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Southern Christian Leadership Conference
NATIONAL MAGAZINE

WELCOME TO OUR 59TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

July 20-22 / The Peabody / Memphis, TN

MEMPHIS
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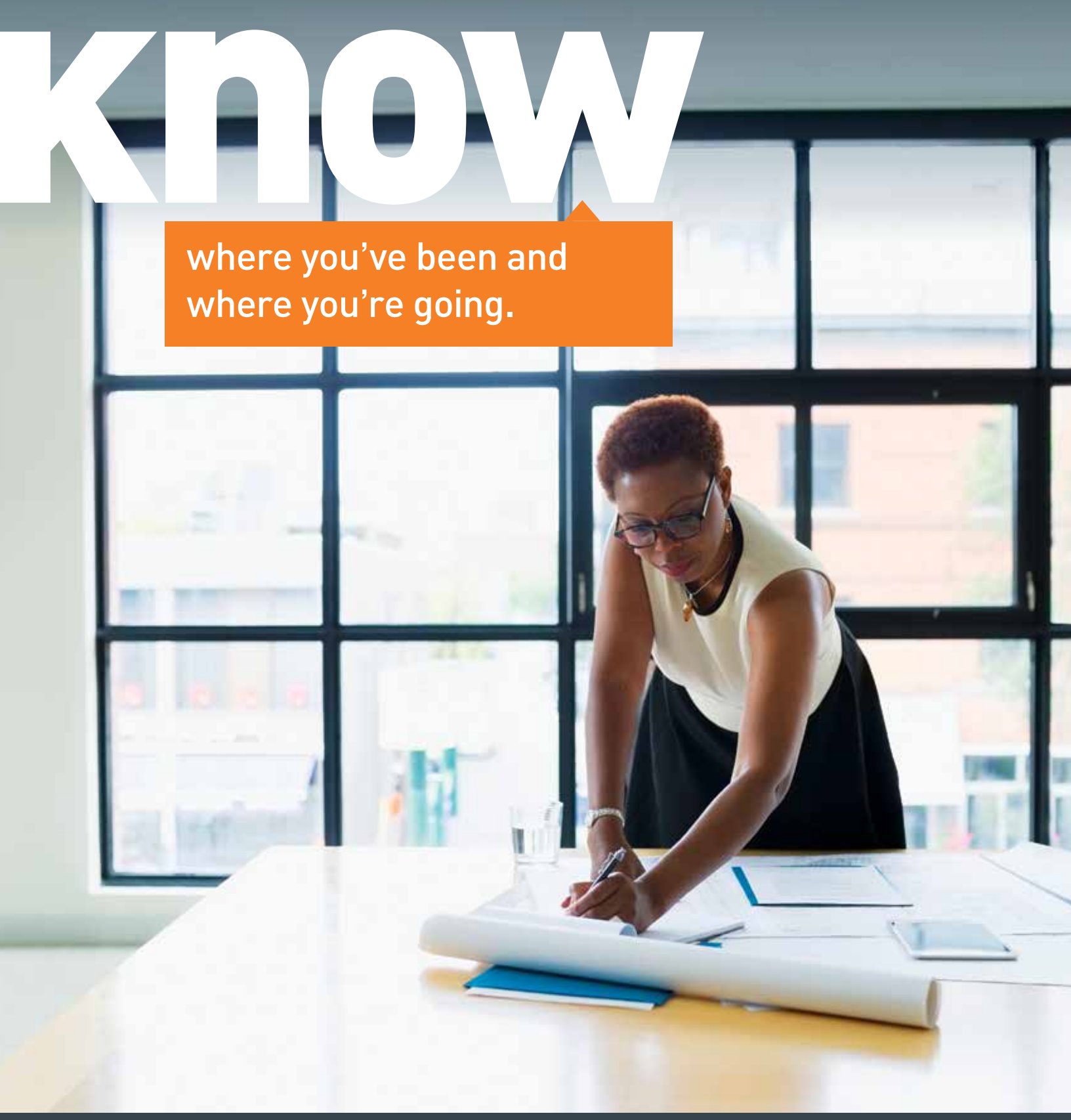

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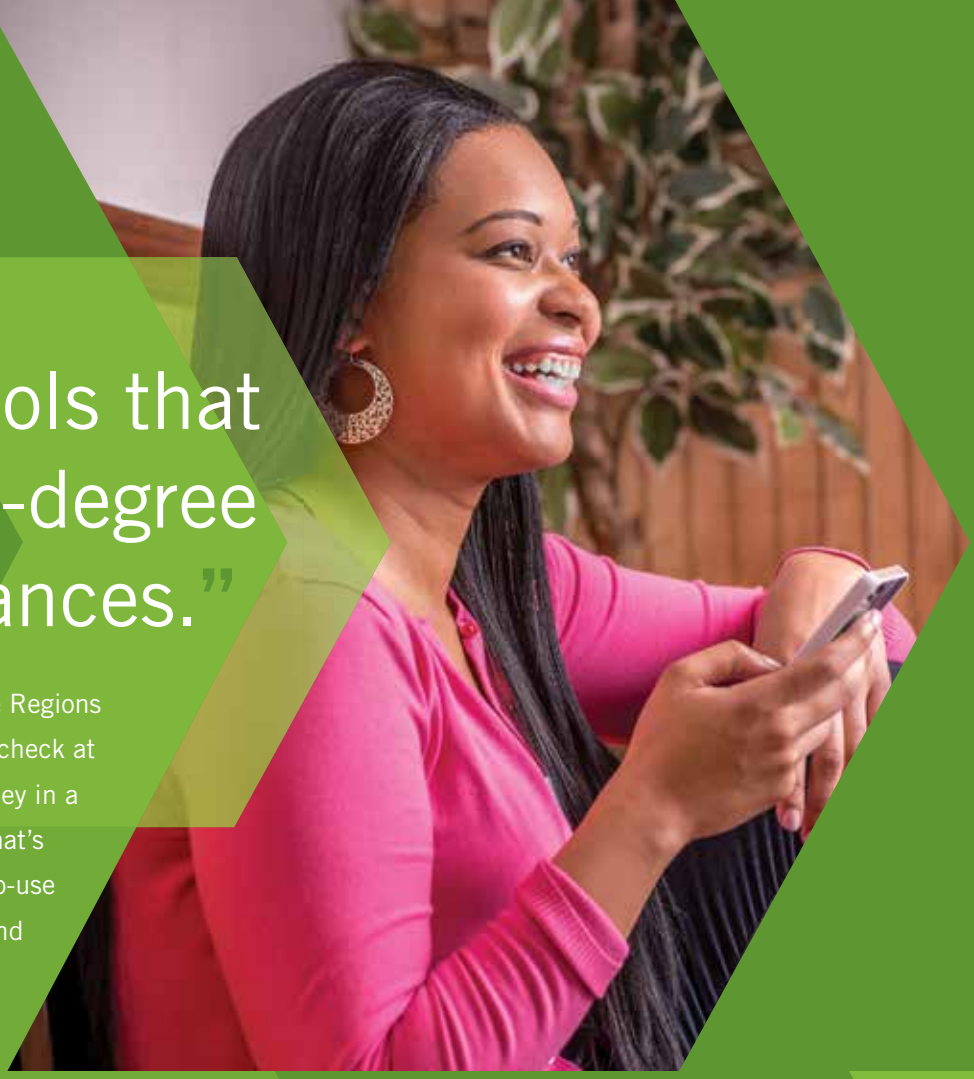

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COVER DESIGN/LAYOUT: Monica Blood

COVER PHOTO: Isaac Singleton, angieandike.com.

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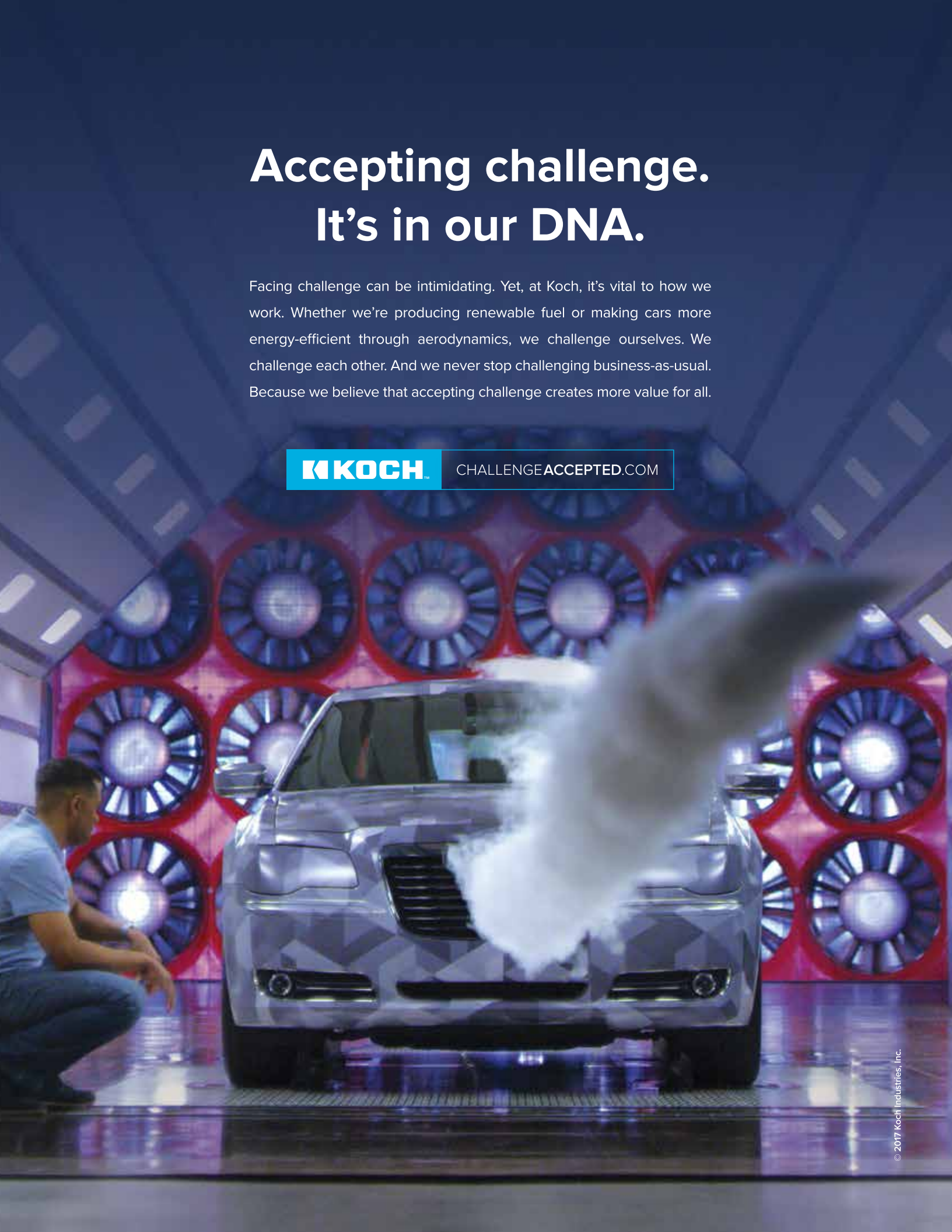

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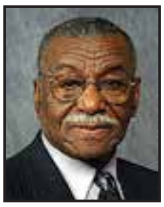

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Continue to stand or continue to fall... We choose to stand.

BY DR. CHARLES STEELE JR.

The fight for a Martin Luther King, Jr. statue at the Georgia state capitol is just as important as any stance we have ever taken. Why? It is simple, for the past 60 years the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) has fought for the freedom of all God's children. Each and every march and rally comes down to demanding that the government treat everyone equally. Martin Luther King, Jr. dedicated his life and at the age of 39, he gave his life fighting for justice. The majority of the freedoms that African-Americans have today is because of Martin Luther King, Jr. and SCLC. MLK and SCLC fought tirelessly each day. Standing up to the government, the Klu Klux Klan and anyone who stood in the way of justice.

Charles Steele at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis. Photo/Isaac Singleton, angieandike.com

This is why every government ruling and decision that is made has the blood sweat and tears of civil rights leaders, freedom fighters, volunteers, marchers and everyday people praying and hoping for a better day, a change….EQUALITY. For this very reason, the MLK statue is a reminder of our struggle, but a call to all political leaders that walk the halls of the Georgia capitol to remember that every vote they make, every issue they stand for will affect ALL citizens of Georgia. These law makers have the ability to move the state forward or backwards. I will even take it a step further and say that I pledge to take this statue to every state all across the country where Dr. King and SCLC's impact and work made a difference. We encourage every law maker to stand on the foundation of MLK and what it represents and not walk by it blindly.

We are reminded of how African-Americans have lost over 50 percent of black wealth (foreclosure of homes). It will take two generations for African-Americans to regain what we have lost in the last years. Another reason why it is important to have the reminisce of Dr. King's statue is to remind us of our gains, the shocking reality of what we have lost and what we will continue to lose if we do not act.

As I write this, I am reminded of the 50th anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Poverty is the worst form of violence". On January 18, 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Lyndon B. Johnson agreed to join forces to launch a "War on Poverty." The Poor People's Campaign was organized in 1968 by Dr. King and the SCLC. This campaign was organized as a civil and human rights agenda to ensure that poor people of all backgrounds would have a right to economic justice. It is time to revitalize a movement.

The year 2018 will mark 50 years, the first time Dr. King ever cried in public. He cried in Marks, Mississippi in the spring of 1968 because of the poverty he saw around him. He likened the poverty to a "Third World" country as he saw the swollen bellies of young children and babies from lack of food and extreme poverty. This campaign is needed all across this planet because there are so many people across the world suffering from poverty. SCLC intends to make sure that all aspects of poverty have a plan of eradication. We can began the process of economic success by the uplifting of all people through education and financial training. We know that education is key to our children's future. Whether it is traditional education, vocational education or non-traditional education and training, education is key. SCLC believes that "education is the new civil rights".

As we prepare for another historical anniversary, we must remember that this is a celebration of accomplishments and not a commemoration, for there is still much more work to be done. SCLC was there in 1957 and SCLC will continue to be there standing strong and fighting for justice. sclc

President Steele visits Memphis ahead of upcoming national convention.

BY LEE ERIC SMITH

"God gave us SCLC as a vehicle to freedom."

—CHARLES STEELE, JR.

Fifty years ago, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, a champion for the poor and disenfranchised—much like its first president, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

But just 15 years ago, SCLC was essentially on life support, struggling to keep the bills paid and the lights on, let alone enact meaningful initiatives.

And now? Well, from July 20-23, a resurgent SCLC will arrive in Memphis for its 59th national convention, hosted by the SCLC Memphis at The Peabody Hotel. The theme: "The Hour Is Now To Believe, Empower, Act." And in his second term as President/CEO, Dr. Charles Steele says the Civil Rights movement has come "full circle"—and that coming to Memphis was a no-brainer.

