

January 25, 2014

Good morning,

I give thanks to the National Naval Officers Association for hosting this gathering and for our lovely breakfast. And I thank you for being here, for sharing one more time of honoring a man whose life was dedicated to achieving a great and honorable vision, a vision that, if met, would have put our country well on the way to healing from the greed and arrogance of the white supremacist ideology on which it was partially founded and the sickness that ideology fostered – a vision that many of us still hold and continue to fight for, despite fierce resistance from those who would keep our debilitating racial divide and unjust economic system in place, a divide and a system that is hurtful to all of us who live in this country, regardless of whether we are conscious of that or not. But before talking more about the vision, I want to spend a few moments talking about the man.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an extraordinary leader who led this country into times that began to break down a system of racism that had been in place for more than 100 years. When we celebrate his day of birth as a national holiday – when we honor his message and his life by visiting a statue of him that has been placed on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. – when we name streets after him and march for justice in his name, it is difficult to think that he was also an ordinary man, fallible and imperfect, as are all human beings. And, he was young. Despite titles and exceptional accomplishments – including being the youngest person at that time to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize - despite the many years since his death and the fact that he was born nearly 85 years ago, we are honoring a young man. Martin Luther King, Jr., the hero of our most recent Civil Rights Movement was murdered when he was only 39 years old.

Let's look, for a few moments, at where he came from – at the source of his vision and at the source of his belief in nonviolence as the way of achieving that vision.

Michael King, Martin's father, was born in 1899 in Stockbridge, Georgia. He was one of 9 children in a family of sharecroppers and grew up in extreme poverty and at a time and place of virulent racial hatred. Despite being beaten as a young teenager by a white mill owner and witnessing the lynching of a black man by a white mob, he listened when his parents advocated nonviolence and followed his parents' teachings that hatred breeds nothing but more hatred. Inspired by courageous ministers who spoke out against racial injustice, he was trained and licensed by them and became a Baptist minister.

Following years of working many jobs to put himself through night school & being a pastor of several churches, he finally graduated high school and went on to be admitted to Atlanta's Morehouse College School of Religion and to become assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Following a long courtship, he and Alberta Williams, the only daughter of the highly esteemed and well-established pastor of Ebenezer were married. When Alberta's father died, Michael became the pastor, preaching his message of social action and nonviolence and helping the church prosper with highly successful membership and fundraising drives.

In the 1930s, Daddy King (as he came to be called by family and close associates) joined the NAACP, the Atlanta Negro Voters League, and the Interracial Council of Atlanta – an organization that was founded by liberal white Southerners to oppose lynching and mob violence and to educate white Southerners about the worse types of racial abuse.

In 1934, as a well-respected pastor, he traveled to the World Baptist Alliance in Berlin. Inspired by the life of Martin Luther, the German theologian who initiated the Protestant Reformation and to honor his dying grandfather's wish, Michael changed his own name and that of his oldest son to Martin Luther King. At that time, his son, Michael, Jr. – now named Martin Luther King, Jr. – was 5 years old. Daddy King continued to direct his influence as a pastor toward the cause of racial equality, heading Atlanta's Civic and Political League and NAACP branch and he had tremendous influence on the development of Martin Luther King Jr.'s social consciousness.

Martin Luther, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1929. There, as in Stockbridge, legalized racial segregation was fiercely and, sometimes, violently defended. However, thanks to the financial success of the ministries of his father and maternal grandfather and contrary to his

father's poverty-stricken childhood, Martin Jr. grew up in relative wealth with all of his material needs and most of his material wants being met and with his family protecting him as much as was possible from the most gross indignities of racism. He was an intelligent and sensitive boy and his father was strict, domineering, physically abusive, and determined that his son would be a successful human being. Discipline, power and the ability to suffer were key values in his childhood home because Martin Jr.'s father believed them to be the keys to success in the racially restricted environment in which the family lived.

