

**What Would Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. think of
Barack Obama, Diversity and America Now?**

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Arcoiris, Brookfield Zoo, Chicago Zoological Society

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for having me as your speaker today. I love zoos. I have loved zoos all of my life. I love the diversity of species, which zoos offer to visitors. But to me zoos also are a lot like libraries. Each releases us from our financial, spiritual and earthly limitations. Each allows us to visit places, see things and both imagine and visualize possibilities that even our wildest dreams couldn't touch without the bottled magic that zoos and libraries provide to those who are adventurous enough to enter. I think that wonderful sensation is partly because each connects us with people who dared to dream and accomplish the impossible. These great human beings went to far off places and captured the diversity in species and different ideas, and they brought them back to share with us. How cool is that?

Today, we celebrate the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. He would have been 80 years old on Jan. 15 – his actual birthday – if he had not been assassinated on April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. Dr. King was a lot like the people who have helped to make libraries and zoos possible. He dared to go to the unheard of place called the great continent of true American ideals and capture the dream of equality, the dream of opportunity for all, the dream of freedom and liberty for everyone regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, age or socio-economic status, and the dream of an unbridled love for diversity. Dr. King knew that diversity is life's third rail. It is a phenomenal power source like that which powers many mass transit systems. It emboldens us with the confidence to communicate with people who are different from us. That helps us to be better at work, in our communities, where we are civically engaged and where we

worship. That is some phenomenal stuff. Diversity also powers up our sense of hope, sense of faith and sense of trust in ourselves and in others. It strengthens our sense of togetherness and our sense of community. It drives us toward reciprocity – a feeling of I’ll scratch your back if you will scratch mine later – and diversity gives us an irrepressible knowledge that each of us is our brother’s keeper regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, faith or disability. That was all built into Dr. King’s dream.

But what is sad is Dr. King’s dream like many of the species in our zoos is on the endangered list. It has a protected status in the cozy captivity of the holiday that we celebrate now. Or like a rare book it is out of print and sits stashed away on some musty library shelf, and no one dares to put it in full circulation. But this dream of everyone fully embracing diversity is one that must roam free for all of us to benefit from the richness that diversity offers. A lot of times we want someone like Dr. King to make diversity a comfort to us. He alone was the only one who could make it happen for us, right?. Like the people who brought us our wonderful zoos and libraries in communities nationwide, we benefited from Dr. King’s good work. However, from here forward, the rest of the hard work of ensuring that the dream lives and that diversity is freed from the endangered list depends on the work that each of us must do. It is all part of a continuum or a magnificent relay race. All of us have a leg to run and a baton to carry in making diversity welcomed in our workplace, faith community and where we live. We each have to own part of the charge to help power the third-rail of diversity so that others can pick up the charge, too. Hip-hop artist Jay-Z explained that after Barack Obama was elected in November 2008 as the first African American president of the United States. Jay-Z wrote:

Rosa sat so Martin could walk.

Martin walked so Obama could run

Obama ran so our children could fly.

Each of those great persons, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Barack Obama did something fantastic by going against the way things have always been to push America to be better and live out her promise to all. This is why we have to examine ourselves more closely. None of us can depend on Obama to do all of the work himself as this nation's new president. We each have to own a piece of putting the diversity in this country to work for everyone. This nation is far more diverse than it has ever been, and that diversity in race and ethnicity continues to grow. About 34 percent of the country's 305 million individuals are now people of color. When I graduated from college in 1977 and started my journalism career at *The Kansas City Star-Times* as a reporter/photographer, minorities constituted only about 25 percent of the U.S. population. In my first book, *A Teacher's Cry: Expose the Truth About Education Today*, I note that we are seeing the diversity increase the most in our schools so that by 2010 – or next year – 40 percent of all school-age kids will be children of color. The disconnect is that 90 percent of the teaching staff is white and from suburban, middle-class backgrounds. It is a disconnect because we are finding in education just as we are finding in business, government, zoos, libraries, the media and other parts of society that people of different races, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds struggle to communicate well with one another, which hampers teaching, and that blocks learning. I note in *A Teacher's Cry* that educators traditionally have used a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, and that just doesn't work especially with today's students. Our young people are more sophisticated, and they need teachers who can reach them on their level. One way of serving your customers and

co-workers at your zoo doesn't work either. You need to recognize and harness diversity to make the most of every opportunity of all engagements with others.

