**Our Call to Conscience Must be to Our Subconscious**

January 20, 2014

For a better tomorrow, we remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. today — what he spoke, stood, marched and died for.

Dr. King bent the fire, darkness and death of his time into an eternal light of justice that brings hope to hearts in places still darkened by injustice.

Today we must pause to rediscover through his work, our work for a better future.

Today we renew our commitment to pass on his light of justice to our children, our neighbors’ children and the children of those whom we may not know but who have been entrusted to us to guide and teach.

This is why the University of Kentucky is here today – to share a memory, to keep a spirit alive and to collectively join with you as citizens, parents and teachers of our next generation to let them know our past cannot be our future. Tomorrow must be better than today.

This past year my former hometown commemorated the 50th anniversary of the civil rights struggle, a time when thousands of protesters, freedom riders and children followed Dr. King into dogs and fire hoses. In the struggle of that year, little girls went to church to hear teaching, preaching and singing of hymns. Hateful cowards blew them up. Retribution would have been easy.

But 50 years ago Dr. King would write his manifesto – his letter from a Birmingham jail – “No piece of 20th century writing did more to mold the way we see each other in our society, the way we strive for justice, and the way of non-violence to help us seek redress for our society’s wrongs,” said a Birmingham clergyman this year.

50 years and thousands of years later we can more easily and clearly look back and see what it should take to move people, cities and nations to be better places.

History is easy to understand.

The prophet Amos declared in his day, “Let justice well up as the waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream,” to exhort his followers who were engulfed in fear about the change that lay ahead and the courage it would take to get to a better place.

In a Memphis fearful of change, Dr. King, the night before his death, would exhort his audience with the words of Amos. He asked those assembled, “Whenever injustice is around who must articulate it.” Like Amos, he stated, “When God speaks who can best prophesy.” We must. “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream,” he would say for the last time on behalf of long-suffering sanitation workers who simply wanted safe trucks and fair pay and benefits. The needed change all seems so simple now.

So today as we remember Dr. King let us see with clarity and courage the biases and injustices of our day.
The biases and hates of yesterday did not let black people and white people eat together at a lunch counter, swim or walk together at a public park, ride next to each other in a public bus and even bounce a basketball with each other at a public university. We have come a long way.

The biases of today are more subtle, hard to recognize. They are not simple to see; maybe they will be in 50 years. They are not owned exclusively by those who wear hate on their sleeves. They can be held by good people, by you and me when we unknowingly process and interpret what we see and hear in ways they keep us from doing business with each other, hiring each other, promoting each other and listening to each other to make the best decision.

Today our call to conscience must be to our subconscious.

Let us use the lessons of Dr. King to find our brokenness, still our souls and take us all to better places.