"Memphis has a special significance right now," Steele said, referring to the upcoming 50th anniversary of King's assassination. "Memphis has a special flavor to it, a lot of good people here. That's why we said that before 2018, we can't go to no other city before we go to Memphis."

SCLC was founded in 1957, with Dr. King serving as its first president until his death in 1968. During the height of the Civil Rights Movement, SCLC was at the heart of the movement, including helping to orchestrate the 1963 March on Washington. Later, the organization's leadership would be a veritable "who's who" of civil rights leaders: Ralph Abernathy, Joseph Lowery and Martin Luther King III.

But once the major battles of the 50s and 60s had been won, SCLC struggled to remain relevant and viable, Steele said.

Charles Steele and Bernal E. Smith II, President/Publisher of Memphis' "The New Tri-State Defender".

"We were so successful and accomplished so much that the vision was not there within the leadership. We didn't know what the next step was to conquer," Steele said in an exclusive interview with The New Tri-State Defender. "Dr. King even reflected that he didn't include economic development in the plan. We were so concerned with integration, we didn't understand the importance of sustaining ourselves economically."

The organization also suffered from complacency in mobilizing and activating young people over the years, Steele said.

"As the person sitting in Dr. King's position (as SCLC president), I take responsibility for that," Steele said. ""We—SCLC and other organizations—we failed, by not doing a greater job of continuously recruiting young people over our 60 years. You can't rest on your laurels and not continue to train and teach success when it comes to the civil rights

community. We didn't do our job like we should have. I could have done better. Others could have done better."

But does that make SCLC obsolete? Steele scoffs at the idea.

"Saying that the need for SCLC is over, we don't need SCLC anymore is like saying that 2,000 years ago, Jesus was here and now we don't need him anymore," Steele said. "Like God gave us Jesus, God gave us SCLC. It's a vehicle to freedom.

"SCLC doesn't belong to any individual. It doesn't belong to Dr. King or to Charles Steele. SCLC is a gift from God."

But as he watches newer organizations and movements blossom, Steele admonishes young activists not to overlook SCLC and what it brings to the table.

"The worst thing that can happen is to reinvent the wheel when the wheel isn't broken," he said. "We have an infrastructure. And the just because we secured some victories back then, but that doesn't mean we secured them eternally."

But different times call for different tactics. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a massive, grassroots community effort coordinated carpools and taxi drivers to make sure boycotters still could get to work and back. Donations flowed in from black churches across the nation to support the boycott. Some people even donated shoes to help replace those worn out by people taking the sidewalk instead of the bus.

A spirit of community and common purpose propelled that movement—a spirit that's given way to meanness and indifference over the years, Steele said.

"Back then, if your Grandma needed some sugar, she could send someone over to the neighbor to get a cup of sugar. And tomorrow, Grandma would do it for someone else. It was a shared responsibility, holistically in the community. And we don't have that anymore.

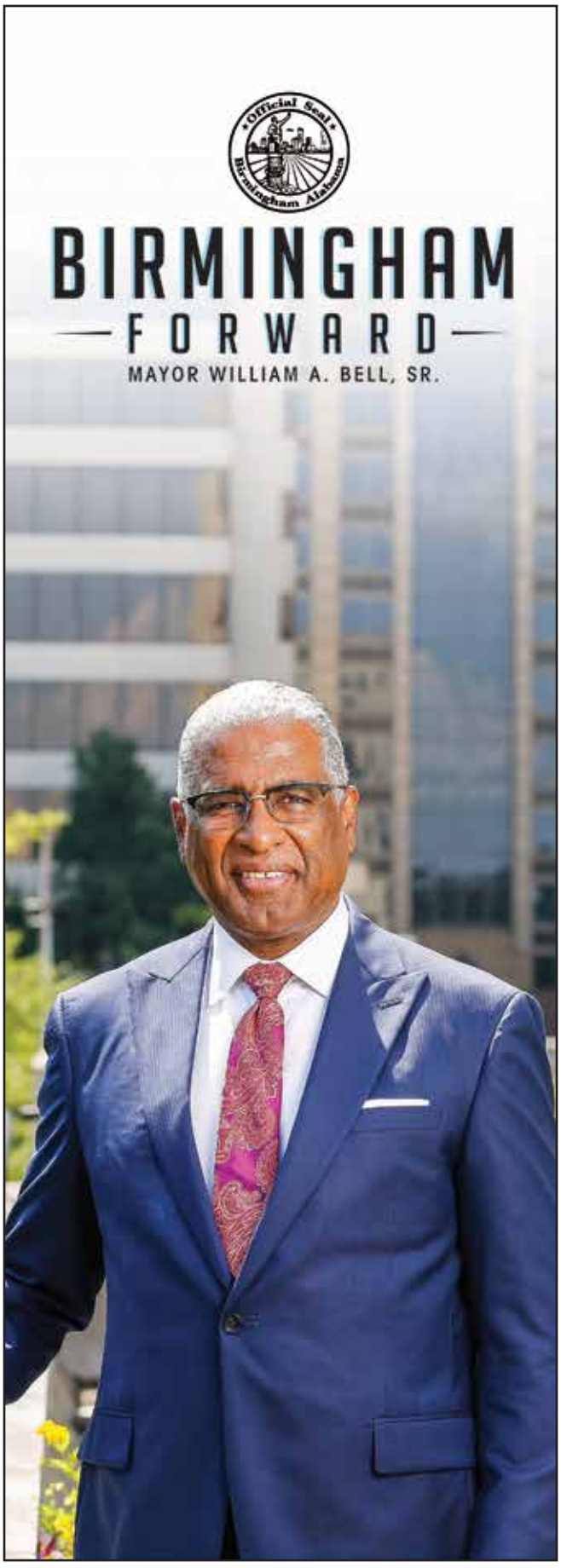
"The devaluation of life in our society on a daily basis has demonized people to the point where they're afraid to stop and help," Steele continued. "We must understand that we shouldn't devalue our lives as black people.

"We should stand together unlike any other race, because of what our ancestors went through in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. We should have a different kind of thinking, a different attitude toward each other. And that is called 'love.'"

Appropriately, Steele continued by quoting Dr. King.

"Dr. King said, 'Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that,'" he added. "Because what love is, is what love does. Let's show each other some love." sclc

LEE ERIC SMITH brought more than 25 years of experience in journalism and communications to the Tri-State Defender. A history maker in his own right, in 1990, Smith became the first African American Editor of The Daily Mississippian, the student run newspaper at The University of Mississippi. He also has worked at the Louisville Courier-Journal, the Jackson Clarion-Ledger, The Miami Herald and the South Florida Sun-Sentinel. In Memphis, he may be best known for his coverage of the Memphis Grizzlies via GritGrindGrizz.com, and as a former co-host of SportsTwist! on local radio.



SCARS and STRIPES

BY DR. BERNARD LAFAYETTE JR.

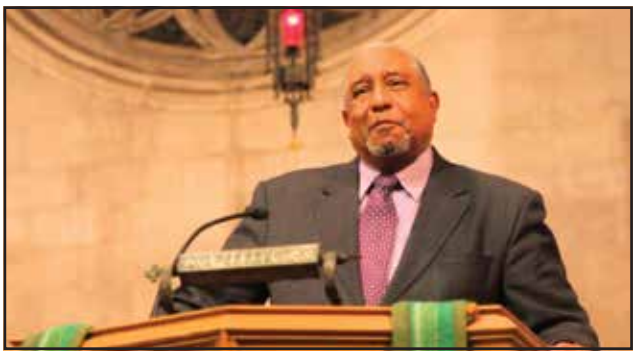
The criminal justice system is designed to prevent individuals from harming themselves and others. The laws that have been established are for the purpose of creating a society where individuals are protected from unjust treatment by fellow citizens and the institution of governance.

The criminal justice laws establish rules and consequences applied when rules are broken. The consequence is an attempt to balance the consequence with the severity of the behavior. The system provides for examination not of the behavior but the intent, the circumstances, as well as provocation.

In the process of mediating the consequences of broken laws the convicts many times experience pain that leave internal scars. The uniforms if striped are visible, but the internal scars are invisible but the internal scars are included.

While the inmates follow a routine schedule and activities but they have individual life experiences. Some have spent years confined although they are innocent. Others have spent years confined; however, they have been in and out of prison a number of years at a time. There are some who feel tortured by the confinement while there others who feel safer on the inside than the outside.

The confinement is characterized as an extreme environment. Extreme environments produce certain behaviors. Examples of extreme environments would be those who reside on the North and South poles, those who live for long periods of time on submarines underwater, those who survive in outer space or on other planets or air traffic controllers or truck drivers on long trips cross country. There is limited space and limited decision making. The average inmate usually makes about six (6) decisions a day while the rest of us on the outside make about twenty-two (22) decisions a day.



Photo/theodysseyonline.com

From the sit-ins in Nashville in 1960 to the Chicago movement in 1966 I have experienced 27 arrests, I thought. I carefully added all my arrest and realized that I was arrested three times while I was already in jail. We had a chance to learn from each other while in jail. Some of my cellmates included Rev. C. T. Vivian, Stokely Carmichael, John Lewis, James Bevel, and James Farmer. We organized our schedules. We had classes and lecturers, sermons, singing and comedy hours. We maintained control of our own schedules when we were in jail.

My first experience returning to jail as a nonviolent trainer was when Ms. Honey Knopp with the Federal Visitors Program. She was a Quaker and I knew her when I worked for the American Friends Service Committee in Chicago with Kale Williams.

There was a riot in a prison in El Reno, Oklahoma where one of the inmates had been killed by a fellow inmate because he did not join in the riots. The inmates who did not participate asked for help. Honey asked me to go to El Reno and conduct a nonviolent training. Later, I was asked to go

to Green Haven Prison in upstate New York to work with Larry Apsey and a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Angel.

It was Green Haven that gave birth to the Alternative to Violence Project as you well know. When we trained the inmates in Green Haven we prepared them to be trainers. The correctional system permitted the inmates from Green Haven to go down state to Goshen Juvenile Facility to train the juvenile inmates. The inmates at Green Haven were considered by the juveniles as the graduates in the criminal justice system. Therefore, they had a lot of respect for them at Green Haven.

There have been a number of opportunities to do nonviolence training in prisons. We were invited to do training in Mexico and Colombia. In Mexico, the Rotary Club members wanted to receive the nonviolence training at the same time. Since we could not have the inmates come on the outside we were able to admit the Rotary Club members to come inside the prison and train with the inmates. There we sat the inmates in broad stripes and the Rotary Club members in pinstripes side by side. These were minimum security inmates. When the maximum security inmates learned that we were training the minimum security inmates, they started a riot demanding that they be trained because they needed the training more than the others. We had approximately 300 inmates and Rotary Club members. We had to make an adjustment, however, nonviolence training is flexible in the presentations and activities yet, they cover the basic content of the training.

Our training in the prisons in Colombia was a powerful experience. When we arrived the report was that it was not uncommon to have six inmates killed in a day. The conflict between the rival groups was enhanced by their possession of lethal weapons such as handguns and hand grenades. There was a structure in the prison where each group or organization in the prison had a representative at what was called the "Talking Table." The leader of the "Talking Table" sent for me and my training staff to do the training in the prison.

The leaders of the group wanted each group to be trained separately. They finally agreed to have the leadership of each group be trained together. The purpose was to illustrate that change can come when the end can be reflected in the means. The goal is for the leaders to show their followers how to handle conflict without violence.

Bella Vista Prison became a nonviolence institution. Many inmates had the opportunity to become nonviolent trainers.

For two years I traveled to Colombia to visit some of the nonviolent sites. One of the sites was a community center where young gang members were being trained in nonviolence by former police officers. These police officers were also former prison inmates. They learned their nonviolence as former inmates in the Colombian prison system.

The killings throughout the prison system were greatly reduced as a result of the training.

Our challenge today is how to institutionalize the nonviolent training in our education system so that our young people will have the skills to manage conflict in all aspects of their lives. We need strong violence prevention programs. If driver's education is important to prevent auto accidents then nonviolence education is important to prevent scars and stripes. sclc

Mostly African-American Inmates Serve Life Sentences in Mississippi

BY ARIELLE DREHER

Image/K. Zeaky III

A new study from the Sentencing Project (sentencingproject.org) found that inmates serving life or virtual life (50-plus years) sentences in the United States are predominantly and disproportionately African Americans. Mississippi's prison system is no exception.

More than 72% of the 2,413 Mississippi inmates serving life sentences are African American, the study shows. Two-thirds of inmates in the custody of the Mississippi Department of Corrections who have been sentenced to life without parole, meaning they will die imprisoned, are African American.

The study looks at the three types of life sentences: life with the option of parole; life without parole; and "virtual life" where a person is sentenced to 50 or more years.

More than 19,000 people were in the Mississippi Department of Corrections' custody by the end of April, inmate counts from MDOC show. Attempts to reform the state's criminal-justice system by implementing only a handful of the Reentry Council's recommendations died when Gov. Phil Bryant vetoed House Bill 1033 despite broad bi-partisan support for the measure. Part of the legislation addressed parole eligibility for Mississippians sentenced under the state's "three strikes"-style law that prevents judges from giving anything but a life sentence.

Ashley Nellis, who worked on the Sentencing Project report, said in a press-conference call that a record high of people are serving life sentences in the U.S.

"The heavy use of life sentences is not confined to a particular region of the country. ... More typically all three forms of life sentences are used in each state and the federal government," Nellis said on the call last week.

The study found that 38% of people serving life or virtual life sentences have been convicted of first-degree murder, and an additional 20.5% of second-degree, third-degree or another type of murder. About one-third of those serving life or virtual life sentences have been convicted of other violent crimes that include rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, or kidnapping. In addition, one in 12, or 17,120 prisoners, who are serving life or virtual life were convicted of a non-violent crime. sclc

ARIELLE DREHER is a news reporter for the Jackson Free Press. She can be reached at arielle@jacksonfreepress.com.

No end to child hunger?

BY CATHELEAN STEELE, Special Programs Director

As a child growing up in America I could not dare to imagine all that I have come to learn about the world as an adult. As young people, we were often delivered the message that "America was the land of opportunity". In that land of opportunity, I surely could not have imagined myself, or any other child for that matter, going a day without a meal. In my family, we were fortunate to eat three meals a day and sometimes four. During those cherished occasions, visiting our grandparents we ate breakfast, lunch, supper and an additional heavy snack before bed.

As a child I was cognizant about social classes; that there were wealthy, middle class and poor people. However what I did not fully understand is that there were children all over this prosperous country suffering from food insecurity.

A few years ago, I had an opportunity to travel to Haiti where I observed the many plights of impoverished people in that island nation. The devastating sight of children with swollen stomachs sent my heart soaring and searching for understanding. When I returned home, my husband and I sent our oldest daughter to Haiti, because we wanted her to gain both sight and empathy for the suffering of children in other parts of the world. Reflecting upon the clarity gained from my trip to Haiti, I realize that I hadn't taken the time to travel within this country to witness the enormous need in our own communities.