At age 15, he graduated from high school and enrolled in Morehouse College. As was true during his entire childhood and adolescence, all people with whom he had intimate contact were colored – the label given to people with African heritage during those years. However, there were other kinds of diversity among the Morehouse students. As is often the case with college experiences, Martin was introduced to thoughts and teachings that conflicted with those of his father and the church. He began to rebel against both.

This rebellion cumulated when, as a 19-year-old college graduate, he decided to attend Crozer Theological Seminary, a liberal integrated school in Pennsylvania, rather than the Morehouse School of Religion, which was his father's choice. This was Martin's first social experience in an interracial setting. There was no separation of the races. Even the maids who cleaned the dorm rooms were white. It must have been a shocking experience for many of the southern Negro men. When I think of that, I remember a young black man whom I will call Sam, who came to San Jose State College from Mississippi in 1965 (nearly 20 years after Martin's time at Crozer) during the summer when I was training prospective Peace Corps Volunteers for service in the Philippines. When Sam witnessed interracial friendships on that campus and young black men dancing with young white women during parties, he became literally paralyzed with fear. Frozen with PTSD, Sam gave up his dream of being a Peace Corps Volunteer and returned to Mississippi.

Why didn't Martin respond in the same way? Why did he continue to stay in an environment that must have brought up great emotional challenges? Perhaps the strength of his spirituality sustained him. Perhaps it was because of the values taught in his childhood home. Perhaps the years at Morehouse gave him helpful information. Perhaps he just didn't want to go home and end the rebellion.

For whatever reasons, Martin's response was different from that of Sam's. Not only did he stay in an academically and socially integrated environment, he dated the white cook's daughter and eventually proposed marriage. She turned him down because of fear of racist attacks from white men. Black boys in Georgia were being killed for even glancing at white girls. She could never have returned to Atlanta with him. Martin, she said, was not so much heart-broken at her refusal, as he was angry at its cause.

In 1951, 22 years old and already ordained as a Baptist minister, he enrolled in Boston University for graduate studies. In 1953, he continued his rebellion against his father by marrying Coretta Scott, a graduate of Antioch College and the Boston Conservatory of Music whose father was a truck farmer, not a Baptist minister. The couple moved to Montgomery, Alabama where Martin became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

However, despite all the rebellion and Daddy King's dissatisfaction with his son's academic and marital decisions, Martin never wanted for anything material. He always had a checkbook and he always had enough. Enough money and enough women. During a televised interview, Dorothy Cotton, one of his close African American friends, said that Martin's womanizing began during college and stemmed from insecurity related to his dark complexion and his physical stature. Martin always felt a need, she said, to win the affection of the girlfriend of the tall, light-skinned athlete and, unfortunately, that need and its consequent behavior did not end with his marriage.

So, that's part of the ordinary – his youthful rebelliousness, his personal insecurity and his womanizing - the imperfections of his humanness.

Now let's look at the extraordinary accomplishments of this young leader who was a martyr to the struggle. He had no pull toward martyrdom and did not seek leadership. He was chosen and reluctantly agreed. He was a deep thinker, a strong believer in the power of faith, a knowledgeable theologian, a philosopher, a man of courage and passionate conviction and a brilliant orator. He came into the Movement with values gained from his family of origin and hard lessons learned from personal life experiences, as well as those learned in academic settings, and, he used

those lessons in his speeches. As one of his friends, said, “He could make a sermon out of anything.”

It was not Martin, but rather Mrs. Rosa Parks, whose action began the Movement. In 1955, the 42-year-old long time secretary for the Montgomery Alabama branch of the NAACP, a civil rights veteran who had trained at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, an interracial training ground for civil rights activists, was arrested for refusing to move from her seat to a white man and move to the back of the bus. Her refusal to move was not because of being tired, as the folklore reports. Instead, it was part of a well-planned strategy to give the NAACP the incident it needed to effectively protest segregation on public transportation. 25 organizations became involved, a meeting was held at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a leader was chosen and Martin Luther King reluctantly accepted that mantle.

