

Despite Dedication Postponement: Message Rings Clear: We Cannot Wait!"

Written by Trice Edney Newswire
Wednesday, 31 August 2011 13:07



WASHINGTON - Despite the postponement of the official dedication of the monument to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., there was one message that still resonated from conversations inspired by the new "Stone of Hope" on the Washington Mall. That message was clearly, "We cannot wait."

"We have to re-educate America in reference to the value of protest, the value of marching," said the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss during the final leg of the "Table of Brotherhood" project, discussions that circulated through four cities, beginning in Atlanta and culminating in Washington, D.C. on August 26. "We've got to organize around the [principles for which] Dr. King died. And, we cannot wait for the Congress; nor the White House. We must present to the Congress and the White House the urgency of a jobs program."

The audience of more than 1,000 applauded loudly as the "We cannot wait" message was declared in the Washington Convention Center. They showed no lack of enthusiasm on the heels of the news that Sunday's dedication of the four-acre, id=mce_marker14 million monument site had been postponed due to Hurricane Irene.

Instead, the "Table of Brotherhood," sponsored by Chevrolet and the General Motors Foundation, pressed on with conversation geared toward racial understanding, tolerance and a more inclusive America. GM gave more than \$10 million to the King Monument project.

"From our perspective, this is just a part of our DNA. We've had a long history of firsts as far as addressing issues, as well as addressing opportunities," said General Motors' vice president for diversity, Eric Peterson, in an interview with the Trice Edney News Wire. GM developed the first minority dealership program in order to assure the inclusion of African-Americans. It now represents 100 minority-owned dealerships. It also established the first minority suppliers and the first women's program in the car dealership industry.

"For us, it's a competitive advantage to really give back into the communities in which we do business," Peterson said.

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The memorial to Dr. King, now unveiled and open to the public, is a testament to the fact that the "DNA" of which Peterson spoke is not pervasive across America. Moss, a renowned civic leader who once co-pastored Ebenezer Baptist Church with Dr. King, and 11 other civil and human rights laborers were seated at the makeshift "Table of Brotherhood." They concluded that "a sense of urgency" – as described by panelist Arianna Huffington of the Huffington Post - is the key to mobilizing behind Dr. King's dream of equality.

Economics, education, tolerance and diversity were among the topics of discussion led by CNN commentator Roland Martin. BET President/CEO Debra Lee; Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.; WHUR personality Ray Baker, and poet Lisa Nichols were also among those at the table.

Civil rights icon Rev. Jackson stressed changes in public policy as being the key to achieving equality by regulating and mandating fairness from corporate America and government. Ray Baker, a recent Howard University graduate, said African-Americans appear dependent on the same corporations that oppress them. It makes no sense to protest against unequal treatment by corporate decision-makers if you have some of the "same people sponsoring your march," Baker said to loud applause.

In the background was a photo of Dr. King and other young civil rights leaders on the front line at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Justice.

Fast forward 48 years, not that much has changed. Rev. Jackson pointed out that young men are now seeing "going to jail as a step up" when given some of the demoralizing economic choices of today.

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The King memorial is the result of the brainchild of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Incorporated of which Dr. King was a brother. It is the oldest Greek letter fraternity in the country. In the absence of the official dedication, the fraternity held its own ceremony on Friday, drawing civil right pioneers including Rev. Andrew Young and Rev. Joseph Lowery. "We are standing on sacred ground," said Herman "Skip" Mason, general president of the Alpha's. "We are in a space where many of our ancestors stood, not knowing that generations later we would return to celebrate the unveiling of a memorial dedicated to a man who was a drum major for peace and justice."

The impassioned statements were many. But none was quite as clear as the one set forth by Dr. King himself in his 1964 book, "Why We Can't Wait."

Dr. King wrote: "Among the many vital jobs to be done, the nation must not only radically readjust its attitude toward the Negro in the compelling present, but must incorporate in its planning some compensatory consideration for the handicaps he has inherited from the past. It is impossible to create a formula for the future which does not take into account that our society has been doing something special against the Negro for hundreds of years. How then can he be absorbed into the mainstream of American life if we do not do something special for him now, in order to balance the equation and equip him to compete on a just and equal basis?"

Dr. King continued, "Whenever this issue of compensatory or preferential treatment for the Negro is raised, some of our friends recoil in horror. The Negro should be granted equality, they

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agree; but he should ask nothing more. On the surface, this appears reasonable, but it is not realistic. For it is obvious that if a man is entered at the starting line in a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner.”

SOURCE: Trice Edney News Wire