

**GROWING UP INTO DEMOCRACY'S CROWN  
BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE  
BY LAWRENCE EDWARD CARTER SR., PH.D.**

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On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America became a reality with this pronouncement: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [and women] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

When our founding fathers penned these words 225 years ago, they pointed us in the direction of democracy and inclusiveness. Since then, there have been those among us who keep bringing us back to the grand and noble idea of democracy.

Mohandas Karamchand "Mahatma" Gandhi, believed to be the greatest world leader of the twentieth century, once said: "Civilization is the encouragement of differences. Civilization thus becomes a synonym of democracy. Force, violence, pressure or compulsion with a view to conformity is, therefore, both uncivilized and undemocratic."

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the civil rights movement in the United States, also understood the deep well of democracy and wanted the "world house" to drink from that well. King said: "We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together — black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu, [Buddhist and Bedouin] — a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace."

### **Learning to Live in Peace**

How do we learn to live in peace? How do we learn to live the lessons of democracy? Thomas Jefferson said democracy cannot survive with an ignorant population. For centuries, we have depended on our institutions of higher education to teach us community, humanity, service and happiness.

W. E. B. DuBois,<sup>1</sup> whom I believe to be the greatest sociologist ever produced on American soil, once said: "The function of the university is not simply to teach breadwinning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools or to be a center of polite society. It is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization."

And so for the sake of democracy envisioned by our forefathers, for the sake of civilization as conceived by Gandhi and for the sake of civil rights imagined by King, we need new educational institutions to teach us SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's civility for the uplift of all human personality and the environment. We need Ikeda's Soka University of America to help us grow up into democracy's crown.

You may ask, Why? I ask, Why not?

Why not Daisaku Ikeda's idea of a university founded to use the power of education to promote respect and peaceful coexistence around the world? Why not an American educational institution built on the philosophy of peace, a philosophy that emphasizes the need for human bonding with the natural world, the need for community and the need for character-nurturing education? To paraphrase a popular 1960s song, why not give a pedagogy of peace a

chance?

We can, if we think outside the box.

The Reverend Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, whom Martin Luther King Jr. called his spiritual and intellectual mentor, was admitted to Bates College in Maine on probation. He went on to pursue four concentrations and graduated with honors. In 1950, fifteen years after he received his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Chicago, Mays was inducted by his undergraduate alma mater, Bates College, into Phi Beta Kappa, when its national chapter voted not to be racist. His 1935 doctoral dissertation, *The Negroes God*, is still in print and hailed as a classic. Today Dr. Mays is considered one of the most published college presidents in American history and is referred to as "walking integrity."

Think what we might have missed if Bates College had not thought outside the box — if the equivalent of affirmative action (equity) had not been practiced by the college in 1918 or if it had used the standard of pure merit for admitting Mays.

Dr. Mays went on to become the sixth president of Morehouse College, where he mentored generations of young men — including Dr. King — and led that institution in thinking outside the box. Morehouse admitted Dr. King at the age of fifteen from the tenth grade in high school. He entered with an eighth-grade reading level and graduated with a "C" average. We should keep this in mind when we are reading his brilliant "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." We are still a family "unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest," and we don't all blossom at the same rate. Some blossom early and some blossom late. The tragedy is if we don't blossom at all.

Think what we might have missed if Dr. Mays had not continued the courageous stance of thinking beyond the standard of pure merit in admitting students like Dr. King.

Today, more than ever, we need a certain kind of educational institution that promotes international exchange, cross-cultural dialogue and environmental justice that is needed for all of us to blossom and self-actualize to the maximum. Benjamin Elijah Mays, Martin Luther King Jr., Mohandas Karamchand "Mahatma" Gandhi and Daisaku Ikeda all had extensive international, interracial, interdisciplinary and interreligious educations through a worldwide dialogue.

We must not think without history, detaching from it in a new autonomous cultural space, losing our historical memory. Soka University of America is prepared to honestly tell its students about the history we have passed so that we might have a more honest and inclusive tradition for building leaders in the academy. "Without a truthful tradition, you cannot build leaders," says Dr. Ikeda.

In the words of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead,<sup>2</sup> we are witnessing a time in history: "When civilization is shifting its basic outlook; a major turning point in history where the pre-suppositions on which society is structured are being analyzed, sharply challenged, and profoundly changed."

## **The Goal of Change is Democracy**

All of this change has the goal of freedom, liberty, equality, equity, coherently critical thinking, ecological responsibility, peace, nonviolence, happiness, value creation and the building of a new world humanitarian order. This change has the goal of inclusive democracy.

