

## "I have a dream..."

At the forefront of the nonviolent civil rights movement was Martin Luther King, Jr., heading his battle with dedication and determination, commitment and courage, justice and equality, and inspiring many to follow. The following is an excerpt from his speech, delivered Aug. 28, 1963, in Washington, D.C.:

"... I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character...

I have a dream that one day 'every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.'

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

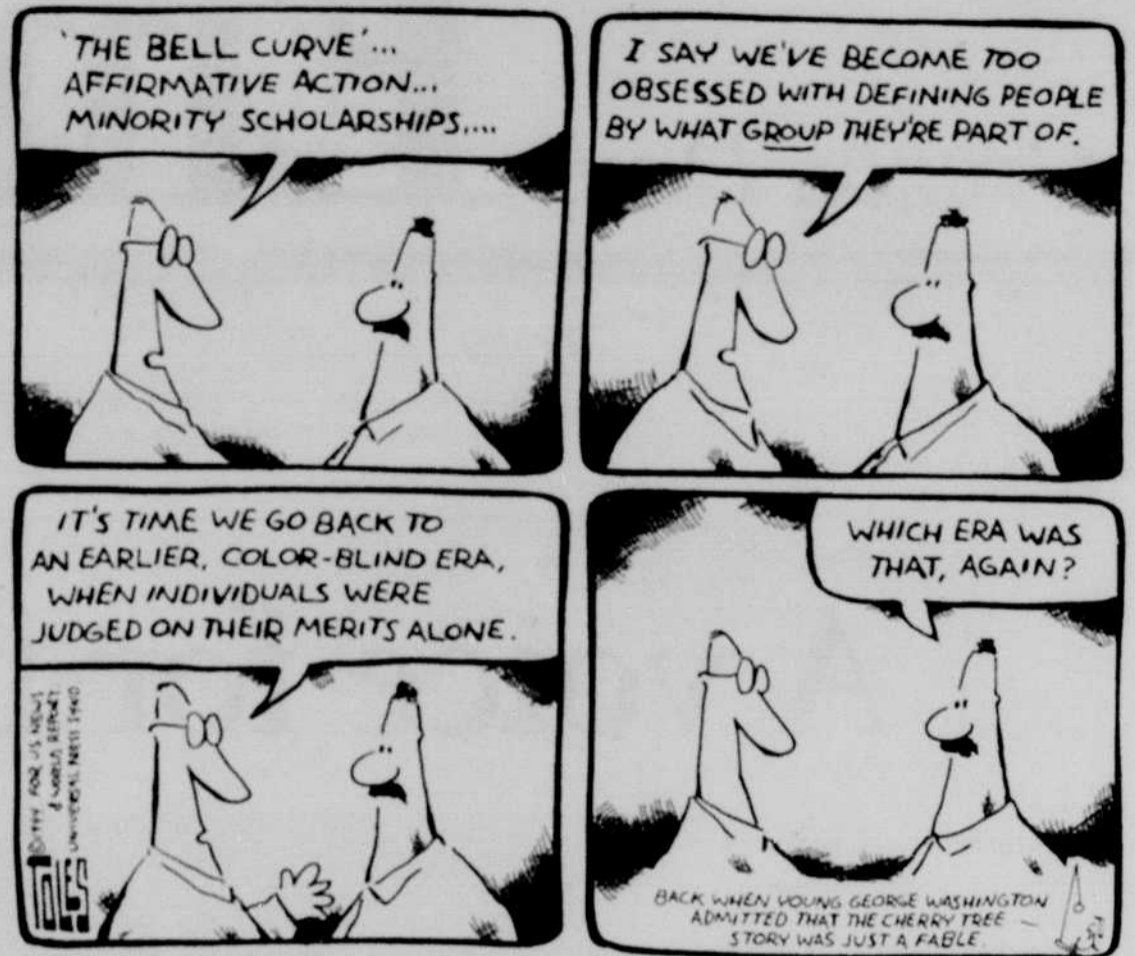
And this will be the day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning 'My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my father died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.'

