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NATIONAL MAGAZINE



# 50th

ANNIVERSARY  
Poor People's  
Campaign

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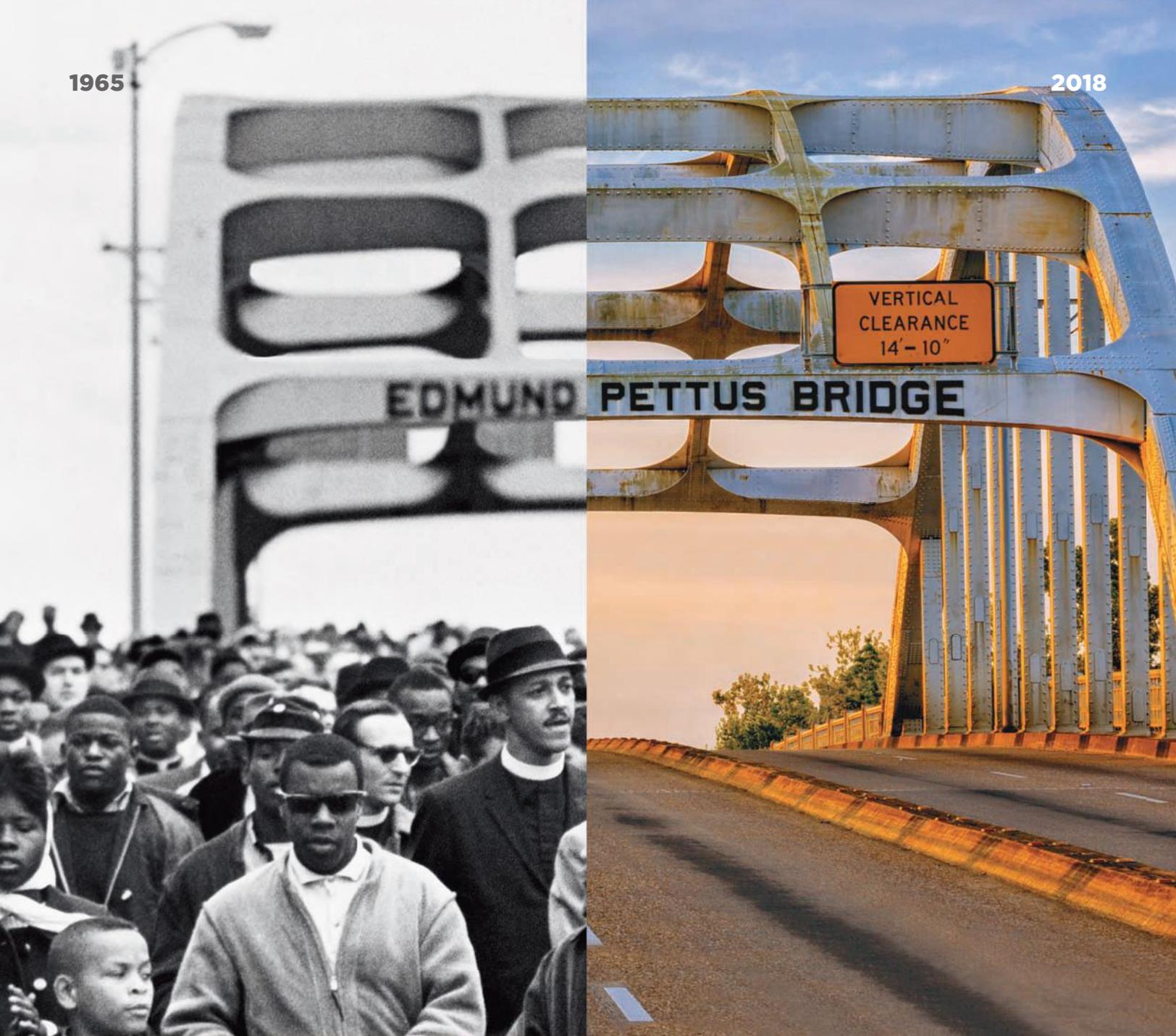
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# 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY Poor People's Campaign

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Cover: SCLC President/CEO, Dr. Charles Steele Jr. and SCLC Chairman, Dr. Bernard LaFayette Jr. at the new statue honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta.

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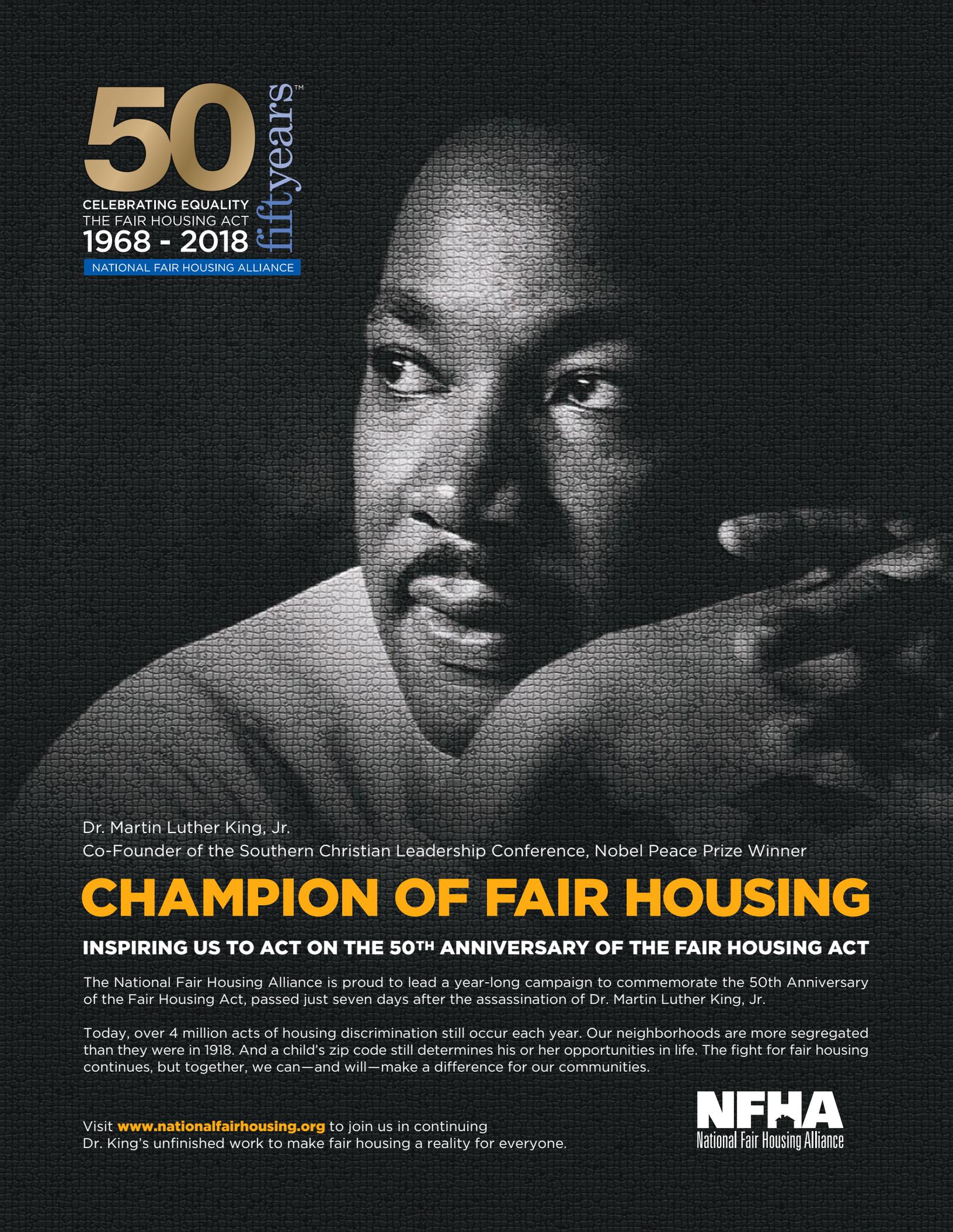
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president's corner

# 50th ANNIVERSARY Poor People's Campaign

## We must elevate our struggle

BY CHARLES STEELE JR., SCLC National President

As we prepare to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the SCLC Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC in June 2018, I am both happy and sadden by our progress in this country. Almost 50 years ago, the SCLC decided to continue on with the SCLC Poor People's Campaign after the death of our co-founder Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. During that time SCLC knew we must continue on fighting for justice and equality for the least of thee. Now, in 2018 our country is divided more than it has been in over 30 years...talk about a reversal of progress! As we come together to celebrate history let us remember that it is not enough just to celebrate—we must elevate.

We must elevate our struggle for full equality and be prepared to fight against those who would not only turn back the clock, they would turn back the calendar.

We must elevate our struggle against police brutality and not sit by and do nothing while innocent people especially blacks are killed by the institutions that are sworn to protect us.

We can't stand on the sidelines when an unarmed Black man is choked to death, shot to death and beat to death by police across the country.

We must elevate our struggle against the US Supreme Court justices who think companies are people. No, companies are companies; people are people. I don't know about you, but I remember the time when we looked to the US Supreme Court to secure our rights. Now, if we want to keep our rights, we try to avoid the US Supreme Court.

We understood it when right-wingers tried to pack the Supreme Court and federal courts across this nation with judges who do not care about us.



Photo: John Stephens

We understand this. We might have been born at night, but we weren't born last night.

We have to wake up, we have to inform ourselves and we have to learn that civil rights organizations are needed!! People fooled you and made you think when we got a Black president we had it made and we didn't need civil rights groups and leaders anymore. Now President Obama has served his full eight years (which we are proud of), but now we see a complete reversal of the mentality of people in this country. Racism is alive and well. I don't want to hear another person tell me this is a new day and we don't need civil rights organizations like we did 50 years ago. Civil rights organizations are needed today and every day! We need people on the ground working and informing the community of what

*“ We must keep the spirit  
of the Civil Rights  
Movement alive and say like  
the old Negro spiritual:  
Before I be a slave, I'll be bur-  
ied in my grave, and go home  
to my Lord and be free! ”*

is going on and what will happen if we don't continue to fight for our rights through voting, marching and protesting.

Let me just say how proud I am of the State in which I was born and raised, Alabama. I live in Georgia now, but I am proud to say Alabama took a stand and sent a message to the people of this country that is possible to stand together and say to the world that right is right and wrong is

We salute the **SCLC** for their tireless efforts to promote equality among us all.

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wrong! Democrat Doug Jones won the Alabama senate seat in a red state (Republican state). Let me just say this if it had not been for black voters, white voters, democrats and some Republicans coming together to take a stand this victory would not be possible. Yes, I said some Republicans that decided they will not vote Republican, instead they decided to write-in a candidate (23,000 write-ins). US Senator Richard Shelby also took a stand and asked Republicans to not vote republican this election, but write-in a candidate. It was also those votes that helped propel Doug Jones to victory. Alabama, you stood up! Thank you to the foot soldiers on the ground knocking on doors and getting people out to VOTE!

Before any of you run out and misquote me, let me be clear: I did not say all Democrats are good and all Republicans are bad—this is not the case. But what I am saying is that it makes a difference to vote for people who have a history of working on behalf of all citizens for justice and equality regardless of their ethnicities or backgrounds.

I'm here to tell you that we didn't stand by and do nothing 50 years ago and we're not going to stand by now while some of those in office try to hijack our democracy.

This is nothing new. The people trying to hijack our democracy are the direct descendants of people who tried to keep us from exercising our right to vote by requiring us to pass ridiculous literacy tests and guess how many bubbles are in a bar of soap.

We put up a fight then and we're going to fight now.

Let's be clear: We have a fight on our hands. But we've

never backed down from a fight when our cause was just. Don't get it twisted—we may be non-violent, but we are not non-thinking.

I had a young man tell me recently, "I wish I could have been part of the Civil Rights Movement." And I told him: "Don't worry, you are going to get your chance."

It looks like everything we fought for before, we will have to fight for again!

We thought we had won the battle over affirmative action. But we thought wrong.

Yes, young people—and old ones, too—we will have to fight the battles all over again. So be prepared.

We celebrate, but we also know how to elevate.

Finally, as we've known for years, the government can't solve everything. There are some things we must do for ourselves.

At SCLC we work with many young people who were not even born in 1963 and know nothing about the, 1963 March on Washington, 1964 Civil Rights Act or the 1965 Voter's Rights Act.

As elders, we must sit them down and tell them it's NEVER okay to use the N-word. In fact, that's what the "N" should stand for—NEVER. That means we don't call our women anything they don't call their Mama. Yes, you heard me correctly.

We must elevate our language.

So, we have a lot of work to do—externally and internally. Yes, it's time to celebrate, but it is also time to elevate. sclc



**sclc**

from the chairman

## 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY Poor People's Campaign



**Bernard LaFayette Jr.  
and Maynard Eaton.**  
Photo: John Stephens

## A candid conversation with Bernard LaFayette Jr. about the making of the Poor People's Campaign

BY MAYNARD EATON, Managing Editor

**T**his year, SCLC is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of its ingenious and nationally noteworthy Poor People's Campaign. The singular and significant event captured the nation's attention, while focusing national public and political attention on the plight of the poor.

SCLC Chairman Dr. Bernard LaFayette Jr, a revered civil rights activist, nonviolence apostle, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr confidant, was the architect, curator and driving force of that historic and memorable Washington, D.C. event.

"Dr. King said one time that Bernard got beaten all the time fighting for justice and equality; going to jail all the time. I've never seen Bernard act as though he was tired," opined esteemed civil rights lady leader and Trumpet Awards founder, Xernona Clayton, when she inducted Dr. LaFayette into her International Civil Rights Walk of Fame in January 2018. "Bernard's bio will tell you he was with the Student Movement in Nashville."

The night before his death, Dr. King counseled his friend Bernard, to use his calling as a Christian pastor and his continuing civil rights crusade to "internationalize and institutionalize" the spirit and philosophy of Nonviolence. That is what LaFayette has dutifully done. It's been his passion, purpose and professional pursuit.

"As Dr. Charles Steele, SCLC's President/CEO preaches and proclaims proudly, "My chairman Bernard still ain't tired; he is still actively and aggressively the voice and visionary in the quest for nonviolent and peaceful solutions and equality throughout the world. To quote you Maynard," Steele explains to this reporter with a perceptive smile, Bernard LaFayette is the 'quintessential' advocate and ambassador of Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence."

Here, Dr. LaFayette reminisces—generously giving us a riveting and revealing "behind the scenes" look at how he made an exceptional and extraordinary experience happen. The controversial Poor People's Campaign resonates as one of the premier actions of the American Civil Rights Movement.

MAYNARD EATON: Did, you ever consider yourself a revolutionary or your civil rights activism to be revolutionary?

DR. BERNARD LAFAYETTE JR.: No, not in that sense because you had one part of the United States that respected people and they were really participating in the system, but it was only in certain sections of the South [that were problematic, we thought]. I was just trying to get conformity and consistency with the Democratic system. The other people were out of whack! I wasn't trying to change the government, I was trying to change these folk's behavior. A revolutionary, in my sense, is that you are trying to change the entire system on a nationwide level. I was trying to change state laws. Those state laws were not consistent with the federal law. You can't have one nation and two different systems.

ME: The call for the Poor People's Campaign was 1967-68.

What was life for black and poor folks then from where you sat? What was it about that time and that era that compelled you and Dr. King to do this novel thing called a Poor People's Campaign? What was all that about, and how did you pull it off and make it happen?

BL: Why then is because when we were looking at apartheid in South Africa, and the other countries in the so-called Third World, there was no difference from the way people were treated in rural Mississippi, rural Alabama, and rural Georgia. It was just another form of slavery; economic slavery!

That whole idea of looking at extreme poverty in our nation, which was supposed to be equality for all people, revealed that they were just being ignored. So, the whole idea of the Poor People's Campaign was to address these issues with our government, because the national government was supposed to be responsible for all the people. That's why we decided to go to Washington D.C.

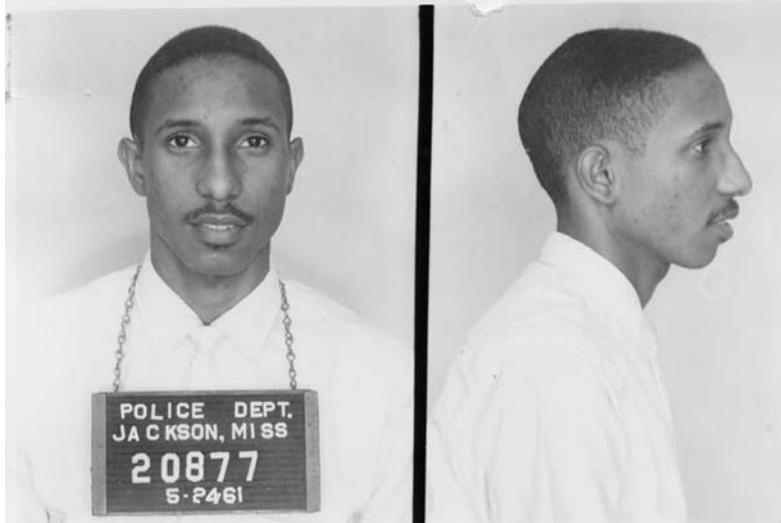
ME: So, the idea was to bring poor people to Washington and demonstrate their plight, but did you intend to achieve?

BL: The first thing we wanted to do was to make sure that our federally elected officials did not ignore these conditions. They were aware that these conditions existed, but they were looking at statistics and not people. They could get to Washington without going through any rural areas except on the expressway. They never actually saw poor

people. They went through those areas but at high speed. Simply put, we wanted to put a face on poverty.

ME: To help do that, you had them travel to Washington, the same way they'd normally go to town correct?