Some of the language today which points to the moral frontiers of this profound change in our evolving democracy for the next century are civility, diversity maturity, the vertically challenged, gender justice, global excellence, quality control, integrity, the physically challenged, gender-neutral, inclusive language, sustainability, religious pluralism, multiculturalism, cloning, communication between silos, universal human, smoke-free zones,

profanity-free zones, homophobia, distance learning, issue sensitive, time sensitive, quantum leap, xenophobia, the digital age and value creation. If we're going to grow up into democracy's crown, we've got to deal with the implications of all that.

The American civil and human rights nonviolent movement was a time of open struggle for international democracy and uniting our divided world house. In this movement, we rehearsed for the democracy that is to be. The whole civil rights movement was a rehearsal. It turned the stupid, stumbling South into the sunshine states because, "A moral person cannot patiently adjust to injustice." That, my friends, is where Gandhi, King and Ikeda are different. They have all taught the necessity of inclusiveness.

The cause of civil rights — which began as a point of entry for including minorities in the larger society — helped revitalize the American democratic ethos, as Martin Luther King Jr. had intended. That rehearsal time broke down barriers for women all over the world. The notion of men being leaders and women backing us up is not in the spirit of democracy. Women and men should work side by side on the front lines. Women are also leaders. Women in Montgomery, Alabama, for example, stayed up overnight in December 1955 and printed 35,000 flyers outlining what happened to Rosa Parks. That's how the movement got started.

We certainly have enjoyed much progress since the civil rights movement. Today, our challenge and our responsibility are to grow into the crown of our possibilities. We must grow into civilization's crown, into civil rights' crown and into civility's crown. We must grow into democracy's crown. We must "be the change we wish to see."

The wisdom of Robert Maynard Hutchins<sup>3</sup> agrees with Ikeda when he says: "Justice and freedom, discussion and criticism, intelligence and character — these are the indispensable ingredients of the democratic state. We can be rich and powerful without them. But not for long."

Through the founding of Soka University of America, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda has placed a crown of civility above the heads of Americans with the hope we will grow tall enough to wear it. Dr. Ikeda states your mission simply: "What our world most requires now is the kind of education that fosters love for humankind that develops character — that provides an intellectual basis for the realization of peace and empowers learners to contribute to and improve society." Not in the history of this nation has an institution of higher learning been founded on the premise of peace.

Dr. Ikeda emphasizes an education that calls for a revolution of the inner life. A human revolution that does not confuse knowledge for wisdom but develops compassionate wisdom by focusing on the deepest and most universal dimensions of life resulting in a natural empathy toward life in its infinite diversity. The failure of empathy makes violence possible. Our goal as "spiritual beings, planetary citizens and human incarnations" must be diversity-maturity.

We have in the twentieth century a near triumph of liberal democracy. Dr. Vincent Harding<sup>4</sup> helps us ask some relevant questions: How do we expand democracy in the poorest communities in this country? What is democratic economics, democratic health care, democratic distribution of wealth? Where are the centers of democracy? How shall American democracy be redeveloped and expanded? How do we achieve the political and spiritual deepening of democracy into education, religion, science and the arts? How do we create a multi-racial and international democracy? What kind of democratic practice will give the world peace? America is still a developing nation, maybe even ethically and morally a third world nation when you consider how frightened we are of differences that we have created.

You, here at Soka University at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are preparing to make students brave. You are preparing to teach them to move beyond this rehearsal time and continue the creation of absolute and indestructible happiness.

From my meeting and dialogue with Dr. Ikeda, it is clear that by happiness, Dr. Ikeda — like

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda — does not mean mere pleasure, indulgence, self-seeking, cowardice, indolence or complacency where the development of personality ceases and we are left with immature and arrogant individuals, unable to grow out of their selfish ways of never listening to others. Dr. Ikeda talks about an attitude of creativity, exhilaration, joy, accomplishment, deep fulfillment, purpose and enlightenment that evokes creativity in students. Happiness is obtained through fully realizing our potential, while not being swayed by circumstances, but seeking to tower above misfortune.

### **The Constant Creation of Value**

Real freedom is a constant creation of value. This is a very American idea. Freedom is not a gift. It is an achievement. If our dreams for democracy are to be actualized, every citizen in our nation is going to have to be educated to the limit of his or her capacity. And I don't mean uncritical accommodation, uncritical adjustment, uncritical amusement, uncritical exercise or uncritical training. Soka University will hold freedom seminars about the many meanings of freedom, and also institutionalized intergenerational seminars and conversations about new careers on how to live together peacefully across racial lines, as well as how to save the environment. If I may paraphrase Gandhi: “[Divine law, sacred principle], God is the greatest democrat the world knows, for the universe leaves us unfettered to make our own choice between evil and good.”

