



Martin Luther King, Jr.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

By David Nero



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On November 2, 1983 a bill from Congress creating a new national holiday was signed into law by then, President Ronald Reagan. This new national holiday established January 15 as a legal public commemoration of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Beginning in 1986, this day is officially celebrated on the third Monday of each January.

Now, over seventeen years later, it is my pleasure and honor to be able to offer these words in this space, in recognition of the struggle, sacrifice and successes that Dr. King symbolizes in the quest of America to make the promise and hope of freedom a reality for all citizens of this great country.

In his life and in his death, Dr. King reminded us courageously, eloquently and heroically that an unfortunate reality of both our national past and our global present is that the joys and benefits of personal freedom and civil entitlement are still not possessed by all colors, classes and nationalities in equal measure. Martin Luther King became a symbol and a leader in the modern day struggle to defeat bigotry, discrimination, oppression and racism wherever it was found in this country or around the world.

In that struggle his primary legacy to us was the gentle weapon of love and the stainless sword of non-violence. These were the ideals and principles that guided his struggle against injustice. Through him we learned that the human spirit is greater than physical violence. We learned that hope and courage are more powerful than fear. He preached and he practiced the profound belief that race does not have to divide those of good faith and high intentions. He knew and he helped us all to believe that love can and will prevail over hate.

But as I take this moment to reflect more deeply, more completely on what he stood for and what he accomplished, other things also became clear that still have profound meaning in the circumstances and situations we now struggle through without his physical and spiritual presence to aid our quest.

He understood that those who have sought to oppress right and dethrone justice do not rely on any one single weapon to impose subjugation, but instead have brought to bare a veritable arsenal of weapons an strategies to accomplish those ends.

The assault has targeted both the body and the mind, ranging from the fabrication of negative racial and cultural stereotypes (which continue to dominate public media and communication) to the physical terrors of old style southern justice, lynch law and night-riding, which has not yet completely disappeared from our streets or countrysides even these many years after King's great crusades.

Martin Luther King understood that the only logical way to respond to such a perverse and diverse attack on human rights and aspirations, was to be resourceful and multidimensional in our own turn; to be strong; to be smart; and most of all to be comforted in the righteousness of the task ahead. King knew, as we now must also know, that repression must never be accepted without resistance. That while all have a contribution to make, it is not necessary nor desirable for everyone to fight the same battle or use the same weapons in their opposition. It is the unity of opposition that matters and not an artificial uniformity of strategy or approach that must materialize.

Martin Luther King knew; just as Frederick Douglass had known; just as Har-

riet Tubman, and W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson had known, that the struggle is for control of the mind as well as of the body. An in our double-barreled battle our truest unity and greatest strength is our fight against a common foe - racism, and not in all using the same tactics or advocating the same philosophy.

King's continuing lesson for me and his lasting legacy to our struggle today should be a determination never to be deterred by the proclamations from those who oppose what we so rightfully seek.

King's continuing inspiration to me and I hope to all the youth of today, is to never let those who oppose and resist the progress of right and the growth of racial justice, define either our personal goals or our collective objectives.

I, you, we can and will achieve all that we conceive if we keep a clear and unflinching picture before us. We must seek what is justly and rightfully due in this generation from society as a consequence the great wrongs and injustices perpetrated in earlier generations upon a helpless underclass, but we must also understand the requirements and demands upon each of us as individuals with free will and personal responsibility for success or failure in this present generation.

In addition to what is legitimately owed to us, we also each and every one of us, owe ourselves something as well. In earlier generations, African-Americans and others had to struggle daily and very personally with the difficulties, inconveniences, injustices and often outright horrors of a society committed to the privileges of one race and class, and the suppression of all others. Thanks to champions like the man we honor today, Martin Luther King, African-Americans in this country now enjoy rights and opportunities that even the most optimistic of our predecessors would find hard to conceive. This transformation was not accidental nor coincidental. It was created by King and many, many others just as brave, just as willing, but now unknown and unnamed. Fortunes, careers, not infrequently even lives were the price of those victories. We now owe it to those known and unknown benefactors to succeed with or without the help of others or the arrival of those reparations rightly due.

Excuses, however justified, are a poor replacement for high self-expectations. However imperfect our present circumstances may be, they hold far more possibilities than any ever before for African-Americans willing to world hard to succeed.

We cannot afford to squat behind complaints and accusations, regardless of how valid they might still be - or we will pay a terrible social and economic cost. That cost is the threat of becoming obsolete. That cost is becoming inconsequential and being left out of the future world. We must choose success instead. Let success, in education, in business, in politics and in spiritual fulfillment, be our biggest and best testimonial to the life and sacrifice of Martin Luther King and all those who struggled before him to create these opportunities we enjoy.

