

XTRA MARTIN LUTHER KING REVISITED

I HAVE A NIGHTMARE

A black King did not redeem black Americans; neither will Obama, says this black scholar

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WITH the Democratic Party's black presidential candidate Barack Obama giving Senator Hillary Clinton, who was once the front-runner, a run for her money, some view his remarkable popularity as the realisation of slain black leader Martin Luther King Jr's dream – the final victory of the American civil rights movement.

Others view it – their respect for Mr Obama notwithstanding – as a testament to its remarkable failure.

Both the aims and the character of the civil rights movement were flawed. One aim was clearly desegregation. But the movement should never have been about integration.

It should have been about demanding the respect that is due to free human beings; about ending the physical, spiritual and economic violence that had been perpetrated against African-Americans since the end of the American civil war.

What is the value in begging for the right to spend money in a store owned by a racist who would rather kill you than serve you?

Lest we forget, integration was the death knell for black teachers and principals. Thousands had lost their jobs.

"The movement" had moved us from the back of the bus into the unemployment line.

Almost 40 years after Dr King's death, we still have not reached the promised land. Dr King lamented that, in 1963, only 9 per cent of black students attended integrated schools.

But, to give an example, Atlanta's Grove Park elementary school is now 99.99 per cent black.

Dr King said in *Why We Can't Wait* that "there were two-and-one-half times as many jobless Negroes as whites in 1963 and their median income was half that of the white man".

Black median income in 2003 was 62 per cent that of



whites and the black unemployment rate in 2004 was 10.8 per cent, 2.3 times the white rate. The numbers have barely changed.

Following Mahatma Gandhi, the chief characteristic of the civil rights movement was non-violence. To combat violent racists, Dr King spoke of meeting "physical force with soul force". One wonders how well that would have worked against, say, Hitler's Panzer divisions.

Civil rights marchers had to pledge to "observe with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy", promising to "refrain from the violence of fist, tongue or heart".

Said Dr King: "Remember always that the non-violent movement in Birmingham

seeks justice and reconciliation – not victory." Not victory? Whose side was he on?

The riots that occurred in a hundred cities after Dr King's death were the ultimate testament to his failure.

Black people never believed in non-violence after all. Despite our love affair with Dr King, African-Americans are not a non-violent people.

Black Americans kill 5,000 other black people every year. Instead of urging us to love our enemies, Dr King should have taught us to love ourselves.

And despite our absolute hatred and fear of groups, such as the Black Panther party, because these groups refused to espouse non-violence, we have no problem honouring "heroes" such as

General Colin Powell, who may have killed as many as 100,000 Iraqis during the Gulf war.

Apparently, it is evil to take up arms in defence of black people, as the Panthers did, but perfectly-Christian behaviour to take up arms in defence of the profits of oil companies.

Dr King's many worshippers are fond of Gandhian quotes such as "If blood be shed, let it be our blood" – which is fine if you are merely sacrificing yourself. But Dr King was sending out women, children and old people to be beaten and blown up.

Even at the time, as Dr King notes, there were many who viewed this as monstrous.

When those little girls were murdered in Birmingham, why should black people not have

booted Dr King out and hunted the killers down, like we do today to Al Qaeda?

As Dr King had said: "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it."

Perhaps, Dr King needs a history lesson. He writes in *The Sword That Heals* that "non-violence in the form of boycotts and protests had confounded the British monarchy and laid the basis for freeing the colonies from unjust domination".

Yes, that and colonial minutemen with rifles.

This brings us to Mr Obama, a black candidate who refuses even to say whether he supports reparations for slavery.

One of the worst aspects of the King legacy is that, thanks to him, no African-American today is allowed to bring up racism, even in the most objective fashion, without severe repercussions.

You will be instantly labelled a radical, a Black Panther (a bad thing), or a Mau Mau (a very bad thing) – the name of a vicious street gang in New York in the 1950s – who wants to kill the white man.

Dr King has eliminated the possibility of other black people being able to speak out, people with other philosophies, who may not want to hug racists.

Mr Obama can succeed insofar as he makes it plain that, like the British trade unionist Bill Morris, he is "not the black candidate", that he can be counted on neither to be a champion for, nor to defend the rights of, black people.

Our love for Dr King notwithstanding, if we are honest, we will concede that Dr King built nothing and taught us only how to take a beating.

As Gandhi said: "I have admitted my mistake. I thought our struggle was based on non-violence, whereas in reality, it was no more than passive resistance, which is essentially a weapon of the weak."

It is time we all admitted our mistake. A black King did not redeem us. And neither will a black president. — THE GUARDIAN

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