"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies…"

—From MLK Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech.

As Americans, we can turn on our televisions at any time and see numerous compassionate organizations raising money to feed starving children in third world countries. Unfortunately, in America, we have come to rely heavily upon our Federal Nutrition Programs and a few charitable assistance programs, many of which are not adequately reaching a significant population of the poor in our own country.

I recently learned that the official poverty rate in America is 13.5 percent, based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2015 estimates, totaling 43.1 million Americans living in poverty. After reading this eye opening report, I wanted to know how many children in America suffered from food insecurity. Research shows that nearly one in six children in America live in households that struggle to put food on the table.

Photo/John Glenn

While researching poverty and food insecurity, I discovered these cogent words written by Drexel University professor Mariana Chilton, PhD, bringing truth to the issue. "You do not solve hunger simply with more food, the only way you're going to end hunger is to address poverty head-on."

In Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech he said, "I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies…" We are still holding on to Dr. King's words. It now seems entirely appropriate to reinvigorate this discussion on the advent of the 50th Anniversary of Dr. King's "Poor People's Campaign" initiative.

The very same issues that Dr. King addressed in the late 1960's are just as relevant today. Poverty and hunger currently affect millions of people in this country, regardless of race, age or working status. His message resonates with as much force as it did half a century ago.

"America is at a crossroads of history, and it is critically important for us as a nation and a society to choose a new path and move upon it with resolution and courage… In this age of technological wizardry and political immorality, the poor are demanding that the basic needs of people be met as the first priority of our domestic program," Dr. King said during the presentation of the "Poor People's Campaign" in the spring of 1968.

Dr. King's legacy of serving the poor in this country still stands. As First Lady of the SCLC, I am making a passionate call to action that we come together to address child food insecurity and forge logical and sustainable solutions to tackle this problem in our local, national and international communities. Together we can help to ensure that our children and communities do not continue to suffer. sclc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Photo/National Civil Rights Museum

Terri Freeman Leads the National Civil Rights Museum

INTERVIEW BY MAYNARD EATON, Managing Editor

This leading lady is a dynamically profound advocate and "steward" of The Movement—then and now. Terri Freeman is not only keeping the historic spirit and substance of the Civil Rights Movement alive in Memphis, but as she adroitly spearheads the National Civil Rights Museum, her challenge is to also make it robust and riveting so it resonates with Centennials, Millennials and Baby Boomers.

That's a tough job, particularly in the city where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated at the infamous Lorraine Hotel in April 1968. He was there to support striking sanitation workers.

Dr. King believed the struggle for garbage collectors in Memphis exposed the need for economic equity and social justice that he wanted his Poor People's Campaign to highlight nationally. That's why Memphis was significant then, and still is now.

In the following interview, I talked with Terri Freeman about the meaning of Memphis and her role as boss of the National Civil Rights Museum.

MAYNARD EATON: After 18 years in Washington DC as president of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, the largest funder of nonprofit organizations in the area, what compelled you to move to Memphis to become President of the National Civil Rights Museum in November 2014.

TERRI FREEMAN: I thought this would be a really interesting way to cap off a career that really had focused on this stuff. So, to be closer to it and yet still have a platform to draw more people to these issues that are so important around social and racial justice. And, to look at it from the historic perspective of what has already been accomplished, but frankly what still needed to be done.

Terri Freeman inside the National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis. Photo/Micki Martin

And, when I began conversations with the search committee, they really focused a lot on relevance—making sure the museum was relevant in the 21st century, having just completed this significant, major renovation of the museum and its exhibits. So, I thought it was an exciting time for the museum and I thought it was probably the best time for me.

ME: How do you view yourself Mrs. Freeman? Are you an activist or more of a museum curator?

TF: Oh boy, that's a hard question. I don't at all see myself as a curator because I don't have that background, which is in communications and over my work career, in community relations and community outreach. I'm fearful of taking the title of activist because I don't think I do the level of work that I see activists really do. I guess I see myself as a steward of this history and of this place, and a facilitator of The Movement as we are moving forward. I have a responsibility to protect the history and make sure that it is reflected appropriately and accurately—but also to facilitate that conversation around the "so what" if you will. [My job] is making sure people understand that this is not just something that happened, but it's happening has such impact on what's happening today.

ME: Does the museum, you think, echo the past and its historical relevance or does it resonate today in a meaningful way?

TF: I would say it is both. It does echo the history. I think everyone who comes through this place learns something that they didn't know. This place helps illuminate the role that any individual can have to promote freedom and justice and equality—and frankly for that matter—equity. The exhibits in the museum really are permanent exhibits that focus on the past, but the public programming that we have tried to put in place really focuses on the present. And, talks about the connection between what happened in the 20th century, and how that has a bearing on what's going on today. While we have lots of people who come into the museum that are age 50 to 75 and have more of a memory of the civil rights era, we have a whole bunch of people under that age who have no concept of what actually happened. So, what we must try to do is draw those people in and help them see themselves in what happened, and in what is happening.

ME: Is it difficult making the museum and its mission relevant to Millennials? We hear about Black Lives Matter, but do these issues you articulate matter to your daughters for example?

TF: I think they do actually. I have three daughters, 27 down to 18. All three of them have been through the museum. All three of them learned things that they didn't know. All three of them felt that it had some relevance to what is going on today. That said, all three of them would really like to see the museum talk about more—in exhibit form—what is still going on today. So, our challenge is to be able to create exhibits that talk about the fact that The Movement really does continue. There continues to be a level of necessity for people to be a part of continuing discussion, and continuing advocacy and continuing organizing around those things that are impactful today. At some point, we are going to want to add some exhibits, but it is also making sure that

Photo/National Civil Rights Museum

there are living, breathing discussions around those things that matter to people.

ME: So, how do you make that happen and come to life in your museum experience?

TF: Let's take this issue of criminal justice. It's so easy to tie what happened in the 50's and 60's and the issues that African Americans have had with law enforcement to today. You can grab people from an earlier era to talk about what they experienced, and then you can grab people from today and talk about what they continue to experience daily unfortunately. The difficulty comes in. when people look backwards it is so easy to romanticize the history—"Yeah, it was difficult, it was struggle, it was sacrifice, but I certainly would have been on the right side of history had I been there". Here we are today going through some of these exact same issues. And, having those discussions today around equity, around economic justice, around law enforcement and its relationship to African Americans, around mass incarceration, around continued terrorism of our communities—that's a whole lot more difficult for people to talk about when they want things to have improved so much.

ME: Many of us thought we'd come that far?

TF: Exactly. And, then we don't want to take responsibility for the fact that we haven't come that far. That's where I think more of the difficulty comes in.

ME: I read that you were quoted as saying that "we've begun to see another Civil Rights Movement." Explain?

TF: If you look at where Dr. King left off on these issues of fair housing and jobs and full employment and education—we've got some serious things we've still got to focus on. What has been born out of the murders of African American men has been a movement that says we care about Black lives. And, I submit that this movement for 'Black Lives' really is a civil rights movement. And, it's not limited to just black lives but to all people that are disenfranchised. As we get closer to the 50th Anniversary and looking at that also being the 50th Anniversary of the launch of the Poor People's Campaign, that this emphasis on the people living in abject poverty in the richest nation in the world just should not exist. And, that was Dr. King's message in '67 and '68. So, we do see an on-the-ground, second wave of the Civil Rights Movement.

ME: What's your thinking of the upcoming 50th Anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign? Is it a signature event that is still alive and meaningful today?

TF: Looking back on it is a little more difficult in that the Poor People's Campaign fizzled a bit after Dr. King's assassination. So, it didn't get a good, solid footing the way it was anticipated too. I can say there is a bigger wealth gap between those that are haves, and those that are have nots, and that doesn't matter really where you are in this country.

Photo/National Civil Rights Museum

The wealth gap is significant. We have an opportunity to draw more attention to where we are in the country today and how we can rectify some of these situations.

ME: Memphis, then and now is the SCLC National Magazine cover photo and theme. What's your opinion about Memphis and what it means to the nation both then and now.

TF: Memphis demonstrates how difficult it can be to correct some of the issues that have been present for decades. At the same time, it illustrates how much hope there is for the future as you do begin to see changes in Memphis. You begin to see a city that has always had racial polarization begin to deal with those issues of race. One of the things that I found about Memphis as someone from the outside is that it is an incredibly prideful city. They want Memphis' authenticity to always be present. It also is a city where you do see The Movement continuing.

ME: There are noteworthy civil rights museums in Atlanta and Washington DC, but what distinguishes your Memphis museum?

TF: First off, we are the National Civil Rights Museum, and we were the first museum that told the story of the civil rights movement from beginning to end. It is a museum that is really dedicated to that time frame. But it is also an historic site. An event occurred here—a very tragic and unfortunate event occurred—so it has a very special place in the civil rights movement. The greatest peacemaker was taken at this site, but that tragedy has lead us to be able to tell a story of triumph. sclc

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

Noted as one of the nation's premier heritage and cultural museums, the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, is steadfast in its mission to share the culture and lessons from the American Civil Rights Movement and explore how this significant era continues to shape equality and freedom globally.

Established in 1991, the National Civil Rights Museum is located at the former Lorraine Motel, where civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. Through interactive exhibits, historic collections, dynamic speakers and special events, the museum offers visitors a chance to walk through history and learn more about a tumultuous and inspiring period of change.

To accommodate public demand for further educational opportunities, the museum underwent a $27.5 million renovation in 2013 and 2014, adding more than 40 new films, oral histories and interactive media to the already robust galleries. The result is a one-of-a-kind experience that has been featured on the History Channel and CNN, in USA Today and as the focus

for the Academy Award-nominated documentary *The Witness: From the Balcony of Room 306.*

Additionally, the museum is among the top 5% of institutions to be accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and is a founding member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which brings together historic sites, museums and memory initiatives from all around the globe that connect past struggles to today's movements for human rights and social justice. sclc

Can Memphis keep MLK's crusade for economic justice alive?

BY WENDI C. THOMAS

Cleo Smith just celebrated his 50th anniversary at work—one heavy with memories. During his first year as a city employee, he and 1,300 other black sanitation workers walked off the job. They wanted fair pay, safe working conditions, and the respect they believed was due grown men.

The strike drew the attention of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Here, Dr. King found a town where most white residents interpreted the absence of roiling protests as proof that no racial tension existed, despite the poverty and persistent discrimination that held black residents on the margins.

King also encountered a segregationist white mayor, Henry Loeb III, who refused to recognize the union or negotiate with its leaders.

"The issue is injustice," intoned King at Mason Temple on April 3, 1968. "The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers."

Mr. Smith was there to hear what would be Dr. King's last speech. The next day, the civil rights leader was gunned down on the Lorraine Motel balcony.

"Memphis became pitch black. I never will forget that," Smith remembers. "The lights were on, the streetlights were on, but there was a darkness that came over Memphis."

Twelve days later, public pressure forced Mr. Loeb to surrender. The workers would get small raises and union recognition. But in the decades that followed, some feel that what King called the "fierce urgency of now," which gripped much of the black community, faded.

Smith sees it in the shrinking crowds that show up for the union's annual parade on the anniversary of King's assassination. Some years would draw 500 or 600 marchers, but this year's parade had fewer than 150.

Too many of the younger workers "don't have any interest in what Dr. King stood for," Smith, 75, says. "If they had any interest, they would have kept the dream alive."

Resurrecting that fervor is part of what keeps Smith, now a sanitation crew chief, on the job. Plus, the city never gave sanitation workers a pension, he says, so he can't afford to retire.

A 'fierce' urgency, faded

In a noisy locker room in a squat city building, before roll call sends sanitation crews into the streets, Smith waves a few co-workers to his side and pulls out a flyer for an upcoming union election. ASFCME Local 1733, he says, will fight to get them better retirement benefits and protection from hazardous waste.

Cleo Smith works his route as a sanitation worker through South Memphis. Mr. Smith has been with the Memphis city sanitation department since 1968. He participated in the landmark strike that brought MLK Jr. to the city. Photo/Andrea Morales

The men, young enough to be Smith's sons or grandsons, look at the paper long enough to be polite. "I'm here because I'm in a fight for the younger people," he says. "I want them to enjoy the benefits we fought for."

Smith, 75, is one of a small fraternity of strikers who still work for the public works department. In 1968, white men occupied the department's top jobs. Today, almost all of the sanitation workers are black.

As the 50th anniversary of King's assassination approaches, Memphis, whose name means "place of good abode," and whose population is more than two-thirds black, has turned introspective. Laboring under the stain of King's assassination and poverty rates that are among the nation's highest, civic leaders are eager to put a positive spin on the city's progress.

Recently, a handful of new nonprofit poverty-fighting efforts have surfaced aiming to help low-income residents achieve a better future. Still, the question remains for Smith and other residents: Since King came in pursuit of economic justice—what has Memphis done with his sacrifice?

When King was killed, the poverty rate for black Memphians was 60%. Echoing nationwide trends, poverty rates for blacks are falling. But still, 30% of the city's black residents and 47% of black children live below the poverty line.

Smith, who quit school in the third grade to sharecrop on an Arkansas farm, has secured a fairly stable life for his family. He makes a nickel more than the $16.65 starting hourly wage for crew chiefs. With overtime, he makes a little more than the city's median income of $36,455.

"If Dr. King came to Memphis today, he would do like Jesus did when he went into the temple," he says as he steers a garbage truck down South Memphis streets. "He overthrew the money tables… and drove them out."

"The thing that would make him angry is the way that they've taken the things that he fought for, instead of making it for the better, they made it worse," Smith says.

Here, he indulges in a bit of hyperbole. By any measure, working conditions are far better and safer now.

In 1968, sanitation workers carried metal tubs, often with holes in the bottom, to collect garbage. The liquid refuse would run down their shoulders and soak their clothes. Once, a bus driver refused to let Smith on because he was so dirty. For their trouble, the workers were paid so little they qualified for food stamps.

Today, hydraulic arms share the hard work, gripping plastic rolling trash bins and dumping the contents into the truck. The city provides workers with protective equipment. Still, Smith says, they come across bio-hazardous material, including improperly disposed needles and old toilets.

Black sanitation workers had already planned to strike before King came to Memphis, but they'd intended to walk off during the summer when piles of trash sitting in the heat might motivate the city to negotiate.

But on Feb. 1, 1968, Echol Cole and Robert Walker were crushed in a malfunctioning truck. Within days, Smith and 1,300 coworkers walked off their jobs.

Do city efforts go far enough?

Today, the city says it pays all adult employees at least $12 an hour, above living wage for a single adult. But attempts at further systemic change in Memphis, a largely liberal city in a conservative state, have been stymied by a Republican-controlled state legislature and Republican governor.

In 2013, the Tennessee state legislature overruled a Memphis living wage ordinance. Tennessee is one of five states who never established a minimum wage, so the federal rate prevails. A 2016 bill that would have raised the state's $7.25 minimum wage to $15 an hour by 2018 didn't make it out of committee.

