

# The Portland Observer

## Martin Luther King, Jr.

S P E C I A L E D I T I O N

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"The Eyes and Ears of the Community"

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### BACKGROUND OF "KEEP LIVING THE DREAM"



*"...I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension.' I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth."*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Keep Living The Dream" began in 1980 with all-day programming on community radio station KBOO (90.7 F.M.), focusing on the life and dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This was prior to the 1986 establishment of a national holiday in honor of Dr. King, and was intended as an educational event as well as a celebration of Dr. King's life. The programming provided an opportunity for students and community members to participate in significant cultural enrichment activity.

From 1980 to 1984, "Keep Living The Dream" was a radio program produced by several KBOO volunteer programmers, coordinated by Ken Berry. The KBOO programming continues, as each year on the third Monday in January, KBOO pre-empt its regular daily programming to allow performing arts groups and others to reflect on Dr. King's life and message.

In 1985, in order to reach a broader audience, "Keep Living The Dream" expanded beyond the KBOO studios to Whitaker Middle School. This allowed for a larger live audi-

ence and provided an opportunity for greater community participation in the program. In addition, "Keep Living The Dream" was simulcasted live on KBOO-FM and Paragon Cable Television channels 30 and 38. After four years, "Keep Living The Dream" outgrew the technical facilities and audience capacity of Whitaker Middle School.

In 1989, "Keep Living The Dream" was moved to the Jefferson High School Performing Arts Center, where the program is recognized as being the largest Martin Luther King tribute in the State of Oregon. The program has continued to be based at Jefferson and to be broadcast on KBOO and Paragon Cable Television.

World Arts Foundation  
World Arts Foundation, Inc. was established in 1978 to promote and preserve African American contribution to American Culture. It was incorporated and received non-profit, tax-exempt status in 1983. The World Arts Foundation works to establish links between African American artists and the wider arts community, to support African American artists and to produce programming showcasing local

and national artist. In addition to the "Keep Living The Dream" project, World Arts Foundation has:

- \* Established the Youngsong Stageband and Gospel Choir to introduce young people and new audiences to instrumental and choral music of such great artists as Mahalia Jackson, Duke Ellington, Dr. Chester Dorsey and Count Basie. Participants are given instruction in gospel, jazz and music theory.

- \* Produced two historical television documentaries, including "An Oral History on the Life and Work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."

- \* Produced a series of after-school theater workshops for the Portland Public Schools.

- \* Hosted the reception for the Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition "Portraits in Black" at the Interstate Firehouse Theater, drawing hundreds of people who otherwise might not have seen the exhibition.

- \* Established a visual arts committee of local African American and ethnic minority artists, for the purpose of networking and creating a directory of artists.



## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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 and 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 countryside 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.)