Managing diversity is about getting us to that new level of sophistication by enhancing our communications skills so we can work better together to put everyone's unique talents in gear to benefit all of us. That is the theme of my second book, *Discovering the Real America: Toward a More Perfect Union*. In that book I note that to get people to embrace diversity, to feel its third-rail of power – instead of running from it or attacking it, we have to rely on the basic premise of capitalism in our market-driven economy and that's **“What's In It For Me?”** People have to know that relying on different individuals for new innovations is the key behind diversity. Two examples I cite in *Discovering the Real America* are George Washington Carver, you know, the kids call him the peanut guy, and the Navajo Code Talkers.

Carver was born a slave. But after the Civil War, Carver received an education and even went to college, although he was denied that college education in the Kansas City area. He went instead to Iowa where he reported that he finally felt that he was treated like a human being. After finishing his bachelor's and master's degrees, he went on to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute where he was responsible for developing more than 300 uses for the lowly peanut and many uses for the soybean. My dad, who is a PhD chemistry graduate of Cornell University, actually heard Carver speak at West Virginia State College in the 1930s when Dad was an undergraduate student there. Dad often tells the story. He said Carver captured the audience's imagination saying that as the students crossed the campus to the auditorium they stepped on lowly blades of grass never realizing that in each blade were the secrets of life. We know now that Carver was describing

DNA and the genetic coding that is in every living thing. In his research, Carver developed industrial uses for the peanut, soybean and other crops. Those crops saved American agriculture by replenishing the soil's nutrients. Centuries of farmers and plantation owners planting cotton and tobacco had robbed the soil of its richness. Had Carver stayed a slave and never received the advanced education that he got in Iowa, we never would have benefited from the gifts of his genius. The other example involves the Navajo Code Talkers. During World War II this country's diversity in people and their native languages benefited the Allies against the Axis powers. The Navajo Code Talkers gave this country the ability to communicate in a way that the enemy could not decipher troop movements and supply information that was being transmitted. Yet, these Native Americans were people this nation tried to either eradicate or completely assimilate. Because the genocide and total assimilation were unsuccessful this nation gained from the richness in cultural heritage that the Navajo were able to preserve. Again, that diversity is our strength, and we don't know what element of diversity in our population today might save us tomorrow, which is why we have to extend a good education, freedom, liberty, equality and opportunity to all now in order for this country to remain fully competitive in the global marketplace.

But I also note in *Discovering the Real America* that too many people have surrendered to the "isms," which we have been wedded to in this country since its inception. But we have to divest ourselves of the "isms" in order to see the value of diversity. In *Discovering the Real America*, I quote Jane Elliott, a diversity guru whom I heard speak in the 1990s in Kansas City. She said a formula for raising racist, sexist, homophobic, violent and elitist children is for parents to put those children in front of television sets, turn the TVs on and walk away. The sweet, vile lessons will ooze from the tube and affect our children. That is because the media reinforce and reverberate the

things that we value in our society. If those values include racism, sexism, homophobia, elitism and violence then those will come out of that magic TV box with the pretty, flickering lights, too. The media, therefore, are among the biggest obstacles to overcoming racism and to discovering the Real America. In *Discovering the Real America*, I cite the Web site that John McKenzie set up. It is www.rrnet.org. It stands for the Recovering Racist Network. According to McKenzie, we are all racists regardless of our color because we live in the United States. Racism is a huge part of this country's history. It is part of the Constitution along with sexism. Racism is written into the textbooks in schools and colleges, all aspects of the media and the laws of this country and embedded in the court cases. But the high ideals of the Constitution and the many amendments that have followed give us hope of changing how things have always been.

