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Commentary

Standing in the Light of Dr. King

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Abstract

It has been ten years since the publication of Professor Larry Gostin's pathbreaking contribution to law, medicine, and public health, Global Health Law (Harvard University Press, 2014). As Professor Sofia Gruskin's review in The Lancet noted, the book "brings attention to critical aspects of law that anyone interested in global health needs to be concerned about…" This sentiment was echoed throughout the academy, civil society, among non-governmental organizations, legislative bodies, and even courts.

Professor Gostin's legacy fits among those who harnessed their wisdom, expertise, and voices for the betterment of others and who recognized that chief among the worst harms for any people to endure is the denial of healthcare. This year, one decade after the publication of this of Global Health Law and numerous articles, commentaries, and books, it is clear that Professor Lawrence O. Gostin refuses to be silent on matters that concern the health of the most vulnerable in our world. Our planet is better for his very presence and commitment to what is just, kind, and compassionate.

Keywords: global health; Dr. King; equality; equity; justice; healthcare; law; global law

It has been ten years since the publication of Professor Larry O. Gostin's pathbreaking contribution to law, medicine, and public health, *Global Health Law* (Harvard University Press, 2014). As Professor Sofia Gruskin's review in *The Lancet* noted a decade ago, the book "brings attention to critical aspects of law that anyone interested in global health needs to be concerned about…" This sentiment was echoed throughout the academy, civil society, among non-governmental organizations, legislative bodies, and even courts.

The revered Justice, Edwin Cameron (ret.), of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, praised the book as "groundbreaking," explaining that it "replicates" the enduring struggle for the right to health, "employing wider principles of social justice and international law." Justice Cameron's own courageous legacy, including bringing much needed attention to HIV/AIDS and outspoken thought leadership on poverty, justice, and equality mirrors the unwavering, steadfast and indeed brave advocacy of Professor Gostin.

It is rare that an academic book praised throughout the world, and rarer still that it becomes the most notable model for health, law, and policy reform. That is why *Global Health Law* was so incredibly groundbreaking, offering a language and framework for capturing more than public health scaled internationally. Rather, the principled stance that Professor Gostin takes is that no matter where in the world a child is born, certain fundamental, basic human rights must govern: clean water, clean air, nutritious food, and a safe means of traveling to school. For Professor Gostin, without these core, achievable basics in the life of every child, we as a global community have failed. In this vein, as Dr. Martin Luther King implored years ago, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." This principle guides Professor Gostin's work in profound ways.

Thus, while rare that an academic work is hailed far beyond the academy, in this case the acclaim and praise were well-deserved then as well as now. At the core of his voluminous and prolific work, for which he is the most cited health law scholar in the world, are the core principles that guide not only his scholarship and advocacy, but indeed his life's work to make the world a more just, safe, and healthy space for all regardless of religion, race, sex, gender identity, or geography. For Larry, if all cannot succeed, there is a fundamental problem — at a human rights level.

To truly appreciate Professor Gostin and the reach of his scholarship, thought leadership, policy influence, and advocacy is to understand that his call to action for better health is guided by principles found at the heart of the civil rights movements around the world that have brought about equality for the most marginalized and vulnerable. It is a call of social justice found in the heroic action of his forebears that resonate within him and that are exemplified in his work with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and on national and global platforms.

Professor Gostin's legacy fits among those who harnessed their wisdom, expertise, and voices for the betterment of others and who recognized that chief among the worst harms for any people to endure is the denial of healthcare. It was this understanding that Dr. Martin Luther King shared with the world on March 25, 1966, before the Medical Committee for Human Rights in Chicago, Illinois. At the group's annual meeting, he urged that "of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman." Later that year, when confronted with a question about why he concerned himself with health, women's reproductive rights, poverty, and much more, Dr. King responded that he refused to segregate his moral concerns.

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