

A DREAM 'DEFERRED'**Margareta GUȘOVSCI***Catedra Filologie Engleză*

Discriminarea rasială este o problemă vitală în zilele noastre. America este țara care s-a confruntat vehement cu acest viciu social. În istoria acestei națiuni sunt două evenimente care au marcat prohibiția rasismului: Războiul Civil și Mișcarea pentru Obținerea Drepturilor Civile din 1955-1974.

Liderul acestei din urmă, Martin Luther King, este omul care a adus speranță și vindecare Americii. El a pus bazele filosofiei mișcării și apoi i-a dat o voce eroică. Cel mai renumit discurs al său, „Eu am un Vis”, este considerat un document-cheie în istoria SUA. El oglindește idealurile și emoțiile întregii mișcări, deoarece exprimă dorința de a trăi într-o lume fără rasism.

Totuși, sondajele indica că visul său nu s-a realizat pe deplin. Nu putem să afirmăm că situația afroamericanilor nu s-a schimbat deloc. Multe exemple pot fi aduse în favoarea ambiției renumitului filosof. Un lucru este cert – tot cu ce s-a ales această categorie a populației până azi s-a datorat numai curajului, dorinței și eforturilor lor proprii.

Chiar dacă visul lui M.L. King a fost spulberat, este greu de spus ce e imposibil, deoarece visul zilei de ieri este speranța zilei de astăzi și realitatea zilei de mâine.

The race issue is a vital topic in the world today. Segregation and discrimination are still alive at practically every level of the society we live in, even though many people believe that integration has already reached its peak. Racism is like a cancer which gradually, but insistently devours every vital cell of a person's body.

America is the country to have experienced racism the most drastically. The American dream of an integrated society, where every person would be allowed the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, has failed to be fulfilled. This country has always been governed by myths about class relationships; some of these myths began to be pierced sooner and some later. But the realm in which truly significant change always took place was that of race relationships.

In the history of America there is an event marking the abolition of slavery – the Civil War. There is evidence that Blacks after the Civil War enjoyed many privileges that their predecessors could only dream of. “They could vote, hold office and attend school. Still, decade after decade, most white Americans never gave the injustices experienced by Blacks a moment's thought. The Negro community's struggle for identity was all but invisible, too, and so were its achievements in different domains” [10]. Newspapers, magazines or radio advocated “Gone with the Wind” stereotypes.

Almost one hundred years later, in the mid 1950's, “the descendants of the slaves, who were themselves still only half free, came striding out of the shadows to claim their rightful place under the American sun” [6]. The modern Black movement, of the decade 1955-1974, transformed the self-conceptions and aspirations of many participants and initiated a national transformation of Afro-American consciousness. It has been called the "second Reconstruction" in order to connect its achievements with those of the decade after the Civil War.

The movement had known many leaders, but “from 1955 the transcendent figure was Martin Luther King. In perseverance, in purity of motive and action, in faith and inspiration, in courage and sheer good-heartedness, he qualifies as one of the greatest Americans” [1]. This was the man who shaped the philosophy of the movement and then gave it a heroic voice. King's activities made him into a symbol of American commitment to civil rights and an example of personal heroism. He won a Nobel Peace Prize at the age of thirty-five, and by the time of his assassination was one of the most admired Americans in the world.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr. captured the attention of the nation with his philosophy and commitment to the method of non-violent resistance. According to Dr. King, this was the only solution that could cure society's evil and create a just society. He really believed in the “turn the other cheek” idea and neglected violence because: “the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate.... Returning violence for violence multiples violence; adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that” [3].

Martin Luther King Jr. was a strong man. He talked about a new day, but he walked a dangerous path. He preached that violence was wrong, and he knew the fight would be long. Professing non-violence, he never resorted to violence himself, and in this respect he was a person ahead of his time.

Because he was the one to take part in almost all the most important events during the 50's and the 60's, at each of these occasions he delivered hearty discourses which encouraged and advised people who relied on him. The speech which has become proverbial, "I Have a Dream", is considered a key document in the American history because it expresses the ideals rooted in the American dream. M.L. King spoke of his desire to live in a world free of racism. "If the Blacks have become used to living in a deep valley and looking up to the high mountains; if they have, over and over again, unsuccessfully tried to climb their peaks, this doesn't mean there is no end to it" [8]. The vivid metaphors of the discourse give a meaning to the bright future to which people aspired: "With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood" [8].

Nowadays, when people meet to celebrate M. L. King's holiday in America, they commemorate Dr. King's "great dream of a vibrant, multiracial nation united in justice, peace and reconciliation; a nation that has a place at the table for children of every race and room at the inn for every needy child" [8].