BL: Exactly. We wanted the people in Washington to see their means of transportation, and to show that certain conditions had not changed.



**A mugshot of Bernard LaFayette Jr., who was arrested for participating in the Freedom Rides, 1961**

ME: Are you telling me that folks really rode wagons and mules and tractors from the deep South all the way to Washington D.C.? That's just difficult to imagine. Is that what really happened?

BL: The answer is yes. One of the things the federal government did was to assign staff people to our different mule trains to make sure that we did not abuse the mules. You didn't walk on the

paved roads with the mules, the same way you walked on the grass. So, you had to have special shoes. They also examined the feces of the mules to make sure we were feeding them properly. They were more concerned about the mules than they were about the people.

Hosea Williams was the Field Coordinator, which meant he oversaw the people in the rural areas and in the fields, and getting them to Washington D.C.

ME: Talk about the late Rev. Hosea Williams. Was that his finest hour, and biggest achievement as a civil rights warrior with SCLC?

BL: Hosea had a lot of experience because he had been trained in the military, and Hosea was a chemist. He was very smart and very wise. In terms of SCLC, his title was Director of Voter Registration. The Program Administrator was my title, so I was the administrator over the different programs in SCLC. I supervised Hosea, and Dorothy Cotton and Jim Bevel and Charles Billups and Fred Bennett, who was over Operation Breadbasket. Dorothy was over Citizenship Education. Bevel was over Direct Action.

ME: So, how then, did you become the leader and the captain of the Poor People's Campaign?

BL: Martin Luther King appointed me the National Coordinator of the Poor People's Campaign after I was hired as

Program Administrator. And, he made Hosea the National Coordinator of Field Operations.

ME: Dr. King named you to that position and what was your reaction, particularly after he was assassinated?

BL: He named me that in 1967, and then we started doing the planning for the Poor People's Campaign. There were many different approaches. We had to mobilize the poor people, so one of the things that Martin Luther King did was to visit different area of the country. We visited rural areas and urban areas because we recognized that poor people were not just in the rural South. They were also in the heart of the ghetto in the North. All he did was listen.

ME: Did you travel with him?

BL: Yeah.

ME: So, you listened too?

BL: Yeah. We listened to gang members and what they're problems were, welfare rights organizations. I identified all the groups that worked with poor people. When we first got started, I wanted to know the scope of this Poor People's campaign. I said to Dr. King there are a lot of different poor people so do you want to include the Hispanics. He said, yes. That meant we had to identify the leaders of these different poor ethnic groups that were involved.

There was a history [to my participation in the Poor People's campaign] before Martin Luther King hired me. He had been observing me, but I didn't realize it. Andrew Young explained it to me.

ME: I've read where Dr. King told SCLC staffers at a retreat in 1967 that "we've moved from an era of civil rights to an era of human rights." Does that mean that the Poor Peoples campaign was a shift in strategy?"

BL: Yes, it became not just simply about civil rights in terms of black people and women. It began to expand to include all ethnic groups. We brought together Cesar Chavez, Corky Gonzalez; native Americans such as "Mad Bear" Anderson, Rose "Crow Fly High" out of Seattle, and, in fact, Russell Means came. He was over the American Indian Movement. We all met at Paschal's Restaurant in Atlanta.

My dilemma was how could we find the leader of the poor white folk? We got Miles Horton because he was the one that helped to do training with the Labor Movement, and a lot of white people were being economically exploited because they were not in unions.

ME: So, we should know it wasn't just black folk participating in the Poor People's campaign?

BL: No, because what we did was set up Congressional hearings so that they could talk about the issues that they were

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concerned about and getting legislation that would help them change their condition. That was the purpose.

ME: There was more to the campaign than just demonstrating and putting up a tent city your saying?

BL: The purpose of it was to get the government to pay attention to the conditions of the poor people, so they had to go and testify. We got a permit to build the mall in D.C. for building a tent city which was the residence of the poor people while they testified during the day. My wife Kate is the one who set up the Coretta Scott Day Care Center in Resurrection City for the children of the families that went to testify during the day.

ME: It must have taken awhile to plan and execute an event of this magnitude?

BL: Martin Luther King wanted to make sure that we had enough people that were ready to come when we kicked this campaign off. We postponed it twice. We didn't want to go up there with 100 people. That would have been embarrassing. I sent people two by two to various parts of the country to mobilize.

ME: During your planning and mobilization process, Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, where he had traveled to promote the Poor People's Campaign correct?

BL: Martin Luther King did not have Memphis on his list of places to go, but he responded because they were union people and they were on strike. When we talked about poor people, we talked about the working poor because all poor people were not unemployed. There were many poor people working for low wages without benefits, so we were in coalition with the unions.

ME: Just before you left Memphis to go to D.C. to continue planning for the Poor Peoples Campaign, Dr. King told you something that has stayed with you forever. Correct?

BL: He said, LaFayette—because he always called me LaFayette—the next movement we are going to have is to “internationalize and institutionalize nonviolence.” He felt that people needed to have ongoing training in nonviolence. Training would really make a difference he believed.

ME: That's the last thing to hear from Dr. King and then he dies from violence five hours later. How tragic. Did his death derail or disrupt the Poor People's Campaign?

BL: People that were hesitant or reluctant or unsure about the Poor People's campaign felt motivated to go and do it because that was Martin Luther King's last campaign. That's why his funeral caravan was a mule train rather than a hearse, so it would identify with the poor people. sclc

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**sclc** from the first lady

*Time Magazine named the women who shared stories about sexual harassment and abuse through the #MeToo campaign, The Silence Breakers – its 2017 Person of the Year.*

# The #MeToo Movement

BY CATHELEAN STEELE, Founder, Justice for Girls



Like the California forest that has suffered from the lack of rain too long, a spark starts a massive fire.

Sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or whatever you desire to call it, is not a new society issue. These issues have been ignored for centuries. The discussion of being harassed has been buried by many women among their deepest secrets. Some will ask this question of the women, what took you so long to tell? The answer is not so simple, maybe—a fear of losing their job, the shame that accompanies them, the fear of being told that they provoked or enticed their harasser. Whatever the reason, these women should not be judged.



Photo: John Glenn

To the excitement of many women the time is now to open Pandora's box. Maybe it was the Women's Movement of 2017, the election of Donald Trump as president or maybe it was just time to address the issues that women and girls of all ages, races and backgrounds have always dealt with.

The #METOO Movement has ignited a fire in women that sends a message of no more, not me. In part, let's thank Tarana Burke, social activist and Senior Director of Programs at Girls for Gender Equality. In 1997, an encounter with a young girl that was being abused by her mother's boyfriend led her to found Just Be INC. In 2006, Burke created the "Me Too" slogan to raise awareness to abuse in society. However, the slogan "Me too" was not well known outside of Burke's circle of influence.

Sometimes it takes a star to shine a light on a star. I was reading an article in the guardian that told the story

of how actress Alyssa Milano, started the #MeToo. In her words, "I awoke one morning to a screen shot that read "suggested by a friend: if all women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." She added the # to "MeToo" and started a revolution that gave women a voice to speak against sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace.

Thanks to Alyssa Milano—we have become aware of Tarana Burke and her work for over a decade helping young girls say Me too. Although Tarana Burke's name and picture were omitted from the Time Magazine cover, she was recently chosen to push the Ceremonial Waterford Crystal Button to signal the New Year's Eve ball drop. Ms. Burke will lead the sixty-second countdown to 2018.

I do not know Tarana Burke and have only become aware of her work within the last few weeks. However, I am proud of the work she does with young people each and every day. I believe that her newly found status will allow her to reach many more young girls that are suffering in silence. Perhaps now, Just Be INC and her Me Too slogan will have a worldwide reach.

We have all known of sexual abuse, harassment, or sexual misconduct in homes, schools, and workplace. The stigma of shame, guilt and blame consumed too many for too long and now there is the freedom of #MeToo.

## *Since #MeToo*

To date, seventy-one men have been forced to resign since the Harvey Weinstein accusers first found the courage to tell their stories. Before you read this—there may be many more resignations. sclc



## **THE WAY HE RESPONDED TO CHALLENGES LIFTED A NATION.**

As we remember Martin Luther King's legacy, we are reminded anew that the challenge of building a better America is a shared responsibility.

Only by tapping the richness of ideas that come from a diversity of people and perspectives can we tackle the challenges that lie ahead.





L-R: Charles Steele Jr., Cathelean Steele, Kate LaFayette, and Bernard LaFayette Jr. at the new statue honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta. Photo: John Stephens

# Finally, a King, a native son, finds honor at home

BY HAROLD MICHAEL HARVEY

He was born a King in 1929 and would live a life committed to equality and justice for all humankind. The dash between the starting line and the finishing line ended in 1968. Some would say that was a short dash, but oh boy, did he pack a lot of life in those 39 years.

The King ran his race well. He was, as they said about the baseball legend, LeRoy “Satchel” Paige, “Sneaky fast.”

He burst upon the scene on December 5, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama as an itinerant Baptist preacher, one hundred and 60 miles southwest of his childhood home on “Sweet” Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia.

In moving to Montgomery after earning a doctoral degree in Religion and Philosophy at Boston College, King traded the Georgia segregationist Governor, Samuel Marvin Griffin for Alabama’s populist Governor, James “Big Jim” Folsom.

In the parlance of the 1950s, a populist sought to engage the common white working class in government and politics. To paraphrase Folsom’s successor, George Wallace, “There is not a dime’s worth of difference between,” a populist and a segregationist, as each political philosophy ignored the plight of Blacks within a given political sub-division.

Probably because King was a newcomer to Montgomery and the city’s white political brokers could not control his purse strings, he was picked to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association’s bus boycott. You remember the story, how our dear sister, Rosa Parks refused to give up her sit in the Negro section of a city bus so that a white man could sit down.

King’s leadership during the Montgomery bus boycott caused his house to be bombed. He stood trial for trumped up charges, which he beat. Some political observers who recall the trial believe that a deal was struck between King’s



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father and Montgomery's power elites; that King would leave Montgomery in exchange for a favorable verdict.

King returned home to Atlanta where he served as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. Back in Atlanta King never forced a major confrontation with the city's white power structure like he had done in Montgomery and would do in other cities throughout the country.

However, he did "sit-in" with Spelman College students at the lunch counter at Rich's Department Store. He attempted to dine at the Pickrick Restaurant owned by Lester Maddox, who would become the Governor of Georgia. Maddox threatened to beat King with an axle-handle if he stepped foot inside the Pickrick.

His advocacy of nonviolent direct action in supporting integration of public accommodations, voting rights, and housing discrimination put a bull's eye on his back.

But before a sniper squeezed off a single round into his right jaw as he stood playfully outside of room 306 at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on April 4, 1968, the King would tell white America on August 28, 1963 about a dream that he had which envisioned people being judged by the "content of their character and not by the color of their skin."

Fourteen months later, on October 14, 1964 King was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. He was 35 years old and when he gave his acceptance speech at the University of Oslo in Norway two months later, no one in the audience suspected that in less than four years his light would belong to the ages.

He returned from Norway to Atlanta without fanfare. There was hardly any recognition that King had become the first person from Georgia to earn a Nobel Prize for Peace.

On April 3, 1968, King told Black Americans that he had been taken up to a great mountain where he beheld the universal God and was shown the land promised by the God of the Old Testament.

The next day, King paid the ultimate price for his belief in justice and equality. Yet no public recognition was given for the sacrifice he had made. Instead of recognition, on April 9, 1968, Governor Lester Maddox caused Georgia State Troopers to surround the capitol to prevent anyone in King's funeral dirge from using the rest room facilities in the state capitol.

For 37 years King would be the only Georgian to receive this prestigious prize. Yet still, no public recognition from the state of Georgia to acknowledge his contributions to humankind.

In 2002, Jimmy Carter, a former Governor of Georgia and former President of the USA was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Carter rightfully should have been awarded the Nobel Prize long before he was, but the committee did not bestow this honor upon him until one year after the state of Georgia removed the Stars and Bars, a symbol of Georgia's Confederate past from its state flag. It was as if, the Nobel Prize Committee refused to acknowledge anyone from Georgia other than King, who preached racial reconciliation, as long as the state held onto symbols of the old south.



Photo: John Stephens

Interestingly, the confederate flag was taken down by Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, who as a young state senator from West Cobb County, in the 1980s had opposed a state holiday for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

On August 22, 2011, the federal government honored Dr. King with "The Stone of Hope" at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial in the District of Columbia.

Three years later, the state of Georgia began efforts to honor Dr. King on the grounds of its capitol.

August 28, 2017 was a grand day, with fine speeches from Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, State Representative Calvin Smyre, Rev. Dr. Bernice King and Governor Nathan Deal. On this day, King's supporters were protected by State Troopers who were armed and ready to prevent anyone from disrupting the proceedings.

Finally, an honor fit for a King, whose statue now faces the rising sun on the east side of the state capitol, overlooking the Atlanta streets where he played as a little boy, forging the character that would shape a state, a nation and a world. sclc

*HAROLD MICHAEL HARVEY is an American novelist and essayist. He is a contributor at The Hill, SCLC National Magazine, Southern Changes Magazine and Black College Nines. He can be contacted at [hbarvey@haroldmichaelharvey.com](mailto:hbarvey@haroldmichaelharvey.com).*

**Congratulations to the SCLC  
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# HONORING MLK JR.

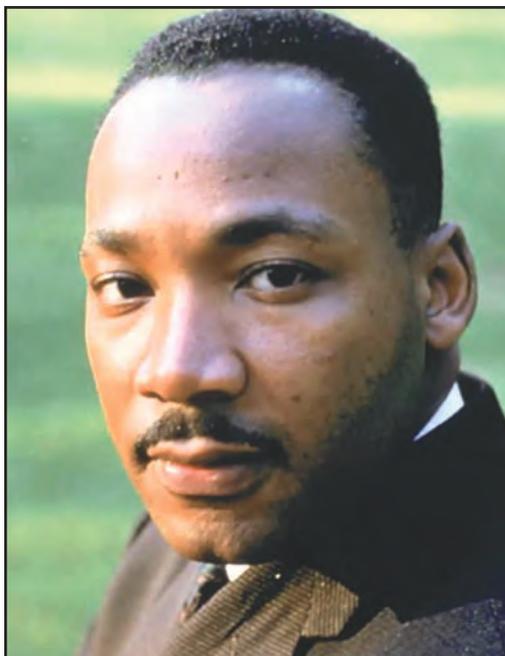
BY HEATHER GRAY

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in January is when countless communities in America celebrate the great man. The first Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration in America was, in fact, in 1986, yet the actual holiday itself was approved by Congress in 1983. Starting in 1984, I was fortunate to work for Coretta Scott King at the “Martin Luther, Jr. King Center for Nonviolent Social Change” in Atlanta, first as a researcher and then as the Director of the Non-Violent Program. There were countless memorable experiences for me while working for Mrs. King and one in particular, but first some history.

In the mid-1980s, I was attending many meetings with Mrs. King, along with other staff members, King Center board members, and local and national civil rights leaders, about the efforts around the country to celebrate the first King Day holiday and what we would do in Atlanta. Frequent visitors were, of course, civil rights legendary leaders such as John Lewis, Andrew Young, Bernard LaFayette, Joseph Lowery and James Orange, to name a few. One of our frequent visitors was also Walter Fauntroy, who was the delegate to the US House of Representatives from the District of Columbia’s at-large district. Many of them were always coming and going consistently at the Center regardless of holiday preparations, but to say this was an exciting time is putting it mildly.

When the holiday was first celebrated in 1986, and as part of the King week celebration, Mrs. King asked me to organize an International Anti-Apartheid Conference to be held at the King family’s Church, Ebenezer Baptist, located next to the King Center. I did precisely that and it was a powerful event with countless anti-apartheid national activists in the country attending and speaking. You could just feel the excitement in the air both about the King holiday itself in addition to this representation of the important collaboration of the international movement for justice.

But for those of you not in Atlanta, I want to share something about the King Center and the surrounding neighborhood. The King Center is located on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta close to downtown Atlanta in what is one of the major historic Black communities in the city. Much of the area is now, appropriately, a National Park. Mrs. King, in fact, created the “Martin Luther, Jr. King Center for Nonviolent Social Change” in 1968 in the basement of her



home in Atlanta, which was the very year Dr. King was assassinated. Her home on Sunset Avenue was close to the Atlanta University Center some distance from Auburn Avenue. In 1981, Mrs. King moved the King Center to its present location on Auburn Avenue.

A block away from the King Center, on the same side of the street, is Dr. King’s birth home built in 1895.

Also, next to the King Center itself is the renowned Ebenezer Baptist Church that was the King family church. While the church was created in 1886 by the freedman, Pastor John Andrew Parker, he was followed by Pastor Alfred Daniel Williams in 1894. The present location and building of the church on Auburn Avenue was

in 1914. Then Dr. King’s father, Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., became the pastor of Ebenezer in 1931. Interestingly, Alberta King, Reverend King, Sr.’s wife, was the daughter of Pastor Williams. Sadly, Alberta King was killed by a lone gunman at Ebenezer in 1974 while she played the organ at the service.

Martin Luther King, Jr. served as co-pastor at Ebenezer with his father from 1960 until his death in 1968.

Further down Auburn Avenue from the King Center was the headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Created in 1957, SCLC served as the activist arm of King’s civil rights advocacy.

Subsequently, in 2000, Ebenezer Baptist Church was designated as a National Historic Site and, in 1999, a new Ebenezer Baptist Church had been built across the street.

Then, in January 2018, the Trump administration changed the Martin Luther King, Jr. Auburn Avenue area from a National Historic Site to an expansive “National Historical Park”.