The yearlong nationally televised process of black folks mostly walking to and from work and sometimes getting rides from courageous white allies ended when Congress declared that bus segregation was no longer legal in the U.S. The Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century had had its second major victory and Dr. King was catapulted into national recognition. Shortly after that, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed, with Dr. King at the helm. A Philip Randolph (the famed labor organizer who was also a major civil rights and socialist party leader) and Bayard Rustin (a leader for civil rights and gay rights and a great proponent of non-violence) organized the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, a non-violent demonstration to plea for voting rights with the support of SCLC and the NAACP. Dr. King gave his “Give Us the Ballot” speech to a crowd of app. 20,000 people in Washington, D.C. I remember it. I was a 15 year-old high school student and it was my first march.

In 1958, Dr. King traveled to India to study Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence. In 1959, he moved to Atlanta to direct the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to concentrate on actions related to civil rights and to co-pastor with his father.

Over the next 9 years, thanks to the efforts of black leaders and young and old black and white citizens working together and taking great risks,

the Civil Rights Movement had several victories: the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, the Immigration and Nationality Services Act, the Fair Housing Act, and legalization of the right to marry across color lines.

On August 28, 1963, during the famed march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Dr. King delivered the “I Have a Dream” speech for which he is most widely known. According to Dorothy Cotton, the idea for the speech came from an interchange that she overheard and shared with him. A white mother speaking to a black mother and saying “I have a dream that one day my child will be able to hold hands with your child and it won’t matter.” Dr. King turned that speech into a memorable and poetic sermon that came from his heart, as well as from his mind, and he delivered it spontaneously at the prompting of Mahalia Jackson.

In part, the speech is memorable because of its brilliant construction and because of Dr. King’s passionate oration. However, it is also memorable because of its content. It was not only a dream that Dr. King and that white mother held in common. It was a dream that millions of Americans – mostly black Americans, but also many white Americans - shared, as evidenced by the numbers who came to the marches, by the white students who joined the Freedom Rides, by the courageous white southerners and northerners who stood up against white racial violence in various other and sometimes more personal ways, and by those who risked their lives to register black voters. Motivated to become part of the movement for racial equality by spiritual beliefs, by social consciousness, by intellectual awareness that we cannot hurt others without hurting ourselves, by knowing that we cannot even be an unwilling part of a system of oppression without destruction to our own humanity, or simply by the desire to be part of something that was morally and socially significant, Americans of both races came together in the struggle.

And yet, despite that togetherness and the violence that ensued during those years of the Movement, despite hosing and beatings, despite the jailing of activists and the burning of churches and Freedom ride buses, despite the sit-ins and marches, despite all the people who lost their jobs and their homes and their lives in the struggle for justice, and despite all of the victories won, the dream of racial equality has still not materialized and those hard-won victories themselves are now in jeopardy.

Dr. King saw clearly the relationship between economic injustice and racism, a relationship that dates back to slavery and the time of indentured servitude – both of which were based on and held in place by economic greed. Protesting economic injustice promised to be even more dangerous than protesting racism, as it confronted the greed of those people in power and threatened the system on which this country was built.

And yet, for Dr. King, the possibility of physical health & mental health & hearts & intellects & self-esteem & family relationships by eradicating poverty in this country was worth the risks. Think of how much potential is lost when people have to always live on the level of basic survival! And so, on November 27, 1967, he announced that the Poor People's Campaign – a campaign that he had been working on for a year - would culminate in a tent encampment of poor people of every skin color on the National Mall. There would also be a March on Washington that would demand a \$30 billion antipoverty package including full system employment and the annual construction of 500,000 affordable residences. Less than 5 months later, while assisting poor sanitation workers in Memphis Tennessee organize a union for better wages and working conditions, and very shortly after delivering his prophetic "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered.