First we have to recognize the stories and contributions of people who don't fit the traditional image of the United States as a white, male-dominated, Christian, middle-class, suburban-centered nation. That image of a whites-only America is reinforced by our schools, in our literature, in the politics and the government of this country and by the media.

I note in *Discovering the Real America*, that Ray Suarez describes the media as projecting "melanin-free zones" offering to people a view of America that is mostly white. In his book, *The Old Neighborhood: What We Lost in the Great Suburban Migration: 1966-1999*, Suarez – a newsman for PBS – wrote how popular television shows in the 1990s excluded people of color:

The writers and casts of "Seinfeld," "Mad About You," "Friends," "Ellen,"
"Caroline in the City" and other popular television programs extol the excitement,

sophistication, variety and sheer with-it-ness of urban life. But these shows seem to exist in urban environments unrecognizable to millions of their nonfictional neighbors. Most Latinos in the United States live in large urban areas. Most blacks in the United States live in large urban areas. The networks beam their vision of white urbanity and cozy consumption into the homes of millions of white suburbanites without having to recognize or apologize for the real black-and-brown world that exists just beyond the camera frame occupied by Jerry, George and Kramer.

The dramatic urban landscape is another matter entirely. Unlike the melanin-free zone of Caucasian sit-comedy, the urban jungles of “Homicide,” “The Commish,” “NYPD Blue” and other (shows) feature brown and black characters galore. They are cops, secretaries, victims and most notably, suspects. The membrane between late prime-time and your local news grows thinner with each ratings period, as the clenched jawed realism of black-and-brown urban pathology segues easily into the mayhem of local news. It must be a comfort to an increasingly suburbanized reportorial staff, management and audience that the ‘alleged’ wild men in their center city are far, far away.” (p.127)

Katheryn K. Russell wrote in her book, *The Color of Crime: Racial Hoaxes, White Fear, Black Protectionism, Police Harassment and Other Macroaggressions* that the overpowering, consistent and persistent negative images of “black deviance” have been “seared into our collective

consciousness.... Images of everyday life are overridden by images of black deviance.” (p.3) She added:

The public’s perception’s that crime is violent, black and male have converged to create the *criminalblackman*. By itself, this mythical criminal black figure is scary enough. However, the figure has become ominous because we do not have anything to compare it with. There is no *criminalwhiteman*. There is every reason to believe that if more images of white criminals and white criminality were put in the media spotlight, the public image of crime would change. The damage of this black stereotype, however, cannot be undone simply by highlighting white crime. The media and the academic community will also have to expose the *criminalblackman* stereotype as a misrepresentation. (p.114)

We have to look past the negative images to see the truth. That is what *Discovering the Real America* attempts to do. In the book, I quote Dr. Mary Frances Berry's book, *The Pig Farmer's Daughter and Other Tales of American Justice: Episodes of Racism and Sexism in the Courts from 1865 to the Present*. Dr. Berry had been chairwoman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission from 1993 to 2004. She points out that it's only when all of our stories are part of the landscape that helped shape America that we can then expect equal treatment, equal opportunities and justice in day-to-day disputes and conflicts – especially from law enforcement authorities and the courts. If some people’s stories are discounted, if those individuals are not seen as valuable contributors to the country that they have helped build then they will be discounted in everyday situations, too. Dr. Berry wrote:

Whose story counts in legal decisions rests heavily on who controls political and economic power in a process that is circular and progressive. The stories of the powerful are the only ones that count, and counting further enhances the power of the tellers in the economic and political arenas. The exclusion of their stories reflects the historical silencing of African-Americans.