The "I Have a Dream" speech arose many great minds to commit themselves to the construction of the Beloved Community. The key word of the speech "dream" has become overused. People began to think in terms of their dreams, poets began to write about their dreams and not only; everybody became involved in the Civil Rights Movement. The address encapsulated the ideals and emotions of the march and, in a sense, of the entire civil rights movement. Even though the optimism generated by the march was dimmed by Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson secured passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

It would be right to ask one question in view of the things written so far. Is Martin Luther King's dream any closer to becoming reality? It is still a dream. "From the injustice of racial segregation, all ethnic minorities, not just blacks, face the stigma created by quota-based 'positive discrimination' programs - intended to help such people. Unfortunately, this leads to some whites believing that ethnic minority employees or students only got in because of their race, not their abilities." [7] One African American politician said 'we have to run twice as fast to be considered half as good'. Still, in the U.S., Hollywood actors, Eddie Murphy, great musicians, Diana Ross, and the likes, have all eluded the barriers of race. The Bush administration also represents the changing class nature of racism and its impact on the blacks as a whole. On his staff are the two highest-ranked African Americans ever appointed to a presidential cabinet – national Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell.

What is different today is that there is less official opposition to the concept of having civil rights. In our times, it's very rare to find someone who reports to be opposed to civil rights and equal opportunity and non-discrimination. From the perspective of communities of color, in many ways, the civil rights issues have been more difficult to deal with because racism and discrimination have become more covert. And due to that, national outrage at the lack of civil rights doesn't exist. Many whites in America, who aren't somehow involved in or absorbed in the civil rights and race relations issues, genuinely believe that everything's fine, if not to consider the death of James Bird in 1998 and some Rodney King, cases which shouldn't have happened.

Unfortunately, this is a good example about how the society doesn't change and is very hateful. There are many organizations around that promote hate and prejudice. The statistics which are the clearest barometers for determining and measuring the quality of life in American society, show that African Americans continue to lag behind whites in every possible category. As the booming economy of the 90's drew to a close, Black poverty rates dropped to a record low of 23 percent. Black unemployment fell to a record low of 7.2 percent in 1999. Even at this historic low, Black unemployment still was twice the unemployment level for whites.

African Americans tend to be the last to be hired when the economy is booming. That means that they also tend to be the first to lose the jobs when a downturn hits. In education the situation is not much better at all. Two recent studies show that African American applicants face many obstacles due to their Black sounding names. Besides this, they are likely to be called about jobs more rarely than the white applicants with prison records.

Poverty is the most difficult problem with which the Afro Americans are supposed to fight. A study recently conducted by Cornell University found that nine out of ten Black Americans, or 91 percent, spend at least one of their adult years in poverty, compared to 52 percent of whites. Access to health care is another major problem for Afro Americans, because 23 percent of them have no health coverage at all. Poverty and lack of health insurance mean that Blacks die on average six years younger than the rest of the population.

All of these terrible numbers are underscored by the fact that, when it comes to making the laws that have an impact on the lives of Afro Americans, there is a woeful lack of representation. In the history of the US Senate, one of the most powerful decision making bodies in the country, there have only been four Black senators. Today there are none. There have been two African American governors in the history of the US. Today there are none.

If racism was caused only by ignorance and prejudice, then economic disparity between races should have ended in the sixties. The civil rights and Black power struggles exposed racist injustice, the administration of Lyndon Johnson reacted and implemented the 'war on poverty', and that should have been the end of the story. Instead, the disparity never disappeared, and began to grow shortly thereafter. Basically, by the mid-1970's young college educated blacks were earning the same amount as their white counterparts. There was no racial disparity. But by the 21st century the economic gap, as measured by median income, has returned to the same level as at the end of the sixties. The economic advances of the civil rights and the Black power movements have been virtually erased.

It would be wrong, nevertheless, to conclude that things are just as bad as they were before the Civil Rights Movement. "Many of the legislative gains from that period, from affirmative action to ending segregation, are under attack. But the impact of the movement has been longstanding, fundamentally changing the attitudes and perceptions of millions of people about African Americans. On a whole range of issues, whites are more sympathetic to the realities of Afro-Americans in the US society, and they also have closer contact and relationships with Blacks, than forty years ago" [5]. All these gains are being preserved today by the commemoration of Martin Luther King's holiday established by the US Congress on January 15th of every year as Martin Luther King Day. It celebrates the life and legacy of a man who brought hope and healing to America.

It is a day of interracial and intercultural cooperation and sharing. No other day of the year brings so many peoples from different cultural backgrounds together in such a vibrant spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood. Whether one is African-American, Hispanic or Native American, whether one is Caucasian or Asian-American, he/she is part of the great dream Martin Luther King, Jr. had for America. This is not a black holiday; it is a peoples' holiday. And it is the young people of all races and religions who hold the keys to the fulfillment of his dream.

This proves that Martin Luther King showed great character - his words, and memories, and great vision live on and continue to inspire. A good example in this respect is provided by Jess Stone with her famous song "I Had a Dream", which shattered America in 2003. This was a real revival of the movement, because phrases from M. L. King's speech set under modern tunes were voiced all over the world. This song describes the issue of racism as good alive in the USA today but, besides, it suggests the existence of a certain prejudice concerning Blacks. The singer implies that, perhaps, we will not see the end of it for another forty years, or even longer. In fact, the issue is not so much racism in itself as prejudice, which is something that all human beings have. We believe something about something and until proven otherwise, that's the unfortunate way it is.

Intolerance in the USA comes from whites and if there was some progress in the situation of African-Americans until nowadays, it was all due to their joint efforts, to their courage and their desire. That is why, even if M. L. King's dream was postponed, it is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow.

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