At the local level, the city of Memphis has focused on reducing violent crime and adding amenities like bike lanes to attract professionals to a city where population growth is flat. But this approach, some civil rights activists complain, ignores yawning wealth disparities.

For every dollar in wealth the average white family in the United States has, a black family has just five cents. Research shows black families are far less likely to own a business that white families, and what black-owned businesses there are have struggled in both the public and private sector. Between 2010-2014, black-owned businesses in Memphis received just 3% of city prime contracts, according to a 2016 disparity study. The private sector is worse: In 2012, the most recent year for which federal data is available, 0.83% of business receipts citywide went to black businesses, a 23% decrease from 2007.

Since being elected in 2016, Mayor Jim Strickland has worked diligently to increase spending with black-owned businesses, but the city's goals are broad, also covering businesses owned by all minorities and white women.

Tennessee National Guard troopers in jeeps and trucks escort a protest march by striking sanitation workers through downtown Memphis, March 30, 1968. Photo/AP

Equality demands intentionality, and intentionality requires race-specific goals, argues Julie Nelson, director for the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, which works with municipal governments and agencies to craft such policies.

"Racial inequalities are not random," Ms. Nelson says, but were "created over the vast majority of our country's history—everything from who's a citizen, who can vote historically, who can own property, who was property."

One example: All five of the states that don't have a minimum wage were once slave-holding states.

That past shows up in the present everywhere, she says. Employment is a good example. "You've got people of color clustered in low-paying jobs.… The jobs where the white people are clustered tend to be the higher paying jobs."

What's being done

Across the city, veteran black-led groups such as the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center and the reproductive justice organization Sister Reach—plus newer organizations such as the Coalition for Concerned Citizens and the Official Black Lives Matter chapter—tackle economic justice at a grassroots level.

At the same time, others, with the benefit of deeper pockets and stronger connections to traditional philanthropy, have started their own poverty-fighting initiatives. One is Slingshot Memphis, which aims to disrupt poverty by applying investment principles to social problems. Modeled after New York's Robin Hood Foundation, Slingshot will measure how effective local nonprofits are.

For example, Slingshot might ask, Is the return on investment in job training for adults greater than an investment in early childhood education? "We're putting a dollar value on interventions," says Justin Miller, CEO and founder.

In February, low-income neighborhoods in North Memphis were among six sites chosen nationwide to receive $1 million planning grants through the Strong, Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC). The first-time grant is funded by the Ford, Kresge, and Robert Wood Johnson foundations, among others. The three-year grant will pay staff as they convene a "collaborative table" of residents equipped to lobby for equitable development.

LITE Memphis, a four-year-old program housed at the University of Memphis, wants to turn black and Hispanic high school students into entrepreneurs. They coach teens to develop a business idea, help them find paid internships, follow them through college and then help them find capital to start their business. The program is only four years old, so they don't have graduates yet, but executive director Hardy Farrow knows how he'll measure success.

"By the time they're 25 and they launch a business, I want them to be just as profitable and have just as many employees as a similar white-owned business with a same timeline of existence in the same industry," Mr. Farrow says.

But two larger-scale efforts may come closest to King's vision of economic justice: the Fight for $15 movement and

MICAH, a multiracial convening of congregations named after an Old Testament prophet.

Although the black church played a critical role in the 1968 strike—raising money for and distributing food to striking sanitation workers, trying to negotiate with the mayor and serving as home base for protesters and organizations—in recent years, its voice has been muted.

Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope, or MICAH for short, wants to change that, by organizing faith communities to remake public policy, not people. MICAH, which will focus on education, criminal justice reform and poverty, will follow the Gamaliel community organizing model, which fosters political action among local community and faith leaders. Gamaliel's first executive director, Greg Galluzzo, counts as his best-known mentee former President Barack Obama, then an organizer in Chicago.

With demands for an hourly wage more than twice the federal standard and a union, Fight for $15 organizers joined with the Movement for Black Lives in April, on the 49th anniversary of King's death.

With the Talladega College marching band keeping time, workers from across the region marched from City Hall to the National Civil Rights Museum, which sits on the grounds of the Lorraine Motel.

"The only reason you come to the place where the martyr's blood was shed is to hear the blood speak and to recommit and re-consecrate ourselves to the unfinished business of the martyr," said Rev. William Barber, a leader of the Moral Revival movement.

During his life, King insisted on solutions that required a commitment from the government, just as he did when planning the Poor People's Campaign. His assassination almost derailed the campaign's momentum, but activists' efforts in the following months, including thousands who marched on Washington shortly after King's death resulted in the expansion of free food distribution programs in 200 counties.

Still, at 13.5%, the national poverty rate is higher now than in 1968, when it was just under 13%. Last year, Memphis relinquished its spot as the poorest large metropolitan area in the nation. It's now second.

An uncertain legacy

On the night before his assassination, Dr. King asked the crowd gathered at Mason Temple for what would be his final speech to persevere. "We've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end," he said. "Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through."

But at this point, the sanitation worker Smith, who is also a Baptist preacher like Dr. King, isn't optimistic about the future of low-wage workers in Memphis. His hope is in a higher power.

WENDI C. THOMAS is an award-winning journalist and founder of the race relations initiative Common Ground Memphis (commongroundmemphis.org). She's spent more than two decades working at the daily papers in Indianapolis, Nashville, Charlotte and Memphis.

Civil Rights Under Siege

BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX

When he was running for President, 45 asked African Americans what we had to lose by electing him. Embracing the most dystopian view of the African American community, he attacked our schools, our streets, crime rates, and unemployment and suggested that we were so far down that electing him could only improve things. Curiously, he never talked about racism when he talked about the status of African Americans. He never spoke of hate crimes, police killings, or racist symbols like Confederate flags and Confederate statues. He never denounced some of his most racist supporters, including Klucker David Duke and alt-right leader Richard Spencer. He just asked what Black folks had to lose by electing him!

We've been learning what we have to lose in these nearly five months of 45's "leadership". He cynically used HBCU Presidents in a photo op, while cutting education funds that help HBCUs. He has been silent or slow in denouncing racist incidents that have occurred on his watch, including the lynching of Second Lt. Richard Collins III, and the murder of heroes Ricky John Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, who stood up to the rabid racist Jeremy Joseph Christian, who was harassing two young women on a train in Portland (it took him three days to respond tepidly to that incident). As of this writing, two days after a noose was hung in the Smithsonian Museum for African American History and Culture, he has not uttered a syllable of condemnation. These issues don't appear to be important to him.

Are we surprised, then, that the budget he has submitted to Congress, would eviscerate civil rights protections in literally every area of our lives. Already, Attorney General Jeff Sessions has moved back toward draconian jail sentences for minor crimes, reviewed consent decrees with police departments, looking to loosen them, and suggested that the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department can be smaller. The budget reflects that so clearly that Venita Gupta, who led the Civil Rights Division under President Obama and now leads the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, says she sees this budget as a "setback" for civil rights.

The new budget calls for folding the Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCCP) with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, although the two agencies do distinctly different work. EEOC investigates civil rights complaints, while OFCCP audits contracts to ensure that employees have equal opportunity in terms of both promotions and pay. The proposed budget cuts OFCCP by 16 percent and eliminates 130 full time employees. When the other 470 employees are absorbed into the EEOC, that agency will not get an increased budget despite its expanded mission.

Both agencies have been important in ensuring that civil rights violations are rectified. In 2010, EEOC had more than 20 active cases that involved nooses. Even as nooses continue to be hung as symbols of intimidation and hate, such as the noose hung at the African American Museum (the second hung at a Smithsonian museum in a week), the agency charged with investigating these complaints would have fewer resources to do so.

Similarly OFCCP has won money settlements for thousands of employees, and changed employment requirements when those requirements have a discriminatory impact. Women employees at Home Depot were among those receiving monetary settlements because of OFCCP investigations.

At the Department of Education (surprise, surprise), a woman who opposes affirmative action leads the Office of Civil Rights. That office will be cut significantly, limiting its ability to investigate discrimination complaints in school systems. At the Environmental Protection Agency, efforts to look at environmental justice have been eliminated.

From the noose hung at the African American Museum to the defacing of LeBron James' home with a racial slur, there is continuing evidence of the persistence of racism in our nation. This racism is emboldened by a national leadership that is silent despite its manifestations. We cannot be surprised. Our 45th President, after all, once said he did not trust African Americans to work on his accounting. He probably would have failed any OFCCP audit, and certainly attracted several housing discrimination lawsuits decades ago.

The President who has been accused of discrimination has the power to ensure that his capitalist cronies face fewer accusations by weakening civil rights enforcement. What did African Americans lose when 45 was elected? Among other things, we (and others) lost civil rights protections! sclc

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New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu

Of Confederate monuments, NOLA's mayor asks, "Is this really our story?"

BY DEIDRE FULTON

Recently, as New Orleans completed the controversial and long-awaited task of taking down Confederate monuments from its public spaces, Mayor Mitch Landrieu marked the occasion by delivering a speech that has since been lauded as "stunning," "incredible," "powerful," and "a clear-eyed view of our past as well as our present."

Many said the speech would go down in history.

On Friday, May 19, 2017, Mayor Mitch Landrieu delivered an address about the City of New Orleans' efforts to remove monuments that prominently celebrate the "Lost Cause of the Confederacy." The statues were erected decades after the Civil War to celebrate the "Cult of the Lost Cause," a movement recognized across the South as celebrating and promoting white supremacy.

There are four prominent monuments in question. The Battle of Liberty Place monument was erected by the Crescent City White League to remember the deadly insurrection led by white supremacists against the City's racially integrated police department and government. The Jefferson Davis statue on Jefferson Davis Parkway, the P.G.T. Beauregard equestrian statue on Esplanade Avenue at the entrance to City Park, and the Robert E. Lee statue at Lee Circle.

THE FULL SPEECH:

The soul of our beloved City is deeply rooted in a history that has evolved over thousands of years; rooted in a diverse people who have been here together every step of the way—for both good and for ill.

It is a history that holds in its heart the stories of Native Americans: the Choctaw, Houma Nation, the Chitimacha. Of Hernando de Soto, Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, the Acadians, the Islenos, the enslaved people from Senegambia, Free People of Color, the Haitians, the Germans, both the empires of Francexii and Spain. The Italians, the Irish, the Cubans, the south and central Americans, the Vietnamese and so many more.

You see: New Orleans is truly a city of many nations, a melting pot, a bubbling cauldron of many cultures.

There is no other place quite like it in the world that so eloquently exemplifies the uniquely American motto: e pluribus unum—out of many we are one.

But there are also other truths about our city that we must confront. New Orleans was America's largest slave market: a port where hundreds of thousands of souls were brought, sold and shipped up the Mississippi River to lives of forced labor of misery of rape, of torture.

America was the place where nearly 4,000 of our fellow citizens were lynched, 540 alone in Louisiana; where the courts enshrined 'separate but equal'; where Freedom riders coming to New Orleans were beaten to a bloody pulp.

So when people say to me that the monuments in question are history, well what I just described is real history as well, and it is the searing truth.

And it immediately begs the questions: why there are no slave ship monuments, no prominent markers on public land to remember the lynchings or the slave blocks; nothing to remember this long chapter of our lives; the pain, the sacrifice, the shame ... all of it happening on the soil of New Orleans.

So for those self-appointed defenders of history and the monuments, they are eerily silent on what amounts to this historical malfeasance, a lie by omission.

There is a difference between remembrance of history and reverence of it. For America and New Orleans, it has been a long, winding road, marked by great tragedy and great triumph. But we cannot be afraid of our truth.

As President George W. Bush said at the dedication ceremony for the National Museum of African American History & Culture, "A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them."

So today I want to speak about why we chose to remove these four monuments to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, but also how and why this process can move us towards healing and understanding of each other.

So, let's start with the facts.

The historic record is clear: the Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and P.G.T. Beauregard statues were not erected just to honor these men, but as part of the movement which became known as The Cult of the Lost Cause. This 'cult' had one goal—through monuments and through other means - to rewrite history to hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of humanity.

First erected over 166 years after the founding of our city and 19 years after the end of the Civil War, the monuments that we took down were meant to rebrand the history of our city and the ideals of a defeated Confederacy.

It is self-evident that these men did not fight for the United States of America, They fought against it. They may have been warriors, but in this cause they were not patriots.

These statues are not just stone and metal. They are not just innocent remembrances of a benign history. These monuments purposefully celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, and the terror that it actually stood for.

After the Civil War, these statues were a part of that terrorism as much as a burning cross on someone's lawn; they were erected purposefully to send a strong message to all who walked in their shadows about who was still in charge in this city.

Should you have further doubt about the true goals of the Confederacy, in the very weeks before the war broke out, the Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, made it clear that the Confederate cause was about maintaining slavery and white supremacy.

He said in his now famous 'Cornerstone speech' that the Confederacy's "cornerstone rests upon the great truth, that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth."

"The monuments that we took down were meant to re-brand the history of our city and the ideals of a defeated Confederacy."

Now, with these shocking words still ringing in your ears, I want to try to gently peel from your hands the grip on a false narrative of our history that I think weakens us and make straight a wrong turn we made many years ago so we can more closely connect with integrity to the founding principles of our nation and forge a clearer and straighter path toward a better city and more perfect union.

Last year, President Barack Obama echoed these sentiments about the need to contextualize and remember all of our history. He recalled a piece of stone, a slave auction block engraved with a marker commemorating a single moment in 1830 when Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay stood and spoke from it.

President Obama said, "Consider what this artifact tells us about history…on a stone where day after day for years, men and women…bound and bought and sold and bid like cattle on a stone worn down by the tragedy of over a thousand bare feet. For a long time the only thing we considered important, the singular thing we once chose to commemorate as history with a plaque were the unmemorable speeches of two powerful men."

A piece of stone—one stone. Both stories were history. One story told. One story forgotten or maybe even purposefully ignored.

As clear as it is for me toda…for a long time, even though I grew up in one of New Orleans' most diverse neighborhoods, even with my family's long proud history of fighting for civil rights…I must have passed by those monuments a million times without giving them a second thought.

So I am not judging anybody, I am not judging people. We all take our own journey on race. I just hope people listen like I did when my dear friend Wynton Marsalis helped me

see the truth. He asked me to think about all the people who have left New Orleans because of our exclusionary attitudes.

Another friend asked me to consider these four monuments from the perspective of an African American mother or father trying to explain to their fifth grade daughter who Robert E. Lee is and why he stands atop of our beautiful city. Can you do it?

Can you look into that young girl's eyes and convince her that Robert E. Lee is there to encourage her? Do you think she will feel inspired and hopeful by that story? Do these monuments help her see a future with limitless potential? Have you ever thought that if her potential is limited, yours and mine are too?

We all know the answer to these very simple questions.

When you look into this child's eyes is the moment when the searing truth comes into focus for us. This is the moment when we know what is right and what we must do. We can't walk away from this truth.