You can add to that silencing those individuals who are Native American, Asian American, Hispanics, gays, lesbians and people with disabilities just to name a few. But there is no stillness in the silence. It's in the silence that the stereotypes grow, and the prejudices they spawn often are the ones that criminalize and marginalize people of color so those individuals are viewed as troublemakers in our country.

I think we have to ask ourselves what we lose as a nation when we condemn and demean such large groups of our population with stereotypes, discrimination and bigotry and extend to others on a purely merit-less basis what's known as white privilege. Please think of white privilege as you would your finances. Would you want all of your securities invested in one thing – like the stock market – especially now? Diversification is the only smart thing to do with money. But it also applies to people. There is great value in diversity because the brain power and talent in this nation do not rest in the minds of only one kind of people. Racism, however, prevents people of all colors from seeing the value of the diversification of diversity. It is the notion of a superiority of one group over others and a need for white privilege to keep the underprivileged in their place. It is cyclical and self-fulfilling. I note in *Discovering the Real America* that our schools, colleges and

our media perpetuate what I call an **existential victimization** of the nation. **Existentialism** is a \$50 word you'll likely never see in the newspaper. It is a 19th and 20th century philosophy. It is based on people as human beings never having enough information to make perfect decisions. Instead we seek more information. Therefore we are always making decisions based on incomplete data, which results in us getting more information to make new correcting decisions. Yet, we as people must take responsibility for the decisions we make. When racism, discrimination, bigotry and prejudice intervene they cut off the flow of accurate information so that people make decisions and judgments based on seriously restricted data, or the misinformation of stereotypes. Conclusions are reached that are absolutely wrong but preordained to further generations-old hatreds. When racism, discrimination, bigotry and prejudice staunch the free flow of information they make **existential victims** of us all, and that has happened for centuries in the United States and elsewhere. That is what exclusion does. It serves as a fence just like the one Congress approved along the Mexican border keeping us from knowing and being enriched by each other.

When the "isms" rule us they keep us from knowing the complete stories of the triumphs and tragedies of people of color. I think you have to appreciate that it's from communities of great need that we often get the most innovative people because they have learned all of their lives to make do with less. But also consider this quote from Amy Tan, an Asian American writer. Her words are in *Discovering the Real America*. She said: "*They didn't know who I really was. They didn't know how much the smallest amount of recognition would have meant to me and how the smallest amount of criticism could undo me.*" We are hurting people when we don't value diversity, and that has to stop.

When we value diversity we eliminate the defaming language that often gets used on some people, and we learn to empower everyone so they can be all that they can be. It is what Dr. King would have wanted, and what he would have admired greatly in our new president, Barack Obama. To really embrace the **“What’s In It For Me?”** aspect of diversity we have to realize that diversity has two hands and two legs. On the one hand, diversity is about how we are similar. That’s comfortable for most people and easy to stomach. On the other hand, diversity is about how we are different. People prefer to just focus on ways in which we are similar. Some people will go so far as to say, “I don’t see you as being black, or as being Hispanic, or as being disabled....” That’s supposed to be a compliment, but it’s offensive because it says that the speaker can only accept me if I am not one of those “others.” I can only be acceptable in his mind if he can see me as being like him. That is so wrong.

There is a greater richness to be harvested from the difference. It is in the difference that we can gain new ideas and problem-identifying and problem-solving abilities because we learn from others whose skills are also different from our own. They enhance us, and they make us better. But we have to be willing to listen and learn. We can’t do that if we harbor prejudices and bigotry against those who are different. We have to be open like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and as bold as Barack Obama in drawing allies and adversaries close and benefiting from their diverse abilities. Today, ladies and gentlemen, we live in a time when we desperately need new ideas and diverse problem-solving skills.

