

Thank you for the generous introduction, President O'Day.

I would like to thank everyone for taking time out of your day to attend the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Special recognition must be given to Dr. Womble and my incredible team of student interns for bringing this endeavor to pass; the community organizers for helping to establish the vision of this project; to Austin College for providing the venue and being an institution that embodies its values in an incredible capacity; my family for their unconditional love, guidance, and support; and God for bringing together the individual strands of fate in a way that only he can.

Today, I will be reflecting on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I would like to first start by providing a brief history of events that brought the King holiday to fruition. Next, I would like to assert what I believe to be our obligation to the maintenance of Dr. King's legacy, as well as the preservation and continuation of Dr. King's work towards equality and liberty.

Before a recount of the history is given, let us ask what is the purpose of a memorial. A memorial is something designed to preserve the memory of a person, event, or event to be remembered. Specifically, efforts to remember Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr had endured months, dare I say years, just so that an event such as today could even occur.

On to the history.

The first effort to establish a commemorative holiday for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. occurred April 8, 1968, when Michigan Congressman John Conyers introduced legislation to the United States House of Representatives. Further, in June of 1968, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center was founded in Atlanta, with the mission of establishing a living memorial to Dr. King. Later, in 1979, Coretta Scott King testified before congress until in November of that very year, the Dr. King bill sponsored by Congressman Conyers was defeated on the house floor by a measure of five votes. Thereafter, on November 3, 1983, President Reagan signed the Holiday Bill, then sponsored by Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy, establishing that the 3rd Monday of every January be recognized in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Subsequently, on January 20, 1986, the first National Holiday in honor of Dr. King was celebrated. On August 23, 1994, President Clinton signed the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday and Service Act, which solidified the holiday as one of community involvement and service. Finally, on June 7, 1999, Governor Jean Shaheen of New Hampshire signed the King Holiday legislation into law, which completed the enactment of the holiday in every state.

Now, the telling of that history is not completely comprehensive. Yet, it can be readily discerned that the Holiday itself would not have come to existence had it not been for the persistent and enduring efforts of those torchbearers just mentioned. Even further, however, many intermediate actors and events were not explicitly stated, but their contribution to this great legacy is a thing of inestimable measure. For this, we all owe a great debt.

Dr. King and the other Civil Rights leaders of the mid-20th century represented an incredible league of pioneers that came across an underdeveloped field of equality in America. The soil was poor, the climate desolate, and the weeds had covered the expanse of the ground. However, as dismal as the prospects looked, and though such as a plot of land seemed in-conducive to the harvest of liberty and the fruits of equality and opportunity, this league of pioneers went to work. As was stated in the book of Isaiah chapter 35 verse 1, “the desert will [then] blossom as the rose.”

Tirelessly, with hands full of blisters, brows brimmed with sweat, and aching muscles, they plowed the field, pulled the weeds, planted the seeds, and watered the ground. In their toil, the opposition was strong and unceasing. The opposition—in its mission—aimed to maintain the field as it was, or at the very least, to prevent its development and maturation into what the league thought it could become. However, though members of the league were lost during the

struggle, their work, once put in motion, could not be stopped, and even though obstacles slowed the momentum for brief moments, the slack only lasted for a season, for the momentum of the movement was restored beyond what it previously was. Thus, in its proper time, the harvest came, and could then be enjoyed by many. However, time, yes time, has done to the harvesters what no mere man can do. As time has marched on, it has claimed many of those original pioneers, and the league, which was once numerous, is now but only few. And the few who remain are much older and lacking the vigor to tend to the field as they did in their youth. Yet, the harvest has sprung, and there still exists an opposition looking to reduce that field to its ravaged condition of infertility. Indispensably, it must follow that new harvesters come and assume the labor. For without this fundamental insurgence of energy, it will be as if no work had ever been done at all. Fundamentally, two questions certainly follow from the previous observation.

- 1.) Who is obligated to assure the maintenance of the harvest?
- 2.) Why does any obligation necessarily exist?

To the first, the harvest, so long as its preserved, stands as a triumph of democracy and maintains itself as a necessary premise in the proof of humanity that free men can justly govern themselves. In the book of Luke, chapter 10 verse 2, it is said that

"The Harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few". If any find themselves exercising upon the fundamental blessings of Liberty and Autonomy, then there exists work in the maintenance and continuation of that freedom.

To the second question, why does any obligation necessarily exist? When the activist commenced upon their legendary crusade, they went not in search of eternal glory or stardom or fame but went with the thought of an unborn multitude in mind. If they could not come to taste the fruits of Democratic equality, then they would make every deliberate effort to make sure that their children could. By that diligence, and through that stern demeanor, later generations have been able to eat from the tree of liberty and opportunity. Similarly, however, just as we have been the beneficiaries of a noble and patriotic generation of doers, there will surely be latter generations who will want to come to know the fruits of liberty and opportunity for themselves. Therefore, out of reverence for our fathers and mothers, duty to our sisters and brothers, and a commitment to the preservation of hope for those who come after us, we must shoulder the labors of the field, make it our own, become ourselves a living memorial, and ignite a flame that rages for all eternity for all to see and admire. In this way, this holiday and the labors associated with the preservation of this august legacy stand as an indelible memorial never to be forgotten.

May the Lord bless and keep us all

Thank you.