



*"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?"*

*By, Jarnickae Wilson*

**Age: 15**

**School: St Mary's College**

*"Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual." -Martin Luther King<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King. I Have A Dream (1963)

The history of the human condition and civilization is one punctuated consistently by the advent of men, and women, whose presence constantly reinforces the dynamic and persistent nature of its progress. Every century, and indeed every decade, has formed a unique temporal setting in which these bold revolutionaries have arduously and with much angst, chiseled away at the recalcitrant stone tablet that is our inseparable past. Christ's noble message of unconditional love and solidarity for humankind; the sanctimonious efforts of the Athenian legislator Solon, in laying the foundation for democracy; and the peaceful road to independence walked by Mahatma Gandhi and his followers are all testament to this resilience. However, the conditions and struggles through which Dr. Martin Luther King persevered, to deliver to a disenfranchised people the very real message and substance of progress which they so longed for, is an achievement so gargantuan in the ever motive contraption of history, that its poignancy resonates in the very essence of the present-day American nation. In the lips of and liberties that the descendants of his generation enjoy, that very struggle continues- so that these truths thought self-evident by the forefathers of the nation, can rightly be so for posterity.

It is this very generation of indoctrinated resilience from which the forty fourth President of the United States of America: Barack Obama originates. In actuality, the defining principles of his campaign most eloquently establish the continuity for a civil rights movement with noble birth in America's slave populations- predating the very establishment of a federal government. Residing prominently within his message of hope, renewal, humility and change, is the intrinsic sentiment, that despite our differences, our shared humanity should be the governing factor in our interactions. Barack Obama's very birth, in 1961, to a white American mother, and Negro Kenyan father, is the incarnation of the meaning of progress. Yet, just as his birth, his election to the Oval Office is only a partial realization of Dr. King's dream in its entirety. Indeed, many may argue peremptorily, that his election is the end of a dream envisioned long ago. Yet, just as Dr. King's struggles were perhaps the end of the beginning of the civil rights movement, Barack Obama's victory is but the beginning of the end in an attempt to eradicate social stratification from the American culture. The dream, like the civil rights movement, is ever active- moving in the sorrowful Negro spirituals in minor keys; moving with

women like Rosa Parks who refused the injustice of segregation; moving with the Freedmen's sons, who fought for education in the reconstruction; moving with the marchers on the streets who refused to be intimidated by the blows of law enforcement; moving in the hearts and minds of a people intent on global reformation. To this day, it continues towards realization, as in many cases across America and the world; individuals continue to be scorned because of their race and ethnicity, economic oppression is rampant, and militarism is the very sustenance and buffer of African American youth. In our time, a settlement for injustice would be the greatest threat to progress and sovereignty of the American people- "for injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."<sup>2</sup>

*"Me loose de shackles from I hand, but still cyan lose de brain...Cause racist face I just replace with partial colour blind"-Nkrumah Lucien<sup>3</sup>*

A circumspect examination of the historical context from which the present-day American nation spawned is absolutely integral to an adequate comprehension of the true extent of Martin Luther King's vision. From the Civil War; to the hope presented by the dawn of the emancipation proclamation; and the sorrow that categorized the betrayal which ended the Reconstruction, America's history has been filled with violent and acute changes, which have threatened the very existence of its most vulnerable minority: African Americans. This very existence has been rife most noticeably with social disenfranchisement, but even more damagingly, with a subverted economic, legal, and educational oppression.

The history of the struggle for a plural American society began on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1861, with the first hostilities of the American Civil War- a conflict which for centuries, has been seen as the fight for the liberation of the slave population. With the secession of seven southern states, and the establishment of the Confederacy, President of the Union, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation- the document in which the freedom of the South's "hewers of wood and drawers of water" lay. This issuance, accompanied by the blood of the volunteer armies of the Union, in the victories culminating at Danville, Virginia, when the uniquely African

---

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King; Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)

<sup>3</sup> Nkrumah Lucien; Eternal Slave (2009), Unpublished

American Union XXV Corps captured the confederate capital, laid the foundation, for a new chapter in the fight against racism. This chapter was to be fought, not with the stony insurrection and bloody rebellion advocated by John Brown, but with the silent resilience of generations of thrifty Negroes ready to pursue economic fulfillment and educational advancement. Herein this resolute sentiment laid the significance of the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, and the progress that was its product.

The period directly succeeding the conclusion of the Civil war, is incontrovertibly one of the most crucial in the history of America's society. Upon the now impoverished South, was forced the just change of equality for all men, but an equality which all notable scholars knew did not yet go beyond the superficial distinction of skin colour. Hence, in the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, lay the first attempt to realize the then unspoken dream of Martin Luther King. The act of establishing schools, and making a previously destitute minority of millions a self-supporting element of the nation, was perhaps the most pivotal, and revolutionary of the tasks undertaken by the Bureau. Understandably, however, this was a task largely unachievable with the temporary stature of the Bureau and zeitgeist of the nation, and its collapse thereafter was certainly not startling, but surely devastating. While the contribution of the Bureau is notable, its success should be considered minimal, as it failed to create economic, educational, and legal equality for the then hated freedmen in the Southern United States. Even the fifteenth amendment, with its empty promises of equal voting rights, could not rectify the serfdom and injustice that was to be suffered by a people whom the federal government certainly could not protect- especially while separate but equal facilities were being ruled legal, by its supreme court: the most powerful element of its judiciary.