Now let’s talk about the two legs of diversity. The first leg of diversity allows us to confidently walk in the workplace and within the other circles in which we travel, enabling us to better

communicate concerns and new ideas with those who are close to us. Valuing diversity better enables us to influence people and to be open to them influencing us. The second leg of diversity lets us communicate with others outside of our companies, schools and communities so we are able to expand our customer base, our profits, friendships and connections to new people who can teach us. When diversity is walking well on both legs and using both hands then new ideas really begin to flow generating new products and services and enlarging our lives with new ideas. I think Dr. King would appreciate our new president, Barack Obama, because Obama embodies the best of the two hands and two legs of diversity. The two hands and legs of diversity can work for you in your zoo and in this community by putting all of the talent among you to work in the most productive possible way. That makes everyone feel appreciated and welcomed.

I note in *Discovering the Real America* that it is when we are talking that we are exchanging ideas with others. That makes us smarter because we grow from learning the problem-identifying and problem-solving skills of others. Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, who was among the founders of the Niagara Movement and the NAACP exactly a century ago this year, also wrote the groundbreaking book, *Souls of Black Folks*. That 1903 book said that black people are vastly more than the stereotypes this country would have people believe. Dr. Du Bois noted that we possess what he called a “double consciousness” in which we see things through the lens of Americans and as Africans in America. That greater depth means we have the potential to be and deliver to this country so much more than what prejudice, bigotry, racism and discrimination keep us from accomplishing. Remove those chains and we all advance. That same double consciousness applies to Native Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, gays, lesbians, people with disabilities and women – just to name a few. But first we have to get past the obstacles preventing us from

discovering this part of the real America. I note in my first book, *A Teacher's Cry*, and in *Discovering the Real America*, that we have to value what matters to others who are different if we are to benefit from what they have to offer. That means getting beyond the tried and true **Golden Rule**, which tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The flaw in that rule, however, is that it assumes that everyone is like us. I have Golden Rule scars from trying to apply it to women when we all know that men and women are very different with different dreams, hopes and expectations. In *A Teacher's Cry* and in *Discovering the Real America*, I note that people instead should use the diversity-approved **Platinum Rule**, which instructs us to do unto others as they would prefer us to do unto them. That means we have to ask questions and get answers to understand where other people are coming from and understand other people's abilities, ideas, problem-identifying skills, problem-solving skills and needs. I note in my books that journalists like me communicate in what I call a **currency of conversations** because a great wealth of information is actually shared when people talk. The value of diversity then emerges from being hidden to get harnessed to rocket us to new, unexplored frontiers. Embracing diversity enables us to discover the real America, which has been buried in us all. But keep this in mind, too. I tell students in colleges this when I get the opportunity to lecture at universities nationwide on diversity: **"You can only be as good in your profession as your depth and breadth of experiences as a human being."** It means you have to enlarge your experiences with others who are different and feel good about coming out of your comfort zone knowing that it will enable you to better communicate and gain from everyone you meet.

But not everyone is on the same page. There is tremendous resistance to diversity because diversity doesn't fit the way things have always been and the ways in which many people have

been taught. In *Discovering the Real America*, I include the song “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” from the 1958 hit play, “South Pacific” by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

*You’ve got to be taught to hate and fear
You’ve got to be taught from year to year
It’s got to be drummed in your dear little ear
You’ve got to be carefully taught.*

*You’ve got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a diff’rent shade
You’ve got to be carefully taught*

*You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You’ve got to be carefully taught!*

Unlike other books on diversity, I include Dr. Peggy McIntosh’s 62 points of white privilege in *Discovering the Real America*. The best privilege of white privilege is sharing the privileges with others. White privilege gets in the way of inclusiveness and welcoming the power and adaptability that diversity offers. What follows are a few examples of white privilege. The first point of white privilege is:

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
4. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race in all classes, in all subjects, at all grade levels.
8. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
10. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
13. I can go home from most meetings of organizations to which I belong feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
15. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the newspaper and see people of my race widely and positively represented.
17. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
21. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

23. If I get angry and ask to speak to the “the person in charge,” I can be fairly sure I will be talking to a person of my race.

25. I can go shopping alone in department stores near my house without being followed or harassed by store detectives on the grounds that I may be shoplifting or soliciting.

