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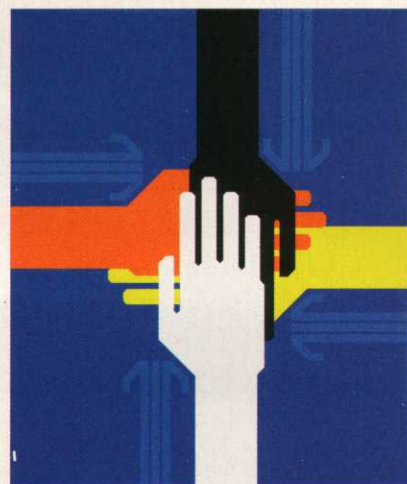
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MLK Day



One summer day in Washington, D.C., several years ago, I was helping a graduate school professor with research on William Faulkner at the Library of Congress.

That same day, the papers of Thurgood Marshall, the first African-American Supreme Court Justice, were made available to the public. The library swarmed with academic and journalistic heavy-hitters. I met one of them named

“The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers.”

— REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.,
“THE STRENGTH TO LOVE”

David Garrow, who wrote *Bearing the Cross*, the biography of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that won a Pulitzer prize.

I rushed to the bookstore, got the book and devoured it in but a few days. What I learned from Garrow's book, which dramatized the public triumphs and private foibles of King, was a lesson that I have seen repeatedly. To paraphrase author Mignon McLaughlin, Americans tend to honor their dead troublemakers and live conformists.

**IT'S TIME AMERICANS HONOR
THE SPIRIT OF THE MAN INSTEAD
OF JUST TAKING ANOTHER THREE-DAY HOLIDAY** **BY MARK LUCE**

On the third Monday of each January (this year, it's Jan. 19), the nation honors King's legacy of nonviolence and public service with a holiday. It should be a time of racial healing, of cross-cultural understanding and the best of the American ideals of equality and freedom. As I get older, however, I wonder if it has become just another three-day weekend.

In grade school, King is all but sainted. We learned that he led the struggle for civil rights and was cut down by an assassin's bullet in Memphis on the morning of April 4, 1968. What we didn't learn is that our own government spied on the man — tapped his phones, sent infiltrators to his meetings and filed report after report for FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. What we didn't learn is that President John F. Kennedy held out as long as he could from even addressing King's concerns. What we didn't learn was that King was human — he had several affairs and was fond of blue jokes. And what we didn't learn is that later in his life, King worked tirelessly — and rather radically — on the problem of poverty and also became an outspoken critic of America's deepening involve-

ment in Vietnam. Yes, he was nonviolent, but he was militant about equality.

In short, what we tend to hear about is the noble King, but we tend to forget that it was the country's own reluctance to practice what it preached — fairness, justice and liberty for all — that forced King into his role.

It would be wonderful to see us transform the King holiday into a full-fledged national day of service. It could mean volunteering to help with a parade, singing in a choir, aiding in a soup kitchen or performing an act in a cooperative spirit that emphasizes the “we” in our diverse country instead of the “me” of our daily lives. Such a day could help bring us together in a spirit of shared endeavor in what appears to be an increasingly divided and distracted country. All it takes is the understanding that things can always be better — just what King preached throughout his life.

Mark Luce, a Golfdom contributing editor based in Lawrence, Kan., rereads his copy of Bearing the Cross to remind himself about the importance of King's life.

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