And I knew that taking down the monuments was going to be tough, but you elected me to do the right thing, not the easy thing and this is what that looks like. So relocating these Confederate monuments is not about taking something away from someone else. This is not about politics, this is not about blame or retaliation. This is not a naïve quest to solve all our problems at once.

This is, however, about showing the whole world that we as a city and as a people are able to acknowledge, understand, reconcile and, most importantly, choose a better future for ourselves, making straight what has been crooked and making right what was wrong.

Otherwise, we will continue to pay a price with discord, with division, and yes, with violence.

To literally put the confederacy on a pedestal in our most prominent places of honor is an inaccurate recitation of our full past, it is an affront to our present, and it is a bad prescription for our future.

History cannot be changed. It cannot be moved like a statue. What is done is done. The Civil War is over, and the Confederacy lost and we are better for it. Surely we are far enough removed from this dark time to acknowledge that the cause of the Confederacy was wrong.

And in the second decade of the 21st century, asking African Americans—or anyone else—to drive by property that they own; occupied by reverential statues of men who fought to destroy the country and deny that person's humanity seems perverse and absurd.

Centuries-old wounds are still raw because they never healed right in the first place.

Here is the essential truth: we are better together than we are apart. Indivisibility is our essence. Isn't this the gift that the people of New Orleans have given to the world?

We radiate beauty and grace in our food, in our music, in our architecture, in our joy of life, in our celebration of death; in everything that we do. We gave the world this funky thing called jazz; the most uniquely American art form that is developed across the ages from different cultures.

Think about second lines, think about Mardi Gras, think about muffaletta, think about the Saints, gumbo, red beans and rice. By God, just think. All we hold dear is created by throwing everything in the pot; creating, producing something better; everything a product of our historic diversity.

We are proof that out of many we are one—and better for it! Out of many we are one—and we really do love it!

And yet, we still seem to find so many excuses for not doing the right thing. Again, remember President Bush's words, "A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them."

We forget, we deny how much we really depend on each other, how much we need each other. We justify our silence and inaction by manufacturing noble causes that marinate in historical denial. We still find a way to say "wait, not so fast."

"History cannot be changed. It cannot be moved like a statue. What is done is done. The Civil War is over, and the Confederacy lost and we are better for it."

But like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "wait has almost always meant never."

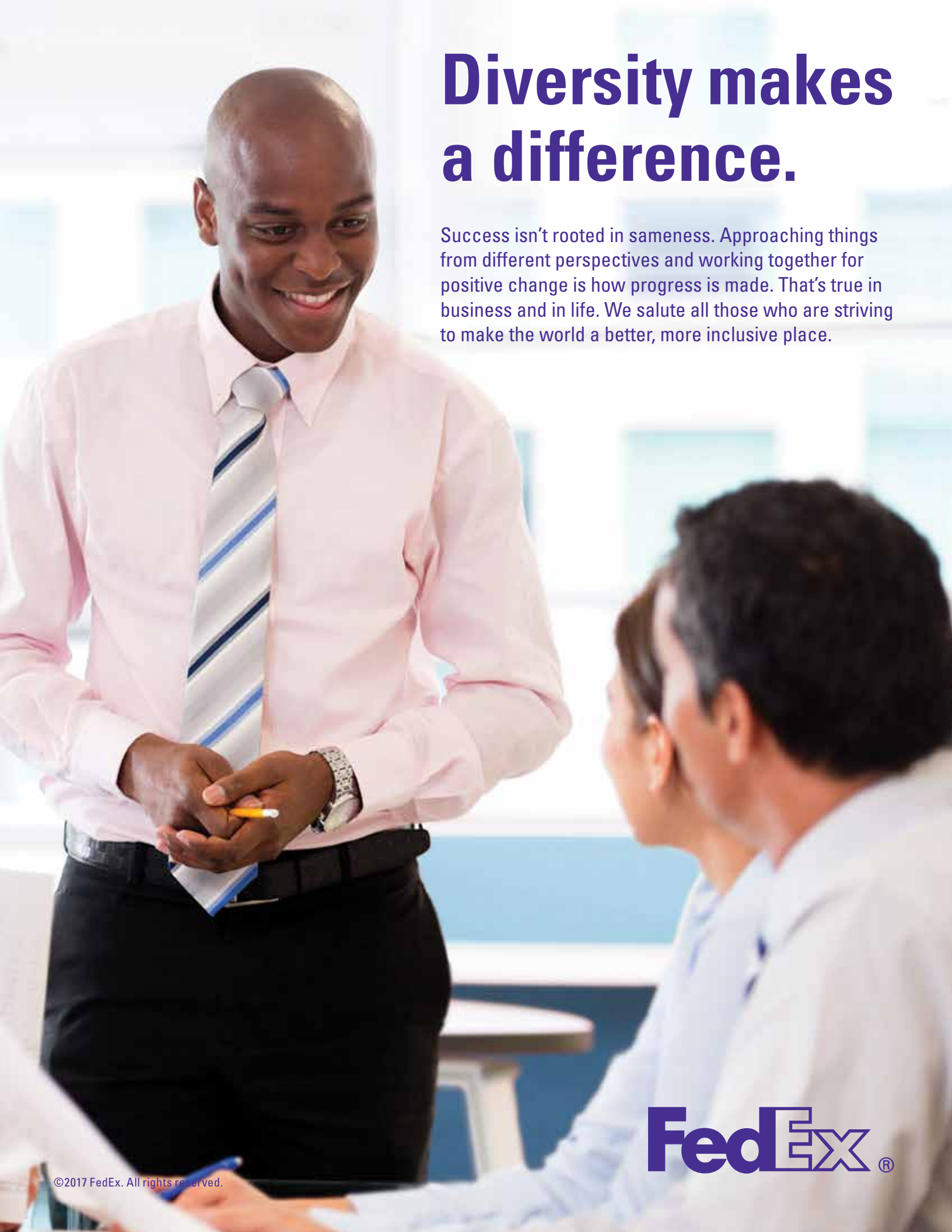
We can't wait any longer. We need to change. And we need to change now. No more waiting. This is not just about statues, this is about our attitudes and behavior as well. If we take these statues down and don't change to become a more open and inclusive society this would have all been in vain.

While some have driven by these monuments every day and either revered their beauty or failed to see them at all, many of our neighbors and fellow Americans see them very clearly. Many are painfully aware of the long shadows their presence casts, not only literally but figuratively. And they clearly receive the message that the Confederacy and the cult of the lost cause intended to deliver.

Earlier this week, as the cult of the lost cause statue of P.G.T Beauregard came down, world renowned musician Terence Blanchard stood watch, his wife Robin and their two beautiful daughters at their side.

Terence went to a high school on the edge of City Park named after one of America's greatest heroes and patriots, John F. Kennedy. But to get there he had to pass by this monument to a man who fought to deny him his humanity.

He said, "I've never looked at them as a source of pride … it's always made me feel as if they were put there by people who don't respect us. This is something I never thought I'd see in my lifetime. It's a sign that the world is changing."



Diversity makes a difference.

Success isn't rooted in sameness. Approaching things from different perspectives and working together for positive change is how progress is made. That's true in business and in life. We salute all those who are striving to make the world a better, more inclusive place.

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Yes, Terence, it is, and it is long overdue.

Now is the time to send a new message to the next generation of New Orleanians who can follow in Terence and Robin's remarkable footsteps.

A message about the future, about the next 300 years and beyond; let us not miss this opportunity New Orleans and let us help the rest of the country do the same. Because now is the time for choosing. Now is the time to actually make this the City we always should have been, had we gotten it right in the first place.

We should stop for a moment and ask ourselves—at this point in our history, after Katrina, after Rita, after Ike, after Gustav, after the national recession, after the BP oil catastrophe and after the tornado—if presented with the opportunity to build monuments that told our story or to curate these particular spaces ... would these monuments be what we want the world to see? Is this really our story?

We have not erased history; we are becoming part of the city's history by righting the wrong image these monuments represent and crafting a better, more complete future for all our children and for future generations.

And unlike when these Confederate monuments were first erected as symbols of white supremacy, we now have a chance to create not only new symbols, but to do it together, as one people.

In our blessed land we all come to the table of democracy as equals.

We have to reaffirm our commitment to a future where each citizen is guaranteed the uniquely American gifts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

That is what really makes America great and today it is more important than ever to hold fast to these values and together say a self-evident truth that out of many we are one. That is why today we reclaim these spaces for the United States of America.

Because we are one nation, not two; indivisible with liberty and justice for all, not some. We all are part of one nation, all pledging allegiance to one flag, the flag of the United States of America. And New Orleanians are in, all of the way.

It is in this union and in this truth that real patriotism is rooted and flourishes.

Instead of revering a 4-year brief historical aberration that was called the Confederacy we can celebrate all 300 years of our rich, diverse history as a place named New Orleans and set the tone for the next 300 years.

After decades of public debate, of anger, of anxiety, of anticipation, of humiliation and of frustration. After public hearings and approvals from three separate community led commissions. After two robust public hearings and a 6-1 vote by the duly elected New Orleans City Council. After review by 13 different federal and state judges. The full weight of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government has been brought to bear and the monuments in accordance with the law have been removed.

So now is the time to come together and heal and focus on our larger task. Not only building new symbols, but making this city a beautiful manifestation of what is possible and what we as a people can become.

Let us remember what the once exiled, imprisoned and now universally loved Nelson Mandela and what he said after the fall of apartheid. "If the pain has often been unbearable and the revelations shocking to all of us, it is because they indeed bring us the beginnings of a common understanding of what happened and a steady restoration of the nation's humanity."

So before we part let us again state the truth clearly.

The Confederacy was on the wrong side of history and humanity. It sought to tear apart our nation and subjugate our fellow Americans to slavery. This is the history we should never forget and one that we should never again put on a pedestal to be revered.

"A piece of stone – one stone. Both stories were history. One story told. One story forgotten or maybe even purposefully ignored."

As a community, we must recognize the significance of removing New Orleans' Confederate monuments. It is our acknowledgment that now is the time to take stock of, and then move past, a painful part of our history. Anything less would render generations of courageous struggle and soul-searching a truly lost cause.

Anything less would fall short of the immortal words of our greatest President Abraham Lincoln, who with an open heart and clarity of purpose calls on us today to unite as one people when he said:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to do all which may achieve and cherish: a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." sclc

DEIRDRE FULTON is a senior editor and staff writer for Common Dreams. Previously she worked as an editor and writer for the Portland Phoenix and the Boston Phoenix, where she was honored by the New England Press Association and the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies. A Boston University graduate, Deirdre is a co-founder of the Maine-based Lorem Ipsum Theater Collective and the PortFringe theater festival. She writes young adult fiction in her spare time. Email her at deirdre@commondreams.org or find her on Twitter: @deirdrefulton.

Our political economy is designed to create poverty and inequality.

Poverty is not an abstraction. People wear it on their faces, carry it on their backs as a constant companion—and it is heavy.

BY DENNIS KUCINICH

Dennis Kucinich, a former chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and represented Ohio's 10th District from 1997 to 2013.

This keynote speech was given by Dennis J. Kucinich at the Conference on Poverty and Inequality at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government on Feb. 25, 2017.

Let me begin by sharing with you the story of an inner-city Cleveland family of seven, two adults and five children all under the age of 11. he family did not own a home. They were renters. As the family grew, it became ever more difficult to find rent. At one point the old car in which they roamed the city in search of rent became their living quarters. Evenings, the father and mother and a newborn slept in the car's front seat, and the four other children, in the back.

They found rent by understating the number of children, which, when discovered, led to eviction and the same cycle of wandering as urban nomads. The father, a truck driver, had a war-related injury that occasionally required medical treatment, taking him out of work. Bills piled up, which led to garnishments. The mother suffered from post-partum depression, compounded by noisy, rambunctious children.

The children were sometimes out of school, as the family did not know where its next shelter or its next meal would come from.

This inner-city family lived in 21 different places in 17 years, including a couple of cars.

When we gather today to speak of poverty and inequality, I understand, because I was the oldest child in that inner-city family, which grew to nine persons, a family that was riveted to a day-to-day struggle to survive.

Ours was an intense experience of poverty and inequality that led to social disorganization, chronic instability that made daunting every encounter with every institution in a society, instability that created severe emotional difficulties in four of the seven children. Poverty and its partner chaos can play on people's minds.

One of my most powerful memories was of listening to the sound of my parents' counting pennies to pay utility bills. "Click, click, click," I could hear the pennies drop, one by one, as they hit the metal top table.

Today I can hear those pennies dropping all over America for families not able to scrape together the cash to pay their bills, families who lack adequate housing, families who do not have adequate health care, families trying to raise children in a chaotic urban environment, families who truly do not know where their next meal will come.

In America today there are tens of millions of people with a hard-luck story. Tens of millions out of work, in ill health, in search of affordable rent, having neither a place nor a home to call their own; millions of people

for whom, as Langston Hughes put it, life "ain't been no crystal stair."

No one who escapes such an environment physically or economically does it alone. There are teachers, coaches, doctors, lawyers, aunts, uncles, neighbors who appear as angels in our lives, who catch us when we are about to fall, who lift us up at the right moment, who show us a different path, who guide us in a new direction, who transport us to new possibilities, new futures.

But for every person upon whom fortune smiles, opportunity calls, and destiny stirs, there are many others for whom the future is obscured, for whom society is harsh, punitive, and unwelcoming.

I call these people my brothers and sisters, my cousins, my kinfolk who are ill-fed, ill-clothed, lacking in basic health care, working (if able) for low wages, hostages to debt, owning little, credit starved, renting if they can, and estranged from even rudimentary knowledge of wealth creation.

Poverty is not an abstraction. People wear it on their faces, carry it on their backs as a constant companion, and it is heavy.

Those of us acquainted with that condition often lack understanding of the nature of the material world, and, since access to material wealth seems random, are prey to the notion about wealth preached ironically by the Pardoner in The Canterbury Tales, "Radix malorum est cupiditas," 'The love of money is the root of all evil."

One does not need to have taken a vow of poverty to be poor, one needs only the unconscious or conscious acceptance of the underlying precepts of a class-based society, the meek acceptance of a doctrine of predestination, the assumption of one's status as merited and the acceptance of a political economy that equates one's personal wealth with one's innate value as a human being, while the so-called invisible hand of the marketplace quietly dips into the public till, and "moral hazard" is a polite term for theft.

All are created equal, indeed, but all do not have the same access to privilege, nor the same friends inside the government or financial centers of power, nor the same accountants.

Our reality is socially constructed and culturally affirmed. We have come to accept a system of things as inevitable without challenging the assumptions upon which a system is based.

Where does money come from? How is it made?

Before answering that question, let me state the obvious: Our political economy is structured to create poverty and inequality.

