



New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Working for a World Without Violence.

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NYSCASA Honors the Life and Legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

ALBANY, NY — Today we honor the life and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968). We are meditating on Dr. King’s [“Letter from a Birmingham Jail” \(1963\)](#), and we encourage our allies to read it in its entirety today.

Despite calls from political leaders and commentators to unify and move on, the nation has yet to fully reckon with the underlying causes and lasting impacts of the white supremacist insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. In light of this, Dr. King’s words seem prescient.

In the letter, Dr. King responded to criticisms of the Birmingham campaign and the practice of direct action by several white religious leaders in Alabama, which had been published [as a statement](#) in a local newspaper.

Notably, the authors criticized demonstrations taking place in Birmingham for creating tension in the community. Dr. King responded that their statement failed to express a similar concern for the conditions in the community which brought about the demonstrations in the first place: “It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city’s white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.”

Dr. King explained:

We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In other words, the Birmingham campaign was intended to foster a constructive tension that would force local leaders and community members to confront injustice in their community.

The events that transpired on January 6 at the U.S. Capitol vividly demonstrated how white supremacy is allowed to operate in the United States and how it is enabled and empowered by our nation’s leaders—some of whom are now calling for national unity and peace. “We can’t skip

justice and get to peace," [says Bernice King](#), the youngest of Dr. King's children. She continues: "True peace," my father said, "is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice."

According to Dr. King's teachings, if the nation is to move forward, we must foster constructive tension. We must embrace the discomfort of exposing white supremacy, promoting accountability for those who participate in and enable white supremacy, and creating conditions that enable our communities to heal and thrive.

As an organization committed to ending sexual violence, NYSCASA recognizes that sexual violence is rooted in systemic oppressions that shape our society, including—but not limited to—white supremacy, racism, and economic injustice. Moreover, these oppressions negatively impact survivors' access to support, advocacy, and medical care in the aftermath of sexual violence. In order to eliminate sexual violence and support all survivors, we must create a culture that actively fights for equity and opposes oppression in all its forms.

As we have [previously shared](#), we join calls for meaningful accountability for those who perpetuate white supremacist violence and those who enable it. We encourage each other and our communities to reflect on the difficult truths of our complicity and the ways all violence is interconnected, and to begin to repair the legacy of white supremacy and its relations, colonization and patriarchy.