

Does the Election of president Barack Obama  
represent the Fulfilment of Dr. King's Dream or  
is it only one milestone along another road to  
full equality?



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On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2008, Barack Obama gave his victory speech for his just finalised election campaign for the presidency of the United States of America. The significance of this had historic implications since it was the first time the United States of America had a President of black ethnicity. This feat, the election of a black man to the highest seat of power in the United States of America, was considered by many to be the epitomization of the vision of the late civil rights activist of the American segregation era, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. However, can we truly say that the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has been fulfilled when translated into the context of today? In my opinion, the election of President Barack Obama is a significant milestone along the road to full equality rather than the fruition of Dr. King's dream. This opinion is based upon several areas of analysis such as the views which people have on social status and wealth, religious beliefs and racism.

The late Dr. Martin Luther King was born into a world of racial oppression, where black people were not classified as human beings who had equal rights but as 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens. Several injustices were carried out against "people of colour" in his era, for instance, lynching, theft of property, denial of the right to vote and the absence of freedom of speech and personal expression, just to name a few. Imagine the look on a young lad's face as he watches his father being brutally burnt and hung from a tree or as he listens to his mother's frantic cries as she is being taken away by a group of white savages. It was due to this environment which the cruel world had bidden him into that developed his strong sense of justice and great desire to speak out against the oppression against his own race. Furthermore, he believed in equality and that no one should have the right to judge another based on anything other than the depth of their personality. When he said, "I have a dream, where my four little children would not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character" one gets an insight into his ideology of how people should relate to each other. Like the phrase "don't judge a book by its cover", Dr. King illustrated that people should not make assumptions on what they see but to look further, to look into the hearts of others. However, the sad truth is that due to the mechanics of society, people are being judged not on the content of their character, instead, on frivolous things such as wealth and social status. For instance, many people judge other and deem what sort person they are based solely on how they dress and what type of clothes they are able to afford. In addition, there is still the segregation of people of different classes who believe in the concept of being superior to others who are less fortunate than them. Is this the change which Dr. King spoke of? He said, "Segregation is the adultery of an illicit intercourse between injustice and immorality" and this was used to express his view on how society should exist. Obviously, during the past five decades there has been some change, but many citizens of the world still have to emancipate their minds. In the days of Dr. King, the main conflicts were white against black and there has been a positive change since the black race can enjoy the liberties of life. However, due to the way people think, the fabric of society is still torn. No longer is it only a battle of black against white, rather, black against black, black against white and white against white. In order for his dream to truly come into fruition we must cease the social discrimination. If not, rather than this great change which seems to be the common goal, there would just have been a shift of the issue.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."; more powerful words enunciated by Martin Luther King Jr., (MLKJ) during his I had a dream speech.

In the year 2010, almost a half century from the time the famous “Dream” speech first pierced the air, we wonder whether the dream is now a reality. Are we in such times that religious background will not affect our routine abnormally so long as our intentions are pure? A re-examination of Obama’s candidacy suggests otherwise. In his campaign, as is the norm, several issues and major incidences from his private past life affected his public outlook. Not surprising, a major issue of his campaign was his religious background. Speculation drew attention to the particular Islamic background of Mr. Obama. His father was an ex-Muslim, his step-father was a Muslim who caused him to spend two years at an Islamic teaching institution. Obama also had a similarly controversial Christian background, but this was not as volatile as the Islamic one was, even though Obama was not a Muslim. He was a proud member of the Trinity United Church of Christ. This presented a problem for Mr. Obama due to the fact that his preacher, who was seen as his spiritual mentor, made some racist statements about America which in turn generated concern about Obama’s religious background once again. Are these views the views of his religion or simply the opinions of a radical preacher? In spite of Obama’s firm public denunciation and distancing of himself from the comments of Mr. Wright, this still presented a bias and concern for his campaign. This clearly shows that religious bias and intolerance still exists in our world today. Consider a person travelling into the U.S.A.; would a person of Islamic and Arab background on average experience the same as a person of another religion or race? The term “terrorist” is so vaguely used and the American society has attached an image to this term, which is a person who has a barrage of facial hair and is a member of the Islamic faith. Currently, the United States of America is at war with two predominantly Muslim countries Iraq and Afghanistan, and war of words with another predominantly Muslim country, Iran. It is known that these wars have generated some level of a religious response even in the form of military action with some members of the Islamic community treating the war as a ‘holy war’. Is this the majority of Muslims or a radical few? The world at large is witnessing so much religious intolerance and discrimination that the very “right of religious association” seems to be in question. The ideologies of some religious and political leaders have to change. Dr. Martin Luther King showed that he was not only fighting for his race but for all creeds and races not to embrace and show love to one another. He stated, “We will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: *Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*”