The new National Historic Park encompasses 35 acres in the area and many buildings, including Ebenezer Baptist Church, Dr. King’s birth-home and, importantly, the original headquarters of the SCLC.

Mrs. King always told me that the role of the King Center was to train individuals in non-violent social change and that the activist work was that of SCLC, where those trained in non-violence could be involved or inspired regarding additional work in the movement. To me, this was a wise designation of responsibilities.

The Auburn Avenue area also includes residential housing, shops, music clubs, restaurants, and other major churches, such as Big Bethel AME Church and Wheat Street Baptist Church, etc.

Dr. King was raised in this vibrant neighborhood and when he died, he was brought back home. His tomb is located on the King Center grounds next to Ebenezer Baptist and surrounded by what is referred to as the reflecting pool. It is one of the most visited tourist sites in America. The tomb of Mrs. King, who died in 2006, is now next to her husband.

My office at the King Center was located in the back of the building so when I sat at my desk I could look out directly at Dr. King's tomb and would often see throngs of people visiting the site.

One cold January day in the 1980s, when there was snow and ice on the ground and virtually no cars or individuals on

those in need and those seeking justice in Atlanta, the United States and the world. I've also wondered, did he grow up with Dr. King in the Auburn Avenue area? Was he acknowledging a long time friendship? I don't know.

I have thought also that this gentleman wanted some time alone with Dr. King and to communicate in whatever way was possible with the spirit of the great man and to honor him.

My friend William Small from South Carolina responded with this note:

I used to have in my office a picture of a young black boy, with his shoe shine box shining, the shoes of a white adult male wearing western boots. The boots created a sense of geography, the activity contributed a sense of time. I had next to that picture a picture of an old Black man sitting on the steps of a house in a poor environment. The steps upon which he rested suggested Baltimore or maybe Philadelphia.

Life in a sense had not been very kind, his labors had produced little in the way of sustainable gain or reward. I juxtaposed those photos because of their interactive impact. Not because of what they said singularly, but because of the questions they raised collectively. Could the young boy with all of his early entrepreneurial will be the old man on the other end of a life experience? What might the range of intervening factors be?

The image that you described to me generates the same kind of thought. Reverence to whom? Hope or desperation? Resolve or resignation? Where would life lead the old gentleman when he stood up? How would he be viewed standing in contrast to the concerns extended to him in a prayer posture? What in his life would be new or energizing in a sense of opportunity regeneration? As importantly, what was the impact on you the observer that has impressed this image in your consciousness for almost half a century?

What was the impact on me in witnessing this beautiful moment? To me this singular gesture of humility suggests what I, and many others, have likely thought and felt about Martin Luther King. Love was central to King. If he

did not like what someone did or how oppressive they might be, he would say, "I love you, but I don't like what you do." Love is powerful and Dr. King, of course, knew it. So, even apart from his profound leadership, speeches and analysis of the problems faced in the world, he was and remains a spiritual force in taking a stand for and loving humanity and all of us as individuals and many of us, and likely the elderly gentleman as well, know and knew precisely that reality. It is likely, in return, that the elderly gentleman that day was expressing his love for Dr. King. Or whatever might have been the reason for his gesture, his humility has empowered me ever since and I respectfully revere Dr. King and the elderly gentleman who remains forever in my consciousness. sclc

*HEATHER GRAY bio on page 23.*



**1963, Leaders of March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. L-R: Rabbi Joachim Prinz, an unidentified man, Eugene Carson Blake, Dr. King, and Floyd McKissick.**

the streets or sidewalks, I went into work anyway. Hardly anyone else was at the King Center that day.

As I sat at my desk, I looked outside yet again to view Dr. King's tomb. No one was outside. Then suddenly an elderly black gentleman walks by my window and up the few steps to the reflecting pool and close to Dr. King's tomb. He then kneels in front of the tomb with his head down, as in prayer. The image of him is still ingrained in my consciousness. It was such a beautiful gesture.

I've always wondered what was likely going through this gentleman's mind and I've asked some friends for ideas of a metaphor of sorts to describe this devotional expression. Invariably and not surprisingly the response is that he wanted to take this opportunity to honor and thank Dr. King for his leadership, his sacrifice, his transformative service to



# 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY of the Poor People's Campaign

BY HEATHER GRAY

While Martin Luther King, Jr. had apparently thought of calling for poor people to amass at the capitol's Mall in 1966 when welfare activists were marching, it wasn't until 1967 that there were concrete plans made by SCLC for a "Poor People's Campaign". King began to articulate a movement to address the economic injustices plaguing the black community and America overall.

But first, here is some background.

The dynamics and accomplishments of the "movement" in the 1960s were profound, such as the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. However, for King, all this was not enough, as when he realized that while you might be able to get on a bus or stay in a hotel, if you didn't have the money to pay for the bus ride or for a hotel room what good were these rights?

King also cited the history of economic opportunities for whites that had been denied the black community and wisely complained about the hypocrisy of blaming the poverty ridden black community for its own situation.

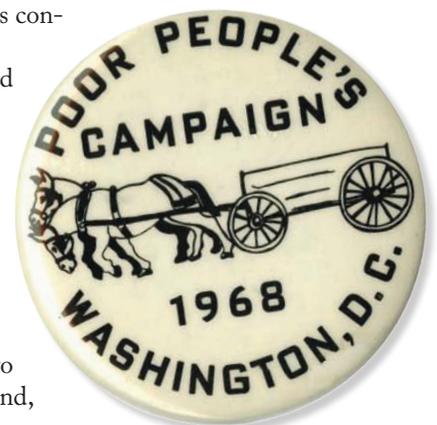
One profound example of inequities noted by King was the 1862 Homestead Act that gave millions of acres in the west to white families for free, yet Black America was always denied its "Forty Acres and a Mule!" And then white

America had the gall to say to the black community "you need to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps!" This injustice and hypocrisy had to end!

King's April 4, 1967 "Beyond Vietnam" speech at Riverside Church in New York resulted in criticism both from many in the civil rights leadership and the so-called "liberal" left not to mention the conservative politicians and corporate leaders. This is because he was moving away from his somewhat safe focus on civil rights to the beginning of a challenge not only to America's war machine, but to the country's controlling wealthy interests.

Remember that the Cold War mentality was still a reality in 1950s and 1960s America, as when King was organizing for "civil rights," posters went up in the South referring to him as a "communist". But King would not be deterred.

If anything, he chose to broaden his perspective and,



as many say, adhered to his conscience as when he identified in his 1967 “Beyond Vietnam” speech the triplets of evil—racism, materialism and militarism that, he said, if not addressed America would never have true justice. He also stated that “A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth.”

In 1967, then, he made a major shift in his thinking from focusing primarily on “civil rights” to “human rights” that would encompass a demand for economic justice.

It was, in fact, at an SCLC retreat at the Penn Center in South Carolina from November 27 to December 1, 1967, that King and others planned the Poor People’s Campaign. King gave two speeches at the retreat. One was “Why a Movement?” and the other was entitled “The State of the Movement.” In that latter speech King said:

“The decade of 1955 to 1965, with its constructive elements misled us....Everyone underestimated the amount of rage Negroes were suppressing , and the amount of bigotry the majority were disguising....”

The SCLC announced its Poor People’s Campaign a few days after concluding its Penn retreat. At the retreat, King told the gathering, “I don’t know if I’ll see all of you before April, but I send you forth.” This was his great commission to his staff. (Penn Center)

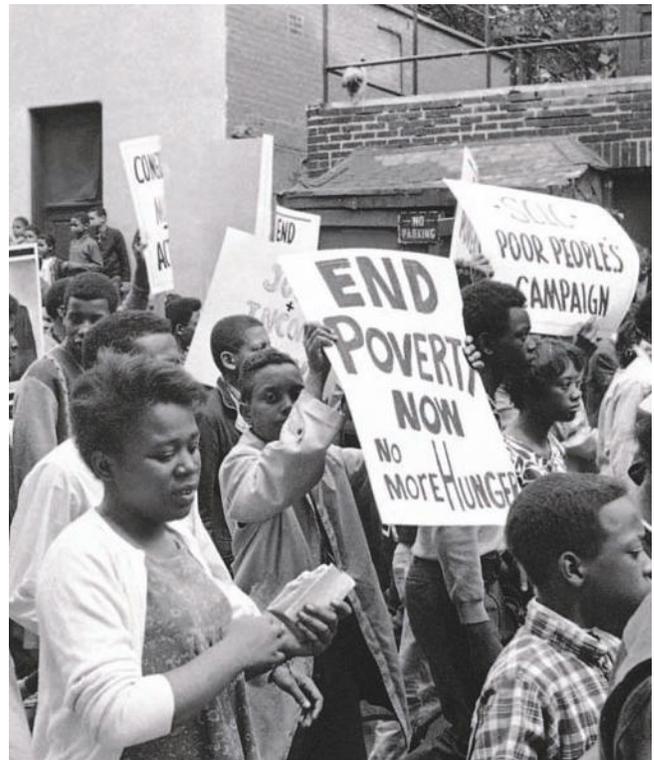
Then, on April 4, 1968, King was assassinated in Memphis while there in support of the striking sanitation workers. But, however painful this immense loss was for the SCLC leadership, they did not stop the plans for the Poor People’s Campaign.

In fact, prior to his assassination King and others had moved forward on the campaign seeking endorsers and activists around the country to become involved and the work continued with the assistance also of his widow Coretta Scott King. Both King’s leadership and a desired vision for addressing economic injustice prevailed!

In May 1968, there was also, for 6 weeks, a “Resurrection Camp” in Washington DC occupied by thousands of poor folks that became disrupted due to lack of resources, for one. However, when Robert Kennedy was killed on June 5, 1968 just 3 months after King’s assassination, many felt that this second killing of a leader did not bode well for their movement. Many of those in the camp also marched in the Kennedy funeral.

An “Economic Bill of Rights” was drafted by activist Bayard Rustin. Rustin suggested that the federal government should:

1. Recommit to the Full Employment Act of 1946 and legislate the immediate creation of at least one million socially useful career jobs in public service;



A segment of the “poor peoples” march on Washington moves through a north Philadelphia street on May 14, 1968 en route to a rally at Independence Hall

2. Adopt the pending Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968;
3. Repeal the 90th Congress’s punitive welfare restrictions in the 1967 Social Security Act;
4. Extend to all farm workers the right—guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act—to organize agricultural labor unions;
5. Restore budget cuts for bilingual education, Head Start, summer jobs, Economic Opportunity Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Acts.

The Economic Bill of Rights did not pass Congress and the activism did not accomplish overall what was hoped for by SCLC leaders and others. But the demands for economic justice were made on a national scale in 1968 like never before by the 20th century black community and it remains an important historical model and imperative especially in today’s economic and political climate. America has much to thank the SCLC activists for their vigilance and leadership on these issues. As they say in Southern Africa – “The struggle continues!” sclc

*HEATHER GRAY produces “Just Peace” on WRFG-Atlanta 89.3 FM covering local, regional, national and international news. Gray lives in Atlanta and can be reached at [hmcgray@earthlink.net](mailto:hmcgray@earthlink.net).*



# 50th ANNIVERSARY Poor People's Campaign

COMMENTARY

## *SCLC's New Poor People's Campaign: A direct action response to poverty in America*

BY RANDAL L. GAINES, SCLC Vice Chairman

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, “SCLC”, is committed to building a transformative movement to eradicate poverty in America by creating opportunities for functional sustainment and self-sufficiency for the underrepresented poor and dispossessed.

In addition to rallying committed support for its national agenda, SCLC's National Board Chairman, Dr. Bernard LaFayette, and its National President, Charles Steele, are actively advancing SCLC's international mission by working to re-shape national and global business and governmental initiatives toward eradicating poverty nationally as well as globally.

SCLC is issuing a call to action to America to take the moral high ground and formulate and implement policies that directly address the issue of poverty, pursuant to ensuring economic equality in this country. SCLC's prevailing objective is to change the hearts by inspiring a commitment to our moral obligation of providing for the “least of these”, and the underserved.

In early 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, SCLC and other

civil rights leaders planned and organized a “Poor People's Campaign” to serve as the second phase of the Civil Rights Movement with the specific purpose of gaining economic justice for the nation's poor and disenfranchised. SCLC's current National Board Chairman, Dr. Bernard LaFayette, served as the national coordinator for Dr. King's 1968 Poor People's Campaign. Inspired by Dr. King's compelling vision, SCLC organized and led one of the most effective coalition building efforts in the nation's history.

The 1968 campaign's operational objectives included organizing and mobilizing poor people from across the nation to conduct peaceful protest throughout the Nation's Capitol to draw attention to the plight of poverty in America and to compel Congress to pass substantial anti-poverty legislation. The campaign did produce positive, impactful changes; however, President Lyndon Johnson and Congress were pre-occupied with domestic unrest and war waging in Vietnam and Congress did not take any constructive action in regard to America's poverty crises.

Through organized resistance and protest, civil rights leaders and activist groups have made great achievements in the area's civil rights, healthcare, and worker protection. Comparatively, very little to no progress has been made in the war on poverty.

Today, 46.5 million people, including 1 out of every 5 children, are living in poverty. This represents an increase of approximately 10 million people since 2008. The average white family has a net worth of \$112,000. The average black family has a net worth of \$5,600. The top 5% owns 70% of the wealth and the bottom 80% owns only 7% of the wealth.

The plight of poor and dispossessed in America represents one of the greatest injustices of all time. Economic justice is an indispensable cause in the fight of positive social change. It is vitally



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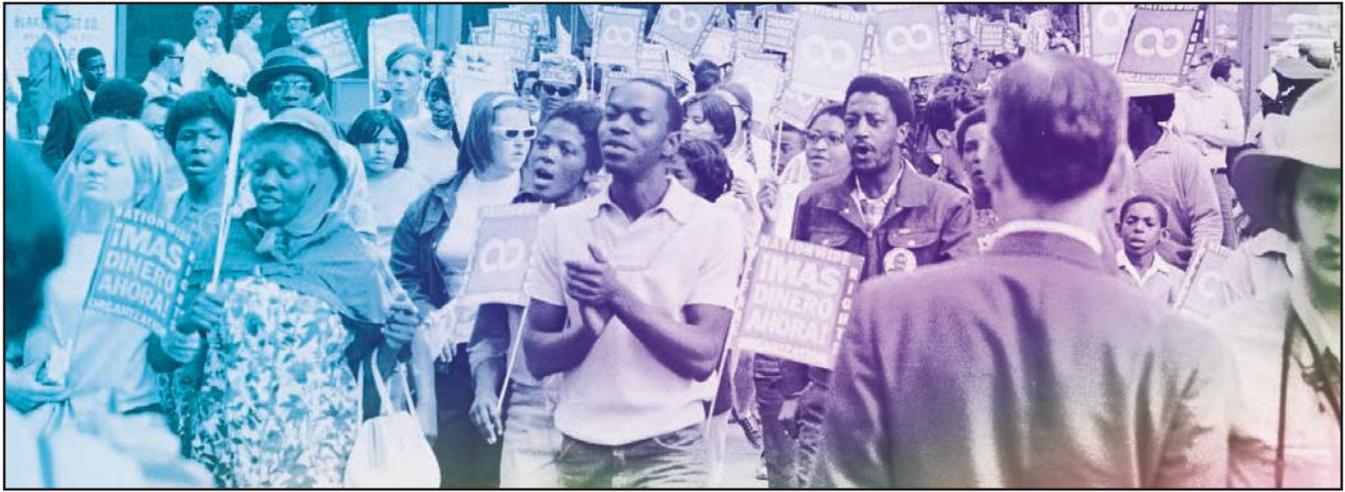
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important for America to take immediate action to address the obvious fact that the vast majority of America's costly social ills can be directly tied to poverty, i.e., violent crimes, drug abuse, unacceptable high school dropout rates, and high incarceration rates.

The fight for economic justice is an exceedingly compelling initiative. Attaining this initiative is attainable, but its course will be challenging in part due to the non-progressive, misguided political climate that been fostered in Washington by the current administration. Adding to that challenge is the fact that the plight of the poor in America has been overtly excluded from the national agenda.

Another inherent challenge to advancing the laudable cause of economic justice is the lack of political mobilization among the poor and lack of access to political resources.

Adding to that unfortunate dynamic is the republican party's strategic rhetoric of aggravating ill-conceived racial fears to promote disunity among America's citizens who share common disadvantages and common interest.

As a core component of SCLC's call to action for its New Poor People's Campaign against poverty in America, SCLC's core poverty prevention initiatives include:

1. Building a coalition of organizations that share a common goal of eradicating poverty and promoting economic empowerment in America.
2. Advocating for a congressional hearing on poverty

pursuant to urging Congress to direct the federal government and its executive agencies to develop and initiate national poverty prevention programs.

3. Attainment of a national commitment to job training, full employment, and adequate wages.
4. Federal programs that promote minority business ownership and provide access to business start-up capital.