27. In my neighborhood, I can be sure that the police will not harass me because of the color of my skin.

30. The word “criminal” in the dominant culture does not conjure up the faces of people whose skin color is like that of my father, mother, brother, sister, husband, nieces, or nephews.

34. Lawbreaking by the U.S. government with regard to treaties with Indian people was not taught to me as a criminal aspect of my racial heritage.

37. The U.S. government has never made it a crime for me to speak my native language or observe the religious ceremonies of my parents and grandparents.

43. Lawyers featured as experts by the media are overwhelmingly people of my race.

52. I can stand behind another person at an ATM machine without being feared as a potential mugger.

53. If I am laughing with my friends on a street at night, it is not assumed that we are in a gang.

59. TV shows and films show people of my color as the main defenders of law and order, cleverest detectives, best lawyers and judges, and wiliest outlaws.

60. Portrayals of white males on TV as criminals and violent individuals do not incriminate me as a Caucasian; these males, even the outlaws, are usually presented as strong men of a quintessentially American type.

61. Illegal acts by the U.S. government, in the present and in the past, around the world, are not attributed by whites to Caucasian immorality and illegality.

62. Bad race relations in the United States are not attributed by whites to criminal behavior, despite a history of race-related breaking of laws by whites over the entire span of Anglo-European life on this continent.

Then there is the other side of white privilege. This is what it looks like for African Americans and other people of color. Someone sent me the following via e-mail. Here is ***“Being Black in Corporate America.”***

1. They take my kindness for weakness.
2. They take my silence for speechlessness.

3. They consider my uniqueness strange.
4. They call my language slang.
5. They see my confidence as conceit.
6. They see my mistakes as defeat.
7. They consider my success accidental.
8. They minimize my intelligence to “potential.”
9. My questions mean I'm unaware.
10. My advancement is somehow unfair.
11. Any praise is preferential treatment.
12. To voice concern is discontentment.
13. If I stand up for myself, I'm too defensive.
14. If I don't trust them, I'm too apprehensive.
15. I'm deviant if I separate myself from the majority.
16. I'm fake if I assimilate.
17. My character is constantly under attack.
18. Pride for my race makes me “too black.”
19. Other than the above, I am treated like everyone else.

Author unknown.

In *Discovering the Real America*, which is about diversity, I also include just a few hundred of the thousands of examples of what conservatives call “diversity of thought.” I have saved in my career as a journalist a lot of this negative feedback in letters, e-mail, voice mail and faxes that I have gotten when I have written on diversity issues. When Dr. King was taking his revolutionary stands,

he got feedback like this. I am sure President-elect Barack Obama has received his share of such public feedback, too. Let me just share just three examples with you:

“I have excellent news, Lewis. I know how you negroes can receive the reparations that you claim you deserve. All you need to do is move back to your filthy motherland. Page a-9 of Tuesday’s *Star* states that the U.S. is giving \$5 billion “assistance” every year to your AIDS-ridden motherland to “extricate Africa out of her long night of misery.” To put that in terms that you people can understand, Lewis, \$5 billion represents 416,666,667 slabs of ribs a year!! Boy, Lewis, after five years, that’s 2,083,333,335 slabs of ribs!! I submit that 2,083,333,335 slabs of ribs would extricate a lot misery out of a lot of negroes.”

Here is another that is very telling:

A very high percentage of black males are a drag on every metro area in America. They don't give a squat about anyone or anything -- especially your laughable ``peace gatherings." Black females are not nearly the drag on society. They simply get so overweight that society eventually needs to take care of them when they have finished being the sole head of over 70 percent of black households.