With regards to racism, the election of Barrack Obama as the first black President of the United States of America is not the complete fulfilment of Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream, albeit a significant milestone in the revolution that was started by the Civil Rights movements of the early sixties.

The name of Martin Luther King Jr., is intertwined with the history of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. The Montgomery bus boycott, the freedom rides, the Birmingham campaign, the March on Washington, the Selma march, the Chicago campaign, and the Memphis boycott are some of the more noteworthy battlefields where King and his followers--numerous in numbers, humble and great in name-- fought for the equal rights and equal justice that the United States Constitution ensures for all its citizens. King, building on the tradition of civil disobedience and passive resistance earlier expressed by Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi, waged a war of non-violent direct action against opposing forces of racism and prejudice that were embodied in the persons of local police, mayors, governors, angry citizens, and night riders

of the Ku Klux Klan. The great legal milestones achieved by this movement were the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In 1964 Congress passed Public Law 82-352 (78 Stat. 241). The provisions of this civil rights act forbade discrimination on the basis of sex as well as race in hiring, promoting, and firing. Title VII of the Act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to implement the law. By the late 1970's all branches of the federal government and most state governments had taken at least some action to fulfil the promise of equal protection under the law. In spite of all these advances, the fulfilment of M.L.K.'s is still dreams away. There is still a lot of prejudice and mistrust from all sides, nonetheless, the election of a black President is a remarkable achievement in the history of the U.S.A.. It did, however, come much earlier than expected. Notwithstanding this milestone, there are many other areas to be addressed.

In his inaugural speech on January 20 2009, after being elected the President of the U.S.A., President Obama made reference to the racial and gender biases that once existed and the significant improvement in both of the evils of racial and gender issues in the American history by using the example of the 106 years old African American woman, Ann Nixon Cooper. She would have witnessed a lot of the racial atrocities committed in her lifetime. She would have also witnessed seeing women gain the right to vote. In the same inauguration speech, President Obama also alluded to the fact that "This victory alone is not the change we seek. It is only the chance for us to make that change". This statement itself indicates that the dream has not been fulfilled, but that a fertile soil and an enriching environment is being created for the dream to fully materialise and be fulfilled.

In M.L.K.'s speech, he was careful to speak to both the oppressors and the oppressed of what must and must not be done. Great strides are being made in the racial arena, but there are still prejudices that manifest themselves in subtle ways; the trivialisation of the accomplishment through insensitive remarks such as the suggestion that the name of the President's residence would have to be changed if a "black guy" won and Harry Reid's comments that Obama was a "clean black guy with a phony accent". These actions remind us of the faults on this earth which we live in and that there is still much to be done in order to make the world a better place.

In conclusion, the election of President Barack Obama is a great milestone in history; it will be a great milestone to be remembered in the future, and in the fulfilment of Dr. Martin Luther King's dream. The world is becoming a more desegregated place but until all races, creeds and classes learn to be accepting of each other and love each other as brothers and sisters in the human race, the vision of Dr. King would not be fulfilled. In essence, the election of Barack Obama was not the change which Dr. King prophesied but