Let that success in their names be our gifts of honor to ourselves and to the country. The country that has always needed us, to fight in its wars, to raise its crops, to rear its children - needs us now as well. Our shared racial past has given a particular segment of society an "inherited" and "unfair" headstart over other population segments. The historic unfairness of the headstart creates social tensions and conflicts that prevent the country collectively from utilizing the full potential of its human resources, skills and talents for growth and progress. It is thus hampered and handicapped in competition with other countries more able to focus efficiently the full power and talent of their national resources on economic or other problems. If

this country slips behind we slip behind, too.

It is in all our interests to forge a future in which the dream of King "...that my four little 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..." includes a reality that not only their character but their skills and talents as well will be recognized and utilized for the common good.

In the last major sermon that King delivered only days before his assassination, he spoke of how he wanted to be remembered should it pass that he not be able like Moses to enter the Promised Land with his people. He said: "I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver my eulogy, tell them not to talk too long...I'd like somebody to mention that day, Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody..."

Let us use his memory and the lasting eloquence of his lifelong struggle for justice and love to ignite our own fire and passion in pursuit of those goals. Let us use his vision of peace and non-violence to rededicate ourselves and this country to make the ideals of our founding renewed and newly true - One nation under God with liberty and justice for All.

Quotes

"In his own life's example, he symbolized what was right about America, what was noblest and best, what human beings have loved unconditionally. He was in constant pursuit of truth, and when he discovered it, he embraced it..."

(Words of Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King at the White House ceremonies making his birthday a national holiday, November 2, 1983.)

"...I'd like for somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther, Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody...I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity." (From King's "Drum Major" sermon describing how he wished to be remembered, - given 2 months before his assassination in 1968)

"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.'" (From King's "I Have a Dream speech", Washington, D.C. Lincoln Monument 1963.)

"Negroes of the United States, following the people of India, have demonstrated that non-violence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation." (From King's acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize, 1964.)

"He taught us that only peaceful means can bring about peaceful ends, that our goal was to create the love community. America is a more democratic nation, a more just nation, a more peaceful nation because Martin Luther King, Jr. became her preeminent non-violent commander. (Words of Coretta Scott King, widow of Martin Luther King, Jr. at the White House ceremonies making his birthday a national holiday, November 2, 1983.)

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final reality."



-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., From his Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, December 10, 1964, Oslo, Norway

Join us Monday, January 21st, in celebrating "The Dream".



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A percentage of our day's sales will be donated to Portland's Saturday School

In Memory Of Martin Luther King Readings of His Life & Dreams

Powell's books is proud to host a series of presentations celebrating the life and dreams of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. African-American actors from the Portland area and students from Jefferson High School will present readings and interpretations of King, his life and his work, in his own words and the words of those who knew him.

The participating professional actors who will be involved are Gregory Donavon, George Rankins, Neil Thomas, and Tommy Smith.

Gregory Donavon has performed with the Columbia Theater Company in Hot L Baltimore, Dead Zeke Speaks, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and Simply Heavenly. He was in Death and the King's Horseman (New Rose Theatre and the Northwest Afrikan-American Ballet) and The Colored Museum (IFCC), and is involved with the Oregon Shakespeare Company's produc-

tions of The Recruiting Officer and Our Country's Good. Donavon is also a founding member of The Carousel Company-Theater for Children.

George Rankins appeared onstage in the Portland Opera production of Showboat and IFCC's Ceremonies in Dark Old Men. He has appeared in television commercials for U.S. Bank of Oregon, Mutual of Omaha, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Farmer's Insurance, and General Motors. George "Chick" Rankins was also a writer, producer, and host of a weekly public affairs show in KPTV.

Neal Thomas played the silent Detective Halamer in the film Drugstore Cowboy. He also appeared in the popular children's video Wee Sing in Sillyville. He was involved in the Portland Opera productions of Showboat and Aida, as well as The Colored Museum (IFCC) and Death and the

King's Horseman (New Rose Theatre and the Northwest Afrikan-American Ballet)

Tommy Smith is the African-American Outreach Coordinator for the Metropolitan Arts Commission. He has played the lead in the musical Hair for Eugene's Performer's Acquisition Company. Local productions include Raisin in the Sun and The Cherry Orchard, both for New Rose Theatre. He performed in Of Mice and Men and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Columbia Theater Company) and Death and the King's Horseman (New Rose). Other appearances include Homeland, for IFCC, and the upcoming IFCC production of Carry On, Dear Blood, an original work by South African exile Run Vzel.

Monday, January 21, at 2 pm, At Powell's Books, 10th & W Burnside.

IN MEMORY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

MONDAY JANUARY

21 2 PM

POWELL'S BOOKS 1005 W BURN SIDE

readings by
Tommy Smith
Gregory Donavon
George Rankins
Neil Thomas
&
Jefferson High School Drama Department