

What will MLK's memorial mean?

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

As I approached the site of the memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King on the Mall in Washington, D.C., to attend the event celebrating the beginning construction, I was impressed at its juxtaposition between Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. This was a fitting place because King was one of the "founding fathers" of this nation every bit as much as those who began the democratic experiment in 1787.

In effect, men like Lincoln and Jefferson would begin the experiment; but it would take Frederick Douglass and Dr. King, along with Cesar Chavez, Russell Means, and others to fulfill it by expanding the notions of democracy, equality and freedom, through their leadership of movements that demanded that the principles apply to all Americans.

As I sat there listening to the speakers on the platform, I looked at those arrayed on the stage and became aware that they represented a grand contradiction, reflective of the position of Black people in America today. Again, as at the funeral of Coretta Scott King, the presence and voices of officialdom in the person of presidents of the United States and

dignitaries — most unassociated with the movement — were accorded priority.

But the presence and voices of those who worked with King closest (except for Andy Young and Rev. Jesse Jackson) and for whom he suffered most were largely missing. They included Dorothy Cotton, James Orange — Rev. Joe Lowery would surely not be invited — Rev. C. T. Vivian, someone from Ralph Abernathy's family and others.

That scene on the stage was as contradictory and as ironic as the image of Malcolm X on a postage stamp, but it is perhaps inevitable as the best of our community ascends to the realm of national respect. With that ascension, however, there is the question of what the memorial would represent.

Would it be the way which the nation pays respect to the man who led a movement for social change, challenging politicians with "lips dripping with interposition and nullification" to a vision of the Constitution that held out the hope of resourceful citizenship?



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Or, will it be merely a monument to a slain dreamer who pined for the eventual freedom of his people? Will it become a constant reminder of a man and people who waged a bloody battle for freedom and through him, challenged to the nation "to live out the true meaning of its creed," or distort his life as one of an eloquent preacher. The action that resolves the contradiction is to be perpetually engaged in the struggle for authenticity; to infuse the memorial with the meaning of the movement for which King gave his life; by continuing in this age to raise the troubling questions about fulfilling the meaning of the American Constitution; to challenge the direction of America when it privileges racism, war and poverty by its callous inaction or misdirected decision. In this way, we continue to try "to bend the moral arch of the universe toward justice."

This means addressing the current problems of the uses to which power will be put. We live in an era where real human problems are not resolved by the power of reason

and the use of the massive material and spiritual resources of the nation. Rather, there has arisen a paradigm that mobilizes military might, money and radical Christian evangelism through an ideology that conserves resources for the few and excludes the many by its control of public policy.

A memorial to Dr. King and his movement would call that philosophy, its direction and its result into question. This finally raises another question about framing the King Memorial in an authentic way: By giving officialdom its due, but by having another event that invokes the blessings of Africa, invites the presence and voices of his staff and his colleagues in the breadth of the Civil Rights Movement and mingles them with locked-out peoples of all races. That is my vision of how a Memorial to Dr. King and the hundreds of thousands of those whose marching feet caused Jefferson and Lincoln to look our way should finally achieve its authenticity. And it will not be so until it is suffused with that history and that spirit.

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Common sense leads to common cents

By James Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Some people say "common sense is not common," which may be the main reason Black people are not as far up the economic ladder as we should be. Having been in this country since it started, having provided the free labor that led to the creation of much of the wealth now enjoyed by those in charge, and having established a history of self-help and entrepreneurial initiative since our enslavement, Black people have the strongest case and the greatest need to exercise a little common sense when it comes to working collectively to improve our current position in the U.S.

If we use our common sense, we will definitely have common cents. Common sense suggests that we do as other groups are doing and as our ancestors did in this country: pool our resources and support one another.

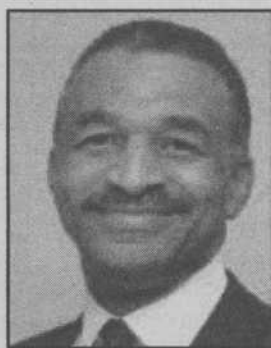
Common sense tells us to look around and see the dire straits our children are facing in this country and start compiling some common cents to help them meet and overcome their current and future economic challenges.

Common sense teaches us that we must not do anything that will subject us to the misery of incarceration and the profiteering of this nation's prison industrial complex; we must institute a national Boycott Prisons

campaign and work to give our youth alternatives, especially economic alternatives to their negative behaviors.