It is incumbent upon SCLC and other impactful civil rights and social justice organizations to fight for those who have lost their ability to fight due to lack of resources and to serve as an effective voice for those who's voices have been silenced to lack of hope. It's imperative that we

learn from the 1968 campaign by examining its challenges and successes. We must retain those concepts and principles that are universally applicable to the success of national movements, and develop new compelling goals and strategies that can inspire impactful changes and create opportunities for economic advancement for America's under represented poor and disenfranchised. sclc



*RANDAL L. GAINES is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of The Jackson; SCLC's Vice Chairman and national board member; and State Representative, Louisiana Legislature.*

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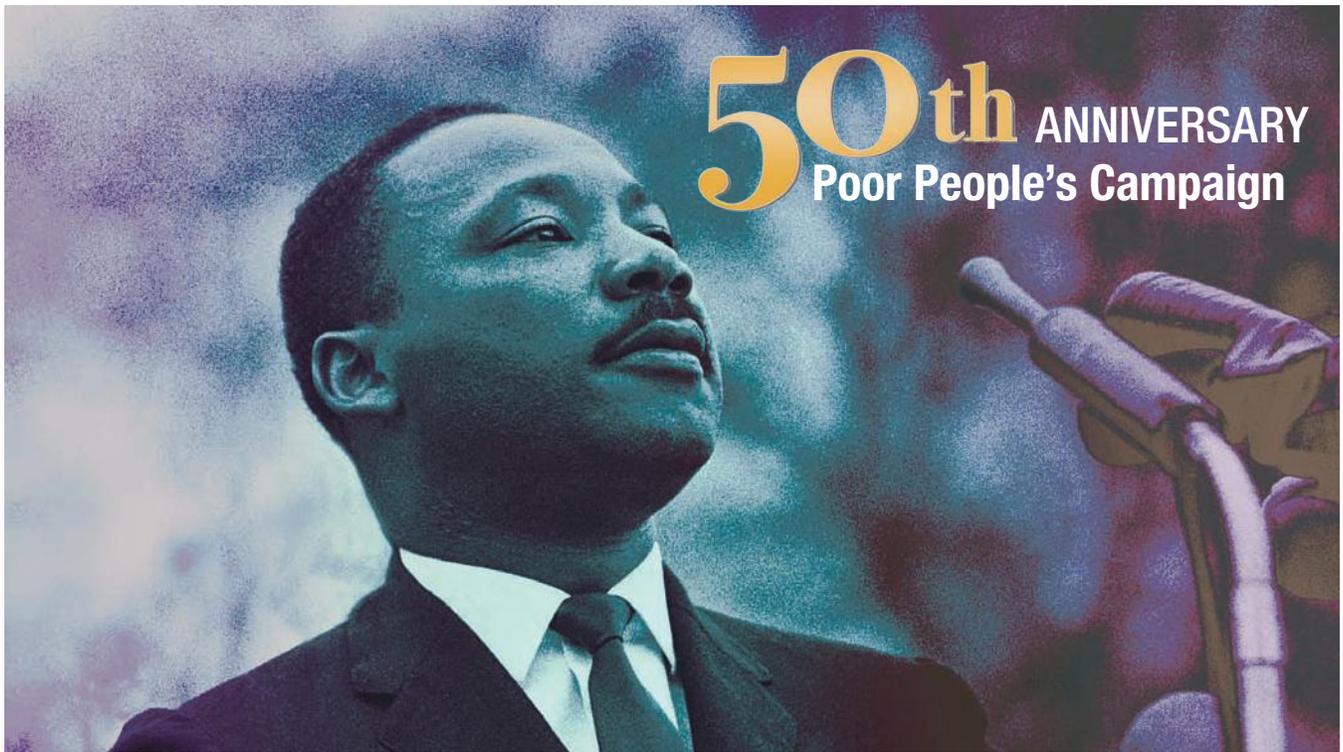
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USAF Retired  
Tuskegee Airman

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## Building a bridge over a treacherous river requires a visionary leader

BY N. JONAS OHRBERG

**I**t was on a rainy and cold winter's evening that I guided my car along E-Street in Washington, DC, heading West toward the Roosevelt Bridge that towered over the dark and freezing waters of the Potomac River. Through the drizzling rain drops that smothered the windshield of my car, to my right I glanced at the Kennedy Center, and on my left, beyond a number of leafless trees, I could see the marble of the Lincoln Memorial embraced by powerful white spotlights. As I gazed towards the illuminated Lincoln Memorial I could hear Dr. King's powerful voice that so many years ago had touched the American heart and soul with an eloquent message, which included the words, "I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream." These profound words were not only the foundation of the Dr. King's legacy of leadership, but also the Civil Rights Movement and The Poor People's Campaign.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was both a visionary and prophetic leader during the Civil Rights Movement, and moving forward with the Poor People's Campaign in 1967-68. Part of this vision included, which Dr. King knew, that obtaining civil and economic equality could only be achieved through the American infrastructure and within the

symbolic context of "The American Dream." Even though Dr. King was physically and emotionally exhausted toward the end of his life, and extremely disappointed with the American establishment and society's resistance to supporting and achieving actual change, his leadership efforts relentlessly emphasized creating and fostering a message of hope for economic and civil justice rooted in a balanced sense of patriotism, and acknowledging the American traditions and establishment.

Dr. King specifically encouraged bridging the gap between the African American community and the poor white community as part of the Poor People's Campaign. Dr. King noted, "One unfortunate thing about Black Power is that it gives priority to race precisely at a time when the impact of automation and other forces have made the economic question fundamental for blacks and whites alike. In this context a slogan 'Power for Poor People' would be much more appropriate than the slogan 'Black Power.'" Dr. King emphasized that economic justice was not only an issue for the African American community, and rather than alienating the poor white community Dr. King extended a hand of support and good faith to all poor Americans, without regard for their race or heritage.

One of the underlying elements of Dr. King's philosophy was the economic and civil rights for basic humanity,

“ One unfortunate thing about Black Power is that it gives priority to race precisely at a time when the impact of automation and other forces have made the economic question fundamental for blacks and whites alike. ”

— MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

which transcended the question of race. In 1967, Dr. King expressed the sentiment, “I think it is necessary for us to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era of human rights...” This transition is important because the emphasis on humanity did not foster the notion of an America of “Us versus Them,” nor did it alienate one race or community, but rather promoted the sentiment that we all deserve the same economic rights and opportunities regardless of race or heritage. Moreover, years earlier Dr. King had proclaimed the importance of “Human Power” in the struggle for equality and justice rather than the power of one race over another, which underlined the relevance of basic humanity and how as fellow human beings we can foster real and lasting change in America.

What does all of this mean today? As in the days of the Poor People’s Campaign, there are several obstacles as well as opportunities in today’s efforts to achieve economic equality and justice. One of the most important factors in the success or failure of these efforts is leadership. The leaders within the various majority and minority communities, organizations, and agencies must acknowledge that there is a need for change. This is a change that is beyond political rhetoric and political affiliation. Dr. King included the words listed below in the work, “I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World,” regarding leadership. The description of leadership is applicable today in living and leading the legacy of the 1967-1968 Poor People’s Campaign. God Give us Leaders!

*A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands;  
Leaders whom the lust for of office does not kill;  
Leaders whom the spoils of life cannot buy;  
Leaders who possess opinions and a will;  
Leaders who have honor; Leaders who will not lie;  
Leaders who can stand before a demagogue and damn his treacherous flatteries without winking!*

*Tall leaders, sun crowned, who live above the fog in public duty and private thinking.*

Based on Dr. King’s description of the type of leader required one must look beyond personal needs, monetary gains, celebrity, and be strong enough to withstand the waves of political pressures or motives. Also, and most importantly, the leaders must be intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually prepared to face the challenges of fostering real and lasting economic justice and bridging the gap across communities of race and political affiliation. sclc

*N. JONAS OHRBERG, PhD. is a Professor with Forbes School of Business and technology at Ashford University. He is the founder of the Forbes School of Business Center for Diversity and Multicultural Research. Ohrberg earned a PhD in Organization, Management, and Leadership from Capella University.*

*Ohrberg is the founder of the organization, The Human Promise: One Heart One Humanity. With a deep passion for and belief in positive change, he founded The Human Promise to share a message of unity, understanding, and acceptance between diverse communities and peoples, and emphasize common humanity in fostering positive change.*



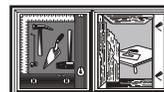
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# It's time to build people, not buildings

BY TERENCE LESTER

It's December 22, 2017 and I'm sitting outside a local coffee shop in the heart of the city of Atlanta looking at yet again a new infrastructure go up.

New construction always symbolizes growth, forward movement, and business which are all great things for a growing city.

But, on the other hand, it represents a much different picture and set of emotions for those who live on the margins and are slipping through the cracks of life because of poverty and homelessness. Researchers still say that, "most Americans will spend at least one year below the poverty line at some point between ages 25 and 75, and the poverty rates continue to climb in rural areas."

This type of data lets us know that poverty affects everyone. It does not discriminate.

The irony is almost heart-wrenching, because while I sit and write this, I'm also gazing at a few people experiencing homelessness sleeping on the ground next to the new building that's going up.

Now I see a mother walking with her children and her children clearly have on clothing that is not suited for the winter season that I feel on my typing fingertips.

I can see the pain in their eyes as she tries to walk closer to her child hoping to transfer some body heat.

I have many questions circulating around in my mind that I bet Martin Luther King Jr. had in his mind while starting the "Poor People's Campaign" right before he was assassinated.

How do we live in a country where we build fancy new buildings, but don't build the people sleeping outside of them homeless?

How do we allow poverty to erode and rip people's lives apart when we live in the wealthiest country in the world?

Why do kids go to sleep at night with their stomachs screaming for help because of food insecurity?

Why do we continue to commit structural sins against those who are supposed to be our neighbors?

How do we live in a world where 1% percent of the population controls all of the world's wealth?

As I reflect on Martin's life, I reminded of the three social ills he stood up against including: poverty, war, and racial injustice.

During the last days of his life, one of his top focuses was poverty! During his speech to receive the Nobel Peace Prize he said these words, "A second evil which plagues the modern world is that of poverty. Like a monstrous octopus, it projects its nagging, prehensile tentacles in lands and villages all over the world. Almost two thirds of the peoples of the world go to bed hungry at night. They are undernourished, ill-housed, and shabbily clad. Many of them have no houses or beds to sleep in. Their only beds are the sidewalks of the cities and the dusty roads of the villages. Most of these poverty-stricken children of God have never seen a physician or a dentist."

More than ever, poverty still remains to be a much needed focus in our country. People still struggle to make living wages, homelessness is rising, and we have yet to focus on making building people who are on the bottom of society a top priority.

However, I do believe we are in a time where the younger generation can pick up the torch and carry his legacy on in tremendous ways. Younger people are skilled and have the capabilities of bringing attention to the plights of poverty by using technology to solve problems. The younger generation also have the capabilities of organizing groups

of people to love people back to self-sufficiency much faster because of the technological advances.

Just this past week, our organization Love Beyond Walls launched a digital campaign to get a former executive a job that had become homeless and battling with poverty. In the spirit of Martin, we stood up and said enough is enough. We shared his story and within six days we were able to literally change this man's life by lifting his voice and sharing his story via technology.

Although we've been able to see successes like this, there are many more stories of poverty across this country that we need to take a stand for in the most urgent way possible.

As I sit here, continuing to look at the building, again I look at the people suffering with poverty I am asking you (anyone who is reading this) to join the revival of moral responsibility to be our brother's and sister's keeper. Plainly put, we need to take a stand to lift the voices of the poor and build people.

You may be wondering how do I join this uprising to



take a stand for those who are voiceless and outcast? I believe the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. teaches us how in three simple ways:

Firstly, we should stand up to injustice in the strongest way possible. If we are not standing against the ills that plague people then we are a part of the problem. King said it this way, “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

Secondly, we must love people that do not look like us, sound like us, or even come from where we come from. Martin followed Jesus’ teachings when Christ said that we should “love our neighbors.”

When Jesus exclaims this, Jesus is actually asking us to love people they are not like us. If we truly loved people when would not see buildings go up and communities be gentrified while people’s very lives are decaying.

Third and last, we should sacrifice. Martin Luther King Jr. lived a life of sacrifice. Before he was assassinated, he was giving a voice to those plagued with poverty in the U.S.—Not only did he sacrifice for others by becoming an advocate. He laid down his life for people caught in the cycle of poverty.

More than ever we are being summoned to become advocates for those who have no voice and sacrifice to life them to a place of equality and equity. sclc

*TERENCE LESTER is a minister, speaker, community activist and author who co-leads Love Beyond Walls, a not-for-profit organization focused on raising poverty awareness and community mobilization. Go to [lovebeyondwalls.org](http://lovebeyondwalls.org) for more info.*

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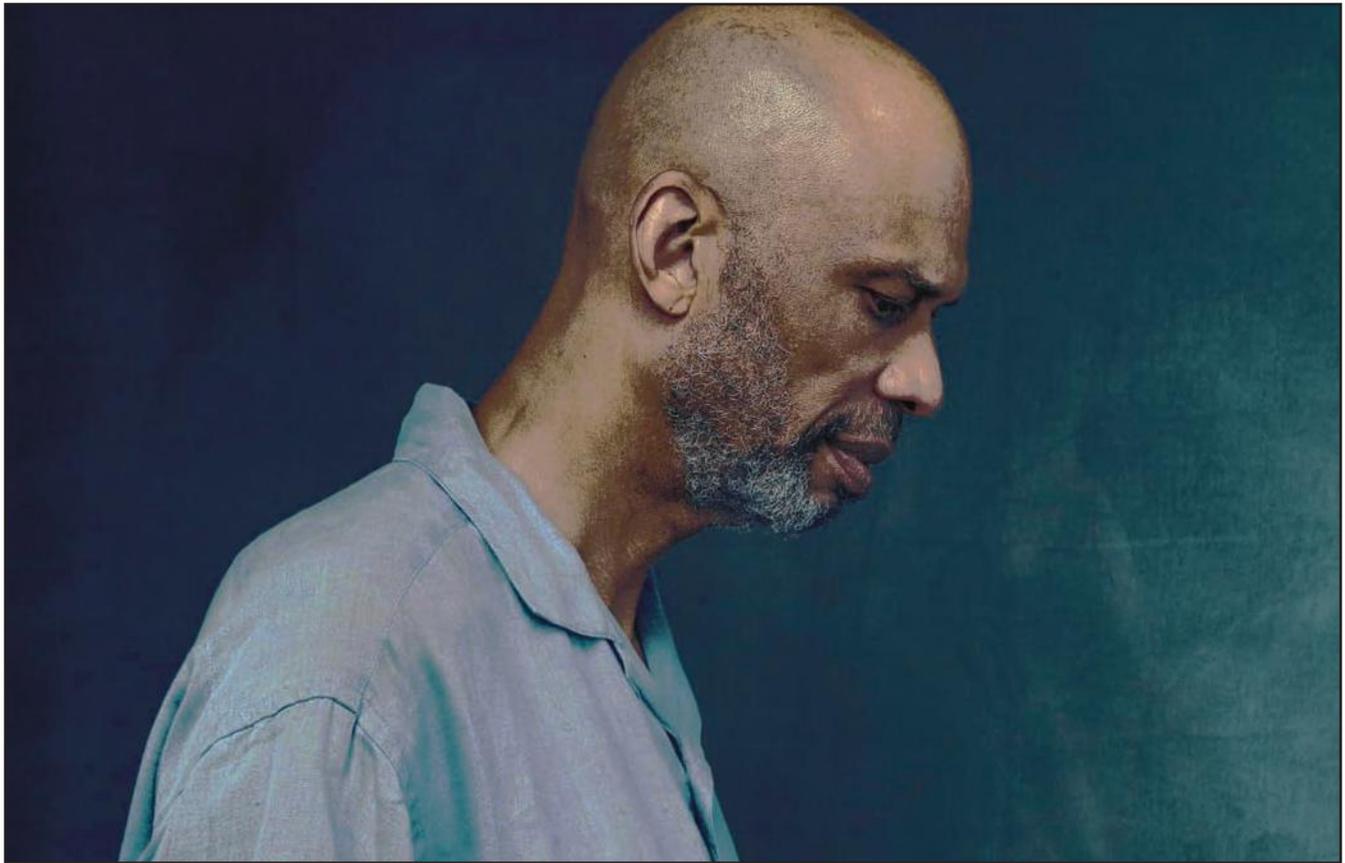


Photo: Austin Hargrave

# Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

*“Trump is where he is because of his appeal to racism”*

The basketball legend and social activist who counted Ali and King among his contemporaries discusses Colin Kaepernick, LaVar Ball and Trump’s America

BY DONALD McRAE

Like all people my age I find the passage of time so startling,” Kareem Abdul-Jabbar says with a quiet smile. The 70-year-old remains the highest points-scorer in the history of the NBA and, having won six championships and been picked for a record 19 All-Star Games, he is often compared with Michael Jordan when the greatest basketball players of all time are listed. Yet no one in American sport today can match Kareem’s political and cultural impact over 50 years.

In the 90 minutes since he knocked on my hotel room door in Los Angeles, Abdul-Jabbar has recounted a dizzying personal history which stretches from conducting his first-ever interview with Martin Luther King in Harlem, when he was just 17, to receiving a hand-written insult from Donald Trump in 2015. We move from Colin

Kaepernick calling him last week to the moment when, aged 20, Kareem was the youngest man invited to the Cleveland Summit—as the leading black athletes in 1967 gathered to meet Muhammad Ali to decide whether they would support him after he had been stripped of his world title and banned from boxing for rejecting the draft during the Vietnam War.

Kaepernick, the former San Francisco 49ers quarterback who has been shut out of the NFL for his refusal to stand for the US national anthem, is engaged in a different struggle. But, after being banished unofficially from football for going down on a bended knee in protest against racism and police brutality, Kaepernick has one of his staunchest allies in Abdul-Jabbar.

At the Cleveland Summit Abdul-Jabbar was called Lew Alcindor, for he had not converted to Islam then, and he

became one of Ali's ardent supporters. When Ali convinced his fellow athletes he was right to stand against the US government, the young basketball star knew he needed to make his more reticent voice heard. He has stayed true to that conviction ever since.

