

## The Future of Social Change

MARCH 2021

Featuring:

Dr. Bernice A. King, CEO, Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change

Catherine Keating, CEO, Wealth Management, BNY Mellon

Moderated by Tom Hoare, Deputy Chief Communications Officer, BNY Mellon

**TOM HOARE:** Hey, everyone, it's Tom Hoare from BNY Mellon. Welcome back to our Perspectives podcast series, where we bring you the conversations, the thinkers and the leaders that are shaping our financial world and beyond. Thanks for coming back and joining us for another episode.

It's really an honor to introduce our guest for today's episode, and it's an especially timely and relevant conversation as we wrap up Women's History Month this year. Our guest today is Dr. Bernice A. King. Dr. King is the youngest daughter of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King, and she really has had a distinguished career, really expanding on the incredible legacy of her parents. She is a global thought leader, she is a speaker, she is a peace advocate, and she is also the CEO of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She's got an incredible story, and we are so honored that she joined us to share it with all of you, and our conversation today is led by Catherine Keating. Catherine Keating, of course, is the CEO of BNY Mellon's Wealth Management business, and she is a member of BNY Mellon's executive committee, and they touch on a number of really timely and relevant topics.

Dr. King shares how her parents influenced and shaped her own life and career, and the example they set for her in terms of leading with compassion and driving sustained social impact and change. She talks about the outsized impact that the pandemic has had on communities of color, and how that impact has inspired the BE LOVE initiative that calls for social justice, which is something that she is

leading as part of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She talks about the importance of mentors, allies, friends, and supporters when you think about how to create and seize opportunities for success, and where you can really drive change in our world, so we're going to get right to it.

As always, we want to hear from you. Listen, rate, review, share your feedback with us, wherever you listen to your podcast – Apple, Spotify, Google, or whatever platform you choose – and as always, you can find us on social media via LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and of course on [bnymellon.com](http://bnymellon.com). Enjoy this episode, and we'll see you at the next one.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** I am so delighted to introduce Dr. Bernice King. Dr. King has made challenging racism in our country her life's work, following in the footsteps of her remarkable parents, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King. We're just thrilled to have you here today.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Thank you, glad to be here.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** So let me start with your parents' influence on your career. One of the things that your father said in the "I Have a Dream" speech is that he hoped that his four children, and you're the youngest of the four, would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the strength of their character. How did your parents, who were two great civil rights activists, influence your career, Dr. King?

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Well, of course, I was fortunate to have two parents that were outstanding people and great leaders, and usually when I think about their influence, I tell people that the most important thing for me is that my parents didn't just teach me important leadership values, they emulated them. They were a daily example of what it means to lead compassionately, to be a servant leader, to be a transformative leader, and my mom I would say mostly influenced me by her day-to-day actions. She did a very good job of invoking a lot of my father's teachings and a lot of my father's words in our home, and it helped to create a framework for my growth and development. She provided me with different opportunities at different times in my life to exercise my leadership, and so I really credit a lot of who I am today to both of them.

Of course, I didn't know my father as much, I was only five when he was assassinated, but I gleaned so much from his life and watching films and listening to her. She was like a walking encyclopedia concerning the work that they were involved in, and having the benefit and value of the entire King family – including my grandparents, who raised my father and his sister – to contribute to my understanding of who he was as a person and as a leader, and his growth development and his

trajectory has played a great influence on my life, and I try to as much as possible stay true at least to the whole notion of being a servant leader, a compassionate leader, and a transformative leader.

And last but not least, I'll frame it in this context: both of my parents led with their conscience, which sometimes can be challenging, and I find myself trying to remain true to that. My father was once in an interview with a gentleman by the name of Mike Douglas, and at this time, my father had spoken out against the war in Vietnam, and it was very controversial for him to take that stance as a civil rights leader. Many people felt that he just should have stayed in the realm of civil rights, you know, he didn't know anything about international affairs, and that his speaking out would jeopardize the support of President Johnson and his administration for civil rights action, but my father felt that he had to follow his conscience, and so Mike Douglas asked him this question, "Are you concerned about losing favor with President Johnson?" And my father's response was "Well, that's not the most important thing. The most important thing is that I not fall out of favor with what is truth and with what my conscience tells me is just and with what my conscience tells me is right." He went on to say, "I would much rather remain in favor with these principles than with a person who may misunderstand the position I take." Wow, a leader of conscience, and so I thank God for the deposits that my parents made in my life.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** Well, thank you for that, and I want to focus in particular for a moment on your mother, Coretta Scott King, because you've mentioned her influence on you and, you know, professional women can sometimes feel that it can be hard for their voices to be heard, it can be hard for their accomplishments to be recognized. Your father's legacy is very well known, obviously, but you said that your mother, Coretta Scott King, deserves immense praise for really architecting his legacy. Can you talk a bit about your mom's role in driving change?

