Given Dr. King’s model of love overcoming fear and violence, how can we strengthen our communities?

Fear is a sickness. It will crawl into the soul of anyone who engages it. It has tainted your peace already.
I did not raise you to see you live with fear. Strike it from your heart.” Flint Sky, character *Apocalypto* (2006)

The above quote taken from *Apocalypto* a fictional movie about the internal turmoil that opened the Mayan culture up to conquer by the Spanish, could just as well come from the lips of Dr. Martin Luther King. The quote, like Dr. King refers to the power of the heart and its positive emotion of love conquering the crippling emotion of fear. It is this knowledge that Dr. King understood could strengthen and empower a community against any force that tries to destroy it. He and other freedom fighters used this wisdom to face the violent attacks from their oppressors. Now, as we face the violence and ignorance of poverty, we must look back to these great wise elders who have accomplished so much. For Martin Luther King to practice this he faced vicious dogs, high pressure fire hydrant attack and even house bombings. Today, we must stand on the shoulders of these courageous freedom fighters and gain strength from their wisdom to save our communities once again. In practice today it should look like neighbors not afraid to watch their neighborhoods and know who is around, people acknowledging each other with words of kindness and concern, and respect of our elders and leaders.
I have heard people say that drugs and gangs have made their neighborhoods unsafe so they move to new areas. This is not the solution; if we are not courageous in the fight against these ills then they will only move also, possibly where you are again. I’m not say don’t be fearful of someone shooting randomly down a street, but as Dr. King states:

“Normal fear protects us; abnormal fear paralyses us. Normal fear motivates us to improve our individual and collective welfare; abnormal fear constantly poisons and distorts our inner lives. Our problem is not to be rid of fear but, rather to harness and master it.”

We must ask ourselves, is it normal to watch and take note of who is in our neighborhood and why? Is it abnormal for an elder to sit on the porch and get fresh air? Analyze your answers, heed the words of Dr. King and remember the quote about fear stated in the beginning and empower yourself to make a change in your communities. Don’t be disillusioned that you won’t be targeted for retaliation by some, but there is yet another bit of wisdom from Dr. King in the same kinds of situations,

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

I could list more quotes from Dr. King and others on the crippling power of fear, the strengthening power of love, unity and hope, but it is the action behind these quotes that we need. We should arm ourselves with the strength of these words and the power of the actions they evoked, face our cancerous fear and go into our neighborhoods ready to do battle with corruption. When we empower ourselves to make change, we inspire others to do the same. We will then be able to witness the magic of community as each one strengthens one. Some feel that violent people should be locked up and the key thrown away or that they should be executed. I believe that it is our duty to understand that history of violence and it’s consequences to our society in all its forms. As a nation we need to look at the development of violence in communities; only when we address the root of these problems shall we halt the continuance of them. We have been a nation of hatred and violence. Our nation has focused on the achievement of its American dream and has done so at the sacrifice of others. We must admit these truths and change as a nation community and ensure equality of all peoples. If a person is not valued and empowered with
education because of the social-economic statues they will find alternative means of empowerment. History has shown us that those with the biggest guns and most fearless attitude are the ones who win the games. This is a war of personal power and respect. Our youth and underserved community members are acting out their desires for acknowledgement and equality. It is an obligation of all who are educated and wise to be willing to put aside their fears and fight for equality for all in all situations and against corruption and ignorance.

“History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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