Fear should never be an organizing principle. Value creation must be! There must be, as your founder Dr. Ikeda says, “A revival of philosophy in the broadest, Socratic meaning of the word.” In our bodies, Spirit has given us a plan of how society is to work. We must be specialists with the vision as a whole, like each cell in our body. Soka University will provide more education to develop the imagination. It will be an education not always based on pure merit.

Freedom has a purpose. Freedom is for the pursuit of happiness and service. It is for the development of the individual and of society. Freedom gives us the release from the great burden of uniformity, and releases value creation. Dr. Vincent Harding says, “If two people agree on everything all the time, then one of them is unnecessary.” It is only when we are in dialogue that we are most human. There is something special about multi-lateral dialogue, one in which we are all minorities.

We are citizens of a world that does not yet fully exist. The future is an infinite succession of present moments. We must learn to live together now what we believe to be the best of the ideals we treasure. We must abandon undemocratic and uncivil practices. Daisaku Ikeda holds a crown above our heads with the hope that we will grow tall enough to wear it. He encourages us, in Gandhi's words, to “be the change we wish to see.”

And when we have grown up into democracy's crown, we will have answered the anguished echo from all of the wisest humane reformers: Roger Williams's<sup>5</sup> call for religious liberty; Samuel Adams's<sup>6</sup> call for political liberty; Henry David Thoreau's<sup>7</sup> denouncing coercion; William Lloyd Garrison's<sup>8</sup> demanding emancipation; Eugene V. Debs's<sup>9</sup> crying for economic equality; Robert Maynard Hutchins' insistence that democracy requires liberal education for all; Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream to be judged by the content of one's character and not by the color of one's skin; Nichiren Daishonin's call for perceiving the Mystic Truth inherent in all living beings; and Daisaku Ikeda's challenge that we be the highest seat of learning for humanity, the cradle of a new culture and a fortress for the peace of humankind.

Then we will be able to live together in a great “world house” in peace, respecting the worth and dignity of all human personality as sacred. This is the *raison d'être* for Soka University of

America as we attempt to wear democracy's crown in a new century and millennium that will emphasize the greatest ideals of democracy — civilization, civil rights and civility. With this realized hope of being the change you wish to see, President Daniel Y. Habuki of Soka will join the celebrated royal company of President David Star Jordan of Stanford, President William Rainey Harper of Chicago and President Benjamin Few of Duke. *Honoris causa* to kosen-rufu (or world peace) — when the grand idea of democracy envisioned in the Declaration of Independence blossoms for everybody around the globe.

1. DuBois, W.E.B., (1868–1963) American sociologist.
2. Whitehead, Alfred North, (1861–1947) British mathematician and scientist.
3. Hutchins, Robert Maynard, (1899–1977) American educator and university and foundation president.
4. Harding, Vincent, American historian and professor at the Iliff School of Theology at the University of Denver.
5. Williams, Roger, (1603?–83) British colonist, founder of Rhode Island and pioneer of religious liberty.
6. Adams, Samuel, (1722–1803) American political leader and signer of the Declaration of Independence.
7. Thoreau, Henry David, (1817–62) American writer and transcendentalist.
8. Garrison, William Lloyd, (1805–79) American journalist and reformer.
9. Debs, Eugene V., (1855–1926) American political activist and socialist.

### **A COLLEGE AND LIFE DEDICATED TO STUDENTS**

Morehouse College was founded in 1867 as the Augusta Institute with the purpose of preparing students for teaching and the ministry. It is the nation's only private, historically black, four-year, liberal arts college for men. Morehouse College is ranked number one on the Black Enterprise list of Top 50 Best Colleges for African-Americans. The college houses the Morehouse Research Institute and the Journal of Negro History. It is also home to the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, where Dr. Lawrence Carter has served as dean since 1979.

In addition to serving as dean of the chapel, Dr. Carter teaches Psychology of Religion, Religion and Ethics, Introduction to Religion and The Life and Thought of Martin Luther King Jr. He is also the archivist and curator of Morehouse College. For the past thirty-nine years, Dr. Carter has studied and worked in thirteen American universities, colleges and professional schools, spoken at sixty colleges, universities and seminars and received more than 300 speaking engagements from eighteen denominations in the United States and overseas. He has made more than fifty radio and television appearances, including Thames Television in London and has traveled to nineteen foreign countries.