



*Dr. Martin
Luther
King Jr.*

*Senator
Barack
Obama*

A Legacy of Hope

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Topic: "Does the election of President Barack Obama represent the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream or is it only one milestone along a longer road to full equality?"

Change takes Time

How far have we come? Where are we now? Are these merely baby steps or did we make a giant leap? These are questions that continue to plague the minds of all people. Undeniably, on the day Mr. Barack Obama was elected President of the most powerful country on earth, was the day people of color started walking a little taller. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did not make it to the 'Promised Land,' but on 20 January, 2009, we all took one step closer. Barack Obama's accomplishment as becoming the 44th president is a milestone on the road to full equality. Looking back to about one year ago many American citizens stood up and chanted, "Yes we can!" Nonetheless, the more I think about it the more accurate words might have been, "Yes, some of us can – sometimes."

Mr. Obama's election amounted to a national rebuke, a disapproval of a historically unpopular Republican President, and an embrace of Mr. Obama's call for change in the direction and tone of the great land of America. It was just as much an exceedingly symbolic movement in racial history; a breakthrough that would have seemed impossible forty-one years ago. The day before President Obama took office he invoked the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by taking part in a community renovation project in Washington, D.C. He did this to honor the civil rights leader. By taking time out of his busy schedule to help others, the New President demonstrated that those in public life have a special obligation to lead by example.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a charismatic, intelligent, bold and respected leader; he dramatically changed the arc of American history. His leadership in being a civil rights leader lasted just over one decade. He was a great civil rights leader whose leadership exemplified courage, change, and hope. Dr. King led a movement that started years after the time colored people became free in the United States of America. Although he died before he saw his efforts change a nation he admitted that, “All progress is precarious and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another.”

No doubt President Barack Obama was reminded of these words when he was so ably quoted on November 5th, 2009, “The road will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even one term, but America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight, that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there.” These words have several meanings and they hold the self-evident truth to the fact that his election is “only one milestone along a longer road to full equality.”

Nonetheless, colored people have come a very long way, from slavery in America to Jackie Robinson breaking color barriers in 1947, for professional baseball. Rosa Parks and the ‘Bus Boycott’ in 1955; to the march on Washington in 1963, where Martin Luther King Jr. made his famous, “I have a Dream” speech, electrifying 200,000 supporters. The election of America’s first colored President signifies that any race can be the President of America, but the challenges still lie ahead. It signals the fulfillment of Dr. King’s hope that, “his children would 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.” President Obama

has some past due accounts which must be settled for those African giants that shed blood, sweat, and tears to make his Presidential dream come true. People like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglas, Rosa Parks, and W.E.B Dubois made this great achievement possible. President Obama has been given that chance; is it working? To a certain extent it is, but the challenges are still ahead.

Over the years Dr .King and many others have toiled for equality. We are now enjoying the fruits of their labor, yet so many of us take for granted the resources and opportunities now available to us. For example, riding on the bus meant that colored folks could ‘only’ sit at the back of the bus. Today, we sit anywhere, thanks to Rosa Parks. African-Americans have taken steps towards equality. We are however reminded of the Jim Crow days. (Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system, which operated primarily, but not exclusively in Southern border states, between 1877 and the mid 1960s). Imagine reading these signs - **“NO Dogs, Negroes, Mexicans”** or **“COLORED SERVED IN REAR.”** A black male could not offer his hand with a white male because it implied being socially equal. Also, white motorists had the right-of-way at every intersection. African-Americans and whites could not go to the same schools. The standards of living have improved drastically for African-Americans, yet we are still the minority searching for equal rights. The percentage of blacks graduating from high school and moving onto higher education is by far less than those of our white counterparts. Thus, the struggle continues.

The admission by the President that, “The road will indeed be long and the climb is going to be steep but we will get there,” indicates that his election is just a step in the right direction of achieving Dr. King’s dream. When we consider that many Americans are still being judged by the color of their skin and are discriminated against, we must acknowledge the journey has begun and the words of Dr. King that say, “Discrimination is a hellhound that gnaws at Negroes in every waking moment of their lives to remind them that the lie of their inferiority dominating them” is a very noble and true statement. Dr. King’s Civil Rights Movement was to the benefit of ‘All’ Americans. Yes, an African American is President of America, but is America ready for more of this? Can we have a Hispanic President? Until America can embrace race in its entire splendor, we have only made a step towards fulfilling Dr. King’s dream.

In 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “I have a dream.” He told the crowds that in his dream, “one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed- we hold this truth to be self evident, that all men are created equal.” On Martin Luther King Day 18 January, 2010, President Obama served hot lunches to the needy in America’s capital. By honoring Dr. King through service President Obama continues his teaching that we move closer to the “Beloved Community” that Dr. King envisioned through non-violence and service to one another. Martin Luther King predicted that “In less than forty years an African-American would be elected President of the United States of America.” President Obama did not run an election based on race and he certainly was not elected

merely because of race. He brought hope to a troubled nation. During a church service in Washington, D.C on Sunday, 17 January, 2009 President Obama said, “We enjoy the fruits of prejudice and bigotry being lifted slowly—sometimes in fits and starts—but irrevocably from human hearts. It’s that progress that made it possible for me to be here today.” President Obama reflected on his first year in office while denoting the legacy of Dr. King.

Yes, Dr. King’s prediction was materialized and America does have its first African American President. However, the assumption, as I interpret it, is that since America has elected an African American to the nation’s highest office we can now assume that Dr. King’s vision for America has come to pass. This is totally absurd and far from been fulfilled. While the election of President Obama is a significant deal, it alone does not fulfill the dream. Has equality been achieved? No, the struggles of our black brothers and sisters in America fighting for equal rights continue; racial injustice continues. Compare African-American progress with regards to health, income, graduation, most of us are still at the same place. Dr. King’s dream was all about collective progress. President Obama obviously, has reached the highest glass ceiling in America. He is there and a lot of us are there with him. However, until America completely confronts the issues of race and equality Dr. King’s dream remains what it is said to be “A Dream.”

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