

# 43 Years of MLK Tributes



Keep Alive the Dream archivist Bobby Smith.

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said, “Every parent wonders what the future will hold for their children, and it is our responsibility to see they have dreams.”

On the same panel, Ken Berry’s son, Cedric, reminisced about how when he was seven months old, his dad held him on stage while singing “The Greatest Love of All.” The documentary then shows that footage where Cedric is a laughing baby, grabbing at the microphone while his father sings.

Traci Harris-Woods also recalled her experience as a member of the Youth Sound Ensemble, which she said was an

“awesome experience,” followed by a video of the choir in 1982, where as a teenager she was lead singer on “Be Grateful.”

“We put together the Youth Sound choir to demonstrate just how important the arts and education are for our youth,” Berry said. “Each year we brought hundreds of children together for a performance, after hundreds of hours of rehearsals.”

Then there’s the late Grace Collins, namesake of the Grace Collins Memorial Center, leading a group of children singing “We Love Thee Lord Jesus,” and a performances of the New Hope Baptist Church Choir, the Youth Sounder Choir, the Wilder Ward Singers and the Billy Larken Trio. Other groups include the Thara Memory Youth Sound Ensemble in 1984 and the Alonzo Chadwick SEI Youth Choir in 2005.

The documentary also features video footage and commentary on the history of Black experience in Portland and the state of Oregon, from the 1859 “exclusionary clause” to keep Blacks from moving here when Oregon became a state, to the Vanport flood in 1948, to the gentrification of Portland neighborhoods in more recent years.

Past interviews with esteemed Black Portlanders are included, like with musician and teacher Janis Scroggins when she was a young woman. Scroggins died in 2014, and in 2016 the celebration included a musical tribute to her.

A 2020 video of the Sebe Kan Youth Dancers performing African dances, and the Kappa Alpha Psi Junior Dancers in 2003, are also featured, with dancer Michael Dean talking about what a great experience it was to “step out on that stage and see the whole of Black Portland.”

Another speaker featured is former state Sen. Margaret Carter, Oregon’s first Black woman legislator, who talked about King’s “economic dream.”

“We’ve got to put the fire back under corporations in terms of their negligence of not bringing young people on and giving them job opportunities,” she said. “Sacrifice needs to be made and if they don’t, we need to take to the streets against corporations. And yes, I’m saying get in the streets. That’s where the economic answer lies.”

In footage from 1988, entertainer Art Alexander talked about how for too many Black residents, life was like being “pushed into a nightmare.”

In 2015, another esteemed speaker was Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, famous for his philosophy of nonviolence that led India out of colonialist oppression.

Gandhi said King and his grandfather, who was assassinated in 1948, never met, but after the Montgomery boycott in 1959, the Indian government invited King and his family to visit as its guest to meet with people who were in Gandhi’s circle to learn about his philosophy.

“And he came with the whole family and spent more than a month and learned that nonviolence is not just a strategy of convenience; nonviolence is a way of life,” Gandhi said. “We have to become nonviolent ourselves. We have to become the change that we wish to see in the world.”

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