"We're talking about 50 years since the Cleveland Summit, wow," Abdul-Jabbar exclaims. "We were tense about what we were going to do and Ali was the opposite. He said: 'We've got to fight this in court and I'm going to start a speaking tour.' Ali had figured out what he had to do in order to make the dollars—while fighting the case was essential to his identity. Bill Russell [the great Boston Celtics player] said: 'I've got no concerns about Ali. It's the rest of us I'm worried about.' Ali had such conviction but he was cracking jokes and asking us if we were going to be as dumb as Wilt Chamberlain [another basketball great who played for the Philadelphia 76ers]. Wilt wanted to box Ali. Oh my God."

Abdul-Jabbar's face creases with laughter before he becomes more serious again. "Black Americans wanted to protect Ali because he spoke for us when we had no voice. When he said: 'Ain't no Viet Cong ever called me the N-word', we figured that one out real quick. Ali was a winner and people supported him because of his class as a human being. But some of the things we fought against then are still happening. Each generation faces these same old problems."

The previous evening, when I had sat next to Abdul-Jabbar at the Los Angeles Press Club awards, the past echoed again. Abdul-Jabbar received two prizes—the Legend Award and Columnist of the Year for his work in the Hollywood Reporter. Other award winners included Tippi Hedren, who starred in Alfred Hitchcock's thriller, *The Birds*, and the New York Times reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey who broke the Harvey Weinstein story two months ago. As if to prove that the past can be played over and over again in a contemporary loop, we saw footage of Hedren saying how she would not accept the sexual bullying of Hitchcock in the 1960s just before Kantor and Twohey described how they earned the trust of women who had been abused by Weinstein.

Abdul-Jabbar explained quietly to me how much of an ordeal he found such occasions. He was happiest talking about John Coltrane or Sherlock Holmes, James Baldwin or Bruce Lee, but people kept coming over to ask for a selfie or a book to be signed while, all evening, comic references were made to his height. Abdul-Jabbar is 7ft 2in and he looked two feet taller than Hedren on the red carpet.

The following morning, as he stretches out his long legs, I tell Kareem how I winced each time another wise-crack was made about his height. "I can tell you I was six-foot-two, aged 12, when the questions started," Abdul-Jabbar says. "How's the weather up there? I should write down all the things people said when affected by my height. One of the funniest was at an airport and this little boy of five looked at my feet in amazement. I said: 'Hey, how you're doing?' He just said: 'You must be very old—because you've got very big shoes.' For him the older you were, the bigger your shoes.

That's the best I've heard."

In his simple but often beautiful and profound new book, *Becoming Kareem*, Abdul-Jabbar writes poignantly: "My skin made me a symbol, my height made me a target."

Race has been the primary issue which Abdul-Jabbar has confronted every day. In another absorbing Abdul-Jabbar book published this year, *Coach Wooden and Me*, he celebrates his friendship with the man who helped him win an unprecedented three NCAA championship titles with UCLA. They lost only two games in his three years on campus as UCLA established themselves as the greatest team in the history of college basketball and Wooden, a white Midwesterner, and Kareem, a black kid from New York, forged a bond that lasted a half-century. Yet, amid their shared mo-



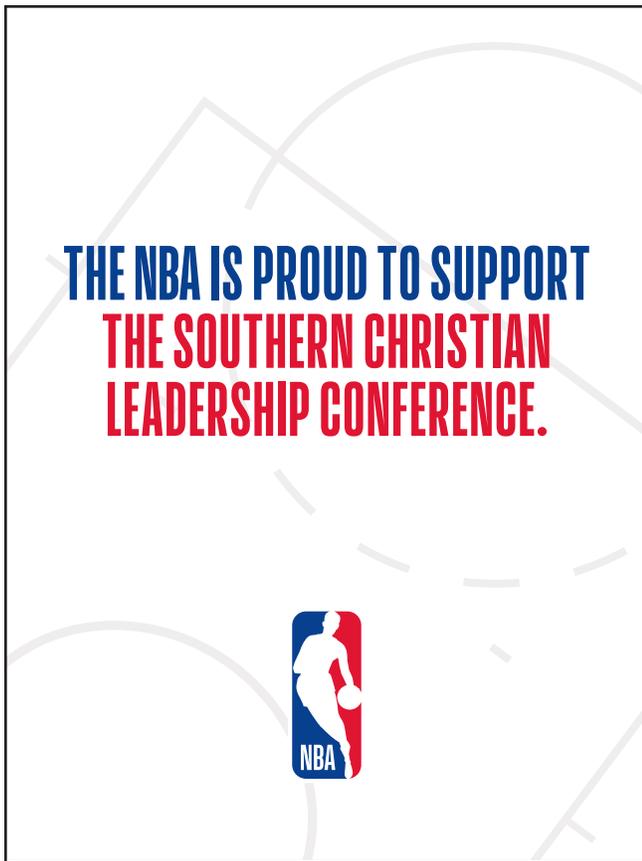
Muhammad Ali, then Cassius Clay, with Bill Russell and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, then Lew Alcindor.

ality and decency, race remained an unresolved issue between them.

Wooden was mortified when a little old lady stared up at the teenage Kareem and said: "I've never seen a nigger that tall." Even though he would later say that he learned more about man's inhumanity to man by witnessing all his protégé endured over the years, Wooden's memory of that encounter softened the woman's racial insult by saying that she had called Kareem "a big black freak."

Abdul-Jabbar nods. "He would never see a little grey-haired lady using such language. When it doesn't affect your life it's hard for you to see. Men don't understand what attractive women go through. We don't get on a bus and have somebody squeeze our breast. We have no idea how bad it can be. For people to understand your predicament you've got to figure out how to convey that reality. It takes time."

Abdul-Jabbar made his first high-profile statement against the predicament of all African Americans when, in 1968, he boycotted the Olympic Games in Mexico. After race riots in Newark and Detroit, and the assassination of



King in April 1968, he knew he could not represent his country. “Dr Harry Edwards [the civil rights activist] helped me realize how much power I had. The Olympics are a great event but what happened overwhelmed any patriotism. I had to make a stand. I wanted the country to live up to the words of the founding fathers—and make sure they applied to people of color and to women. I was trying to hold America to that standard.”

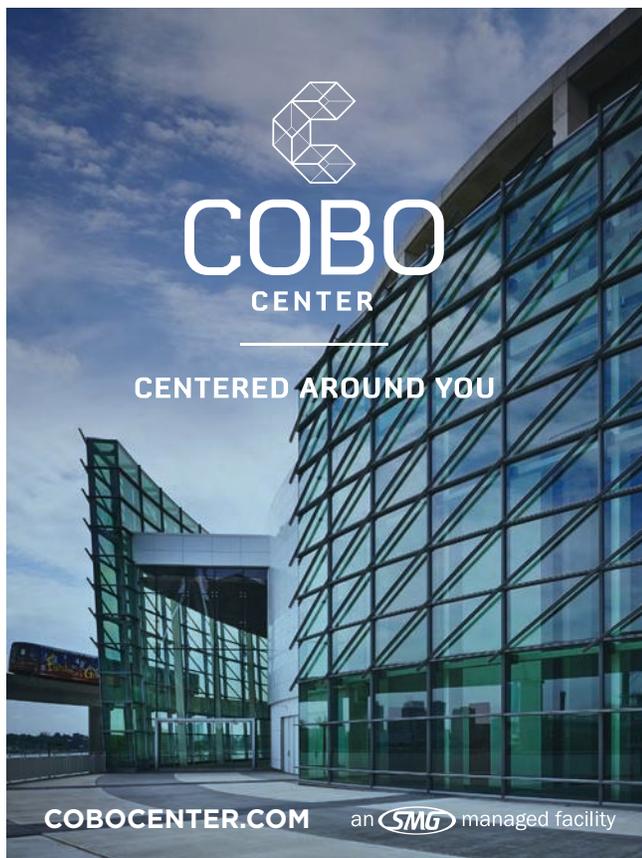
The athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos took another path of protest. They competed in the Olympic 200m in Mexico and, after they had won gold and bronze, raised their gloved fists in a black power salute on the podium. “I was glad somebody with some political consciousness had gone to Mexico,” Abdul-Jabbar says, “so I was very supportive of them.”

Does Kaepernick’s situation mirror those same issues? “Yeah. The whole issue of equal treatment under the law is still being worked out here because for so long our political and legal culture has denied black Americans equal treatment. But I was surprised Kaepernick had that awareness. It made me think: ‘I wonder how many other NFL athletes are also aware?’ From there it has bloomed. This generation has a very good idea on how to confront racism. I talked to Colin a couple of days ago on the phone and I’m really proud of him. He’s filed an issue with the Players Association about the owners colluding to keep him from working. That’s the best legal approach to it. I hope he prevails.”

Over dinner the night before, he intimated that Kaepernick knew he would never play in the NFL again. “We didn’t get that deep into it,” he says now, “but he has an idea that is what’s going down. But he’s moved on. He hadn’t prepared for this but he coped with different twists and turns. Some of the owners in the NFL are sympathetic, some aren’t. It’s gone back and forth. But he appreciates the fact that kids in high school have taken an interest. So he got something done and this generation’s athletes are now more aware of civil rights.”

Kaepernick has been voted GQ’s Citizen of the Year, the runner-up in Time magazine’s Person of the Year and this week he received Sports Illustrated’s Muhammad Ali Legacy Award. Considering the way Kaepernick “has never wavered in his commitment”, Abdul-Jabbar writes in Sports Illustrated that: “I have never been prouder to be an American ... On November 30, it was reported that 40 NFL players and league officials had reached an agreement for the league to provide approximately \$90m between now and 2023 for activism endeavors important to African American communities. Clearly, this is the result of Colin’s one-knee revolution and of the many players and coaches he inspired to join him. That is some serious impact ... Were my old friend [Ali] still alive, I know he would be proud that Colin is continuing this tradition of being a selfless warrior for social justice.”

In my hotel room, Abdul-Jabbar is more specific in linking tragedy and a deepening social conscience. “I don’t know how anybody could not be moved by some of the things we’ve seen. Remember the footage of [12-year-old]



Tamir Rice getting killed [in Cleveland [in 2014]. The car stops and the cop stands up and executes Tamir Rice. It took two seconds. It's so unbelievably brutal you have to do something about it.

"LeBron James and other guys in the NBA all had something to say about such crimes [James and leading players wore "I Can't Breathe" T-shirts in December 2014 to protest against the police killing of Eric Garner, another black man]. They weren't talking as athletes. They were talking as parents because that could have been their kid."

If the NFL appears to have actively ended Kaepernick's career, what does Abdul-Jabbar feel about the NBA's politics? "The NBA has been wonderful. I came into the NBA and went to Milwaukee [where he won his first championship before winning five more with the LA Lakers]. Milwaukee had the first black general manager in professional sports [Wayne Embry in 1972]. And the NBA's outreach for coaches, general managers and women has been exemplary. The NBA has been on the edge of change. I was hoping the NFL might do the same because some of the owners were taking the knee. But they're making an example of Colin. It's not right. Let him go out there and succeed or fail on the field like any other great athlete."

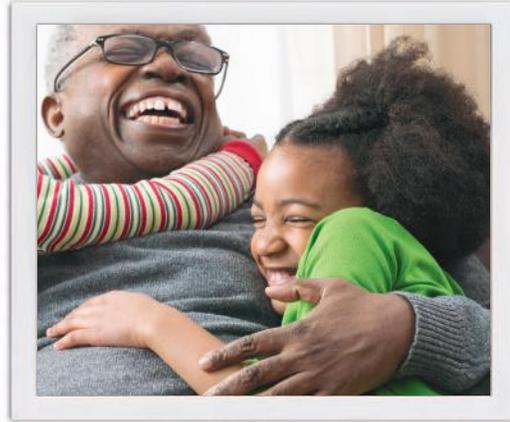
Abdul-Jabbar smiles shyly when I ask him about his first interview—with Martin Luther King 53 years ago. "As a journalist I started out interviewing Dr King. Whoa! By that point [1964], Dr King was a serious icon and I was thrilled he gave me a really good earnest answer. Moments like that affect your life. But my first real experience of being drawn into the civil rights movement came when I read James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*."

Has he seen *I Am Not Your Negro*—Raoul Peck's 2016 documentary of Baldwin? "It's wonderful. I saw it two weeks after the Trump election. It was medicine for my soul. It made me think of how bad things were for James Baldwin. But remember him speaking at Cambridge [University] and the reception he got? Oh man, amazing! I kept telling people: 'Trump is an asshole but go and see this film. Trump doesn't matter because we've got work to do.'"

In 2015, after Abdul-Jabbar wrote an opinion piece in the *Washington Post*, condemning Trump's attempts to bully the press, the future president sent him a scrawled note: "Kareem—now I know why the press always treated you so badly. They couldn't stand you. The fact is you don't have a clue about life and what has to be done to make America great again."

Abdul-Jabbar smiles when I say that schoolyard taunt is a long way from the oratory of King or Malcolm X. "If you judge yourself by your enemies I'm doing great. Trump's not going to change. He knows he is where he is because of his appeal to racism and xenophobia. The people that want to divide the country are in his camp. They want to go back to the 18th century."

"Trump wants to move us back to 1952 but he's not Eisenhower—who was the type of Republican that cared about the whole nation. Even George Bush Sr and George W Bush's idea of fellow citizens did not exclude people of color."



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George W's cabinet looked like America. It had Condoleezza Rice and the Mexican American gentleman who was the attorney general [Alberto Gonzales] and Colin Powell. Women had important positions in his administration. Even though I did not like his policies, he wasn't exclusionary.

"Look what's going on with Trump in Alabama [where the president supports Roy Moore in the state senate election despite his favored candidate being accused of multiple sexual assaults of under-age girls]. You have a guy like him but he's going to vote the way you want politically. That's more important than what he's accused of? People with that frightening viewpoint are still fighting a civil war. They have to be contained."

Does he fear that Trump might win a second term? "I don't think he can, but the rest of us had better organize and vote in 2020. I hope people stop him ruining our nation."

Abdul-Jabbar also worries that college sport remains as exploitative as ever. "It's a business and the coaches, the NCAA and universities make a lot of money and the athletes get exploited. They make billions of dollars for the whole system and don't get any. I'm not saying they have to be wealthy but I think they should get a share of the incredible amount they generate."

In Coach Wooden and Me, he writes of how, in the 1960s, he was famous at UCLA but dead broke. "Yeah. No cash. It's ridiculous. Basketball and football fund everything. College sports do not function on the revenue from water polo or track and field or gymnastics. It's all down to basketball and football. The athletes at Northwestern tried to organize a union and that's how college athletes have to think. They need to unionize. If they can organize they can get a piece of the pie because they are the show."

The legendary Michael Jordan never showed the social conscience of Abdul-Jabbar and other rare NBA activists like Craig Hodges. But Abdul-Jabbar is conciliatory towards Jordan and his commercially-driven contemporaries. "I was glad they became interested in being successful businessmen because their financial power makes a difference. I just felt they should leave a little room to help the causes they knew needed their help. But Jordan has come around. He gave some money to the NAACP for legal funds, thank goodness."

Abdul-Jabbar defines himself as a writer now. As he reflects on his LA Press Club awards he says: "To be honored by other writers is incredible. I'm a neophyte. I'm a rookie."

He grins when I say he's not doing not too badly for a rookie who has written 13 books, including novels about Mycroft Holmes—brother of Sherlock. "Yeah, but I still feel new to it and to get that recognition was wonderful. I was very flattered that the BBC came to interview me about Mycroft because the British are very protective of their culture. Arthur Conan Doyle is beyond an icon. So I was like, 'Wow, maybe I am doing OK.' When I was [an NBA] rookie somebody gave me a complete compilation of Doyle's stories. I went from there.

"People were amazed because I always used to be reading before a game—whether it was Sherlock Holmes or

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Malcolm X, John Le Carré or James Baldwin. But that was one of the luxuries of being a professional athlete. You get lots of time to read. My team-mates did not read to the same extent but I'm a historian and some of the guys had big holes in their knowledge of black history. So I was the librarian for the team."

I tell Abdul-Jabbar about my upcoming interview with Jaylen Brown of the Boston Celtics—and how the 21-year-old has the same thirst for reading and knowledge. While enthusiastic about the possibility of meeting Brown when the Celtics next visit LA, Abdul-Jabbar makes a wistful observation of a young sportsman's intellectual curiosity. "He's going to be lonely. Most of the guys are like: 'Where are we going to party in this town? Where are the babes?'" So the fact that he has such broader interests is remarkable and wonderful."

Abdul-Jabbar acknowledges that his own bookish nature and self-consciousness about his height, combined with a fierce sense of injustice, made him appear surly and aloof as a player. It also meant he was never offered the head-coach job he desired. "They didn't think I could communicate and they didn't take the time to get to know me. But I didn't make it easy for them so some of that falls in my lap—absolutely. But it's different now. People stop me in the street and want to talk about my articles. It's amazing."

