



THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

ANITA SKOP, *Community Superintendent*

COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 15
131 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-935-4317

January 18, 2021

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Dear District 15 Community:

In light of the events of the past few weeks, I felt that it was especially important to reach out to you on this historic day in this momentous week, as we honor the memory of Dr. King and await the inauguration of the new President as well as the first woman, and the first woman of color and of Indian descent as the new Vice President. While these events are celebratory, they are in direct contrast and yet irrevocably aligned to the deeply disturbing attempt at an insurrection just twelve days ago at the Capitol; events that make the work and the words of Dr. King even more profound.

As a child I watched the civil rights movement play out in real time on my family's small black and white television set. My camp counselor was a Freedom Rider. I sang all the folk songs and bunked in a four-man tent with three girls of color where we discussed hair styles and interracial marriage. I watched Mattel market a Black Barbie and Diana Ross become a fashion icon with an Afro in Vogue. In short, we thought that we were moving forward, that we were making a difference; that the world was changing for the better. We were so optimistic and so excited, but we were so wrong! This reality was brought home nearly fifty-two years ago by the assassination of Dr. King, and only two weeks ago when forty thousand people stormed the Capitol in a violent effort to maintain an administration that aggressively championed white privilege.

The day after January 6th I had an enlightening conversation with a colleague of color. My colleague simply said, "Things will never change." That comment was an epiphany. It made me realize the horrific impact of racism on all people of color down through the generations. Living in a society that has disparaged and denigrated a significant portion of the population (the very term itself means "to blacken and vilify") for the past four hundred years has caused something that is unspeakable. It has taken away hope! It has taken away the hope of safety in communities. It has taken away the hope of economic success and dreams of a better life! It has taken away hope that education provides opportunities for our children of color! It has taken away the belief that "liberty and justice for all," are really, truly for all!

Racism has taken away these hopes and dreams, and by doing so limited the potential for people of color to bring their knowledge and talents and gifts to the world and to be respected for them. It has made them live in fear. This is especially heartbreaking when you think about the children, our precious children. They are our future, and they bring so much possibility into the world. Who can say that the doctor who will cure cancer is not a person of color? Who can say that the astrophysicist who will enable us to explore the cosmos is not a person of color? Who can say that the political leader who will bring the world peace is not a person of color?

On this special day we remember and honor a man who was killed because he was trying to bring an end to racism. He was killed because of hate, hate that is still with us, hate that we must all work to end. It has festered for too long and taken too many lives.

In his most famous speech, "I Have a Dream....," Dr. King is quoted as saying, "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope." "Out of the mountain of despair" that has been part of our history for too long, we will mine that "stone of hope." We will polish it with love and care and give it to all of our students as a talisman, as an emblem of strength. We will empower them with a belief in themselves that is so deeply embedded that it is unshakeable even in the face of adversity. We can and we will restore that hope now so that our children can pass it to the generations yet to come.

This is our commitment as members of the District 15 community. We will honor the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by continuing to do his work, by continuing to spread the beliefs he espoused, by working to truly ensure there is equity for all students and all families.

With best wishes and hope for the future,

Anita Skop