

Anniversary

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Meanwhile, Sen. Hillary Clinton spoke at a commemorative event held at Mason Temple, the site of Dr. King's last speech. She recalled meeting Dr. King and shaking his hand when she was a young woman. Later, she too toured the museum.

Rev. Al Sharpton, president of the National Action Network (NAN), moved the organization's 10th Annual Conference to Memphis for the 40th anniversary commemoration. He led the second march of the day, from City Hall to the museum, where a candlelight vigil took place. The vigil included guest speakers and performers, such as Rev. C.T. Vivian, Dr. Cynthia Griggs Fleming, and the Philander Smith Concert Choir. Forty lanterns were lit and the names of civil rights figures of the past were read.

Fourteen-year-old Samir Ford participated in the NAN march and in the candlelight vigil.

"It was very moving to see that 40 years later the dream that Dr. King envisioned is still being carried out among people from all over the world — all colors, all races, all ages — who came to this small city to pay their respects in person," said Ford, a ninth-grade student at Memphis' Central High School.

For Beverly Robertson, the vigil and commemorative march honoring sanitation workers were the most significant among the two dozen or so events happening throughout the city.

"This year's 40th anniversary commemoration was a time for reflection and reconnection," the museum director said. "At the vigil, Martin King III spoke and Rev. Bernice King asked the audience to recommit to the principles espoused by King... to eradicate poverty and seek economic parity."

Robertson said one visitor told her "she experienced an epiphany standing in front of the historic Lorraine Motel and listening to the profound words of Dr. King's daughter. She understands that she is the manifestation of Dr. King's dream and has the responsibility to use her life to make a meaningful difference in the continued struggle."

Martin Luther King III also spoke on April 2 at NAN's 10th Annual Keepers of the Dream Awards at the Peabody Hotel. King has attended the conference and



Sentinel-Voice photo by Karen Wood

Rev. Al Sharpton, left, joins the Rev. Bernice King and Martin Luther King III on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel as the Kings released a dove in memory of their father.

the awards banquet, traditionally held in New York City, every year.

VIPs attending the awards gathering, hosted by Mo'Nique, included Rev. Jesse Jackson, Tavis Smiley, Cornell West, Bishop Charles Blake, Roland S. Martin, CNN's Don Lemon, and Memphis Mayor W.W. Herenton, as well as honorees Earl Graves Sr., William Lucy, Cicely Tyson, Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker and Myrlie Evers-Williams. While the Miles College Choir provided entertainment during the awards ceremony, Shirley Caesar performed at an April 3 gospel concert hosted by the conference.

"I always come to Memphis with mixed emotions," said King. "My mother lost her husband, I and my siblings lost a father, but the nation perhaps gained a movement."

King referenced the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, \$3 million for Bear Stearns, housing foreclosures and the presidential election. He said the fulfillment of his father's dream is not if Barack Obama is elected president but when there is parity in healthcare, housing, education and jobs. He concluded by saying that his father was a praying preacher who believed that prayer changes things. He punctuated his point with a Helen Steiner Rice poem about prayer.

Angela Davis, activist, teacher and former Black Panther member, spoke at the University of Memphis about Dr. King and a global civil rights movement. In addition, there were tributes to heroes of the 1968 Sanitation Strike, concerts, symposiums and even a book signing by Clarence B. Jones, the author of "What Would Martin Say?"

Jones — Dr. King's attorney and speechwriter — was

part of the "In Remembrance There is Life" event staged by the National Civil Rights Museum, along with former SCLC Education Director Dorothy Cotton and Memphians Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, former Memphis Branch NAACP executive secretary Maxine Smith, Rev. Samuel "Billy" Kyles, former Shelby County Mayor Bill Morris, and Dr. Jerry Francisco, the medical examiner at the time of Dr. King's assassination.

Tavis Smiley brought his PBS television show and radio broadcast to Memphis for commemorative week. He interviewed those involved in the sanitation strike and in Dr. King's life, including long-time supporter Harry Belafonte.

Also, on April 4, Belafonte and Congressman John Lewis were honored at the April 4th Foundation Commemorative Awards dinner held at the Memphis Cook Convention Center. Belafonte gave a "powerful speech" in which he condemned the audacity of some folks in telling Sen. Obama whom he should and should worship with — resulting in thunderous applause from the audience.

Rev. Joseph Lowery was keynote speaker with Angela Bassett as mistress of ceremonies.

Many local activities sponsored by churches, schools, colleges, nonprofit and grassroots organizations, such as the NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Cultural Development Foundation, and the Beloved Community, filled the commemorative calendar of events. More than 75 national and global news outlets covered the events, said Robertson.

Florence M. Howard writes for the Tri-State Defender

Key figure in O.J. heist releases tell-all book

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Thomas Riccio, the memorabilia dealer who arranged O.J. Simpson's ill-fated meeting in a Las Vegas hotel room, says in a book released Monday that the former football star's entourage carried at least one gun, even though Simpson tried afterward to tell him otherwise.

"He was trying to convince me a gun wasn't involved, but that was ridiculous," Riccio says in the book "Busted," which he and his publisher, Phoenix Books, tout as an inside account of events leading to Simpson's arrest in the botched Sept. 13 heist.

"I was standing right next to the guy with the gun," Riccio says. "Some reports claim there may have been a second gunman in the room, but I only witnessed one."

Riccio acknowledged the 212-page book breaks little new ground.

"Maybe there's nothing really surprising in it," Riccio told The Associated Press by telephone from New York, where he planned a news conference and television appearances Tuesday.

"But as far as the O.J. thing, it's amazing how many people don't know quite what happened," he said.

Simpson has maintained that no guns were used and that he only wanted to retrieve his belongings when he and five other men confronted two sports memorabilia

dealers in the meeting Riccio arranged in a hotel room at the Palace Station casino.

Simpson and two co-defendants face kidnapping, armed robbery and conspiracy charges carrying the possibility of life in prison with the possibility of parole.

Riccio bluntly declares in the book that he is "out to make as much money as I can off this incident," and says he doesn't care what others think. Riccio has acknowledged peddling audio recordings of the hotel room confrontation to a celebrity website.

"I don't believe O.J. wanted anyone to get hurt," Riccio says, adding that he thinks Simpson "believed that there was no other recourse than to do it the way he did."

"Nobody was kidnapped," Riccio declares, rejecting the most serious counts in the case. He says adding that if Simpson is found guilty of having plotted to have guns brought to the room, he "should probably do some sort of prison time, but certainly nowhere near the life sentence he is now facing."

A spokeswoman for Riccio's publisher said Riccio was just trying to help Simpson get back items that he says were stolen from him.

"Tom had no idea about goons or guns," said Karen Ammond, publicist for the book. Ammond said Riccio's writing con-

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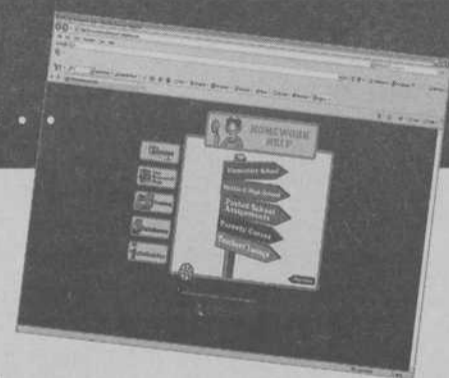
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