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Yeah, wow, I mean everybody that's listening to me obviously knows my dad, and this may surprise some people: over 100 nations around the world celebrate his birthday every year. He's not a citizen of their nation but yet they celebrate his birthday. So I always tell people that when my father was assassinated, he was one of the most hated persons in America, and today he is one of the most admired and loved persons, although he is no longer with us in the world, and how did that happen? Is that just automatic because he was a great orator and he was a great leader, he made tremendous contributions to our world? No, it was because my mother was the architect, as you said, of his legacy. She did not come to it by accident. She came to it because they were both working as partners in this movement, and she was very committed to social change.

In fact, she was an activist before she met my father, she was a peace activist, had been involved in a lot of peace work, was very influential in my father speaking out against the war in Vietnam. She said, “Hey, I believe it’s time for you to lend your voice to the peace movement,” and it was difficult at times, as I said. There were friends that were turning on him in the civil rights movement, criticized him publicly, but it was my mother who stood strong and said, “We need you in the peace movement,” so my father subsequently spoke out against the war in Vietnam.

When he was assassinated, two-and-a-half months after he was assassinated, obviously through prayer, she birthed the King Center, because she knew that the work that they did in that movement needed to be catapulted into the future so that generations like now would have the glimpses to draw from, the teachings that he left with her, with us, available to them. So she set out to travel around the world with her book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* – I’m sorry, I mean *Where Do We Go from Here – My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, and she started establishing his presence in the world, and further after, of course, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in ’64, and then she came home and she started encouraging state and local officials to celebrate the King holiday and send their proclamations to the King Center, and she continued to build upon the work of exposing people to my father and building the King Center at the same time, and once the King Center was up and running, she then proceeded to put a lot of her energy into the King holiday.

Now, even before that time, she had been very heavily involved in influencing full employment legislation. The Brady Bill, which I believe there is a bill about to be signed into law, as we know, around background checks, well, she was a part of the prelude of all of this, and we know about her work with the LGBTQ+ community, and her continual work on the peace front, and so she was extremely influential. She built broad coalitions, and that’s how the holiday really I think passed. In 1983, she called together almost 700 different organizations, that’s a lot, to march on Washington that August, and before they could even hit there, Congress had passed the King Holiday legislation and had it moved to the Senate. I guess they felt, oh Lord, this groundswell of people are now coming to D.C. under her leadership, and of course we know in November that year, the legislation was signed into law.

So she really, when you think about Dr. King, we wouldn’t know him and his iconic state had it not been for her diligence, her consistent and persistent way of shaping his legacy, ensuring that his papers would be here today, and the first speech that he ever made on behalf of being President of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization that spearheaded the Montgomery bus boycott, she insisted that someone take a tape recorder, because she was still home, had delivered

my sister I believe two-and-a-half weeks prior and couldn't go, but she knew instinctually something powerful, historical was happening, and we have that speech today because of her.

So when we think about him, please think about her because we really wouldn't know him the way we know him if it were not for her, and if she did not continue to champion important causes for humanity.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** I love some of the words you used – consistent, disciplined, persistent in making this happen. They are such great qualities for anybody in working on something important, and for all of us in our careers. I love that. So let me switch to the pandemic, because the global pandemic has forced all of us to stop and focus on what's really important, what's important in life, what's important in work. It's done here at BNY Mellon. Our CEO, Todd Gibbons, led the whole company to reaffirm our purpose as a company, our values, and I have a feeling that that may have been the case a bit for you as well in the King Center because you have announced a new initiative over the last month, you call it the BE LOVE initiative, which is calling for action on social justice, and we know, of course, that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on people of color in this country and around the world, so talk to us about this new initiative, what it is and why now, why you thought it was so important.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Well, you know, over the last few years, there's been great polarization and division in our country. You know, it's one thing to have differences, it's another thing to become combative, to become inhumane in how we deal with those differences.