Given the scope and sheer tenacity of all these efforts relatively early in the History of the United States of America, one may, with justified incredulity, regard W.E.B Du Bois' remark, thirty eight years after the conclusion of the war, which advocates "To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the bottom of hardships"<sup>4</sup> as indicative of systematic failure. Yet, this sentiment still rang true through the time of scholars such as Mr. Du Bois,

---

<sup>4</sup> W.E.B Du Bois; *The Souls of Black Folk*; I: Of our Spiritual Strivings (1903)

Booker T Washington, and Marcus Garvey. Any objective analysis of the development of America in the first fifty years of the twentieth century is almost guaranteed to declare no notable social progress in the condition of race relations or economic equality. In fact, this time period, is unfortunately an example of nothing more than an apparent regression- A return to lynching; rape; persecution and essential slavery.

Yet, it was the arrival of a new figurehead for a seemingly stagnant movement that catalyzed the transition towards unsegregated society. Indeed, Martin Luther King, the unassuming pastor from the “Deep South” recognized the multilayered and complex discrimination that was the barrier to the true freedom of his people. It was most definitely his realization, that freedom for the Black Man in America, and around the world, transcended the boundary of his skin colour, and encompassed his economic independence, his position in the judicial proceedings of his nation, and his educational prestige. It was the view of plantation owners that “an educated Negro was a dangerous one,” for it was only an educated Negro that could properly become assimilated and accepted in truly free society. Thus, in the marches, in the speeches, in the numerous beatings and struggles, Dr. King retained the desire to eradicate poverty, militancy and inequality across America, and the World, not just for blacks, but for all races and genders- for his dream was a global one, unlimited in scope unlike those of his predecessors. Many who support the notion that Obama’s election is the realization of this ideal aptly forget this, but in doing so, they discard the very essence and definition of Dr. King’s movement for justice.

Modern America, *prima facie*, is an ideal for all nations of the world to aspire to, and rightly so. It is one of the most successful examples of Capitalist society; of equality across all borders; and of plurality. Yet, when scrutinized with greater care, a number of most pertinent questions are to be asked by the observer: “Why does our educational system reward our youth, based not on their ability, but on their community of origin?”; “Why is it that a man is, in many cases, paid more than a woman for the same job?”; and “Why is it that a young black student, filled with potential, was beaten to death on his way home from school?”<sup>5</sup> The

---

<sup>5</sup> Kristen Mack and Stephanie Banchemo; 16-year-old boy beaten to death in Roseland; <http://www.chicagobreakingnews.com/2009/09/boy-16-found-slain-on-far-south-side.html>; Retrieved 1/24/10

answers to these questions are quite simple: “For the same reason that a Swastika is painted outside a congressman’s office,”<sup>6</sup> “For the same reason that 36.5% of homicides in 2008 were committed by blacks,”<sup>7</sup> and “For the same reason that only 14% of African Americans complete University.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, however simple they may seem, all these responses create more questions than answers in the mind of the observer, for they all demonstrate the failure of our society, to adequately satisfy Dr. King’s desire for indivisible justice. There can be no justice for America and its population, white and black, male and female, until the veil is lifted, and the economic, judicial, and educational stratification is purged from its society.

“True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars need restructuring.” Martin Luther King

The history of strife, emancipation, liberation and equality is one which epitomizes the need for continuity and steady progress. The fight to eradicate stratification of all kinds, in all facets, is not one which commenced with a single grandiose act nor is it once to be terminated with such. The election of Barack Obama to the highest office of a nation whose very aspiration is justice, is a milestone which is only part of the substance of a dream that has emanated from the constitution of its forefathers. Martin Luther King’s dream is multifaceted, transcending the easily accessible superficial traits of our individuality, and penetrating the very soul of a nation. In the continuum of time, where seconds rapidly turn to minutes; minutes to hours, days to years, we must remain vigilant, to spearhead an avant-garde that stretches from sea to shining sea; that is in and of itself, supranational in nature. In our perseverance, the dream shall soon be fulfilled.

Contact information:

Jarnickae Wilson

[benz200x@gmail.com](mailto:benz200x@gmail.com)

---

<sup>6</sup> Swastika Painted outside US congressman’s office; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/6019028/Swastika-painted-outside-US-congressmans-office.html>; Retrieved 1/24/10

<sup>7</sup> Crime in the United States 2008: Expanded Homicide Data; U.S Department of Justice; FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division. 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Public Information Service, U.S Census Bureau. Asians and Pacific Islanders Have Nation’s Highest Median Income in 1997, Census Bureau Reports.

