses artificial intelligence and data visualization tools to help its users research smarter. Fastcase will join Casemaker as legal research tools available as benefits of membership in the WSBA.

*See page 12 for more information.*



Would you like to learn more about the  
WSBA Civil Rights Law Section and get involved?

Visit [www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Sections/Civil-Rights-Law-Section](http://www.wsba.org/Legal-Community/Sections/Civil-Rights-Law-Section).

NOTES:

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2. King, Dr. Martin Luther. "Where Do We Go from Here?" (August 16, 1967), <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention>.
3. Carmen Reinicke, *US Income Inequality Continues to Grow*, CNBC (July 19, 2018, 5:06 P.M.), <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/19/income-inequality-continues-to-grow-in-the-united-states.html>.
4. Brian Thompson, *The Racial Wealth Gap: Addressing America's Most Pressing Epidemic*, FORBES (Feb. 18, 2018, 12:15 P.M.), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianthompson1/2018/02/18/the-racial-wealth-gap-addressing-americas-most-pressing-epidemic/#5e4f16317a48>.
5. Michael Balsamo, *FBI Report Shows 17 Percent Spike in Hate Crimes in 2017*, *Seattle Times* (Nov. 13, 2018, 1:26 P.M.), <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/fbi-report-shows-17-percent-spike-in-hate-crimes-in-2017/>.
6. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information: 2017 Hate Crime Statistics, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2017/tables/table-11.xls>.
7. Ryan Blethen, *Hate Crimes Skyrocket Across the Nation, Almost Double in Seattle Over the Past Year*, *Seattle Times* (Nov. 14, 2018, 7:41 A.M.), <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/crime/hate-crimes-skyrocket-across-the-nation-almost-double-in-seattle-over-the-past-year/>.
8. Janet Reitman, *U.S. Law Enforcement Failed to See the Threat of White Nationalism. Now They Don't Know How to Stop It*, *New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 3, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/03/magazine/FBI-charlottesville-white-nationalism-far-right.html>.
9. National Police Shootings Statistics, *The Washington Post* (Updated regularly and allows interaction to sort by race, age, mental illness and more), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/police-shootings-2018/?utm\\_term=.283b2e7ca9cf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/police-shootings-2018/?utm_term=.283b2e7ca9cf).
10. Ciara O'Rourke, *While in Custody: The Fight to Stop Jail Deaths in Washington*, *Prison Legal News* (June 5, 2018), <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2018/jun/5/while-custody-fight-stop-jail-deaths-washington-state/>
11. [https://www.wsba.org/docs/default-source/about-wsba/governance/resolutions/wsba-statement-denouncing-recent-acts-of-violence.pdf?sfvrsn=b2703af1\\_2](https://www.wsba.org/docs/default-source/about-wsba/governance/resolutions/wsba-statement-denouncing-recent-acts-of-violence.pdf?sfvrsn=b2703af1_2).

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