

MARTIN AND GEORGE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Part Two

The events which led to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s rise to prominence came out of that struggle and they were present in more places than Montgomery, Alabama. For years, throughout the United States, the conditions under which blacks and other minorities had been forced to live had cried out for solution. For an equal number of years those pleas for redress had been ignored.

Martin Luther King, Jr. had been born into those conditions in Atlanta, Georgia in 1929 at a time when the Ku Klux Klan ran rampant through the country and created circumstances wherein not only were blacks subjected to Jim Crow laws and not protected by any but their very lives could be taken without the government so much as raising an eyebrow. Justice was indeed blind—it was blind to the extent that it did not even see black people at citizens.

King's early life was made worse by his growing up during the depression years of the 1930s. When the stock market crashed in 1929 it brought about not only economic ruin for the country but economic devastation for blacks who were already on the bottom of the economic totem pole and had been since the close of the American Civil War.

King was probably first made aware of the different treatment of the races when he was six years old. Two white boys with whom he had played were told by their mothers not to play with him anymore. He could not understand why that happened. His mother, when asked, replied only that he was "not to ever forget that he was just as good as anyone else." When he was eight, while on a shopping trip with his father, they were told to go to the back of the store. His father, a proud man who had undoubtedly suffered those indignities before, did not want his son to have those kinds of experiences as part of his introduction to democracy in America. They left the store without having made a purchase. There were many more similar incidents which occurred in his lifetime as they occurred in the lives of all other black people which painted a sordid picture of the abundance of injustices which he

and other people like him had to endure. All of those events prepared him for a "rendezvous with destiny" which he did not realize awaited him.

Shortly after turning 15 years old he graduated from high school and entered Morehouse College. It was there that he decided upon a life in the ministry. It was there, too, that he studied the philosophies of the world. Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, he entered Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. His arrival at Crozer placed him in an environment unlike any in which he had ever lived—integration. He had a great deal of difficulty adjusting. There were no problems with his white classmates. The problems were a result of the way in which he had been programmed after 19 years of living in an oppressive, stagnant and demeaning society. He managed to overcome those difficulties and complete the degree. From there it was on to Boston University where he would receive the Ph.D., meet his future wife, and decide against taking a position with large, financially secure Northern churches. He returned to the south.

December 1, 1955. That was the date that it all began—the civil rights movement. On a relatively quiet street corner in Montgomery, Alabama which had been the first capitol of the Confederacy almost a 100 years prior. A hundred years earlier Rosa Parks would have probably been a slave. That day, that December, in 1955, she had been technically a slave and, somehow, she had looked through the veil and glimpsed freedom. Things could never be the same.

By refusing to give up her seat on a city bus, Rosa Parks ignited that civil rights movement. King, who had arrived at Montgomery less than a year earlier, was selected to lead the ensuing bus boycott. He had not planned his life to follow that course. He had planned to be a minister as his father had been but one who would shy away from the "foot stomping" and lean more in the direction of sermons based on the philosophy of theology and drawing from Aristotle, Socrates, Galileo, Rousseau, Locke, Hegel and others. He appreciated such concepts as "strength

by Professor Roosevelt Fitzgerald



Professor
Fitzgerald is
director of ethnic
studies at
University of
Nevada-Las
Vegas

through struggle, harmony out of pain" and he also was quite familiar with Thoreau's Civil Disobedience and understood the cause of the peaceful protest against the Fugitive Slave Laws which led to Thoreau's arrest. He had also discovered Mahatma Gandhi who, perhaps more than any other, influenced the approach to life which he would take. Tatya-graha—truth force or love force had a profound significance to him. Passive resistance was to become the force by which he would live and die.

Such utterings from a pulpit of a small Baptist church caused some white citizens to look upon him as a sort of rabble rouser while black citizens wondered silently and aloud: "Who is this guy?" or, in other phraseology: "What manner of man?"

Through his life experiences he had unknowingly been prepared for the great task of moving the "holy experiment" of 1787 closer to full realization. Many times before, the passing of the baton of freedom had been refused or dropped; lost or stolen. King accepted it and carried it and by so doing aided the United States in living up to its principles.

King and Washington were indeed different. The latter helped enable the country to grow while the former nurtured it. There are yet some who wish to belittle and demean his accomplishments. There are those who would prefer things being the way they were during "the good 'ol days." There are some who wish to believe that one race is superior to others. Fortunately most Americans have grown up and realize that the primary reason for whatever differences there might be in attainments has been due to racism and discrimination. Given an equal opportunity to succeed, suc-

cess becomes more likely. Martin Luther King, Jr. helped change all that.

Perhaps more than anything else, being born when he was, at the place where he was born, being denied the right to enter public libraries, being forced to attend inferior schools, not coming from a tradition of education, having to struggle for every inch of advancement that he made, graduating from a substandard high

school at the age of fifteen, completing an undergraduate degree at nineteen, a master's degree before he was 22 and a Ph.D. before his twenty-sixth birthday illustrates quite well what is possible when opportunity is there.

During the week leading up to his first nationally recognized birthday, many celebrations took place around America. Most of these, along with the "die hard" places, were reported in media. As I looked from town to town—north, south, east and west, I saw something which I had rarely seen before during the celebration of other holidays—large numbers of integrated Americans celebrating a common event. I do not mean merely sitting along the sidelines watching or being a member of a marching band that is segregated. I mean integration.

Years ago people used to ask, when a black male child was born: "Is you the one?"

The question had to do with a savior who would deliver the people out of bondage and oppression. The answer, apparently, was always in the negative. On January 20, 1929, once again the question was asked in the King household. Without their knowing it, the answer was in the affirmative.



PARAGON ADVERTISING

Quality Printing and Publishing Services

ADVERTISING FLYERS
LETTERHEADS
ENVELOPES
BUSINESS CARDS

CHURCH PROGRAMS
PAMPHLETS
MENUS
SOCIAL PRINTING

INVITATIONS
BINDERY SERVICE

NEWSLETTERS
BROCHURES



PICKUP & DELIVERY
ADVERTISING SERVICES

QUALITY WORK — COMPETITIVE PRICES

paragon advertising
(A subsidiary of Brown Publishing Co., Inc.)

1201 South Eastern Avenue
(1 Block South of Charleston)

387-6290