This third one from *Discovering the Real America* is a dozy:

“When a ‘black’ moves into an area -- here comes his black friends and relatives, and then we whites are frightened from there on. Who commits 90 percent of the crime in Kansas City -- blacks -- and it’s frightening to be around such. I believe in segregation and always have -- you are not in my comfort zone and also you bring drugs, drive-by shootings, rape and killings into the community. Is there any wonder why we do not care for you people!!? True, not all whites are nice people, but I don’t want to be around them either. Yes, I know a few nice, refined blacks, but I’d still rather be around those like me. I’m sick of February being ruined by ‘Black History Month,’ and I detest ‘Martin Luther King’ and the whole month of January being shoved down our throats -- even our presidents never have such coverage on their birthdays. And this business about the ‘Confederate flag’ flying on the state building in the South, if you don’t like it, don’t look at it!! That flag is their heritage and is their right. If you are all so up on African heritage, go there to live -- we’d love to lose all of you -- would mean less crime here! Over there, every 26 seconds, someone is dying of AIDS -- would you want that? Look at the Kansas City school system -- those schools (Southwest High) dropped to low after transporting all the blacks to white schools, instead of going to the schools in their area. This is what ruined the Kansas City schools. I am sorry sir, but this is how I feel, along with many people. Stay out of our areas and our schools, and we’ll leave your kids alone.”

That is the mindset of too many people. But my book, *Discovering the Real America* also strongly urges each of us to be like Dr. King to do the hard work to dismantle the lies, the racism and the stereotypes starting first with ourselves so that we can discover the truth about America,

which has been hidden from us all of these years. And then we must share the truth and the joy of the discovery with others. *Discovering the Real America* offers ways in which that can be done. In *Discovering the Real America*, I quote Dr. Daniel Wildcat, a professor at Haskell Indian Nations University. He said at a diversity conference in downtown Kansas City that “We are still trying to discover the real America,” and I know he is right. I also quote Gary R. Howard’s book, *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*. Howard calls the journey that Dr. Wildcat describes “Our Unfinished Work.” Howard wrote:

There is the old country of oppression and racism from which we are attempting to emigrate, and the new country of hope, transformation, and healing that we are only beginning to explore and inhabit. We have of necessity been border travelers, attempting to map a new route toward positive White identity, while at the same time being inextricably tied to the weight of former images. . . . There is a feeling of adventure and discovery in growing toward a greater awareness. There is a personal renewal and hope to be found in the possibility of change and the opportunity to believe and act in new ways. There is a positive and healing privilege gained through our connection and collaboration with colleagues and students from other racial and cultural groups. And there is a joy in knowing that we have chosen to be in this struggle, that we are part of a movement to dismantle the foundation of our own past and present dominance. (115-116)

Let me close with two poems and then a story. Each describes how we have to work together for change. First is the poem from *Discovering the Real America* – **“Where’s Rosa Parks”**:

Where's Rosa Parks?
Have you seen her lately?
We've got trouble again
On America's bus
The 9-11, Pentagon and World Trade blasts
Blew people of color
Back to the past
To the back of the bus
That America rides
Into the future
Noting no black, Latino, Asian or Native strides
Prejudices and stereotypes dominate
In whites' quiet riot
Fueled by Nixon, Reagan, Bakke, the Bushes and O.J.
Inclusiveness now seems far, far away
Equality weakens; opportunity fades
Get to the back of the bus, nigger!
That's where you'll stay.
Has anybody seen Rosa Parks?

In *Discovering the Real America*, I also write:

To truly end racism, the truth has to be told. Many African Americans today feel “Rosa Parks tired” about race relations. Parks was the black seamstress who on Dec. 1, 1955, decided to break the law of the segregated South and not give up her seat on a public Montgomery, Ala., bus for a white man. Contrary to popular myth, Rosa Parks’ feet weren’t any more tired than normal after work. To quote Parks, “The only tired I was, was tired of giving in.” There comes a point in the history of every oppressed people when one person loudly says no more and others stand behind the courageous act because they are “Rosa Parks tired,” too.

