

Celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr.

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

During last year's debate on affirmative action, we heard Ward Connerly, who led the battle to end affirmative action in California, invoke the name of Martin Luther King, Jr. It wasn't until Coretta Scott King put the record straight shortly before election day that we heard the truth about what Dr. King believed and called for.

Mrs. King reminded Mr. Connerly and others that Dr. King had come to the conclusion that African Americans must have some economic advantages if they were ever to make up for the 200 years of free labor they provided this nation and the 200 years of inadequate education and opportunity. Dr. King, she was sure, would have been in favor of affirmative action programs.

As we celebrate what would have been Dr. King's 68th birthday, only months after the nation ended its 60 year-old promise to care for indigent women and children, the question we must ask is what would Dr. King say about today's so-called welfare reform.

Only months after Californians voted to end affirmative action, we must ask what would Dr. King say about today's so-called equal opportunity. Only months after the acquittal of Pennsylvania police officers in the death of Johnny Gammago, of a

New York police officer in death of Anthony Baez and a riot in Pensacola, FL following the shooting of a black man by a police officer, the question we must ask is what would Dr. King say about police brutality. And, after the burning of 124 African American churches over the past five years, what would Dr. King have to say about the state of race relations in America nearly 30 years after his death.

Rather than put words into Dr. King's mouth, perhaps it is best to use his own words—words which history conveniently has made bland and less prophetic.

For example, in his final book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*, Dr. King quoted Hyman Bookbinder, assistant director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, who said, "The poor can stop being poor if the rich are willing to become even richer at a slower rate." In a later chapter, Dr. King wrote, "The economic highway to power has few entry lanes for Negroes. Nothing so vividly reveals the crushing impact of discrimination and the heritage of exclusion as the limited dimensions of Negro business in the most powerful economy in the world." Still later in that same book, he wrote, "The poor are less often dismissed from our conscience today by being branded as inferior and

incompetent, adding, "We also know that no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands it does not eliminate all poverty."

Finally, read these words of Dr. King during a series in Canada in 1967. "The dispossessed of this nation—the poor, both white and negro—live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing...to lift the load of poverty."

Dr. King's real dream was of a society free from discrimination and free from poverty and injustice. It was not some milk-toast, pasteurized, uncritical dream, but a radical one which challenges us even today.

What would Dr. King say about the church burnings, about the police brutality, about the end of affirmative action? I've got my own guesses. But I don't think he would be congratulating us on a job well done.

Celebrate Dr. King's birthday by thinking about what he would be saying, by reading what he really did say and then by doing something about injustices you see around you.

(Note: Dr. King's sermons, speeches and writings can be found in *A Testament of Hope* edited by James M. Washington and published by Harper San Francisco.)

"Philanthropy

is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Strength of Love

Odyssey to honor Martin Luther King with tribute program

"Dreams of Kings" to Telecast on Monday, January 20 at 6:30 p.m. (ET)

In honor of Martin Luther King Day, Odyssey (formerly the Faith & Values Channel) will telecast "Dreams of Kings", a tribute to Dr. King, on Monday, January 20 at 6:30 p.m. (ET).

"Dreams of Kings" is a visual and musical celebration to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and how his work was formed out of his faith commitment. This half-hour special brings together music,

documentary footage from the civil rights movement and excerpts from speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr. with the Resurrection story to trace the spirit of justice from ancient times to today.

"Dreams of Kings" will be repeated on Tuesday, January 21 at 2:00 a.m. (ET). The program was produced exclusively for Odyssey by Trinity Church (Episcopal), New York City.

Odyssey is now available in more than 28 million households

nationwide via cable and the Primestar direct-to-home satellite service. It offers a mix of religious, moral/ethical, values-based family-safe programming. Odyssey is jointly owned by VISN Management Corp., a subsidiary of Tele-Communications Inc. (TCOM). NICC is a consortium of 64 Protestant, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox faith groups and evangelical traditions. Viewer information: 888-390-7474. Web site: <http://www.odysseychannel.com>



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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
1929-1968

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