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The Truth About Civil Rights

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Monday, August 26, 2013 - 09:11



As Americans commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of The March on Washington, our nation will reflect on Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream, a utopian vision which placed emphasis on one's character, not color.

Many will make the journey to relive this historic moment, envisioning what America was like fifty years ago when Dr. King gave America's version of The Sermon on the Mount.

This weekend, there were countless films of Birmingham and Selma, the media interviewed several civil rights leaders, legends shared their war stories of freedom rides and Jim Crow. It was a ceremonial passing of the torch from one generation to the new voices of Black America who will remind everyone that while blacks have made great strides, the struggle continues.

While many consider the March on Washington as the highwater mark of the Civil Rights movement, there have also been many topics undiscovered. Such as, were there others who made an impact besides Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X? Although multiculturalism and

diversity is a catchphrase among liberals after fifty years, examples of great women or gay men who risked their bodies and lives for equality are rarely highlighted. One must wonder, were there any blacks of prominence outside of civil rights? Did any blacks own restaurants, or run companies? Were opportunities so limited that all blacks could do was sing, protest, and march?

Why, after fifty years, haven't civil rights activists highlighted other women besides Rosa Parks, whose contributions were just as important as Dr. King's?

For instance, Washington D.C. has parks and museums named after great black men. But what about naming something for a woman who did more than preach hopes and dreams, but represented communities. Women such as Eleanor Holmes Norton, Shirley Chisholm, or Barbara Jordan? They fulfilled what Martin Luther King Jr. expressed as political power.

How about commemorating the architect of the March on Washington, Bayard Rustin; it was his vision from which the march was created and history was made. He was a leader of peaceful resistance, which he learned when he went to India and marched with Gandhi in their struggle for independence. He sat at lunch counters and sat up front on buses long before Rosa Parks refused. He taught these tactics to a fiery militant named Martin Luther King Jr., and the rest was history.

However, there are no holidays or posters for this great man because he had a secret. In 1948, he was caught having sex with a man in his car, and the civil rights establishment who condemned racism from whites harbored bigotry towards homosexuals and ostracized Rustin.

When discussion began of marching, the NAACP and Urban League threatened to call off the March for Jobs and Justice because Rustin was in charge. However, Rustin made an historic move in selflessness by allowing A. Philip Randolph and Dr. King to become the faces of the march, and he faded from the spotlight.

Also what's forgotten in history was the status of Dr. King and those regarded as the faces of Black America. Like the current crop of black spokesmen, many viewed the N.A.A.C.P., C.O.R.E, and civil rights leaders as part of the bourgeois class of blacks who sold out the poor inner city blacks for financial ambition. They saw these leaders as opportunists who supported integration, not based on humanitarian reason, but because it benefited many financially. Most of the civil rights organizations received large grants and funds by wealthy elites and religious organizations who wanted to control the black community for political and economic reasons, instead of mutually benefit of advancement.

Many of the organizers and protesters from that period were young, and viewed the concept of moral persuasion as an immoral concept. They saw no logic in petitioning those who oppressed them by singing negro hymns while having bottles and rocks being thrown at them, in the hopes that their oppressor would be morally persuaded to give rights that were granted to everyone else.

Many viewed Dr. King's message as vintage Uncle Tom, and resented his high visibility. The truth was that many were more aligned with the fiery rhetoric of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown, who voiced their frustration of the hopelessness, joblessness, and despair. They resented the white liberal who came into their neighborhoods only with condescension and advice, fueling their hopes and dreams with broken promises and empty lies.

Although Martin Luther King Jr. preached utopian egalitarianism, many blacks wanted complete

liberation from white dominance.

Infighting

The last forgotten part of history was the infighting between factions of the black community.

While racial tensions were highly publicized, hatred between blacks can be more vile than overt racism. Throughout history, there have been rifts between light skinned blacks and dark skinned blacks. Also, the ideological strategies of the black middle class, who wanted to integrate, and the poorer blacks, who wanted complete control over their neighborhoods. Many blacks who lived in the north had the same derision for the black southerner as their white counterparts who had the same fears about competition for jobs and housing.

The Freedom Rides were rampant with male chauvinism, as the male was the symbol of masculine leadership. Women were instructed to know their place and very few had leadership roles; most were continually propositioned for sex and were put into support roles such as maids, secretaries, and doing laundry.

While Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream instilled a liberal vision of what America could become, the sixties were not the golden age liberals contend it was. Soon after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Lyndon Johnson embarked on social welfare programs; these programs replaced black men as fathers and the government took over the paternal role of parenting with public housing and government welfare.

America is still trying to dig itself out from the liberal policies of the sixties while many are trying to go back there. Don't be misled.

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