We all have to get Rosa Parks tired and sit down for justice in order for this country to stand up and make good on its ideals to all of its citizens. We need to start doing this on the eve of Barack Obama becoming the 44th president of the United States, which Dr. King would have adored. But Dr. King also would have known that having Obama in the White House is far from being enough. This country still needs civil rights advocates and civil liberties agitators. Politicians will always be politicians. We the people have to push for this country to be better. Dr. King spoke of that role, which African Americans have played throughout the history of this great nation, when he said in December 1964 as he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize:

We feel that we are the conscience of America – we are its troubled souls – we will continue to insist that right be done because both God's will and the heritage of our nation speak through our echoing demands.

Yet I have recently learned from some progressive groups that Obama's election has generated the unintended effect of progressive and liberal advocacy groups having difficulty finding funding to sustain their organizations. Philanthropists and funding officials with foundations and corporations ask why do we need groups such as the ACLU, the NAACP, LaRaza, the Boys and Girls Clubs or the Urban League just to name a few any more now that Obama is president? Racism is dead, isn't it? Discrimination is a thing of the past, right? The oppression of our civil rights and civil liberties is dead, correct? Well, nothing could be further from the truth. We must still work together on this. We must still support the organizations that helped Dr. King because America still isn't all that it can and must be.

Listen closely to this poem by Jay Patrick Hinney, and think of what we collectively must do for our community and for our country. We've used the poem in diversity training sessions at *The Kansas City Star*. It's called **"The Cold Within:"**

Six humans trapped by happenstance
In dark and bitter cold
Each one possessed a stick of wood,
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,
The first woman held hers back
For on the faces around the fire
She noticed one was black

The next man looking cross the way
Saw one not of his church,
And couldn't bring himself to give
The fire his stick of birch

The third one sat in tattered clothes
He gave his coat a hitch,
Why should his log be put to use
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought
Of the wealth he had in store,
And how to keep what he had earned
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge
As the first passed from his sight,
For all he saw in his stick of wood
Was a chance to spite the white.

And the last man of this forlorn group
Did naught except for gain,

Giving only to those who gave
Was how he played the game.

The logs held tight in death's still hands
Was proof of human sin.
They didn't die from the cold without,
They died from the cold within.

The poem instructs us to realize that we all need each other. We must serve as enablers for each others' success, get rid of the racism and get to know and welcome all of the diversity that is the heart, soul and intellectual power behind the Real America.

Now comes the story called "Shape of an Ape" by Richard Stone of Bremerton, Wash. Again, think of what you now must do.

The story goes like this: "Researchers start with a cage containing five apes. In the cage, the scientists hang a banana on a string and put stairs under the banana. Before long, an ape goes to the stairs and starts to climb toward the banana. As soon as he touches the banana, the researchers spray all of the apes with cold water.

After a while, another ape decides to make the same attempt for the banana with the exact same result -- scientists again hose down all of the apes with cold water. Then the researchers turn off the cold water. Another ape later tries to climb the stairs, but to the scientists' amazement, all of his

buddies in the cage try to prevent that one ape from going after the banana even though no water sprays any of the apes.

Next, the scientists remove one ape from the cage and replace it with a new ape. The new ape sees the banana and starts to climb the stairs. To his horror, all of the other apes attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted.

Next the scientists remove another of the original five apes and again replace it with a new ape. The new ape goes to the stairs and is attacked. Researchers watch and note that the previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with great enthusiasm.

Again, scientists remove one of the original five apes and replace it with a new ape. The new ape makes for the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four apes that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs, or why they were participating in the pummeling of the new ape.

After replacing the fourth and fifth original apes all of the apes that had been sprayed with cold water are no longer part of this primate committee. Nevertheless, no ape ever again approaches the stairs. Why not? "Because that's the way it's always been around here." Sound familiar.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's strive to change the way things have always been and insist on making the journey to find and value the diversity in the Real America. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would want that. President Barack Obama would want that. As a nation, we have started this march, but we must continue on the path that Dr. King once trod for our children and our children's children's sake so we can make this world better. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much.[30]