In Memory of  
a Great Educator:  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

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It is only fitting that we should commemorate men and women whose contributions have the depth and power to influence future generations. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was such a man.

The declaration of Dr. King’s birthday as a national holiday to be celebrated annually beginning 15 January 1986 provides all Americans, but especially educators, the opportunity to propagate the potent ideals that Dr. King advocated. King’s charisma and his ability to exhort men and women to nonviolent action is legendary. Not only was he an articulate spokesman for human and civil rights, he became personally involved in attaining those rights through nonviolent means.

American society in the 1960s was much different from the society we know today. Much of the impetus for the social reforms we take for granted came directly from Dr. King. Voting rights, school desegregation, and fair housing were among the critical issues he confronted. To achieve his goals he consulted with presidents and world leaders, helping them understand their responsibility to treat all citizens justly.

King taught more than nonviolence; he taught nonviolent action. He not only spoke out against injustice, he acted, often with total disregard for his own safety. In so doing, he gave meaning to the adage that the best way to teach is through precept and example.

Educators and students who are concerned about the increasing incidence of violence in our nation’s schools have much to learn from Dr. King. He saw wrongs and acted to correct them through confrontation and persuasion. He saw injustices and worked within the legal system to remove them. He saw America divided by racial hatred, bigotry, and ignorance, and he preached integration, equal opportunity, love, and compassion. So too can educators and students learn how nonviolent action offers an appropriate alternative to violence. Young people need to be taught the value of conflict management and constructive problem solving employed so successfully by Dr. King.

As we commemorate the legacy left by Martin Luther King, Jr., we would do well to remember and teach the principles and concepts associated with his life, especially his admonition to judge men and women not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

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