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In a 1964 speech at Oberlin College, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The time is always right to do what’s right.” Dr. King spoke these sage words during a period of American history marred by frustration, segregation, and uncertainty. Racism was the ever-pervasive blight that afflicted every demographic in the United States; racial tensions spawned widespread resentment, violence, and chaos. However, there existed a salvation, a beacon of light that pierced the darkness pregnant with prejudice – hope, one personified by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Motivated by this hope, supporters of the Civil Rights Movement did what was right by nonviolently protesting racial inequality. Despite the powerful, oppressive opposition, their hope stood perennial, ultimately leading to reforms in government and a paradigm shift in how racism is viewed in America. Dr. King’s values and words inspired a generation to take action, even – or, perhaps more aptly, especially – in the darkest of times.

Decades later, the significance of always doing what is right has not diminished. Our society still discriminates on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, and social status. As unfortunate as it may be, prejudice and bigotry are, to some degree, inherent to the human condition. For as long as humanity has existed, so has egoism and intolerance. We, as people, have always been narcissistic creatures, intent on glorifying and preserving our individuality, sometimes to the extent that we do not acknowledge the individuality of others. Being so greatly involved in our own qualities, in our own ideologies that we no longer respect and appreciate the subtle nuances that define who we all are as individuals is the very definition of discrimination. We need to act to stop this. Though we may never totally eliminate every one of the negative isms, we must make the commitment as individuals to love one another and to do what is right. If we wish to pre-empt further discrimination, we must make the effort – no matter how difficult it may be – to treat all men and women as our brothers and sisters. We must continue to fight for universal equality for all peoples, regardless of sex, race, or class. Through this, we better society; we establish an America that is more conducive to the enjoyment of life, the conservation of liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – an America that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fought so hard to create.