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado! Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California! But not only that; let freedom ring from the Stone Mountain of Georgia! Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!'"



### COMMENTARY

## Dr. King's life history lesson

Heidi Ford

As the curtains were drawn on the post-World War II era in the United States, a new movement was brewing in the South. Large numbers of black Americans were beginning to organize and collaborate for social reform. The slave revolts, underground railroad and protest organizations of earlier times served as the impetus for what would come to be known as the Civil Rights Movement.

The 1950s and 1960s emerged under a veil of confrontation, bigotry, and violence. A savage tide of violence and oppression through a land teeming with hatred and fear was unleashed in 1955 after a young boy, Emmett Till, was the victim of a brutal, unpunished murder.

Baton Rouge, La. was the setting for the first major civil rights battle. Blacks successfully orchestrated a mass boycott of the city's segregated bus system. Authorities were forced to make concessions to the demands of the movement because of the sheer number and force of the people involved. Many other bus boycotts, such as the famous one Montgomery Ala., were inspired and modeled by this effort.

By 1957 the spirit of the movement turned to legal matters. Although segregation of public schools had been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1954, Little Rock, Ark. was just beginning to desegregate its public school system in 1957. In that same year, a Civil Rights Commission was founded by the government to investigate violations of the 15th Amendment, which provides for equal protection under the law for all citizens of the United States.

The non-violent, yet direct actions of the movement did not bring success without serious backlash. As the new decade of the 1960s unfolded, blacks turned to the streets protesting peacefully under the direction of leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.

Jailing, beating, and murder of such peaceful protesters erupted into a series of riots in Watts, a neighborhood in California, Detroit, Newark, N.J., and Washington, D.C. The predawn murder of Black Panther leaders in their sleep by federal law officers in Chicago in the 1960s clearly showed the great lengths to which racist factions of society would go to prevent black liberation.

Birmingham would be the 1963 site for a demonstration that led to the unleashing of dogs on the crowd of protesters. Violence was becoming all too prevalent by the officers lining the movement's demonstrations.

Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as the focused, pacifist leader for the Civil Rights Movement in America. By 1963 he had founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to further desegregation nationally and end poverty. He led a massive march on the nation's capital in 1963, opposed the Vietnam War and pushed hard for the liberation of his people.

King, a native of Atlanta, entered Morehouse College at the age of 15 under a special program for gifted students. He received bachelor's degree in 1948.

In his senior year, King decided to enter the ministry. During his studies he became acquainted with the writings and works of Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence. He studied theology at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pa. After graduating at the top of his class from Corzer, King earned his Ph.D from Boston University in 1955.

King married Coretta Scott, a native of Alabama, in 1953. The couple had four children.

The 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala. was King's introduction into the national spotlight when the Montgomery Improvement Association chose him as its leader. From that time on his idealism and dedication to the Civil Rights Movement never wavered.

In his first speech to the group he said, "We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.

As a result of the work of Dr. King and others like him Congress passed the strongest Civil Rights legislations since the Civil War in 1964. It was established laws mandating that equal rights would be granted for all citizens in voting, education, public accommodations and in consideration for programs that offer federal assistance.

In December of 1964 King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in Oslo, Norway.

The final Civil Rights Act was passed in 1968 guaranteeing equal housing, and real estate consideration to all.

Although the year brought solid change to the country, it was accompanied by a horrific loss. On April 4th, 1968 during a speech from a hotel deck in Memphis, King was assassinated.

The work of Dr. King was not to be forgotten, by the nation or by the world. In 1986 Congress voted to observe a national holiday in his honor, on the third Monday in January. However, even decades after the Civil Rights Movement began the state of Arizona refused observe the King holiday.

The persistence, patience and spirit of the Civil Rights Movement was absolutely vital to the shedding of the network of oppression which dominated the United States in the post war era.

With the guidance and memory of a leader like King, we can recognize that a pacifist agenda for social reform is surely the only way to bring about successful change.

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