What would he be doing if he were alive today? Surely, he would be working against the attempts to suppress voting rights in communities of poor whites and people of color. He would fight inequities in the criminal justice system, including the prison-for-profit practice, understanding that the imprisonment of men of color totally eliminates their voting rights in many states & reduces their visibility & the development of their children's potential, as well as their own – much in the same way that Jim Crow laws did when he was alive. He would be aware of the huge increase of the number of prisons in this country and know that most of the prisoners come from families with little money. He would note that, in our state, although they make up only 56% of the total male population. 70% of the male prisoners are black and brown and many are in prison for minor drug abuses. I think he would wonder why more of us are not distressed about that.

Given his commitment to civil rights and human rights, he would be focusing on reversing the re-segregation of our schools and opposing drone attacks on foreign civilian populations. He would speak out against

the enormous economic disparity between racial groups and the huge gap between the super wealthy and working class families.

What would Dr. King see if he were to walk through all the streets of the Monterey Peninsula today? What would he notice? How would he feel? What would he want us to do?

I think he would enjoy the natural beauty and be glad for the sanctuary of the Monterey Bay. I think he would notice that we have a large number of nonprofit organizations using hundreds of volunteers to do much needed community service and he would rejoice in that.

I think he would notice that there are interracial friendships and families in our community and that most of our towns have people of different ethnicities working together. I think he would be glad for the lack of legal segregation in public places and on public transportation and that everyone who can afford any restaurant here can eat there and that hotels and stores do not ask people to leave because of the color of their skin. I think he would be happy for the Peace Center because he was so adamantly against the Vietnam War, a war that he saw as unlawful and unjust and one that would return those black and brown and red soldiers who survived to a life of racial injustice.

I think he would praise the Naval Officers who volunteer to tutor children and raise money for college scholarships. I think he would be happy for The Village Project in Seaside because we serve families with little money who are in need of counseling services and, in addition to our focus on broadening their worlds, we tutor high-risk children whose families cannot afford to hire tutors. It is because we value those children so highly and treat them with intelligent care & respect that their school behavior problems dramatically lessen, their self-esteem increases, and they begin to succeed in other ways.

I think he would be happy for Harmony at Home because of its valuable service to Latino school children who have similar needs and be glad that we are beginning to work together.

I think he would also notice the racial divide in our County. I think he would notice the defacto segregation in our schools and in our housing arrangements and in some places of employment and

be concerned that there are white children and adults who have never had a friendship with a person of color. I think he would notice that there are black and brown children and adults who have never had a friendship with a white child. I think he would discover that there are adults of color who feel unwelcome in some of our towns and that there are African American children who have never walked the beaches of Asilomar or Carmel. And I think that would make him distressed and very sad and he would challenge us to do more to reduce separation based on racial identification. Ever conscious of the social oppression of classism, I think he would notice the great economic divide. He would note the affluence in our county while also noting that 25% of our children live in poverty. 25 %. Think of 4 children you know and care about. Now, select the one for whom you would choose poverty. (Pause)

Dr. King would see the beautiful homes and note the numbers of homeless still among us. I think he would speak out against attempts to criminalize that homelessness and ask us to remember the truth he spoke when he said “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

I think he would say that many of us are doing good work and there is a great deal of work left to be done. That he would challenge us to make a solid commitment to do everything within our power to create a fair and just economic system, to protest monies building more and more prisons and less and less schools, and to serve our community’s needs.

And I know that he would not expect us to be perfect, because even he was not perfect. But he would want us to use awareness of our imperfections as a foundation for the development of compassion. He would want us to work tirelessly to eliminate hatred and to reach for friendship and alliance and love, to rise above our greed and our fears and our personal insecurities so that our children and our grandchildren and our great grandchildren will have a chance to develop to their full potential, and to live in a country of integrity – one that lives up to its great promise.

Thank you for listening. Thank you for all that you do.

Ann Todd Jealous