Kenny Chapman, 53, receives coins from a man in downtown Cleveland on Feb. 28, 2017. Chapman has been homeless for about 10 years. Photo/Tony Dejak/AP

Nineteen of every 20 dollars of new wealth created goes to the top 1 percent. The top 1 percent has more wealth than the bottom 90 percent.

This cataclysm for our democracy was accelerated with the sub-prime meltdown of a decade ago.

According to the National Center for Policy Analysis, as many as 10 million families lost their homes to foreclosure during the housing crisis, and as a result had to move, in some cases resulting in a re-segregation of city neighborhoods.

During this period, the Federal Reserve created trillions of dollars and gave them to banks, while Congress authorized $700 billion to bail out banks, without passing a program to make sure that the masses of people underwater in their mortgages or those caught up in no-doc low-doc schemes would have a chance to hold onto their homes.

Meanwhile, one of the few investments held by the middle class, home equity, plummeted as housing values sank in many city neighborhoods.

Much of America has not recovered from the carnival of financial corruption of a decade ago—except for the finance economy, of course.

For those barely holding on to middle-class status, the median income for a four-person family is just over $54,000. Yet the average US household with credit card debt owes more than $16,000 to credit card companies. On average, those with a mortgage owe $176,222, with auto debt owe $28,948, and with student loans owe $49,905.

Health-care consumes about 17.8 percent of America's GDP, or three trillion two hundred billion dollars. The Kaiser Foundation reports that the average month premiums for family coverage in 2016 is $1,511 a month, or $18,132 a year.

The country is held hostage by insurance companies, while politicians wrangle over what is the best system of predatory for-profit health care, as pharmaceutical companies receive near-unlimited patent extension and public funding for 84 percent of new drug research, yet price their products out of the reach of millions of Americans, while their stocks perform at twice the Standard and Poors stock index.

The health-care industry is not the only institution casting Americans into poverty. The average family of four sees some $13,200 a year of its collective wealth deposited into America's largest piggy bank, the Pentagon, which, according to noted economist Chalmers Johnson, now siphons off about a trillion dollars annually from all sources to prosecute several wars simultaneously, while managing nearly 800 military bases in 130 countries, this while never successfully completing an audit and having trillions in accounts that cannot be reconciled.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom."

The cost of the war against Iraq, alone, adds $3 trillion to the national debt while bolstering the bi-party line that there simply is not enough money to meet domestic needs. Families have no reserves. More and more people are tethered to low-paying jobs, with few, if any benefits. Jobs are not there for young people coming out of school. The burden of debt, its extractive nature, forces survivors to borrow and borrow and borrow, to go deeper in debt.

In biblical times there was debt jubilee. Today we have not a jubilee but debt peonage for many, with a national debt compounded by environmental disasters, military misadventures, and Wall Street bailouts, and seldom suffered by those who helped to create it.

The bailout of Wall Street, the utter neglect of Main Street, the collapse of the housing market, the obscene escalation of the cost of private health care, the metastatic cancerous military leviathan point to a massive ethical failure in a society where egalitarian principles have been discarded in favor of a warped, Darwinian, meritocratic society built by gamblers insured by the government, insurance companies subsidized by the government, defense contractors made extravagantly rich by the government, banks that forced

people out of their homes and were then bailed out by the government.

Growing poverty and inequality in America and other countries can be tied to a dismantling of the public sphere through the privatization of public services, which imposes the rentier's premium on parking meters, toll booths, waste and sanitation services, water and sewer fees, and health care, to name a few.

In urban areas privatization looms as a major economic issue. People, through taxes, fees and utility rates, pay once for public services to be created. Once services are privatized, the public is forced to pay again and again, at higher rates, for less service.

The public is told that money is saved. Whose? Wages are cut, services are reduced, increased rates and fees follow. The loss of public accountability and political control shifts onto the public as increased economic burdens and the social and economic costs borne by displaced public workers.

In such a climate, unions are under attack, since they exist to promote economic justice. The right to organize, the right to collective bargaining, the right to strike, the right to decent wages and benefits, the right to a secure retirement, the right to sue an employer for maintaining an unsafe work place, all these rights and more are at risk. Labor unions helped to build economic equality. Their demise means less bargaining power for all American workers.

The ability to bargain collectively is essential in a democratic society, for upholding opportunities for advancement.

A recent article in The Atlantic estimates that "$1 trillion of America's $6 trillion in annual federal, state and local government spending goes to private companies."

A few examples are instructive. In Chicago an investigation showed that the city received $974 million less than the parking-meter franchise was worth.

Forty years ago, I was elected mayor of Cleveland, a city of 700,000, on a commitment to block the privatization of an electrical system which was worth at least a quarter of a billion dollars and was to be sold for $88.1 million, a scheme promoted by the state's largest bank, a business partner of the private utility seeking to acquire the city's division of light and power.

When I refused to sell the system, the bank forced the city into default over $5 million in debt, taken out by my predecessor. Subsequently, its municipal electric system intact, the people of Cleveland saved as much as a half-billion in combined charges for taxes and electricity bills.

Tom Johnson, mayor of the City of Cleveland at the turn of the 20th century, disciple of social reformer and progressive economist Henry George, brought to Cleveland the cheapest streetcar fares and the lowest-cost electricity through public ownership.

He once said, "I believe in municipal ownership of waterworks, of parks, of schools. I believe in the municipal ownership of these monopolies because if you do not own them, they in turn, will own you. They will rule your politics, corrupt your institutions and finally destroy your liberties."

The ultimate privatization that re-framed the entire of our economic and social system and set the stage for a permanent debt mentality occurred in 1913, when the money supply of the United States was privatized through the creation of the Federal Reserve.

Prior to the passage of the Federal Reserve Act, the US Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, placed the power to coin or create money with the United States Congress. That changed under the Federal Reserve. Central banks took over control of the money supply.

From that point on, money equaled debt. The Federal Reserve usurped the power of the government to spend money into circulation and assumed for central banks the power to create money out of nothing, a device called quantitative easing, and give it to their member banks.

In Cleveland, the banks focused a profit-taking scheme on lower-income black and white neighborhoods, touting low-documentation and no-documentation loans, which were bundled into securities and became the collateralized-debt obligations that collapsed and pulled the entire economy down 10 years ago.

It was all fraud, and it was underwritten by the never-audited Federal Reserve, the erstwhile cop who walked off the beat when the pinstripe-wearing robbers were casing the neighborhoods of our cities, bankers cum croupiers, trolling for unsuspecting dreamers in search of that elusive first home, or an upgraded second home, not really knowing about adjustable rates, balloon mortgages, and penalties attached to late payments, but trusting the assurances of their friendly banker, who suddenly reversed years of redlining policies and made loans available without proof of ability to repay.

When you are desperate for a home, you sign on the dotted line. I think back to my parents, who never owned a home, and I can tell you that, if given the offer extended to thousand in Cleveland's neighborhoods, they would have signed on the dotted line, taken the keys, celebrated, and months later been devastated by foreclosure.

The privatization of the money supply is one of five major factors in poverty and inequality today, the other four being the emergence of the military-industrial-intelligence-congressional complex, the maintenance of the for-profit health-care system, and the erosion of public education through the creation of charter schools and the tremendous lifelong debt burden placed on those seeking higher education.

Today we face a renewed threat of privatization that could dramatically thrust the American people deeper into poverty. The privatization of Medicare will make health services inaccessible to millions of elderly. The privatization of Social Security would cause the jackpot lights to flash and spin at Wall Street's casino as retirees check stock advances, declines, and unchanged to discern what the value of the monthly check will be when it arrives at the mailbox.

The planned privatization of the Post Office will mean the end of universal service, less rural delivery, higher costs pricing people out of basic mail service, and cuts to three-days-a-week delivery.

The prison-industrial complex is set for growth with privatization schemes that raise serious constitutional questions.

More and more military services are being privatized, which of course makes for an additional incentive for businesses to support wars and to support the politicians who vote for wars.

As the national debt rises toward $20 trillion, the debate intensifies over privatization of Medicare, Social Security, the Post Office, and government service at all levels, a practice that steals the commonwealth and institutionalizes poverty and inequality as wealth accelerates upwards, furthering economic divisions and erasing the cultural memory of public service, devouring the civic soul, once the animating principle of community, the spirit breath of participatory democracy.

As wealth accelerates upwards, the mass of people are told we cannot afford a living wage, cannot afford a full-employment economy, cannot afford universal pre-K, cannot afford school breakfast and lunch programs, cannot afford supplementary-nutrition programs, cannot afford women's and infant-care assistance, cannot afford more adult education, cannot afford free public college and universities, cannot afford guaranteed retirement security, cannot afford Medicare for all, cannot afford a guaranteed annual income. We are constantly told that the country cannot do these things because it would add to the debt, or destroy individual initiative.

Let me tell you that we can reverse this entire system. Thanks to my wife, Elizabeth, who came to the United States to study monetary policy with Stephen Zarlenga of the American Monetary Institute, I began to explore the equation of money with debt, and the ways of the Central bank that create money out of nothing for the benefit of private banking through quantitative easing and another device known to the industry as fractional reserve banking and recognized by the rest of society as great moral hazard.

As a result of studying the structure of the system, as a member of Congress, I drafted the National Emergency Employment Defense act, which reclaims the power appropriated by the Federal Reserve through the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 and enables the government to issue money debt-free to meet the job creation, infrastructure repair, health care, education, and retirement-security needs of Americans.

Some believe that such a system would be inflationary. Then let me ask: Why has the Federal Reserve created trillions of dollars and placed us in a deflationary period? The middle class does not have enough money to buy goods.

The consumer economy is stalled. The Fed-created money did not get into the right hands. How is it that 19 of 20 new dollars of increased income have gone to the top 1 percent? Really? It is because the system is engineered to transfer wealth upwards, a perpetual inequality machine.

Through reclaiming our constitutional heritage, we can lower taxes and have a full-employment economy, universal pre-kindergarten, school breakfast and lunch programs, full funding for public education K-12, free college and university, guaranteed retirement security, Medicare for All, and a guaranteed annual income, eliminating poverty.

This is not magic. It requires a shift in federal policy, away from private banks' running the economy, solely in the interest of private banks, to the government's reclaiming its ability to be able to spend money into existence to meet the needs of the country, without going into debt.

Private banking would continue through dollar-for-dollar reserves, and have to survive without its government-granted license to speculate.

The government could reduce taxes, increase productivity, enable America to reach new heights of wealth shared by all, or we can stumble along our present course, with the children of the 99 percent being indentured servants to the 1 percent, with more than 50 million in poverty while political parties tinker with a totally corrupt system en route to death on the installment plan institutionalized by a government in thrall to banks, insurance companies, and the military-industrial complex.

Imagine an America whose government was not prepossessed with military force projection around the world, a government that set aside failed doctrines of interventionism, unilateralism, and first strike to concentrate on the practical needs of its citizens for jobs, for health care, for housing, for education, for retirement security, for safe neighborhoods, for clean air and clean water; a government that derived its support not from the power of its armaments but from the power of its commitment to the humanity of its citizens.

Abraham Lincoln spoke at Gettysburg of a nation, "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." The inner equality of our political heritage must be matched by our constant striving for economic justice.

If we have the intent, the vision, and the courage to reclaim the reality of equality, we can make poverty a thing of the past. Now, perhaps, you can understand that when I first began my public career, 50 years ago, as a candidate for City Council, I focused on economic issues, making sure phone, gas, electric, water, and sewer bills were kept low; that privatization schemes were rejected; that perishable foods were labeled and dated; that neighborhoods were safe, recreation facilities in repair, and the quality of life in the city was optimum, wherever it intersected with city services, especially the police, fire department, and housing.

Forty-five years ago, I advocated free public transit in Cleveland and was met with objections that, if transportation was free, why, everyone would be riding the bus!

Exactly. sclc

This keynote speech was given by Dennis J. Kucinich at the Conference on Poverty and Inequality at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government on Feb. 25, 2017.

Stacey Abrams at the 2016 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, PA.

Photo/Scott Applewhite/AP

Georgia can elect the first African-American woman governor in history.

BY STEVE PHILLIPS

Democrats, please don't mess this one up!

The Georgia governor's race presents a golden opportunity and a profound moment of truth for Democrats across the country. With House minority leader Stacey Abrams' recent announcement that she's formed an exploratory committee for the 2018 election, progressives can either capitalize on the country's population trends and maximize their prospects for victory, or they can once again form a circular firing squad, lose the election, and block progress towards overcoming centuries of racial exclusion.

The Georgia governor's race presents a golden opportunity and a profound moment of truth for Democrats across the country. With House minority leader Stacey Abrams' recent announcement that she's formed an exploratory committee for the 2018 election, progressives can either capitalize on the country's population trends and maximize their prospects for victory, or they can once again form a circular firing squad, lose the election, and block progress towards overcoming centuries of racial exclusion.

It's no accident that Barack Obama's historic candidacy inspired record high turnout among African-American voters, propelling him into the White House by a near-landslide margin. In Georgia, Obama received 47 percent of the vote in 2008, a higher percentage than any Democratic presidential candidate since native son Jimmy Carter's 1980 campaign (Bill Clinton won Georgia in 1992, but he received only 43.5 percent of the vote in a race where third-party candidate Ross Perot siphoned off significant Republican support).

Abrams is poised to ride the same sort of wave that carried Obama to victory. In the 241-year history of the United States, there has never been an African-American woman elected governor of a state—any state. As one of the highest-ranking Democrats in Georgia, Abrams represents the best opportunity to finally smash that glass ceiling. A majority of all voters in the Democratic primary will be black, making her the odds-on favorite to win the nomination. In a state that is rapidly approaching "majority-minority" status (whites currently comprise 53.9 percent of the population), the electoral calculus for Democrats is increasingly favorable.

Democrats in Georgia have a vote gap of just under 250,000 votes (in every statewide election since 2008, the average margin of defeat was 236,429 votes). The key to overcoming

that gap is mobilizing more of the 1.3 million voters of color in Georgia who have not been motivated to vote. A catalytic, galvanizing, history-making campaign can change that.

While some bemoan the supposed lack of a Democratic bench, Abrams is already emerging as a rising star in national politics. She spoke at the Democratic Convention in 2016, was featured by The New York Times as one of "14 Young Democrats to Watch," and has raised millions of dollars across the country to register 200,000 African-American voters in Martin Luther King Jr.'s home state.

Winning the top office in Georgia will be critical to retaking political power in the country as a whole over the next several years. Having a Democrat in control of the state's political infrastructure can ensure everything possible will be done to eliminate the barriers to full political participation that the state's conservative leaders have erected and maintained since the days of the civil-rights movement in the 1960s. Looking ahead to redistricting in 2021, whoever is governor of Georgia will play a significant role in either ending or perpetuating the gerrymandering that has unnaturally skewed the congressional districts. Fairly drawn congressional districts can put in play more seats for Democrats to recapture control of the House of Representatives in 2022, if that hasn't occurred beforehand.