And so in looking at that, our institution decided, you know, how can we begin to really drive this whole notion of the vision of the beloved community, where everybody is valued and treated with respect and dignity, and when we looked at 'beloved community,' within that phrase is the words be love, and we wrestled with this whole notion of doing a campaign around love because oftentimes people misunderstand love. You know, some people dismiss it as weak and ineffectual, as an affectionate emotion, as sentimental, but my father helped to frame it differently and he talked about the relationship between power and love, that power needs love to not be destructive, and love needs power to not be weak, and therefore he went on to say that power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

So we decided to go on this journey through a BE LOVE campaign to help us refocus in this nation our energies away from all of the hate and the hostility and the divisiveness, to looking at something that should drive us all in terms of change, which is love. How do we come from a place of love? What does that look like?

So we're looking at how do we answer these three questions – who must we be, what must we do, and what are we to accomplish in what we do – and subsequently, we ask critical questions. Let's redefine love so that people understand in the context of what my father was talking about. Love is a powerful force. Love does implement the demands of justice, it does not sit silently by, but love also is compassionate. It speaks in ways that it doesn't cancel people all the way out. Love engages in a humane way such that you are focused on the injustice and not seeking to defeat, demean, and degrade the person. These all come out through some of the teachings we do at the King Center. Our work is focused on preparing global citizens to create a more just, humane, equitable, and peaceful world through my father's nonviolent teachings, which we have rebranded Nonviolence Through Society, because we believe it is a lifestyle as he taught, that nonviolence is not just about a tactic you use when you're involved in social justice, but you use it in corporate America, you use it in your home, you use it in your church, you use it in the classroom.

So this whole framing is about getting us back to our center of love, and letting that catapult the decisions we make, the conversations we have, the actions we take, and so in doing that, we are doing this series of BE LOVE education and training. The first one is about redefining love, getting us on the same page, revolutionary love which changes people and systems, and then reconciliation love, reconciliatory love, because for my father, that was the ultimate goal, reconciliation, and when you have that ultimate goal, the means and the end have to be consistent. I can't reconcile with you if I'm trying to win over you instead of win over your understanding and friendship, and so that's what the campaign is about. We put it on our website and invited people to take a pledge related to being love in our everyday life, in the decisions we make, in the conversations we have, in the actions we take and so much more, and then inviting people to take those courses, and also encouraging people to connect with organizations who are doing the work of social justice and social transformation so that we all can be involved. And then finally, one of our next phases will be to cultivate spaces and coalitions that are focused on working to implement local, state, national, and international policies and practices that eradicate hate, inhumanity, injustice, and inequity. So we invite everybody to come to the [kingcenter.org](http://kingcenter.org) and take the pledge, join us in this. Ultimately, it will be a movement, this true love movement that implements the demands of justice and corrects everything that stands against love as we are focused on creating the beloved community with the education and training of people in my father's nonviolent philosophy and methodology.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** Well, it's really, really inspiring, Dr. King, and again it just kind of reminds

me of some of the work that we've done at our company this year. You say, you know, focus on what your purpose is and what you want to accomplish, that's exactly what we did. That's exactly what we did, our purpose is to try to help our clients be successful in the financial world, but I'm also struck by something else you said. You said leadership is a lifestyle, and that's a very interesting way to think about it, right, that's very, very interesting for all of us, and it occurs to me that sometimes leadership means stepping forward and other times it can mean stepping back, and in your case, I was struck by the fact that you were the very first woman ever elected as President of a Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It's a position that your dad had held, your brother had held, and you were elected, and you chose to step back. Can you talk to us about what it means as a leader to sometimes step back?

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Well, actually, in that particular situation, I didn't get a chance to serve as President of the SCLC. I was elected, but as soon as I was elected, the board of the SCLC split and they were embroiled in a legal battle, and I spent about a year and a half working with my team, trying to get ready to serve in that position, and it looked like this was going to be an intractable conflict and I had to make a decision, because to be elected and now step away was difficult for me. Did it cast me as a failure? Would people look at me as not being able to have the courage to take the reins in spite of what was going on?

