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Last week the nation and the world planned to celebrate the life and legacy of Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. with the dedication of his memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., but due to an act of God, most of the weekend festivities were postponed.

Dr. Martin Luther King should not only have a national memorial in Washington, but also should have his face on Mount Rushmore, rather than stone images of American presidents whose policies were antithetical to the ideals of Native Americans (Sioux, Lakota) on whose sacred land the faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln were forged.

History reminds us, Dr. King is the true architect of American democracy. For example, Washington said freedom fighters that formed the Black Republic of Haiti should "…starve to death." Jeffersonian Democracy as it was called only permitted White males to vote and own land. Teddy Roosevelt was a rabid racist who supported the bigoted movie "Birth of a Nation". And while Lincoln moved the policy pendulum closer toward racial equity with his Emancipation

Proclamation and his support for the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, it took 95 years for freedom, citizenship, and voting to be enforced by federal law. Enter Dr. King.

Dr. King is the architect of American Democracy because he influenced progressive public policy for ALL Americans, regardless of race, religion, or resources. As Dr. King marched outside on Main Streets of America President Lyndon Johnson coerced in Congress for the passage of seminal legislation in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the 1968 Fair Housing Act that still impact American justice today. More than any other quality, Dr. King was a "man of the people." At 26, fresh out of graduate school with a PhD he, along with Mrs. Rosa Parks, led the Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott to challenge federal law's application to state laws of racial segregation in transportation. He walked with the people for 381 days. At 34, he marched with students in Birmingham, Alabama to secure a public accommodations bill in Congress. At 39, he brought dignity to sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee by advocating for their right to organize and receive fair wages.

Today, the workers at Wal-Mart — the world's largest company — face such issues as respect, fair-paying jobs, and a voice in workplace policies similar to those faced by Memphis garbage workers 1968. To date, Wal-Mart officials have taken a rigid stance against worker's right to organize, which assures lower wages. Predictably, the poverty-level jobs do more harm than good for individual employees as well as the communities in which they live.

However, recently Wal-Mart hourly workers gathered at the corporate headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas to petition for improved working conditions. The "Associates" believe that Wal-Mart is stronger as a global company because of the collective values its workers embrace — hard work ethic, compassion for one another, and honesty. Together workers have launched the "OUR Wal-Mart" Campaign that calls on company executives to do the following:

• Practice the words of founder Sam Walton in "…listening to everyone in your company…"

• Allow workers to join OUR Wal-Mart partnership without workplace retaliation

• Ensure confidentiality through "open door" policy by written resolution to worker issues by

allowing co-worker witness testimony

• Recognize that most hourly workers earn less than $10 per hour, rather than the $13 per hour promoted by Wal-Mart

• Recognize that most hourly workers are given less than 40 hours per week, rendering ineligible for full-time benefits

• Work closely with “Associates” to partner for the good of the entire company

I believe if Dr. King were alive today he would reiterate the words prophetically proclaimed at Mason Temple in Memphis on the rainy night of April 3, 1968 (the night before he was assassinated). On that night, Dr. King essentially said, “…God sent me here to say you are not treating his people right…” He went on to say that while companies such as Coca Cola and Sealtest Ice Cream have the right to make a profit they also have a moral and Godly duty to treat their employees with respect deserved. Dr. King would call for partnership over protest, dignity over dollars, and collectivism over confrontation.

Wal-Mart may well represent “America, Incorporated.” As such, the same American ideals espoused by Dr. King, Congress, and the White House over the past 50 years should be basis for a corporate giant partnering with its common workers. In order for our nation to rise out of recession Wal-Mart, the White House, and the workers must put partnership first.

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