> *"In the 241-year history of the United States, there has never been an African-American woman elected governor of a state – any state."*

But will the progressive community rally to the cause by removing any unnecessary obstructions in Abrams' way and making her candidacy into a strategic national crusade? Sadly, the build-up to this race brings into sharp relief some of the reasons why America has never elected an African-American woman governor.

There are already rumblings that national progressive groups are reluctant to stand with Abrams's campaign, and some donors and politicians are encouraging other, white, Democratic candidates to jump into the race. Names that have been mentioned include former deputy attorney general Sally Yates, who was fired by Trump, and state legislator Stacey Evans. (Yates announced this week that she is definitely not running for governor.)

An *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article reported that the rationale for getting behind Evans is that she could perform better with white voters. That approach, however, was tried—and failed—in the last midterm election. In 2014, the Democratic nominees for governor and senator had two of the most famous last names in Georgia politics—Carter and Nunn. Jimmy Carter's grandson Jason was the gubernatorial standard-bearer, and former Georgia Senator Sam Nunn's daughter Michelle Nunn ran for the Senate. They both lost by slightly more than 200,000 votes, receiving the standard 23 percent of the white vote that Democratic candidates in Georgia have received since 2008. Why would lesser-known candidates from less-beloved families do better? There is simply no empirical evidence that a Georgia Democrat can do much better than 23 percent of the white vote. The greatest upside and clearest path to victory in that state lies in expanding the number of voters of color—the most Democratic voters of all.

The coming days and weeks will show if progressives across the country know how to be smart and strategic. What could be the possible point of urging other Democrats into the race other than to block Abrams's path (resulting in the squandering of precious resources)? Why not encourage Yates to run for state attorney general, the logical post for someone who stood up to Donald Trump as acting attorney general and incurred the White House's wrath as a result? Why not encourage Evans to run for lieutenant governor?

It is rare when the stars line up as they have for Abrams's campaign in Georgia, and the moment of truth will be whether the state and national Democratic power players can see the light. Will Emily's List, the Democratic Governors Association, the Democratic National Committee, and progressive activist groups embrace this dark-skinned black woman the way they have other progressive candidates? Will progressive donors step up and make massive, multimillion-dollar investments in inspiring and organizing the 1.3 million voters of color who have not previously been motivated to participate in Georgia elections?

There is a reason we have never had a female black Democratic governor in this country. There's always an excuse or justification for "not this one," or "she has this fault," etc. But at the end of that long line of excuses lies the embarrassing reality that this nation has never, ever, elevated a black woman to the governor's mansion. It's time to close that shameful chapter of American history and seize this strategic moment before us in Georgia. sclc

STEVE PHILLIPS is a national political leader, civil-rights lawyer, author, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, and the founder and editor-in-chief of Democracy in Color, a multimedia platform on race and politics. He is the author of the New York Times best seller, "Brown Is the New White: How a Demographic Revolution Has Created a New American Majority" (New Press). He is a regular contributor to The Nation.

BY TERENCE LESTER

Are homeless people citizens?

"When you are homeless, not only are you not visible most times, but you struggle to even feel like a citizen."

It never dawned on me that some homeless people feel like they are not fully citizens in the U.S. until I had a conversation with one of my homeless friends the other day. John has been homeless for three years, and lost all his important documents. He says, "I have no I.D. and I do mean none. I don't have a social security card, I don't have a license, and I don't have a birth certificate. Therefore, it is hard to prove that I am who I say I am."

With tears in his eyes, he asked me this heartfelt question, "Am I even human anymore?"

As he explained his dilemma of not being able to secure his I.D. to move on with his life, I began to do personal research as to how not having these basic documents can hold you back and cause you not to move forward when you are homeless.

If you are homeless and do not have proper identification, you are more likely to get locked up if you are unable to prove who you are.

Additionally, you are unable to access a job, secure a bank account, and even secure other documents needed to get any legal document. For instance, when you do not have your basic identification, you can't get a birth certificate or SSC because they require that you have certain documents that you don't possess if you are homeless. In other words, you need identification to secure identification.

What if you do not have an address? Then you can't provide a bill of the other documents needed to secure a social security card or any other type of documents.

Dexter Culbreath, Community Director at Love Beyond Walls puts it this way, "Proximity changes everything. When we are closer to issues, our perspectives change. Whether we thought we had a pretty good grasp on the realities of others or if we had no idea, things become much more clear when we are physically and intentionally present. Relationships are formed, hearts are broken, spirits are lifted and solutions are initiated."

As we explored more, John and I discovered an organization here in Atlanta named, Georgia Law Center for The Homeless that helps homeless individuals secure their information in hopes that they can prove who they really are. This organization has to have lawyers to do research, and secure other vital information like old school records or transcripts from a college. They use these documents to hopefully secure a birth certificate that can then be used to gain access to other documents to help a homeless person move forward with life.

Even then, a homeless person has to have an organization to write a letter on behalf of the person just to vouch for them in a sense. I had to write this letter for my friend:

Here is the letter that I had to write for John just to verify that he was homeless to be helped:

To Whom It May Concern,

This letter is to verify that John has been residing in our shelter from February 14, 2017 until now. Prior to residing with us, he was on the streets for three years. The plan is for him to continue residing with us until we can help him get his identification documents.

Thank you for helping John obtain his identification. Our desire is to help John no longer be homeless.

All the best, Terence Lester
Executive Director, Love Beyond Walls

Think about it, who are you a part from you ability to communicate who you are? Are you a normal citizen? If you couldn't do this there would be no bank account, job, address, credit score, or any of the other things that we sometimes take for granted to remain functional in this life.

Now imagine the pressure homeless people feel that are

caught in this quandary without being able to say, "I am who I say I am—a citizen of the U.S." You are literally cut off from the world and in some instances your place of birth.

As I write this, I am thinking about my friend John who we are helping to secure vital documents that were stolen during his stay at a local shelter in the city of Atlanta. Although he was born here in this country, I have to remind him on his discouraging days that he matters and that he is a citizen. It just takes a little extra work for him to get some of the things that others are able to get right away.

Are there solutions? Yes. I believe with the technology advancements the millennial generation has at their finger tips, someone could possibly leverage it in a way that will help people like John fight for their rights that seem insurmountable sometimes.

I got a chance to interview two millennials, and they seemed hopeful in their generation's ability to fight for these rights with how they have been uniquely equipped. Antwon Davis, a tech founder says, "I think Millennials have a few very unique tools that make us different than any other generation before us. We have immediate access to information via the Internet, we have more influence and an ability to rally large amounts of people around our causes and efforts via social media, and we have a willingness to take risks around problems and issues we're passionate about."

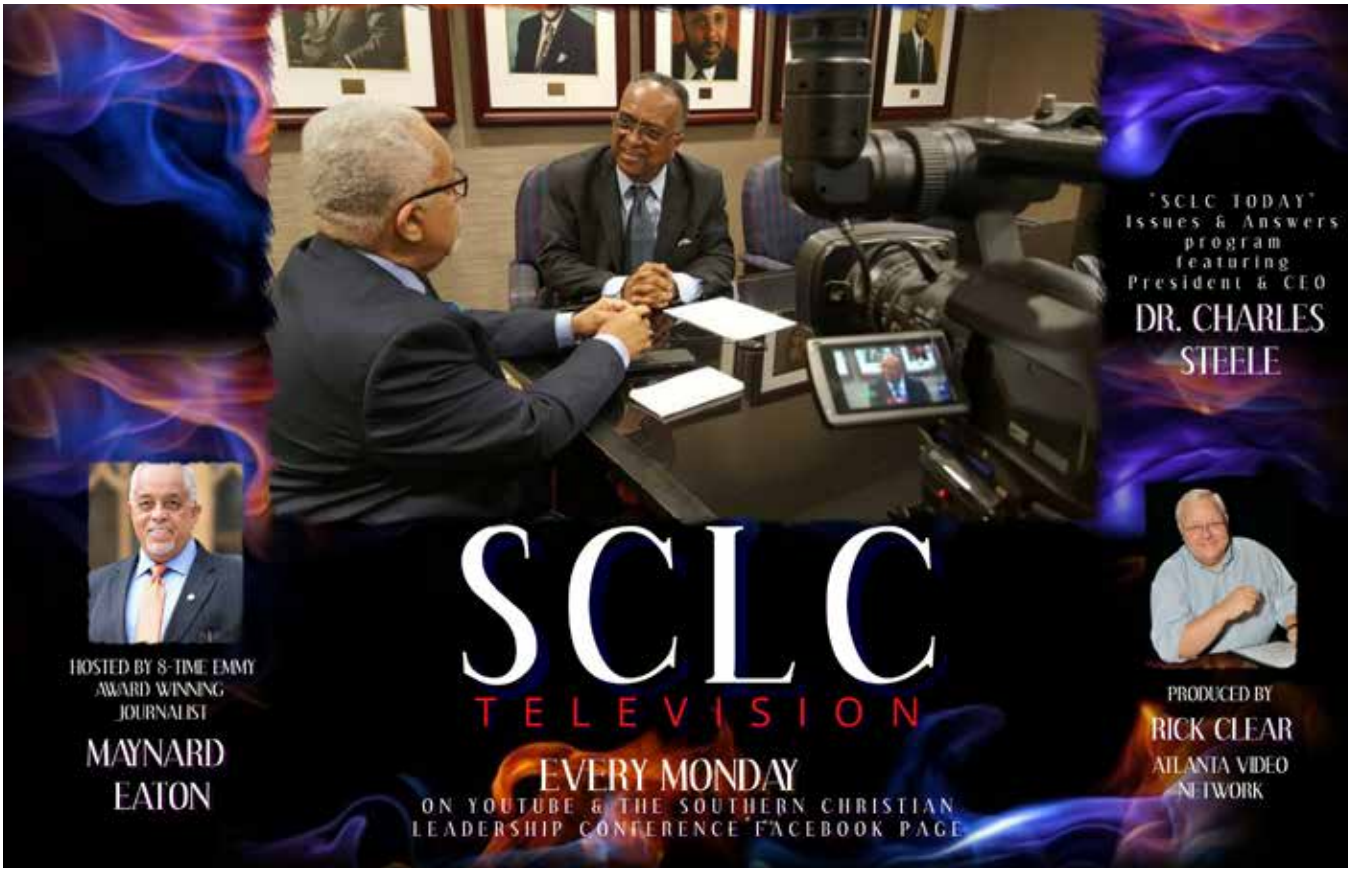
I also chatted with Kellie McGann, a writer and entrepreneur that expressed her confidence in millennials ability to leverage technology to solve issues like those presented above. She's says, "Millennials can use technology to reach more people, educate others in new ways, and be able to instantly help illuminate the needs of people to the community around them and provide resources faster."

It is my personal opinion that becoming aware of the challenges above creates conversation to start seeking out the solutions needed to reduce this 6-8 month journey of securing proper identification as a homeless person to less time if we leverage the right resources. Will the millennial generation help march us toward this? Will homeless people feel like citizens sooner if they are without identification?

In conclusion, the next time you question why doesn't a homeless person just go and get a job, ask yourself, "is that person equipped with the proper identification to access the luxuries that many other normal citizens have?" sclc

TERENCE LESTER is a minister, speaker, community activist and author who co-leads Love Beyond Walls, a not-for-profit organization focused on raising poverty awareness and community mobilization.

He and his wife, Cecilia, founded the community-based center in College Park in 2013. Since that time they have led a couple hundred creative service projects designed to display the skills and gifts of those living in poverty; led homeless and poverty awareness campaigns in schools and throughout the metro Atlanta area; and mobilized over 5000 volunteers through church and business partnerships.



Photo/Lucas Jackson

In Tupac's life, the struggles and Triumphs of a generation

BY JEFFREY OGBAR

Beginning June 16, moviegoers will be able to see the much-anticipated "All Eyez on Me," the biopic of Tupac Shakur, one of the most iconic and influential musicians of the 20th century.

Since his death in 1996, Tupac's place in the pantheon of cultural icons has been firmly cemented. Scores of books and documentaries have detailed his life, career and tragic death, while musicians continue to pay tribute to his influence in their songs. He has sold more than 75 million albums worldwide, and earlier this year he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

But beyond the commercial success, the life of Tupac could be thought of as a metaphor for a generation of African-American youth. A personification of hip-hop's ascendance and the vexing forces that shaped it, Tupac was born in 1971 at the dawn of the post-civil rights era. His life would span the War on Drugs, the rapid expansion of the prison-industrial complex, a black power reprise, the mainstream recognition of hip-hop—and all the pitfalls therein.

Enemies of the state

Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur, was a leading member of a Black Panther Party chapter in Harlem. In 1969, Afeni was arrested with 20 others in the infamous Panther 21 case. Part of a nationwide effort to disrupt the Panthers' political activities—just a year earlier, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had called them "the greatest threat to national security"—the group was charged with conspiring to bomb buildings in New York City. The group ended up being acquitted of all 156 charges on May 21, 1971.

Afeni's son, Tupac, was born a month later, on June 16.

A day after Tupac's birth, President Richard Nixon issued a written statement to Congress about illegal drugs, calling them "public enemy number one." The following day, he held a press conference during which he asked for more federal funds to wage a "war on drugs."

Both events—the systemic crackdown on the political activities of black activists and the nascent war on drugs—would have a profound effect on the life of Tupac, along with millions of other African-Americans.

Crackdown

Few forces were as disruptive to Tupac's generation as the illicit drug trade. When he was born, heroin use was concentrated in the New York City metro area. Crime rates spiraled, overdoses increased and black communities—disproportionately affected by the violence—demanded action: stop illegal drugs, create jobs and implement responsible policing.

In 1973, New York state passed the Rockefeller Drug Laws, the most punitive anti-drug legislation in the country. Possession of four ounces of narcotics now had a mandatory minimum sentence 15 years to life. Many in the black community were initially supportive of the Rockefeller Laws. Yet the fundamental demands from the black community—jobs, health care, police reform—went unmet.

Over the course of the decade, unemployment in black communities across the country soared. By 1983, it had reached 21 percent—a rate higher than all but three years of the Great Depression. And as police brutality and corruption continued to plague black neighborhoods, a new drug was introduced to the streets: crack cocaine, which Tupac's mother became addicted to.

Hip-hop meets politics

Even though black and white drug use rates were similar during this period, poor black communities ended up being the battlegrounds—and killing fields—for the war on drugs. The homicide rate for black males between the ages of 18 and 24 years old more than doubled between 1983 and 1993—to a high of 196 per 100,000 people. (The national homicide rate was 9 per 100,000.) Meanwhile, incarceration rates skyrocketed. In 1970, blacks were 4.6 times more likely to be arrested than whites. By 1990 they were 6.8 times more likely to be detained.

The spiraling violence and conflict fomented a new sense of black political alarm, with many gravitating to black nationalist messages. Young black people started donning African medallions and African-inspired fashion, while pushing hip-hop into a politically subversive realm of musical expression.