Most of all, in his eighth decade, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar "loves to lose myself in my imagination. It's a wonderful place to go when you're old and creaky like me. I see myself working at this pace [writing at least a book a year] but it's not like I have the hounds at my heels. Since my career ended I've been able to have friends and family. My new granddaughter will be three this month. She's my very first [grandchild]. So my life has expanded in wonderful ways. But, still, we all have so much work to do. The work is a long way from being done." sclc

*DONALD MCRAE was born in South Africa and has been based in London since 1984. He is the award-winning author of eight non-fiction books which have featured legendary trial lawyers, heart surgeons and sporting icons. He is the two-time winner of the UK's prestigious William Hill Sports Book of the Year. As a journalist he has won the UK's Sports Feature Writer of The Year—and was runner up in the 2008 UK Sports Writer of the Year—for his work in The Guardian. He was voted Sports Interviewer of the Year for three years running (2010–2012) at the Sports Journalism Association Awards.*

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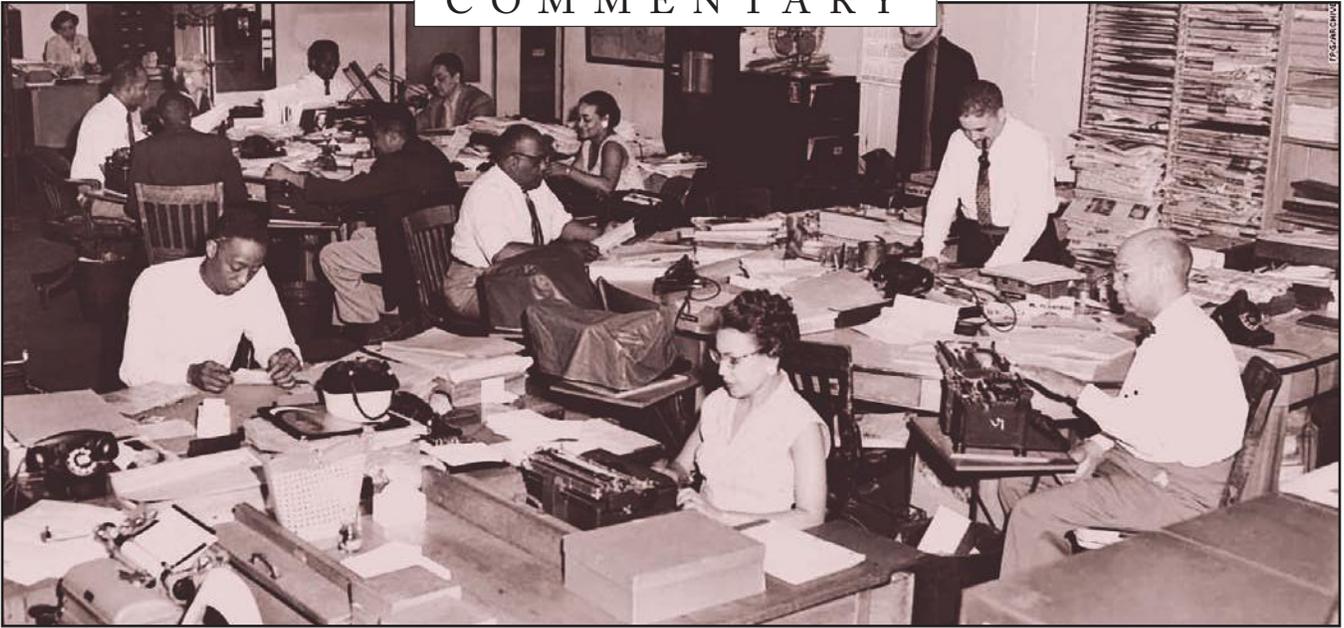
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## Why the black press is more relevant than ever

BY DAVID LOVE

For years, newsrooms across America have had a problem with a lack of diversity and inclusion. People of color are underrepresented among news organizations, which do not reflect the makeup of the general population and have made little progress in the past decade.

Although non-whites make up about 40% of the US population, journalists of color comprise only 16.55% of newsrooms' staff in 2017, according to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) Newsroom Employment Diversity Survey.

Larger newsrooms and digital news organizations are a little better—23.4% and 24.3%, respectively—but not much. People of color are only 13.4% of newsroom leaders.

This comes at a time when society needs and demands more inclusive news. It's been 190 years since the creation of the black press, and it's as relevant as ever.

In the absence of an inclusive environment, the quality of journalism suffers. Certain stories are simply not reported, or are told without the nuance or perspective the circumstances require. The black press has filled that void for generations. And with the advent of digital platforms, a baton has been passed to black millennial writers to continue presenting narratives, with underrepresented points of views, that would otherwise go missing—and do not necessarily reflect the white men who dominate the industry.

Far beyond using social media for entertainment, shopping or communication, African-American millennials have elevated Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other platforms to raise public consciousness about the issues impacting black people. The hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #OscarsSoWhite are prime examples of this phenomenon.

According to Nielsen, 55% of black consumers between 18 and 34 spend at least an hour on social media each day, 6% higher than all millennials. In addition, 29% of black millennials spend three or more hours daily on social media sites, 9% higher than that of all millennials.

While black millennials fall below their counterparts in the percentage of leisure time spent on social media, they exceed the general millennial population in their overall presence on Twitter, Tumblr, Google+ and Whatsapp. That online presence has translated into the creation of a network of black news outlets specifically creating content that will meet readers and viewers where they are.

Additionally, when the mainstream media covers a particular issue, the black press may cover it with a completely different angle—if not a different issue altogether. For example, the black press rejected the mainstream media narrative that white “working class” support for Trump was primarily economic in nature, reporting instead on the presidential candidate's appeal to white solidarity, raw racism and the scapegoating of minority groups.

After all, white economic angst by itself does not reconcile the fact that whites always have fared better than their African- and Latino-Americans. And while the mainstream news organizations have framed the NFL protests through the prism of patriotism and support for the military, the black press has focused on the crisis of police brutality and racial violence that underlie the athletes' decision to take a knee during the national anthem.

Fifty years ago, when unrest rocked cities across the nation as a result of police brutality and systemic racism, the Kerner Commission—an 11-member commission

appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson that highlighted racism for its role in a surge in urban riots—took the news media to task.

“We have found a significant imbalance between what actually happened in our cities and what the newspaper, radio and television coverage of the riots told us happened,” the Kerner report said.

“Our second and fundamental criticism is that the news media have failed to analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States and, as a related matter, to meet the Negro’s legitimate expectations in journalism. By and large, news organizations have failed to communicate to both their black and white audiences a sense of the problems America faces and the sources of potential solutions.”

The Commission made a number of recommendations, including that news organizations employ black people beyond mere tokenism and in positions of real responsibility, and that they publish newspapers and produce programs that acknowledge black people, who they are and what they do.

Although newsrooms have made some progress, it’s not where it should or needs to be. But by empowering themselves and their followers—without gatekeepers and intermediaries in the traditional media sense—young, black journalists have reached a broad audience. They can educate and mobilize others to act on a given issue, and connect with local, national and global social justice movements.

A videographer or documentarian can broadcast a crime in progress—such as a police beating of an unarmed motorist—live and in real time, before an audience of thousands if not millions. In that regard, technology is the great equalizer, a check on the abuse of official power and a call to reform harmful patterns and discriminatory practices.

From its inception, the black press has been a change agent by shining a light on the plight of blacks and giving them the power to write and report on their own narratives. In New York in 1827, Rev. Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm began publication of Freedom’s Journal, the first black-owned newspaper in America. Excluded from white venues and often insulted in their absence, black voices found the need to tell their own stories.

“We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by

representations, in things which concern us dearly,” wrote the editors in their first edition.

Throughout the Civil War, black newspapers were centers for political debate on the war and emancipation, and advocacy for black soldiers. During Jim Crow and the reign of Klan terror, the black press fought against segregation, demanded equal rights for African Americans and helped elect politicians to office.

The Chicago Defender, which had demanded federal intervention from President Woodrow Wilson to stop lynchings, played a role in the Great Migration by urging a mass exodus of black people from the South.

In the 1890s, journalist Ida B. Wells led a campaign against lynching at considerable personal risk. Born a slave, she wrote about the injustices of racial segregation in the South. A mob descended upon her Memphis news office, destroyed her equipment and threatened her with death.

Over the years, many black publications disappeared. Others learned to navigate the new landscape, and a plethora of new black media emerged with a strictly online presence, impacting the manner that black people digest and make sense of the news.

The days of “reading the paper” are long gone for many, but what remains the same is that the black press doesn’t look like the theoretical textbook case of objective journalism—and it was never meant to be—whatever that means to you.

When narratives are told from the perspective of a black lens, perhaps there are no two sides to a story. Perhaps there is only one side, or numerous sides with various textures and shades. What is certain is there is a sense of responsibility to the community, advocating for that community and telling their stories from their perspective.

A digital environment arms African-American millennial writers with tools that enable them to carve out their own territory in their unique and innovative way—exercising free speech and contributing to a healthy democracy, and staying true to the proud history of the black press. **sclc**

*DAVID LOVE writes for thegrio.com, a website dedicated to covering news in the African-American community. He is a writer and commentator based in Philadelphia. Follow him on Twitter: @DavidALove.*

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# Trump's Civil Rights Museum invitation stuck a knife in Mississippi's back

BY DONNA LADD

**M**yrle Evers came back to Jackson, Mississippi, on Oct. 24, 2013, even though her home state had conspired to destroy her husband, Medgar Evers, finally leaving him in a pool of blood in her driveway, her children screaming as he fell, on June 12, 1963.

A Klansman and Citizens Council member gunned down the NAACP leader, who had already spent time in the more metaphorical cross hairs of state leaders (like Gov. Paul Johnson who called his organization — during his successful gubernatorial campaign—“N\*ggers, Apes, Alligators, Coons and Possums”).

But 50 years later, Myrle Evers was 4.3 miles from that driveway—which still has bloodstains—for the ground-

than a little suspicion among civil rights veterans.

Many people worried that Bryant's involvement could have meant the lies from our history books would fill the museum, or at best watered-down false equivalence between terrorists and their brave victims. And, in fact, some civil rights veterans initially refused to turn over artifacts to the museum, perhaps thinking the governor and friends would stuff them down a state-funded memory hole to destroy the evidence.

But when black Jackson native Pamela Junior (who can curl your hair with lyrical stories of the racism she experienced as a child) came on board to direct the museum in 2013 and as word got out that the exhibits were “real”—and that Bryant hadn't excised reality—excitement built for the Dec. 9 opening day.

Then the Trump bomb dropped: The governor that much of Jackson distrusts invited the president that Jackson pretty much despises to join them at the museum opening. The capital city moaned, and Bryant condescended back in a tweet: “Mississippi should be proud that @POTUS has agreed to speak.... Let us come together as one Mississippi.”

Black Jackson, and its allies, are not buying it, though—and Bryant's name is dirt here this week for ruining the event. Hinds County Democratic Party Chairwoman Jacqueline R. Amos (who is black) said that Trump's “campaign appealed to the very worst demons of

the American soul,” adding that “such a hugely divisive and polarizing figure will pervert and diminish what could otherwise be a healing and teaching moment for our state.”

Civil rights leader and congressman John Lewis, D-Ga., and U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., announced in a joint statement that they now won't be attending, writing that “Trump's attendance and his hurtful policies are an insult to the people portrayed in this civil rights museum.” Former Gov. Ray Mabus, a Democrat, also announced that he was staying away, saying “an overt racist and a supporter of white supremacists and neo-Nazis, Donald Trump represents the exact opposite of what this museum is about.”

But here in Mississippi, few whites either know or openly acknowledge the depth of our structural racism. Still, I was 5 when Martin Luther King Jr. led a march in my



1960, Civil Rights activist and NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers in Jackson, Miss.

breaking of the state-funded Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. “I thank Medgar Evers every day for believing not only in his country, but in the state of Mississippi,” she said then. “He used to say, repeatedly, that this will be the best place to live in the United States, once we put our problems, our hatred and our racism behind us.”

A Mississippi flag—with its iconic Confederate battle cross—flapped as Evers talked and Gov. Phil Bryant, a Republican who attended a whites-only Citizens Council school in south Jackson, listened. Bryant supports a state referendum on the flag (though the last such vote, split along racial lines, went strongly in favor of keeping it as-is), but routinely proclaims Confederate Heritage Month and supports policies that hurt many black Mississippians and others here; his involvement in the museum created more

hometown, Philadelphia, Mississippi, and a local drove a car into a crowd of marchers (like that young racist is accused of doing earlier this year in Charlottesville).

Since then, I've learned just how entrenched my state has historically been on "the race question"—but not because the people who started rushing here in the 1830s to claim Choctaw lands were somehow worse humans than all the others in the nation profiting from slavery and plunder. The fatal lure of fertile land, hot sun and safe distance from abolitionists created the fresh hell called Mississippi, which became the wealthiest state.

Structural racism started with enslaved people brought here, often raped, beaten, hobbled and split from loved ones; it continued through the Confederates' treasonous war to maintain and extend slavery and reclaim enslaved people who had fled; and it was revived after the North sold out former slaves to end Reconstruction and then hamstrung them through sharecropping and unequal schools. It re-accelerated through Klan and Red Shirt night raids to scare black (and white) people into submission and Black Codes to keep freed African-Americans subservient and poverty stricken; it was inculcated in younger whites with "lost cause" mythology bolstered by adoring statues, flags and revisionist textbooks; and it exploded into violent resistance after black soldiers, including Medgar Evers, returned from World War II wanting freedom but were blocked by redlining and red-necks with guns.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ordered school integration in 1954, white Mississippi men started the Citizens Council to threaten reluctant whites and spread lies about black inferiority and genetic crime propensity; they brought back the Klan as terroristic enforcers; and they funded the Mississippi outposts of the Americans for the Preservation of the White Race to pay everybody's bond and legal fees who participated in the disenfranchisement of and violence against African-Americans.

They even funded the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission to spy and file "intelligence" reports on anyone who disobeyed—including reporting on a white gas station owner who once let a black man use his bathroom, and feeding James Chaney's license plate number to cops in my hometown so their Kleagle buddies could find Chaney, Andy Goodman and Mickey Schwerner and assassinate them on Father's Day 1964.

The racist-owned newspapers did public relations work for those more inclined to violence, amping up fervor, and white judges and juries had the bigots' backs.

White Mississippi left no escape routes out of this racist maze of destruction—and our state still suffers the residuals today (especially after white people left cities like Jackson, taking their tax base and throwing a lit match behind them to burn down the cities they fled). Structural



**Deborah Bryant, center, hugs Myrlie Evers-Williams as she and her husband, Gov. Phil Bryant, speak during a reception prior to the Medgar Evers 50th Anniversary Commemoration Tribute Gala honoring the late civil rights leader Medgar Evers on June 12, 2013 in Jackson, Miss. Photo: Rogelio Solis, AP**

racism gifted us with high trauma and hopelessness, underfunded schools, fractured families, a disgusting state flag, low voter turnouts, imprisoned parents for drug crimes and shameful generational poverty—all of which is blamed on the "black family" that whites worked so hard to destroy.

I doubt Trump knows a single piece of this labyrinthine history, other than that an occasional redneck Klansman acted a fool. (After all, he apparently thought that Frederick Douglass was still alive and living in Jersey or somewhere.)

Trump knows enough, though, to prey on fear of black crime for votes (just as many Republicans since Nixon have done), drawing bigots out of the closet to fund greed and granting them tacit permission to not bother rising above our past.

Bryant sunk a knife in this state's back by inviting Trump to the museum opening, but we can still hope that the president (and the media gaggle accompanying him) will step inside the museum to comprehend and share the full story of what there is to see here, which is about much more than old Kluckers. They can, and we should, use Mississippi as a mirror to understand the deep roots of racism and poverty in America and how it limits our society now.

We can best honor Medgar and other civil rights soldiers by connecting the dots of America's brutal race history—and the pieces await in Mississippi. Trump may not bother to do much more than give a speech and pose for a photo, but the rest of us can help make this weekend a teachable, urgent moment for America.

Talking about our past without ever fully confronting it can no longer be an option. sclc

*DONNA LADD is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of The Jackson Free Press in Jackson, Mississippi, and a freelance journalist. Follow her on Twitter at @DonnerKay.*



President Trump touring the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. Photo: Tom Brenner, NYT

# Trump rejects calls to stay away, speaks at Civil Rights Museum

BY MICHAEL D. SHEAR and ELLEN ANN FENTRESS

President Trump's presence jolted the opening of a civil rights museum here on Saturday, generating boycotts from some leaders in the movement and small protests by activists as the state's attempt to confront its racially violent past clashed with more recent divisions wrought by Mr. Trump's presidency.

As the country's first state-sponsored museum on the South's civil rights struggle opened its doors, Mr. Trump gave brief remarks, largely sticking to his prepared script as he hailed the icons of the civil rights movement and rejected the racism and hatred on display in the new museum.

"The civil rights museum records oppression, cruelty and injustice inflicted on the African-American community," Mr. Trump, who had ignored calls to back out of the event by some civil rights veterans, said after a brief tour of the museum.

"The fight to end slavery, to break down Jim Crow, to end segregation, to gain the right to vote, and to achieve the sacred birthright of equality—that's big stuff," Mr. Trump added. "Those are very big phrases, very big words."

"Here we memorialize the brave men and women who struggled to sacrifice and sacrificed so much so that others might live in freedom," the president said. Because of

the public indignation ahead of his appearance, Mr. Trump spoke to a small group of dignitaries in the museum, not the larger crowd assembled outside for the official ceremony.

Paired with a second museum that aims to document the state's overall history, the civil rights museum has drawn praise from the movement's veterans as an honest depiction of Mississippi's past.

Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy, was lynched in 1955 by two white men in Money, Miss. And one of the most infamous episodes of the civil rights era took place in Philadelphia, Miss., where three civil rights activists—Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman—were killed while trying to register voters in the summer of 1964.

Those who made a point of skipping the president's speech—including John Lewis, the civil rights leader and Democratic congressman from Georgia—cited his equivocal remarks after the summer's racially tinged violence in Charlottesville, Va., and described Mr. Trump's policies toward Mexicans, Muslims and other minorities as an insult to the museum's purpose.

At a news conference before Air Force One touched down in Jackson, national activists and local African-American

politicians said they were disappointed that the president had chosen to participate in the event.

“Today may be a grand opening, but there will be a grander opening,” said State Senator Sollie Norwood of Jackson, who declined to attend Mr. Trump’s speech. He said he was looking forward to seeing the museum after the president left. “That will be the day that all of us will walk in.”