But unfortunately for me at that time, I had just come out of a court battle with my brothers and I was leery, I mean I was litigation leery, and I did not want to be a part of any more battles like that, and so I decided that it was best for me to step down from the position, and of course I made a public statement, and you know, usually when I make public statements, I try to do it in a way that doesn't attack the other person, and it takes carefulness in doing that, it takes understanding the other person and being compassionate, so that's what I did. I made the decision to step away because I needed to be in a position where I would know who my bosses would be. Can you imagine having two boards? It's enough dealing with one board.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** We agree, we agree, one board is plenty of board. We agree, we agree.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Right, and so it was best for me at the time to do that, and that's what I did, and subsequently about 11 months or 11 and a half months later is when I became CEO of the King Center.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** Wow, congratulations on that. You know, nothing in life that's important is

ever really accomplished alone, and in fact in the “I Have a Dream” speech, one of the things your dad said is we cannot walk alone. We need allies, we need people who will walk with us, who will work with us. How have allies played a role in your success and in the success of the King Center, because it’s one of the things that the Women’s Initiative Network at BNY Mellon wants? We want lots of allies to help us with our work.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Yeah, I mean it’s important to have people walk with you, mentors, allies, friends, supporters in everything you do. I’ve had people who have obviously exposed me to things that I was totally unaware of. I’ve had people to connect me to people that I needed to know. I’ve had, obviously, situations where people have given me opportunity.

I remember when I first was looking for an opportunity to use my skills in ministry, and a friend of mine had just accepted a pastor role, and I kept in touch with him about every quarter, and he was telling me about his new assignment at this church, and I told him, “It’s ironic, I’m looking for a place to serve,” and I went and ended up serving there, and he gave me an opportunity. When I had never served in a pastoral role before, he gave me an opportunity to kind of help in building some of the ministries of the church, you know, giving me the feedback that I needed, kind of sort of like an apprenticeship of sorts, you know, evaluation, feedback, and continuing to encourage me every step of the way.

One of the things I said, my mom, I have to just say, you know, I don’t see my mom, well, she’s an ally but she’s my mom, but she did so many things, she opened up so many doors for me, and I have to tell this story because it’s an interesting story, because most people wouldn’t necessarily do this as a daughter to a mother. I was trying to get some favor with a bank, and my mom picked up the phone and called the president of the bank and asked if he would have a meeting with her daughter, and he agreed to do that. I was trying to get a loan, I was young, much younger, and he met with me and agreed to give me this signature loan, which usually when you’re young like that, you have to have collateral and all that kind of stuff. When I left the bank, I said to my mom, I called her on the phone and I said, “I just want to thank you for the privilege and blessing of being your daughter,” because I know that meeting never would have happened if it had not been for her influence and advocacy, and I’ve seen that happen over and over again.

Obviously, the King Center wouldn’t be where it is today without the allies that my mother had. She faced a lot of challenges. People wanted her to stay home and just raise us, you know, because back then, women were not supposed to be in the workplace, you know, in ’68, but she knew she had a

mission and she knew she had a purpose and a calling, and she set out to do it, and there were people in my family who undergirded her and supported her, and who worked side-by-side with her. There were friends who came along and helped to navigate relationships with certain leaders in corporate America to say hey, this work that she's doing over here is great work. I've seen that over and over again with the King Center.

When I came in, I had to restore some of the image of the King Center, and I had people who believed in me as a person and as a leader, and they came alongside of me and advocated for me before other people, and it's just had a ripple effect, and so I thank God for that support. We cannot, as you said, we cannot do it alone. Anybody who thinks they're so talented and intelligent and educated to do it alone, I think they are deceived, highly deceived. It takes people undergirding, supporting, opening doors for you, advocating for you, encouraging you, because we do get discouraged.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** One of the things that I love about your comments there is that you're basically telling us that we can look very broadly for allies, right? You have allies in your family, like your mom; you have allies in your community, like you did at the church; you could have allies in industry, as you talk about other companies, and it's really very good advice for all of us, you know, there's no limit to the number of allies we can have, and we could be very greedy in trying to find them, to a certain extent, if we want to drive change.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Exactly, and the important thing is to avail yourself of that.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** That's right.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** And never shut off, even strangely enough, there are people who you may have differences with, but there may be points of connection and they are able to even open doors for you.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** That's right, that's right. No, it's really, really good advice to my thousand colleagues that are listening in, and our clients too, so thank you. So let me go back to International Women's Day and the theme of "Choose to Challenge." As I said, it can be hard to challenge and it can be hard for women to challenge sometimes, right? We want to be constructive, we don't want to be aggressive, and yet we want to drive change. Is there one thing that you could suggest to everybody listening today about challenge and how to challenge constructively – and by the way, if there's more than one, that's great too – but one thing that you have learned, you know, leading a life of challenge, challenge of the status quo, what would you say to our listeners today? What's the one

thing that they could try?