Hip-hop groups and artists like Public Enemy, Brand Nubian, Ice Cube and X-Clan started promoting a political message of resistance in its music to a greater extent than any popular genre at the time. Rappers attacked the crack trade, white supremacy and police brutality in scores of songs, from Public Enemy's "Night of the Living Baseheads" to Ice Cube's "I Wanna Kill Sam."

The music—and fashion—of groups like X-Clan were infused with black nationalism. hiphopandpolitics.com

Tupac immersed himself in this movement, embracing and adorning the politics of the black power reprise in his lyrics. While R&B, soul and jazz musicians were largely silent on the challenges in poor black communities, Tupac's first LP, "2Pacalypse Now" (1991), directly confronted issues like mass incarceration, violence, illegal drugs, police brutality and racism.

"I'm tired of being trapped in this vicious cycle," he rapped in "Trapped," "If one more cop harasses me, I just might go psycho."

His next three LPs—like those of many of his hip-hop contemporaries—balanced their subject matter between carefree party songs ("I Get Around") and calls for social justice ("Souljah's Revenge"), while rapping about violence against rival rappers ("Hit 'em Up"), and his love for his mother, even through her struggles with addiction ("Dear Mama").

The trappings of success

As his popularity grew, Tupac personally and professionally struggled over his appeal to the mainstream, while battling the allure of conspicuous consumption, excess and sexism.

He knew the destructive forces of violence and what critics call the prison industrial complex, making calls for social justice in his hit "Changes," which criticized drug dealers and the horrifying effects of mass incarceration. In multiple songs he alerted listeners to the story of Latasha Harlins, the 15-year old black girl whose murderer was given probation by a California court system that had given harsher sentences to people who abused dogs. He created a plan to mitigate the violence in black communities with a code of ethics for drug dealers and truces between gangs.

Nonetheless, Tupac found himself personally mired in violent criminal cases. There were assault charges against him in 1993 and again in 1994. That same year, he was robbed and shot five times in New York City—the day before he was sentenced on sexual assault charges.

And just as commercial hip-hop retreated from the political lyrics of the early 1990s, Tupac's lyrics gravitated to a gangsta style more aligned and palatable to mainstream audiences and radio stations. From "Ambitionz az a Ridah" through "When We Ride," references to "money over bitches" and gang-banging shootouts became commonplace. In 1995, Tupac signed with Death Row Records, a label notorious for its violent atmosphere and its volatile founder, Suge Knight.

In time, he adopted Death Row's gangster rivalries, bluster and violence. Then, while in Las Vegas on Sept. 7, 1996, he joined in the beating of a rival gang member accused of assaulting a Death Row associate. Later that night Tupac was shot multiple times and died from his wounds six days later. Many investigators believe it was a direct retaliation for the beating.

"I might fall, but I'm gonna get up!"

In the end, Tupac's life isn't just an embodiment of the struggles, contradictions, creativity and promise of a generation. It also serves as a cautionary tale. His life's abrupt end was a consequence of the allure of success, much like the pull of the streets. His sensitivity, intelligence and creativity were measured against the hostile external forces that had antagonized him since birth. And while these forces inspired him to rebel, they also tempted him, inviting him to gorge on the excesses of fame and celebrity.

Tupac admitted that he wasn't perfect. In his own words:

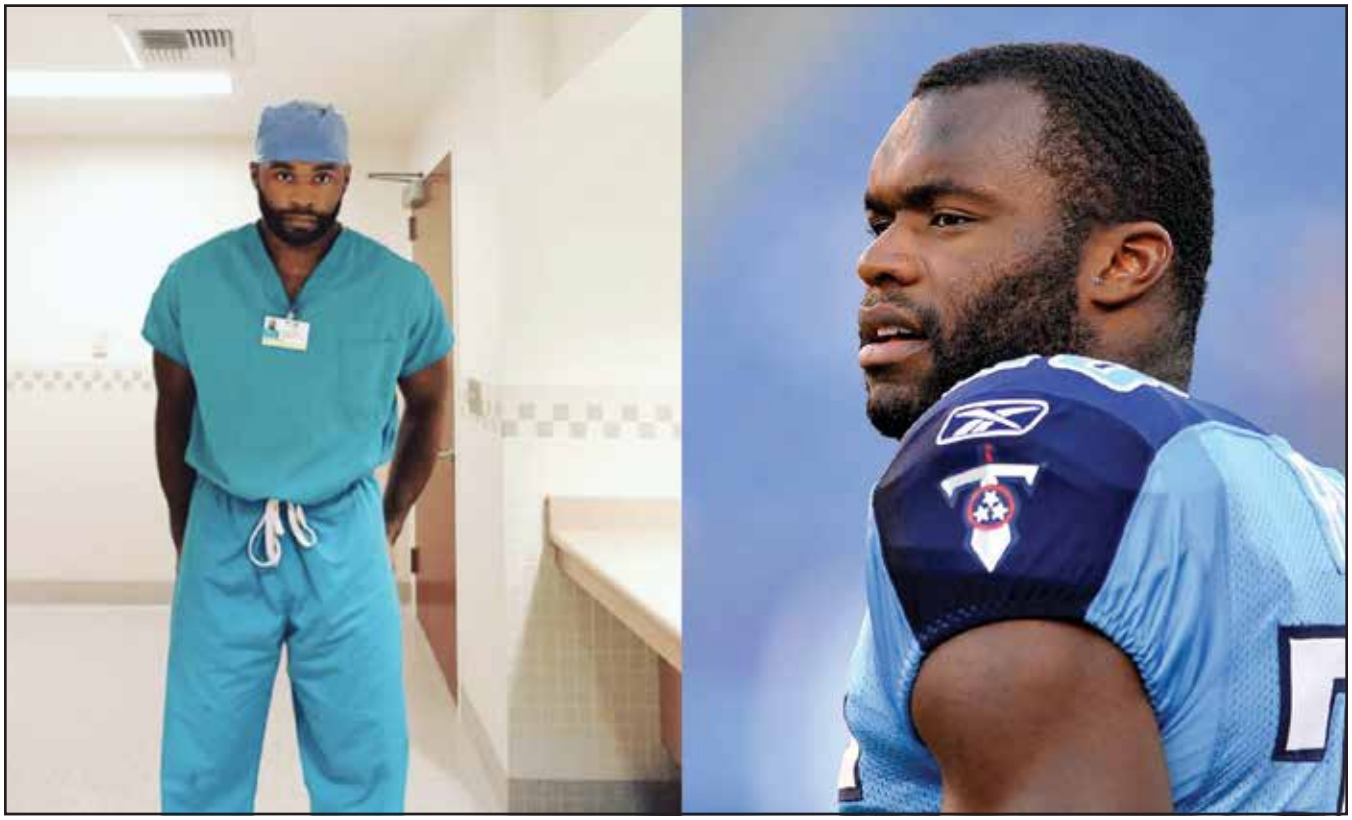
"God ain't finished with me yet. [There's] a path for me, and I make mistakes, and I might fall, but I'm gonna get up and I keep trying 'cause I believe in it…It's still from my soul, my heart."

Today Tupac's legacy lives on, with hip-hop playing more prominent roles in academia, the arts and political movements like Black Lives Matter.

Taking the baton from Tupac, artists like Kendrick Lamar speak to a new generation of black youth with hopeful lyrics like "we gonna be alright."

But it won't happen with anything less than overt action and involvement with purpose—mistakes and all. sclc

JEFFREY OGBAR is a professor of History and Founding Director, Center for the Study of Popular Music, University of Connecticut.



Photo/Aaron Gordon/Getty Images

Myron Rolle's journey from the NFL to Neurosurgery

BY JACQUELINE HOWARD

When Myron Rolle, 30, begins his neurosurgery residency at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital in June, he will be making history.

Before him, "there hasn't really been anybody who I saw doing NFL and neurosurgery," the 6-foot-2 former NFL player said in an interview with CNN's chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta.

Now, Rolle will be treating patients and training amid concerns and contention within the medical field about the safety of American football. He wants to help his two worlds—medicine and football—find common ground, he said.

Not until "toward the end of my career, I started to think about concussions and what the effects of repetitive concussions can do," he said.

"Football has done so much for me, given me friends, family, given me life lessons that now I can use in the operating room or just as a leader," he said. "I would hate to see it go, and I would love to see it around."

A blow to the head, such as what might be experienced during a tackle in a football game, can cause a concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury.

Rolle believes he has a duty to talk to younger players about safely playing the sport he loves.

"The fundamentals have to be emphasized: tackling the correct way. Having the right equipment. Making sure that you don't have very violent practices or contact practices," said Rolle, who sees brain injuries in sports and pediatrics as specialties of interest.

"I will tell you in person, 'Yes, play, but be careful; be safe, and understand some of these things that need to go into it for you to enjoy it,' " he said.

The tight-knit Rolle brothers

Rolle's interest in both neuroscience and football started at a young age, with help from his four older brothers: Marchant, Marvis, Mordecai and McKinley.

He was in the fifth grade when he read the book "Gifted Hands" by Dr. Ben Carson, which sparked his interest in

medicine. Since then, Rolle said, neurosurgeon Carson has become something of a mentor.

Their father, Whitney Rolle, said Myron's oldest brother, Marchant, gave Myron the book.

"That kind of propelled him into that area," Whitney said.

While Marchant gave Myron books to read, his third oldest brother, Mordecai, taught him the game of football.

Myron quickly excelled on the field, and McKinley, the brother closest in age to Myron, often trained with him. Now, McKinley is a high school football coach and teacher in Florida, where he also serves as Myron's business manager.

Growing up, Whitney said, Myron's older brothers not only encouraged him to pursue his dreams, they also had his back.

When the boys were children, "they put dishwashing liquid in the aquarium, and let me tell you, the entire living room was in bubbles," Whitney said, chuckling at the memory.

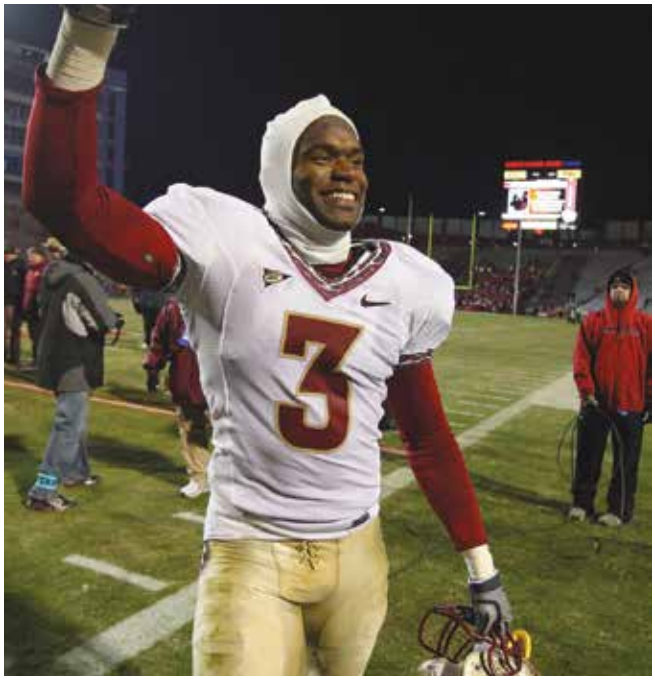
At the time, Whitney repeatedly asked his sons who was behind the bubble prank. No one answered.

"I threatened them. I told them I was going to punish them, and they would not tell on each other. Nobody would squeal," Whitney said.

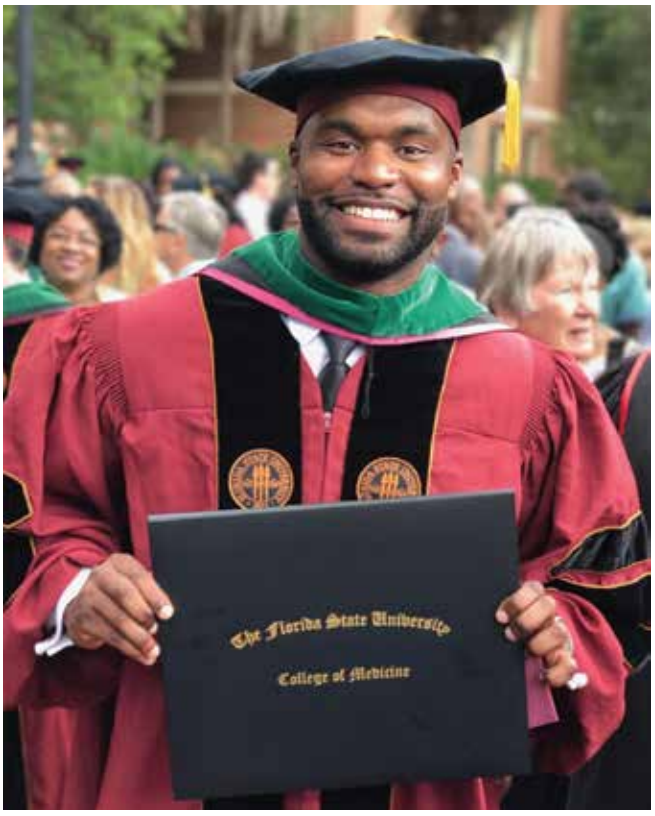
"As much as I was being tough on them, I was in the back of my mind smiling to see how they just stick together," he said. "I've always enforced that they care for each other. They support each other."

Whitney and his wife, Beverly, moved with the oldest three boys from the Bahamas to the United States in 1980, when Whitney was transferred to work at Citibank.

Then came two more sons. By the time Myron was born in 1986, the family had settled into a middle-class life in NJ.



When he graduated high school Rolle was the top football prospect in the country. At college in Tallahassee he was a First Team Freshman All-American, and in 2008 earned Third Team All-America and Second Team All-ACC. Photo/Jim McIsaac



Myron Rolle was once billed as the smartest player entering the NFL. Now, Dr. Myron Rolle is a neurosurgeon graduate from Florida State. Photo/Myron Rolle

He points to his parents, and the sacrifices they made to provide for him and his brothers, as a source of his motivation today.

"When I was younger, trying to afford football camps, my parents would sometimes have to miss bills," he said. "They sacrificed these things for me because they saw I had a goal.

"My repayment for that sacrifice is to continue to move forward, be the best I possibly can be, whether that's on the football field when I played or now as a future neurosurgeon."

From suiting up to scrubbing up

Among all of Rolle's efforts to be the best he can be, he points to November 22, 2008, as the day when he felt the most proud.

On that day, Rolle—then a student athlete at Florida State University—had to be in Birmingham, Alabama, to interview as a Rhodes Scholar finalist. At the same time, he was expected to play in a game against the University of Maryland in College Park.

Dating back to 1904, Rhodes Scholarships are the oldest and among the most prestigious international fellowship awards in the world. Each year, only 32 American students are selected as Rhodes Scholars to pursue a degree at the University of Oxford in England. sclc

JACQUELINE HOWARD is a feature writer and on-air talent at CNN Health, covering the latest news in fitness, diet, nutrition, education, relationships, medicine, diseases and healthy living.

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