

OPINION

Nothing in Common with King

Talk show host dishonors MLK's legacy

BY DEDRICK MUHAMMAD

This year's anniversary of the historic 1963 March on Washington promises to be memorable. Though big commemorations aren't typical for 47th anniversaries, thousands will be in the streets on Aug. 28 commemorating the march, including many people advancing a social agenda that would make Martin Luther King Jr. roll over in his grave.

Flamboyant talk-show host Glenn Beck has called for a national rally on the anniversary at the exact same location as the historic protest, the Lincoln Memorial. Beck's rally theme is "Restoring Honor." According to

his website, this "celebration of America" won't be political. Well then, why have Sarah Palin scheduled to deliver the keynote speech, and why is the National Rifle Association endorsing this right-wing spectacle?

From what I can gather, these folks think that America can restore its honor by strengthening individual virtue, especially if enough people come to Washington on Aug. 28 to listen to inflammatory speeches. Or pick up copies of Beck's new book "The Plan," which he'll launch at this absurd event.

What do Beck, Palin, and the NRA have to do with the 1963 march where Dr. Martin Luther King delivered the landmark "I Have a Dream" speech? Nothing. Beck has admitted not realizing that the legendary march occurred on Aug. 28. He cred-

its "divine providence" for having his rally and book launch converge with such a historic event

Beck now proclaims that he is working "to finish the job" that was at the heart of King's poetic vision, claiming that King's ideas have been corrupted and that he will resurrect MLK's true spirit. Beck's revisionist history discards King's emphasis on social justice, instead emphasizing individual Christian salvation. Beck even reached out to King's distant relatives, including a niece. After questioning her several times, he got her to say that King was not about social justice or government redistribution of the wealth.

To grasp MLK's legacy, it's best to read King's own words. No one can believe Beck's interpretation of King's legacy. Four months after the March on Washington, King said, "We're caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all

indirectly...I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."

If Glenn Beck sincerely wants to advance the Dr. King's vision and the March on Washington's legacy, he could go to Detroit on Aug. 28. There Rev. Jesse Jackson, one of King's lead organizers, and the United Auto Workers (the union was one of the main sponsors of the 1963 march) will kick off a campaign to rebuild America with jobs, justice, and peace. Unlike Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally and book launch, the Detroit march will echo the civil rights movement's call to invest in opportunity for all Americans.

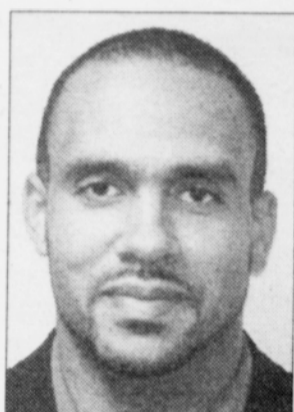
If Beck doesn't want to leave Washington, he should visit the "Celebrate the Dream" event near his own rally. There, Americans will read and listen to the words of Dr. King in a more appropriate tribute.

Finally, since Beck apparently likes to talk to members of Dr. King's family, he should visit the "Reclaim the Dream" rally that day. Martin Luther King III will join other leaders there to commemorate King's authentic social justice vision.

There's nothing virtuous or honorable in trying to appropriate the legacy of a man who gave his life for his beliefs. Instead of proclaiming "divine providence" upon learning of this scheduling blunder, Beck should have admitted his own ignorance and hold his own rally with his own plan, as his vision for America has nothing in common with King's.

It's not too late for Beck to change course. If he does, it could even mark the first step to the virtuous action that Beck's "Restoring Honor" rally and book launch is supposed to advocate.

Dedrick Muhammad is a research associate for the Inequality and the Common Good project at the Institute for Policy Studies.



Misleading Campaign Debunked

How the estate tax benefits small business

BY JIM AMARAL

Small business owners like me have for too long served as poster children for a misleading campaign led by the super wealthy to weaken or abolish the estate tax. I'm the proud owner of

Maine's Borealis Breads, and I want to make something crystal clear: The estate tax impacts neither me nor the vast majority of small business owners. In fact, I support a stronger estate tax.

In 2009, a married couple could leave \$7 million tax-free to their heirs. Most small business owners' annual incomes are too little to accumulate enough wealth to pay the estate tax. In 2009, individuals earning less than \$82,000 declared 95 percent of all small business income, according to the Congressional Research Service. It should then be no surprise that the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center estimates that fewer than 100 American small business or farm estates were expected to pay the estate tax in 2009.

A provision in the tax cuts passed under President George W. Bush

made 2010 the first year since 1916 that estate taxes will not be levied, resulting in the loss of billions of dollars in federal revenue. For generations, even with the estate tax in effect, families have been able to

pass their small businesses and farms onto their descendants. These same generations of small family businesses have enjoyed and benefited from the unprecedented opportunities found in America.

So if the estate tax has no real impact on an overwhelming majority of small businesses, why then do its opponents so adamantly assert that it does? I believe the answer to that question is that opponents are trying desperately to convince average Americans that they'll be affected by the estate tax. In reality, the estate tax is deliberately designed to affect only society's wealthiest households.

It's no coincidence that the underwriters of the anti-estate tax campaign are heirs to some of the largest private fortunes in the world. The Nordstroms, Waltons, Marses, and other extremely rich families have spent tens of millions of dollars lobbying Congress to repeal the estate tax. They're vying for the right to pass billions in wealth from huge corporations like Wal-Mart to their descendants in perpetuity, without

any tax responsibility.

Wal-Mart and corporations like it hurt small businesses. They drive us out of our communities and impede our ability to successfully compete in local markets. It's unreasonable to give tax breaks to a few extremely wealthy families while Main Street business owners like me struggle through this recession.

The estate tax is a boon to small businesses. The estate tax revenue that comes from extremely wealthy families can fund things like small business and student loans so future generations of entrepreneurs have opportunities to secure their own prosperity.

Moreover, small businesses like mine rely heavily on the health of the public sector. Well-maintained highways, telecommunications, and legal systems are all critical components of any small business' ability to succeed.

The absence of an estate tax in 2010 will allow the late George Steinbrenner to pass over \$1 billion tax-free dollars to his heirs, even when taxpayer subsidies made building the new Yankee Stadium possible. Public investment enabled Steinbrenner's business to survive and expand, so it makes sense that his estate should be required to give back to public coffers.

We must make more public in-

vestments that will strengthen our economy, and the estate tax is one way to make that happen. That's why I support the Responsible Estate Tax Act (S.3533), sponsored by Sens. Sanders, Harkin and Whitehouse. This bill would keep the 2009 exemption of \$3.5 million per spouse, and tax amounts above that at 45-55 percent, with a 65 percent rate for billionaire couples, allowing for the highest revenue collection of any estate tax proposal.

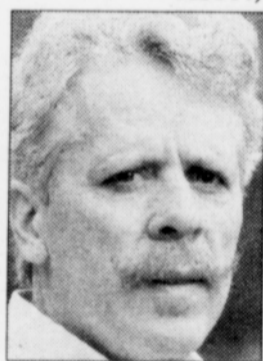
Our nation is struggling economically.

Don't let opponents of the estate

tax frighten you. The estate tax is good for small businesses and helps to facilitate the economic dynamism that has defined American markets. Recovery and prosperity demand a marketplace in which small businesses can emerge and compete.

Progress requires a tax system that creates opportunities for all and helps to ensure that wealth and prosperity are broadly shared, and not just reserved for the likes of the Waltons and Steinbrenners.

Jim Amaral is the owner of Borealis Breads, which began in Waldoboro, Maine in 1993.



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