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Well, this is going to sound interesting when we use the word “challenge,” juxtaposing next to the word “listening” to understand. I find that it’s important to seek openings when you are trying to challenge, particularly in an issue that may be controversial. People have openings, and the only way that they have openings is sometimes you have to take the posture of I’m not here to point a finger at you, I’m here to first seek to understand where you are coming from.

Stephen Covey calls it one of the habits of highly successful people, seeking first to understand then to be understood, because I think so many times we approach situations where we know how we feel, we know the passion surrounding it, and we want people on our page, but in a diverse culture, we have to find openings to connect with people so that we can then find common ground to bring about change that is a win-win outcome, because that’s where I approach things from. I’m always listening for where can I extract something here from this perspective that has a bit of truth to it, and extract something here, and bring those together in a way that all parties can say, okay, I may not be able to get it all but I can live with this, so let’s move forward in this way toward that win-win pathway, so that’s one of the things that I think is important.

The second thing is we are not going to drive change in siloes, write that out. We will not drive change in siloes. We have got to get outside of our siloes and our comfort zones. If we are really going to change the world, think about this quote of my father’s. He said – and he used the word “men” more globally, so I want everybody to understand the context because I want to use his actual quote, so insert “woman” or whatever – he said, “Men hate each other because they fear each other, they fear each other because they don’t know each other, they don’t know each other because they don’t – they’re not connected,” wait a minute, I’m trying to get it right. “They fear each other because they don’t know each other, they don’t know each other because they don’t communicate with each other, and they don’t communicate with each other because they are disconnected from each other.” Connection is so important in this world today to drive change, and we can’t connect this in siloes, because our world has so many different perspectives and angles, and we’ve got to be able to reach across these barriers and reach across the table, connect with each other and find these win-win pathways.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** Well, thank you. You have no idea how your words about getting out of siloes to drive change resonate with us at BNY Mellon and with our audience. You know, your comments today have been so inspiring to all of us here about leadership and about challenge, and I

have sort of four key takeaways that I'm going to take away with me, so thank you for that.

The first one you said is that leadership is really about purpose. You talked about your dad and leading with conscience, and you talked about yourself and leading with compassion, and that leadership is really about purpose, and we believe that at BNY Mellon too.

The second thing I heard you say that really spoke to me is that leadership is a lifestyle, and in that lifestyle you can gather allies all around you, in your family, in the community, in your company, in your industry, you know, to help challenge and drive change.

And the third thing you said is that the first thing about leadership and challenge is listening, it's listening and understanding, and I think that's very important in a world today where it can feel like there's a lot of noise, but you're saying the first thing you have to do is listen, and I think that's very, very powerful for all of us.

And the last one – and again, I told you this really resonates with my colleagues and me – is that you can't lead and accomplish change in siloes, you have to get out of your siloes and find what you share, and that's very, very powerful and important to us at BNY Mellon too.

So again, on behalf of all my colleagues, Dr. King, thank you so much for the work you do, thank you for the time you have given us this morning, and really this inspiration that we're all going to take with us through our day today and into the future, so thank you. Thank you.

**DR. BERNICE KING:** Thank you so much, thank you all for having me, I enjoyed it.

**CATHERINE KEATING:** Oh, it's just been wonderful, just been wonderful.

**TOM HOARE:** Hey, everyone, Tom here again. Thanks for joining us for this episode, I hope you enjoyed that conversation, and as I said at the top, we hope you will keep listening on Apple, Spotify, Google, or wherever you consume your podcasts, and we'd be grateful if you'd share your feedback. Leave a review or a rating, or tell us what you'd like to hear more about on social media, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and of course on [bnymellon.com](http://bnymellon.com). We appreciate you joining, we're grateful to you as listeners, and we'll see you at the next episode.

BNY Mellon is the corporate brand of The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation and may be used to reference the corporation as a whole and/or its various subsidiaries generally. This material does not constitute a recommendation by BNY Mellon of any kind. The information herein is not intended to provide tax, legal, investment, accounting, financial or other professional advice on any matter, and should not be used or relied upon as such. The views expressed within this material are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of BNY Mellon. BNY Mellon has not independently verified the information contained in this material and makes no

representation as to the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, merchantability or fitness for a specific purpose of the information provided in this material. BNY Mellon assumes no direct or consequential liability for any errors in or reliance upon this material.

BNY Mellon will not be responsible for updating any information contained within this material and opinions and information contained herein are subject to change without notice.

This material may not be reproduced or disseminated in any form without the prior written permission of BNY Mellon. Trademarks, logos and other intellectual property marks belong to their respective owners.

© 2020 The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation. All rights reserved.