Amos Brown, the longtime pastor of the historic Third Baptist Church in San Francisco, listed a number of times Mr. Trump had failed to speak up for civil rights causes.

“Since Donald Trump did not show up when we needed him to speak a word on behalf of blacks who have experienced police brutality,” Mr. Brown said, “he does not de-

nation’s first black president, declared in a speech that despite the progress, the “nation’s racial history still casts its long shadow upon us.”

Mr. Obama occasionally grappled publicly with the country’s racial divisions, especially in the wake of the violence that erupted after police shootings of unarmed black men. Mr. Obama’s earlier comment about a white police officer’s “stupid” arrest of a black Harvard professor led to a “beer summit” in which the three men discussed the state of race relations in the country.

For Mr. Trump, race has been a more inflammatory topic. His campaign was rooted in an appeal to disaffected white voters, and his comments about Mexicans and Mus-

*“Trump spoke to a small group of dignitaries in the museum, not the larger crowd assembled outside for the official ceremony.”*

serve to be in Jackson for the celebration of the civil rights museum.”

About 200 protesters assembled along Jackson’s streets, hoping to turn their backs on Mr. Trump’s motorcade as it made its way to the downtown museum from Jackson-Medgar Wiley Evers International Airport, named for the black civil rights activist who was shot in the back by a member of the Ku Klux Klan in 1963. But it appeared that the motorcade took a different route.

Myrlie Evers-Williams, his widow, and Charles Evers, his brother, attended Mr. Trump’s speech, despite reports that members of the family might boycott it. Mr. Evers greeted Mr. Trump on the airport tarmac.

Mr. Trump took pains to acknowledge the death of Mr. Evers, calling him a martyr who had fought during World War II and then returned to Mississippi to fight for the “same rights and freedoms that he had defended in the war” by helping to register blacks to vote. For that work, Mr. Trump said, Mr. Evers was “assassinated by a member of the KKK.”

The president recognized Ms. Evers-Williams, whose endorsement of the museum boosted its credibility, calling her “his incredible widow,” and thanking her for carrying on “Medgar’s legacy.” He also thanked the people of Mississippi, a state, he said, “where I’ve had great success.”

Speaking later to a polite and enthusiastic crowd of about 1,800 under a chilly bright blue sky, Ms. Evers-Williams said: “Going through the museum of my history, I wept because I felt the blows. I felt the bullets. I felt the tears. I felt the cries. But I also sensed the hope.”

Presidents are often called on to reflect upon the country’s darker chapters and to inspire a better future. In 2015, President Barack Obama marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., where African-Americans were beaten during “Bloody Sunday” in 1965. Mr. Obama, the

lims have generated accusations of racism. His efforts to impose a travel ban on people from mostly Muslim countries have been declared racist by several federal judges, though the Supreme Court has now allowed a third version of the ban to take effect.

In August, Mr. Trump was widely condemned for saying that “both sides” were to blame for the violence that erupted in Charlottesville when white supremacists gathered to protest the city’s removal of a Confederate statue.

Invited by Mississippi’s Republican governor, Phil Bryant, Mr. Trump attended the event on Saturday in the hopes of helping to unify a country that has been struggling to repair its lingering racial schisms. But if he thought his presence here would prove to be a bridge, he may have been mistaken.

“He’s expressed a blatant and wanton disregard for human rights,” said Chokwe Antar Lumumba, the mayor of Jackson, who skipped the museum’s opening. “He’s done so through the discriminatory policy he implements. He’s done so with respect to a failure to denounce the alt-right.”

Talamiaka Brice, who helped lead the protests, said Mr. Trump’s policies and often angry remarks were evidence that the racial divisions of the civil rights struggle have not faded completely.

“The ideology that was the catalyst that keeps people demonizing others, that needs to be in a museum, and Donald Trump is evidence that it’s not,” Ms. Brice said.

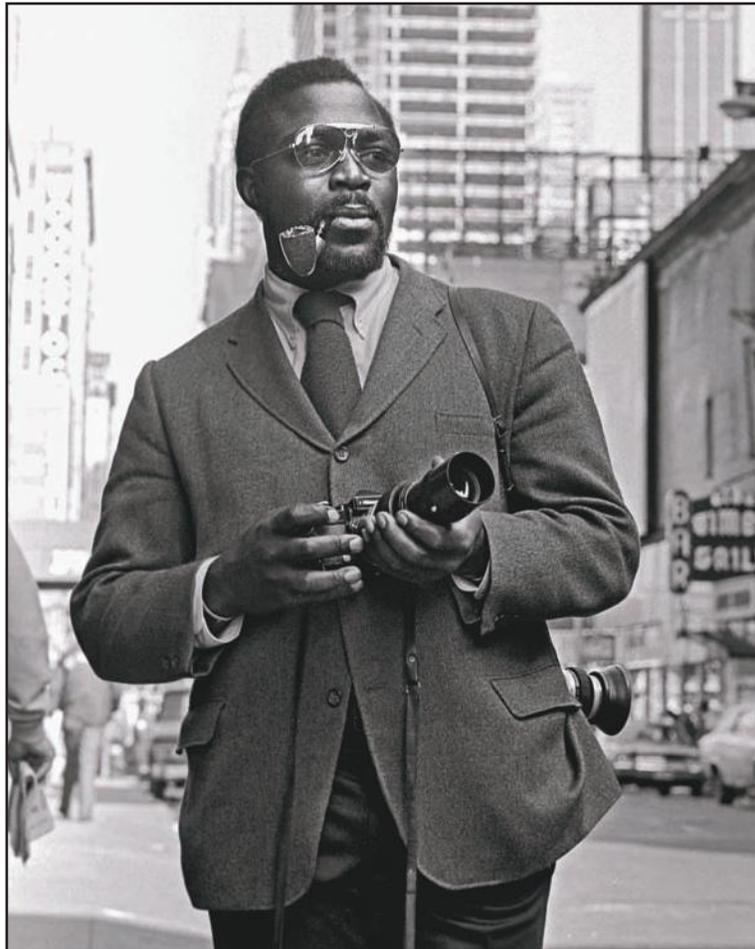
Mr. Lumumba said he fully supported the museum but decided to stay away from the opening after being told that he would not be given a chance to speak.

“I would be sitting behind Donald Trump, not saying anything, looking like or appearing as if I was complicit with his representation in a moment like this,” the mayor said. *sclc*

*MICHAEL D. SHEAR and ELLEN ANN FENTRESS are journalists for The New York Times.*

# Don Hogan Charles, lauded photographer of civil rights era, dies at 79

BY NIRAJ CHOKSHI



Don Hogan Charles in New York in the late 1960s.

**D**on Hogan Charles, who was the first black photographer to be hired by The New York Times, and who drew acclaim for his evocative shots of the civil rights movement and everyday life in New York, died on Dec. 15 in East Harlem. He was 79.

His niece Cherylann O'Garro, who announced the death, said his family did not yet know the cause.

In more than four decades at The Times, Mr. Charles photographed a wide range of subjects, from local hangouts to celebrities to fashion to the United Nations. But he may be best remembered for the work that earned him early acclaim: his photographs of key moments and figures of the civil rights era.

In 1964, he took a now-famous photograph, for Ebony magazine, of Malcolm X holding a rifle as he peered out of the window of his Queens home. In 1968, for The Times,

he photographed Coretta Scott King, her gaze fixed in the distance, at the funeral of her husband, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mr. Charles resisted being racially pigeonholed but also considered it a duty to cover the movement, said Chester Higgins, who joined The Times in 1975 as one of its few other black photographers.

"He felt that his responsibility was to get the story right, that the white reporters and white photographers were very limited," Mr. Higgins, who retired in 2015, said in a telephone interview.

Even in New York, historically black neighborhoods like Harlem, where Mr. Charles lived, were often covered with little nuance, said James Estrin, a longtime staff photographer for The Times and an editor of the photojournalism blog Lens. But Mr. Charles, through his photography, provided

readers a fuller portrait of life throughout those parts of the city, Mr. Estrin said.

“Few people on staff had the slightest idea what a large amount of New York was like,” he added. “He brought this reservoir of knowledge and experience of New York City.”

Exacting and deeply private, Mr. Charles came off as standoffish to some. But to others, especially many women, he was a supportive mentor.

“He’s going to give you the bear attitude, but if you look past that he was something else,” said Michelle Agins, who met Mr. Charles while she was a freelance photographer in Chicago and he was working in The Times bureau there.

The two reconnected when she joined The Times as a staff photographer in 1989.

“When you’re a new kid at The New York Times and you needed a big brother, he was all of that,” she said. “He was definitely the guy to have on your team. He wouldn’t let other people bully you.”

Mr. Charles took Ms. Agins under his wing, and she was not alone. “I’ve had many women photographers tell me that he stood up for them,” Mr. Estrin said.

That may be because Mr. Charles knew the hardships that came with belonging to a group that was underrepresented in the workplace.

At one Thanksgiving dinner decades ago, Ms. O’Garro said, he tearfully described the pain he felt on arriving at a New York City store for an assignment, only to be asked to come in through a back entrance. She added that while covering the civil rights movement in the South, he would often check the tailpipe of his vehicle for explosives.

Despite those obstacles, Mr. Charles went on to have a long career at The Times, covering subjects including celebrities like John Lennon and Muhammad Ali and New York institutions like the United Nations. In 1996, four of his photographs were included in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art on a century of photography from The Times.

Daniel James Charles (he later went by Donald or Don) was born in New York City on Sept. 9, 1938. His parents,



**Nelson Mandela at the United Nations in 1994. Photo by Don Hogan Charles.**

James Charles and the former Elizabeth Ann Hogan, were immigrants from the Caribbean, Ms. O’Garro said.

After graduating from George Washington High School in Manhattan, he enrolled at the City College of New York as an engineering student before dropping out to pursue photography, although at the time it was just a hobby. He worked as a freelance photographer before joining The Times in 1964. He retired in 2007.

Mr. Charles never married and had no children. No immediate family members survive, though he was close with his three nieces and one nephew. sclc

*NIRAJ CHOKSHI is a general assignment reporter with The New York Times express desk. Before joining The Times in 2016, he covered state governments for The Washington Post. He has also worked at The Atlantic, National Journal and The Recorder, in San Francisco.*

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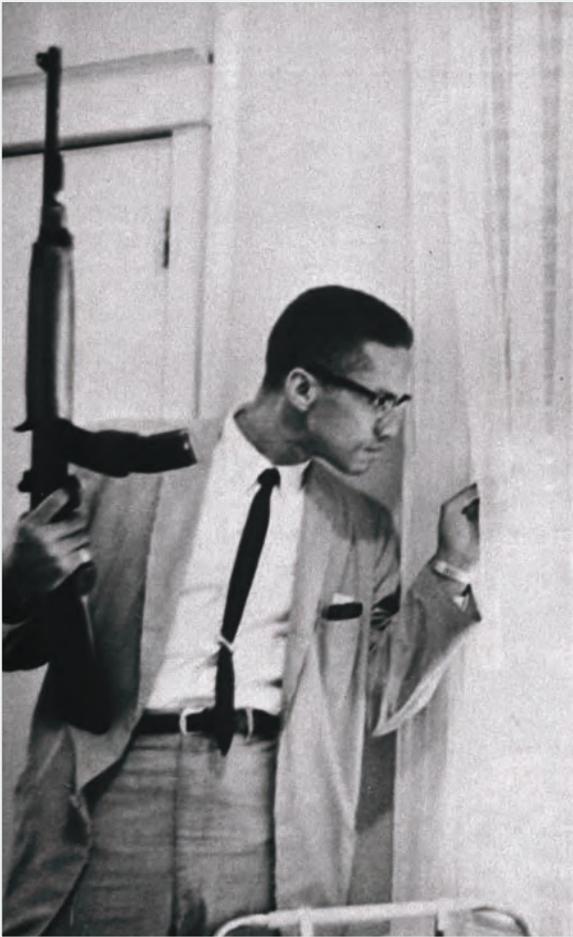
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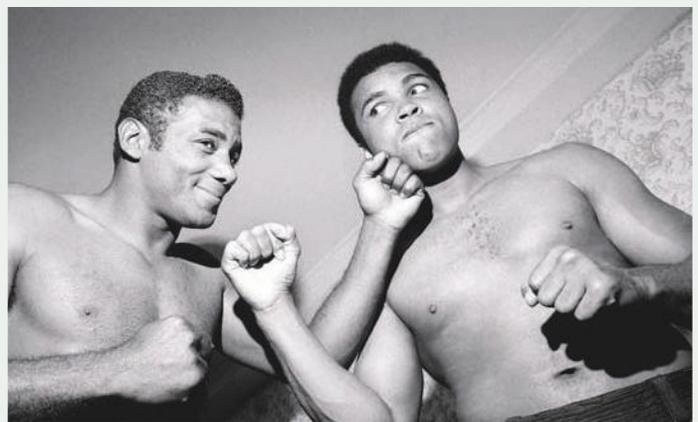
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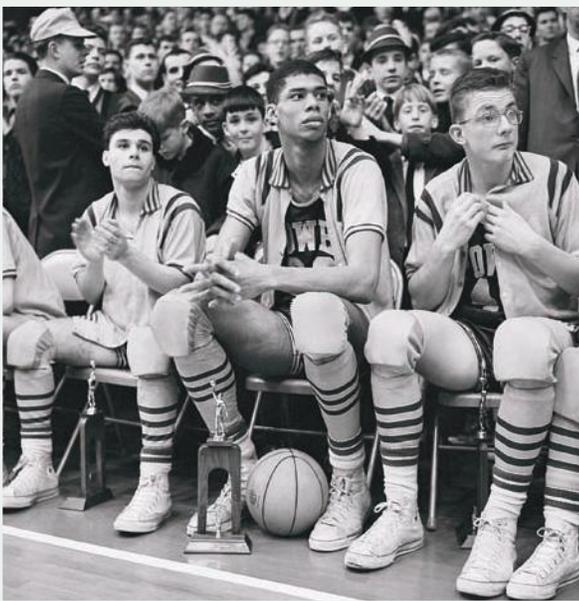
**Malcom X holding a rifle as he peered out the window of his Queens, New York home.**



**National Guard members clearing Springfield Ave. in Newark on July 14, 1967. In several days of rioting amid racial tensions, at least 20 people were killed and 700 injured.**



**Floyd Patterson, left, and Muhammad Ali after their pre-fight physical at the Statler Hilton Hotel in September 1972.**



**A young Lew Alcindor before he changed his name to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar**



**As a 27-year-old Harlem resident, Charles was the first black photographer hired by The New York Times to capture images of his neighborhood.**

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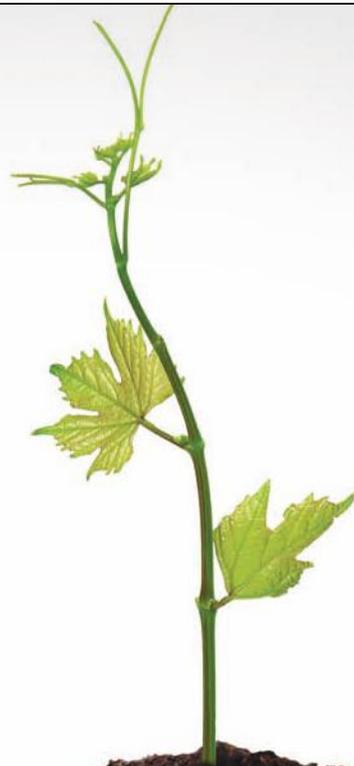
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(1932-2017)

# Remembering Dick Gregory

BY ADRIAN NICOLE LEBLANC

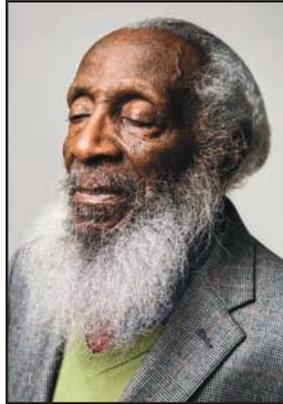
If you scan the thousands of pages of Richard Claxton Gregory's F.B.I. file the way he scanned newspapers and magazines, mining information for material for his comedy, you will find yourself constantly landing on "racial matter"—a phrase preferred by the agency. The file tracks the rare trajectory of a man who made an enormously successful show-business career a footnote to his activism.

Gregory didn't want people's fear to stop them from standing up. Page 264 of the first of eight installments of his government file includes a warning from someone who was clearly afraid of this empowerment—so much so that he sent his concerns directly to J. Edgar Hoover by telegram:

"I advocate and encourage all FBI agents to go after Dick Gregory in full force. Let not anyone stop you."

Wiretaps, beatings, jail and a gunshot didn't stop Gregory—nor did fame and money. He claimed he briefly earned more than Frank Sinatra, entertaining on his terms—"flat-foot," as he liked to say, not dancing and singing but speaking directly about racism. He was the first African-American stand-up to gain crossover fame, and it didn't soften his act. On his first album, in 1961, responding to a heckler, he says, "Trying to get you to shut up is like trying to explain integration to a lynch mob." Hugh Hefner booked him at the Playboy Club. An appearance on "The Jack Paar Show" in 1961 was followed by top billing at the best clubs, and then big money poured in. Gregory commented on his new role: "You been reading these local papers, calling me the Negro Mort Sahl. You have to read the Congo papers and see where they're calling Mort Sahl the white Dick Gregory." The stand-up W. Kamau Bell says: "That line about Ginger Rogers did everything Astaire did, but backwards? Dick Gregory did everything that Lenny Bruce did, but black." In fact, he did more than Bruce.