Common sense should have taught us that banks and other financial institutions still discriminate against us, and by using our common cents, we can overcome much of that discrimination by collectively leveraging our resources and creating and maintaining our own financial institutions. (Before anyone gets scared or asks why we need Black-owned banks and credit unions, think about the Korean banks, the Cuban banks, the Polish banks, the Chinese banks, and all the others that exist in this country.)

Common sense dictates that we utilize our common cents to fund our own initiatives, first, and then look to others to support them — support them, not control them. Having common cents would also increase our ability to defend ourselves against local political issues that are not in our best interests; our common cents can be used to fund ballot initiatives, finance the campaigns of candidates who will work on our behalf, and pay for research, analyses, and recommendations that can be used to make informed voting deci-



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sions.

Common sense instructs us to pursue our self-interest in a society that is rapidly becoming more polarized. Common sense tells us that Black people do not control the major political and economic games; but to ensure our participation in the game and our being in a position to win every now and then, we must use our common

cents. Economics runs this country; common sense should tell us that. If we use our common sense, we will also use our common cents to create and sustain an economic foundation from which to operate and on which to build even more common-cents initiatives.

We must use our common sense the way our ancestors did, as they quickly caught on to the system they faced and immediately went to work building their economic resources to purchase their freedom and that of their relatives and friends. Freedom still ain't free, ya'll.

As we look back on our progress for the past 45 years, common sense shows us how far we have come relative to the strategies we chose to pursue and the leadership we decided to follow. Common sense says several of our leaders have done marvelously well,

but as a whole, Black people are still stuck at the bottom of the economic ladder — a ladder with rungs that begin at the halfway point. It is up to us to figure out how to get to the halfway point; common sense suggests we must build add own rungs to that economic ladder.

Utilizing our common sense would lead us to the accumulation of common cents, and we would be well on our way to developing the resources we need to survive and thrive in this nation. Currently, we are too individualistic in our thinking and our actions to create common cents strategies. We must change our minds, raise our level of consciousness, and put positive action behind our rhetoric.

We must be willing to use our individual God-given gifts, to contribute to the uplift of a people who have suffered more horrendous treatment, both physical and psychological, than any people in this country. Common sense tells us that. How else are we going to prosper? How else will we achieve economic empowerment? How else will we ever be able to impact the futures of our children positively?

Many of us have heard that common sense is not common. If that is true, then I guess I can understand the paucity, or lack of common cents initiatives among Black people. But I don't believe Black people are short on common sense.

How did we survive in this country? How did we progress in the face of adversity and at the risk of even death? Why are we still here? How have we retained our sanity? How could there have been a prosperous Greenwood District in Tulsa, Okla., as well as all the other Black economic enclaves across this country?

Our great-grandparents could not have done all they did without possessing a tremendous amount of common sense that, in turn, directed them to accumulate a great deal of common cents with which to take care of their business? What's up with us?

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Curry

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in this room stand for the right principles and the right philosophy. Let's take it in the right direction, and our children will be the beneficiaries."

- In 1994, he voted to terminate federal funding for the King Holiday Commission.

- In 1995, he criticized Rep. Bennie Thompson, Mississippi's lone African-American member of Congress, for seeking FBI documents on the death of civil rights leader Vernon Dahmer.

- In 2001, he was the only U.S. Senator to vote against President George W. Bush's nomination of Roger Gregory, an African-

American, to the Fourth U.S. Court of Appeals.

In acknowledging to Ed Gordon that he had been wrong to vote against the federal holiday honoring Dr. King, Lott stated: "I'm not sure we in America, certainly not White America and the people in the South, fully understood who this man was, the impact he was having on the fabric of this country."

Linda Chavez, a leading conservative, didn't buy that one.

"Sorry, Senator, that statement reflects willful ignorance. No one who lived through the Civil Rights Era can fail to appreciate the social transformation that occurred through

the efforts of Rev. King and other civil rights leaders.

"Sen. Lott's problem is not that he didn't understand what Rev. King was fighting for, but that, at that time, he was on the other side."

If Lott was sincere when he said he favors affirmative action "across the board," there could be no better time than now to prove it. If he's not sincere, we should see Trent Lott for what he is: a politician willing to say anything to regain power.

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