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**Life after Death: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Truth  
The Substance of Truth**

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*"Both men ate with their gloves on."*

**-Hemingway, Ernest. [Men Without Women](#). New York: Scribner, 1927 (1955 ed.), pp. 81.**

*"Cowardice asks the question - is it safe? Expediency asks the question - is it politic? Vanity asks the question - is it popular? But conscience asks the question - is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it because it is right."*

**-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (1968).**

"The king of love," as Nina Simone called him, might have been physically extinguished four decades ago, but like every true prophet, his deeds outlive the flesh. Ringing louder than ever, are his calls for freedom, justice and equality for all mankind / womankind. As Simone noted, all King dreamt of was "a day" when "peace would come to earth to stay." Though facing "pain, humiliation [and] death," he did not "dread." It takes an overdose of courage to remain as committed as Dr. King was, in the face of unrelenting death-threats. "Always living with the threat of death ahead," Nina Simone sang. If a non-violent man could be visited with such horrific confrontation at death's door, *The High Priestess of Soul* was spot-on in asking: "*What's gonna happen now that the King of Love is dead?*" Tragically, what has happened, ever since, is a co-optation of Dr. King's legacy, and a ruthless drive to simplify the great warrior into a

dreamer. In this practice, white liberals have been most guilty, but they've been graciously assisted by many Black accomplices - including some King-family members.

Beginning on April 4, 1968, these immoral opportunists rewrote the history books in order to make more suitable Dr. King's vision for a radically transformed universe. They have sought to re-make him into the man he never was - a childish dreamer. What shame. The King they know is far different from the one in which we find refuge. The banners of their exploits are advertised, ostentatiously, in Black history month specials across the country. A more visible example is found in the millions of dollars invested to build the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial. It's advocates and directors must have missed [King's request](#), that all he requires is the remembrance that he "tried to give his life serving others," "tried to love somebody," "tried to be right on the war question," "[tried] to feed the hungry," "[tried] to clothe those who were naked," "[tried] to visit those who were in prison," and "tried to love and serve humanity." Though Dr. King deserves so much more than he demanded, the logic of building multi-million dollar memorials, in his name, loses its flavor, with the reality that the money can be put into better use, in dilapidated public schools and community centers across the country. The logic becomes corrupt with the realization that such constructions are only built to satisfy the moral appetite of tuxedo-wearing bureaucrats - some of whom denied Dr. King his dignity, while he was alive. No surprise: Shame is their middle name. It calls, and they hastily respond.

The struggle for truth is a painful one, for those who have robbed his memory are the same ones who proclaim, with unbelievable intensity, their respect and admiration of his service. Those who use his glory for opportunistic enterprises are the very ones posited as legatees of his prophetic calling. They have taken from him the one thing he deserves most - his identity.

His identity as a lover of the poor, and warrior for the disenfranchised has been erased by the emotional graphics played, by mainstream press, around the last week of January, and the first week of April, blaring calls for the day when *"little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."* They [cynically disregard](#) King's revolutionary pursuits, from '65 to '68, when he was forced to conclude that *"so many people who supported morally and even financially what we were doing in Birmingham and Selma, were really outraged against the extremist behavior of Bull Connor and Jim Clark toward Negroes, rather than believing in genuine equality for Negroes."* They wallow in ignorance, with their recommendations of *time* as a vaccination for evil. Dr. King invalidated this "myth," with his insistence that "time is neutral." Those who urged Dr. King, four decades ago, to *"slow up and just be nice and patient and continue to pray, and in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out,"* are the ones who inform us, today, that Obama's election dawned the era of a "post-racial" reality - a time when race is of no consequence, and pigmentation drowns in the river of irrelevance. Dr. King reminded us that the loss of our hybrid identity is not a signifier of racial improvement, because *"integration is not merely a romantic or aesthetic something where you merely add color to a still predominantly white power structure. Integration must be seen also in political terms where there is shared power, where black men and white men share power together to build a new and a great nation."*

What Dr. King understood, which many modern-day Civil Rights leaders fail to

comprehend, is that the struggle for justice must always leave itself open to the possibility of reform and reorientation. He might have started as a staunch integrationist, but he later on found out that *"though it may be true that the law cannot change the heart, it can restrain the heartless. Even though it may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, it can restrain him from lynching me."* This King has been dethroned, and a sentimental, romantic dreamer has taken his place.

The King whose ferocious criticism of the Vietnam War - and wars in general - aroused LBJ's rebuke of the "that goddamn nigger preacher," is reduced to a man replete with fantasies, but no apparent vision.

The King who [met with Chicago street-gangs](#), like the *Vice Lords*, and slept in a North Lawndale slum for months, has been wiped out from the pages of *acceptable* history.

The King [who pleaded](#) that Black people "believe" in themselves, because *"nobody else can do this for us,"* is lost in the *official* narration of his travel through life.

The King who declared that, *"No document can do this for us. No Emancipation Proclamation can do this for us ... If a negro man wants to be free, he has to move down into the recesses of his own soul and sign... his own emancipation proclamation,"* is memorialized as one habitually dependent on legislation to right historical wrongs.

The King who railed against the association of blackness with "ugly and evil" values, and the contrast of whiteness with *"something pure and high and clean,"* has been sheltered away from modern-day discourse on his true heritage.

The King who longed for the day when Blacks folks would be filled with the impulse to "cry out" their joy in being "black and... proud," has been revised as a color-blind messiah of sorts.

The King who turned down a run for the presidency, for his commitment *"to... doing this job of Civil Rights,"* is only remembered, today, by those dependent on his prophetic convictions for inspiration and motivation.

Our King, and their king are two different entities. They are, in the truest sense, separate and unequal.

In spite of the wishes of his countless detractors, Dr. King's foundation of truth and justice has remained unshaken ever since, and though his enemies might seek to eat with their gloves on, their fingerprints are traceable, nonetheless.

### **A poem dedicated to the memory of the timeless moral crusader:**

Let Freedom Ring!  
Let it sound the Trumpet of Justice!  
Let it charge the tune of suffering!  
Let it replace the sound of despair!

Let it ring like a knock at midnight!  
Let it ring like a validated marriage!  
Let it ring across the South!  
Let it ring across the North!  
Let it ring for the lies told!  
Let it ring for the truths buried!  
Let it ring in harmony!  
Let it ring in discord!  
Let it beat the drum of peace!  
Let it sing the song of defeat!  
Let it ring for nonviolence!  
Let it ring for '65 to '68!  
Let it ring in the ghettos!  
Let it ring for the humble!  
Let it ring for the sick!  
Let it ring for the traitors!  
Let it ring for the fair-weather disciples (You know who you are)!  
Let it ring for slick-politicians!  
Let it ring for J. Edgar Hoover!  
Let it ring for the editorials!  
Let it ring for the wiretaps!  
Let it ring for the opportunists!  
Let it ring for Alabama!  
Let it ring for Addie, Denise, Carole & Cynthia!  
Let it ring for Mississippi!  
Let it ring for Emmett Till!  
Let it ring for Chicago!  
Let it ring for King Daley!  
Let it ring for the Judases!  
Let it ring for the liberals!  
Let it terrify the sinful!  
Let it cure the sickened!  
Let its decibel arouse the dead!  
Let it uplift the oppressed!  
Let freedom ring!  
Let freedom ring!!  
Let freedom ring!!!

-Tolu Olorunda

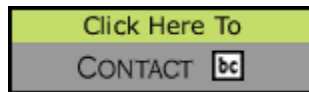
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**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, Tolu Olorunda, is an activist/writer and a Nigerian immigrant. Click [here](#) to reach Mr. Olorunda.

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