In 1962, Medgar Evers asked Gregory to speak at voter-registration rallies in Mississippi, and he gave himself to the movement from then on. He used his celebrity to draw the press, whose attention helped protect the crowds. (One F.B.I. report on a rally at the United Packinghouse Workers hall in Chicago noted "a combo and a girl singer"—which Gregory said was "the trick we used to get you all here.") Then he added, referring to campaign work, "Now we're going to ask you to work hard through the summer.") Steve Jaffe, his publicist for over 50 years, says he can't count the times he watched Gregory cancel gigs and head off to a march over



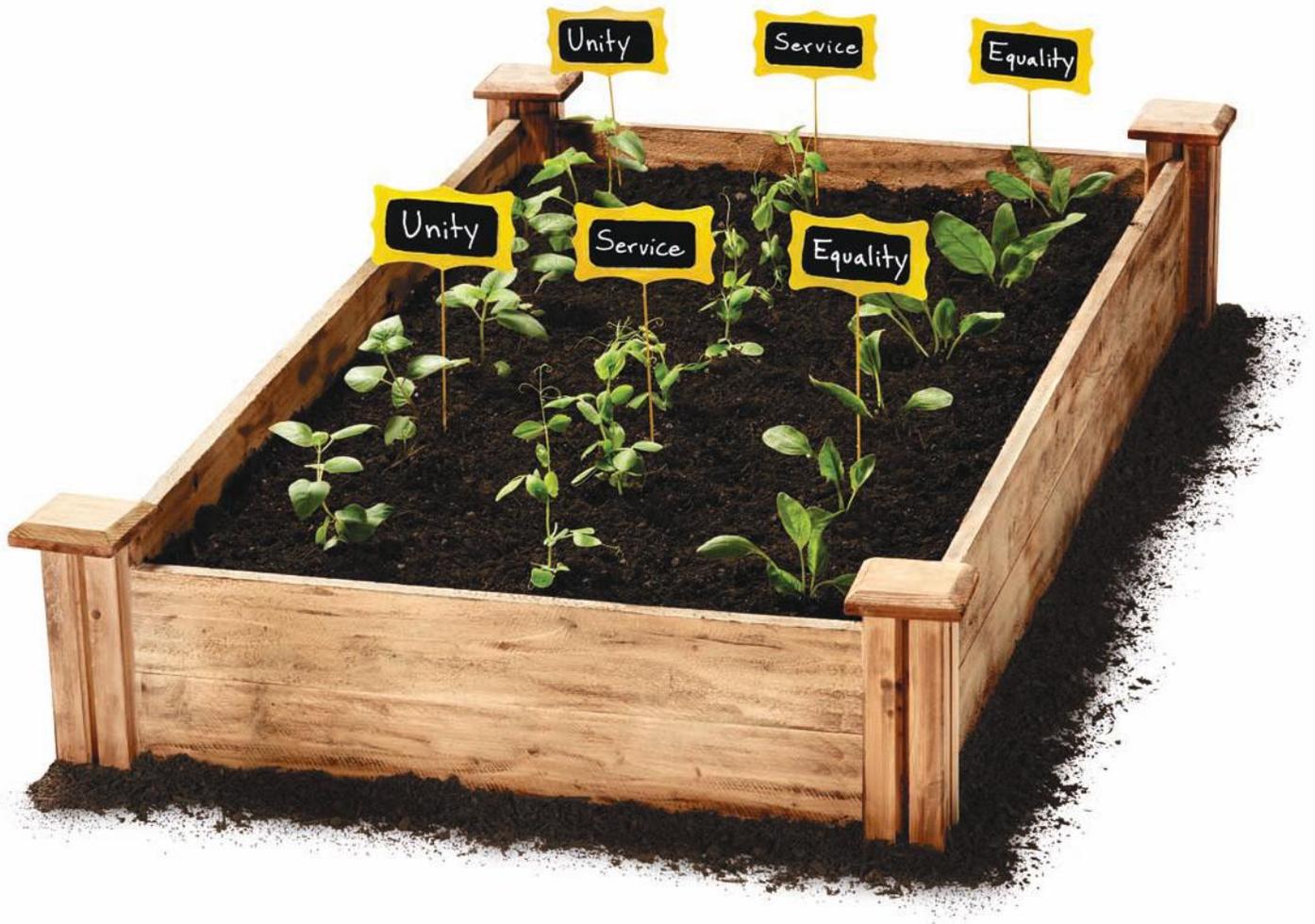
the desperate begging of his agent. "He lived his life not trying to sustain a career," says Edward Schmitt, his biographer. "Distilling the news and making connections. That was not just his method. It was his mind." Gregory used humor to communicate the risks that he and others were taking with their bodies. "Just got back from Mississippi," he says on his 1964 album, "Running for President" (something he did, along with running for mayor of Chicago). "I realized Mississippi is probably the only state in the whole wide world where a fair trial is considered something primitive. I mean, in all honesty, you've got a lot of Northern cops

that will shoot first and ask questions later. But in Mississippi, they shoot first, second, third, fourth. ..."

Gregory, who was a competitive runner in high school and college, pushed his body onto other front lines: He stopped drinking and smoking. He became a vegetarian, then a vegan, and he fasted against the Vietnam War. Even after Gregory stopped performing in comedy clubs in the mid-70s, he often worked 300 dates a year at colleges. He wanted young people to recognize their unstoppable power. The talks "were billed like lectures, but were entertainment," Jaffe says. On airplanes he took to those engagements, the flight attendants knew to take him a garbage bag for his newspaper clippings. "He would grab and read anything he could get his hands on," says Christian Gregory, one of Gregory's 11 children. "That was his research for the show." Information was slippery, and it needed moral framing, but you could get ideas to people through comedy. To Christian, it was "like watching a surgeon with a scalpel to watch my father with the newspaper with a highlighter, to gut them and get the funny out." His son explained that his father's large, serious eyes would scan the text for signs of racism, "looking for the code words." When he found a turn of phrase or a fact that could help him make his case, he would say, "There's the trick, right there."

In a documentary in production by Andre Gaines, Gregory explains in a radio interview—once again—why fighting for justice trumped show business. "It's just—I liked what I felt," he says. You can hear the good feeling in his voice—one still alive on 16 albums and as undaunted on the page. As he wrote in one of his many books: "The freedom of black folks has always outweighed my life as a comic." SCLC

*ADRIAN NICOLE LEBLANC an independent journalist and a MacArthur fellow, is completing a book on stand-up comedy.*



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# John Lennon Was Right

*The government is run by maniacs for maniacal means*

BY JOHN W. WHITEHEAD

**“You gotta remember, establishment, it’s just a name for evil. The monster doesn’t care whether it kills all the students or whether there’s a revolution. It’s not thinking logically, it’s out of control.”**

– John Lennon (1969)

Militant nonviolent resistance works. Peaceful, prolonged protests work. Mass movements with huge numbers of participants work.

Yes, America, it is possible to use occupations and civil disobedience to oppose government policies, counter injustice and bring about change outside the confines of the ballot box.

It has been done before. It can be done again.

For example, in May of 1932, more than 43,000 people, dubbed the Bonus Army—World War I veterans and their families—marched on Washington. Out of work, destitute and with families to feed, more than 10,000 veterans set up tent cities in the nation’s capital and refused to leave until the government agreed to pay the bonuses they had been promised as a reward for their services.

The Senate voted against paying them immediately, but the protesters didn’t budge. Congress adjourned for the summer, and still the protesters remained encamped. Finally, on July 28, under orders from President Herbert Hoover, the military descended with tanks and cavalry and drove the protesters out, setting their makeshift camps on fire. Still, the protesters returned the following year, and eventually their efforts not only succeeded in securing payment of the bonuses but contributed to the passage of the G.I. Bill of Rights.

Similarly, the Civil Rights Movement mobilized hundreds of thousands of people to strike at the core of an unjust

and discriminatory society. Likewise, while the 1960s anti-war movement began with a few thousand perceived radicals, it ended with hundreds of thousands of protesters, spanning all walks of life, demanding the end of American military aggression abroad.

This kind of “power to the people” activism—grass-roots, populist and potent—is exactly the brand of civic engagement John Lennon advocated throughout his career as a musician and anti-war activist.

It’s been 37 years since Lennon was gunned down by an assassin’s bullet on December 8, 1980, but his legacy and the lessons he imparted in his music and his activism have not diminished over the years.

All of the many complaints we have about government today—surveillance, corruption, harassment, political persecution, spying, over-criminalization, etc.—were used against Lennon. But that didn’t deter him. In fact, it formed the basis of his call for social justice, peace and a populist revolution.

Little wonder, then, that the U.S. government saw him as enemy number one.

Because he never refrained from speaking truth to power, Lennon became a prime example of the lengths to which the U.S. government will go to persecute those who dare to challenge its authority.

Lennon was the subject of a four-year campaign of surveillance and harassment by the U.S. government (spearheaded by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover), in an attempt by President Richard Nixon to have him “neutralized” and deported. As Adam Cohen of the New York Times points out, “The F.B.I.’s surveillance of Lennon is a reminder of how easily domestic spying can become unmoored from any legitimate law enforcement purpose. What is more surprising, and ultimately more unsettling, is the degree to which the surveillance turns out to have been intertwined with electoral politics.”





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Years after Lennon's assassination, it would be revealed that the FBI had collected 281 pages of surveillance files on him. As the New York Times notes, "Critics of today's domestic surveillance object largely on privacy grounds. They have focused far less on how easily government surveillance can become an instrument for the people in power to try to hold on to power. 'The U.S. vs. John Lennon' ... is the story not only of one man being harassed, but of a democracy being undermined."

Such government-directed harassment was nothing new.

The FBI has had a long history of persecuting, prosecuting and generally harassing activists, politicians, and cultural figures, most notably among the latter such celebrated names as folk singer Pete Seeger, painter Pablo Picasso, comic actor and filmmaker Charlie Chaplin, comedian Lenny Bruce and poet Allen Ginsberg. Among those most closely watched by the FBI was Martin Luther King Jr., a man labeled by the FBI as "the most dangerous and effective Negro leader in the country."

In Lennon's case, the ex-Beatle had learned early on that rock music could serve a political end by proclaiming a radical message. More importantly, Lennon saw that his music could mobilize the public and help to bring about change.

For instance, in 1971 at a concert in Ann Arbor, Mich., Lennon took to the stage and in his usual confrontational style belted out "John Sinclair," a song he had written about a man sentenced to 10 years in prison for possessing two marijuana cigarettes. Within days of Lennon's call for action, the Michigan Supreme Court ordered Sinclair released.

While Lennon believed in the power of the people, he also understood the danger of a power-hungry government. "The trouble with government as it is, is that it doesn't represent the people," observed Lennon. "It controls them."

By March 1971, when his "Power to the People" single was released, it was clear where Lennon stood. Having moved to New York City that same year, Lennon was ready to participate in political activism against the U. S. government, the "monster" that was financing the war in Vietnam.

The release of Lennon's Sometime in New York City album, which contained a radical anti-government message in virtually every song and depicted President Richard Nixon and Chinese Chairman Mao Tse-tung dancing together nude on the cover, only fanned the flames of the government agents who had already targeted Lennon.

However, the official U.S. war against Lennon began in earnest in 1972 after rumors surfaced that Lennon planned to embark on a U.S. concert tour that would combine rock music with antiwar organizing and voter registration. Nixon, fearing Lennon's influence on about 11 million new voters (1972 was the first year that 18-year-olds could vote), had the ex-Beatle served with deportation orders "in an effort to silence him as a voice of the peace movement."

As Lennon's FBI file shows, memos and reports about the FBI's surveillance of the anti-war activist had been flying back and forth between Hoover, the Nixon White House, various senators, the FBI and the U.S. Immigration Office.

Nixon's pursuit of Lennon was relentless and misplaced.

Despite the fact that Lennon was not plotting to bring down the Nixon Administration, as the government feared, the government persisted in its efforts to have him deported. Equally determined to resist, Lennon dug in and fought back. Every time he was ordered out of the country, his lawyers delayed the process by filing an appeal.

Finally, in 1976, Lennon won the battle to stay in the country and by 1980, he had re-emerged with a new album and plans to become politically active again. The old radical was back and ready to cause trouble.

Unfortunately, Lennon's time as a troublemaker was short-lived.

Mark David Chapman was waiting in the shadows on Dec. 8, 1980, just as Lennon was returning to his New York apartment building. Ironically, Lennon had signed an autograph for Chapman earlier that evening outside his apartment building.

As Lennon stepped outside the car to greet the fans congregating outside, Chapman, in an eerie echo of the FBI's moniker for Lennon, called out, "Mr. Lennon!"

Lennon turned and was met with a barrage of gunfire as Chapman—dropping into a two-handed combat stance—emptied his .38-caliber pistol and pumped four hollow-point bullets into his back and left arm. Lennon stumbled, staggered forward and, with blood pouring from his mouth and chest, collapsed to the ground.

John Lennon was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital.

Much like Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy and others who have died attempting to challenge the powers-that-be, Lennon had finally been "neutralized."

Still, you can't murder a movement with a bullet and a madman: Lennon's legacy lives on in his words, his music and his efforts to speak truth to power.

As Yoko Ono shared in a 2014 letter to the parole board tasked with determining whether Chapman should be released: "A man of humble origin, [John Lennon] brought light and hope to the whole world with his words and music. He tried to be a good power for the world, and he was. He gave encouragement, inspiration and dreams to people regardless of their race, creed and gender."

Lennon's work to change the world for the better is far from done.

Peace remains out of reach. Activists and whistle blowers continue to be prosecuted for challenging the government's authority. Militarism is on the rise, all the while the governmental war machine continues to wreak havoc on innocent lives. sclc

*JOHN W. WHITEHEAD is an attorney and author who has written, debated and practiced widely in the area of constitutional law and human rights. Whitehead's concern for the persecuted and oppressed led him, in 1982, to establish The Rutherford Institute, a nonprofit civil liberties and human rights organization whose international headquarters are located in Charlottesville, Virginia.*

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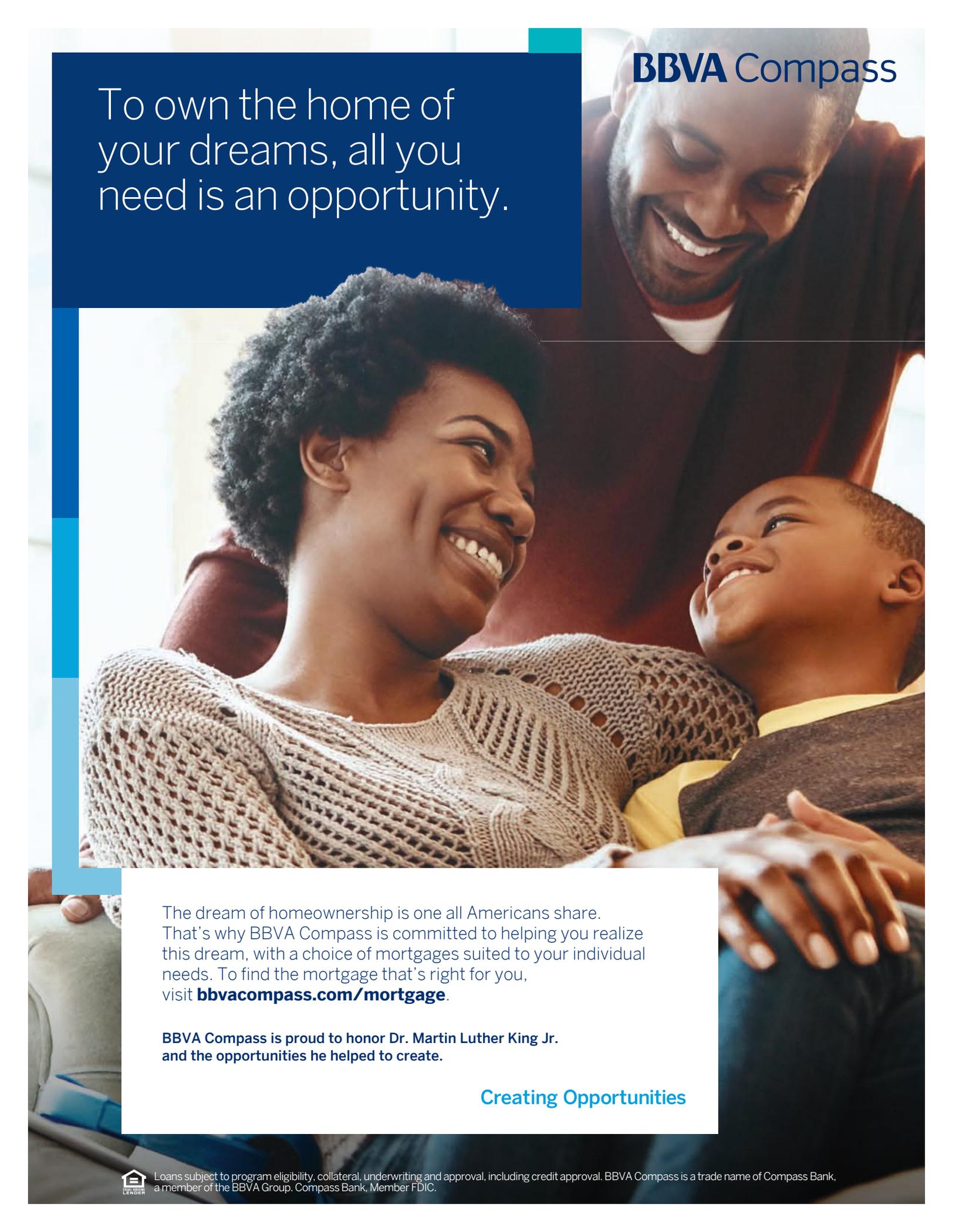
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