

Martin Luther King: “My Dream is Not Obama”.

President Obama should not be welcomed at March on Washington Commemoration

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

On August 28, the 50th anniversary of the historic 1963 March on Washington, an event is being organized at the Lincoln Memorial by the King Center, Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the National Council of Negro Women to commemorate that extraordinary and consequential demonstration. To highlight the occasion, these organizations apparently extended an invitation to the President of the United States to deliver the keynote address on the very same spot where Martin Luther King delivered his legendary “I have a dream” speech.

The fact that Barack Obama will be standing in the shadow of Dr. King, his presence conveying the impression that he somehow represents the values and self-sacrificing lives of Dr. King, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks and many of the thousands gathered that afternoon on the national mall, should be taken as an insult by everyone who has struggled and continues to struggle for human rights, peace and social justice.

Surrendering to Barack Obama the podium that King stood before allows the State to close the circle of meaning on an important chapter of the African American story, and what is possible in that story. Linking the demands and aspirations of African Americans in 1963 to the ascendancy of Barack Obama as President of the United States within the still-dominant white supremacist structure, affirms a limitation that reflects the oppressive reality of African American life. It brings a clear message, even though it is not acknowledged on a conscious level, that the highest aspiration and possible achievement for an African American is to be able to serve white power – to be a servant. That is the “positive” role model for the new black leadership class.

What those so-called Black leaders and even many progressives and radicals don’t understand is that, in ongoing ideological and cultural battles in which capitalism and its minions are systematically engaging to maintain their dominance, symbols have meaning. When Barack Obama delivers his speech that day, he will complete the process, starting with the King national holiday, of symbolically merging the civil rights struggle with the interests of the U.S. State and the capitalist order. The political and ideological consequence of this is that it effectively eliminates any substantive critique of the links between white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy and continued African American oppression, and reduces the range of acceptable discourse related to the plight of African Americans to reforms within the existing order.

But even more damning for the development of an oppositional consciousness and a movement of resistance among African Americans and progressive politics in the U.S. is the

fact that Obama is the living negation of everything, from his domestic to foreign policy, that Dr. King and the movement stood for in 1963.

Could anyone imagine MLK supporting or buying into the incoherent rationalizations of Obama's actions? On Obama's record is the killing of 16 year-old Abdurrahman al-Alawki by a U.S. drone strike, just one of the many innocent dead and maimed civilians who have been casualties of U.S. international aggression under the banner of the War on Terror. Add to that the illegal and immoral invasion of Libya and the killing of more than 50,000 people in that country, and the fermenting of civil war in Syria that has cost more than 100,000 lives; the boycotting of the United Nations anti-racism conference and process that gave political cover to all of the other racist, European states that also walked out; the incomprehensible action to obstruct the elected President of Haiti, Bertrand Aristide, from returning to his country from the exile imposed upon him by the Bush administration; giving the green light to deporting record numbers of undocumented workers, a policy that tore families apart and terrorized communities.

Would Dr. King have seen Edward Snowden's act of civil disobedience as an act worthy of international persecution and imprisonment? Can anyone see Dr. King praising the Obama administration for turning its back on the people of Honduras when they asked for U.S. support to protect their democracy and instead sided with, and gave support to, the coup plotters?

Would it have been possible for Dr. King to remain silent on the state murder of Troy Davis? And what might Dr. King, who personally experienced the heavy hand of state repression, have said about the decision by the Obama administration to coordinate, at the federal level, the suppression of the Occupy Wall Street movement across the country and to give the Presidency, through the National Defense Authorization Act, the power to indefinitely detain and deny the constitutional and human rights of U.S. citizens without judicial review?

If you cannot see any connection between the political and moral positions of President Obama and Dr. King, it is because none exist.

Some will say, with reason, that Obama's record underscores the hard realities faced by a President of the U.S. But that is also the point. The bloodstained reality of the American presidency is an office that is structurally, politically and emotionally committed to upholding global white supremacist, capitalist domination. The symbol of Barack Obama occupying the "white people's house" and the harsh realities of his Presidency cannot be reconciled with the hope of Dr. King's speech and the vision of black people who were gathered on the mall in 1963 to demand an egalitarian society and a world committed to social justice. And it certainly cannot be reconciled with the teachings of Martin Luther King who, despite his very human shortcomings, is a moral giant compared to Barack Obama and his obsequious deference to white power and the interests of empire.

The invitation to this man is an insult to everyone who believes in justice and the integrity and independence of the people's movements and should be rescinded. And if it is not, all of us who considered ourselves people who believe in the independence of social movements from any political party and the right of the people to give meaning to our own experiences free from the State, should boycott the event and call on our friends to do the same.

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