

## Some thoughts, some memories, some reflections about Martin Luther King & the March on Washington



Gil Caldwell on the left

I was a third year student of the School of Theology, when in the spring of 1958 I read that Martin Luther King was to be in Boston for a speaking engagement. I was at the time an officer in the student government association at BU Stn that I believe was named, the Mt. Vernon Student Association, named for the location of the school when it was on Beacon Hill. I spoke to some of my colleagues in the Association about Dr. King coming to Boston and suggested that we invite him to the school. They said yes, and I was asked to make an attempt to reach him. I found out the name of the Hotel where Martin Luther King was staying and I called the Hotel asking for Dr. King's room. Much to my surprise, the Hotel operator put me through to his room and he answered the phone! I asked him about visiting the school and he said yes. He toured the school, and then went downstairs to the Refectory where a picture was taken of him seated with some of the students. I remember being seated on his left, and I believe it was the late Angelo Mongiore who had a

picture taken of us, that has been published in Focus magazine.

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I was 29 when I attended the March on Washington. I was at the time, Assistant Pastor of Union Methodist Church and Director of Cooper Community Center. both in Boston. I had just completed a year (1962-63) of graduate study at Harvard Divinity School I was attending a Methodist meeting in Chicago and decided to leave the meeting and travel to the March on Washington on one of the reserved trains that Chicago residents had procured. I knew no one on the train, but I found that our common commitment to the mission of the March created a bond among us that made us family. When we arrived in Washington, I was overwhelmed by the number of people in the train station in Washington who were arriving aboard trains from around the nation. The racial diversity of the persons whom I saw, affirmed what I had always believed, the Civil Rights Movement was more than a black rights movement, it was a Movement that touched the souls of all those who believed that the USA was, on matters of race, in the process of becoming the nation that it pretended it was, in its founding documents. There were Methodist leaders in Boston who were bothered by the use of the word "on" in March on Washington. They felt that it conveyed a kind of militancy, that might evoke violence by those who participated in the March. They had not yet understood nor appreciated the deep-seated commitment to nonviolence that was at the heart and center of the Civil Rights Movement. During this time when so much sound and fury is devoted to the right to bare arms that is a Second Amendment right, I wonder is there national appreciation for the nonviolence of the CR Movement? Black people certainly were being brutalized and

victimized by local, state and the national government. And, Second Amendment proponents proclaim that the right to own weaponry was a legitimate response and reaction to government-sponsored tyranny. But, we in the Movement, led by Martin Luther King, James Lawson, Bayard Rustin and others, knew that the creation of "The Beloved Community" would not occur if we engaged in "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth". Nonviolence in the presence of verbal and physical violence averted a racial blood bath, that even the most anti-black persons among us ought appreciate.

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This year, the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's, "I Have a Dream" speech, brings to my mind and heart, thoughts about the relationship of the dreams of Joseph in Scripture and the "Dream" of Dr. King. The brothers of Joseph were jealous of his dreams, possibly because they had no dreams, and/or because of the appreciation that others had of "Joseph the dreamer." Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, and Martin Luther King was killed because he sought to actualize his Dream in a nation that preferred to live with the nightmare contradiction of legal and cultural racism, rather than be led to a place where its magnificent words about equality would become realized. Joseph, in the presence of his brothers after listening to their apologies for selling him into slavery, said to them; "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Joseph was saying what is so often said within the Black Church, "God makes a way out of no way". I, as I attended the March on Washington 50 years ago, could not have imagined in my most fanciful of dreams, that at this time of the 50th anniversary of the March, the President of the USA would be a man of African descent, Barack

Hussein Obama. I am fearful that there are persons who in their race-based opposition to President Barack Obama and his family, do not understand that President Obama's legacy that he leaves for the future is secure and positive. But as historians write of how some responded to the nation's first African American President with racially insensitive, sometimes racist, demeaning and dehumanizing critiques, the legacies they leave will be described for what they are; 21st century racism, without the robes and the burning crosses. They have demonstrated their inability to see and affirm the content of Barack Obama's character, because of their hatred for the color of his skin. Martin Luther King in his March on Washington speech longed for the day when his children would be judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. How strange, how sad, how senseless it is that in the 21st century, there are those who are so insecure in their own skins, that they find meaning in "dissing" President Obama for the color of his skin.

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