



## The Dream of Dr. King

HARRIET VAN HORNE

No tolling bells, no muffled drums accompanied Martin Luther King on his last journey through the streets of Atlanta.

No, the sounds that linger in the mind are the slow, steady shuffling of feet and the rich, rolling voices, vibrant with ancient sorrow, crying, "We shall overcome . . ."

That the marching feet belonged to Governors and Senators as well as porters and cab drivers seemed altogether proper. In death, the Rev. King accomplished the miracle he sought in life. For a little while he muted the passions of racism and shamed the hearts of the wicked.

In the procession, with its glittering figures from the entertainment world and its weeping housemaids in black, nobody counted the whites, the Negroes, the Protestants, Catholics or Jews. Here were Americans paying final tribute to one of their own, an American.

Across the land, wherever TV could reach, more Americans, millions of them, were united in grief and guilt. Invisible on that coffin, one felt, were a million sprays of lilac, symbolically placed there by Americans who wished that Dr. King—unlike so many of his comrades—might have gone gentle into that good night. We now know that the bullet that tore at Dr. King's throat tore also at the nation's conscience.

And if we have had a true sign from God, a shred of that bullet has lodged in our hearts, too. Dr. King's wound was mortal, ours should simply set up a chronic, nagging reminder that we owe his sorrowing people the very least a man can ask of life: a fair chance.

\* \* \*

One of the TV voices endlessly discussing the passing of Dr. King suggested that all who marched in yesterday's procession were, however briefly, ennobled by the experience. Another voice spoke of the obsequies as a purging of our national guilt.

Both statements seem reasonable. The enno-

bling extended even to the mules hitched to the little country wagon that bore the coffin. Like a certain donkey in Bethlehem (remembered so touchingly by Chesterton) they had their hour. "One far, fierce hour and sweet/There was a shout about my ears/And palms before my feet."

As for the purging of national guilt, history suggests that the experience, however cleansing, will be brief. The Greeks believed that tragedy, with all its pity and pain and awe, produced an emotional catharsis that lifted us far above ourselves. Were this true, the suspicions, the hate, the ugly spirit of absolutism that pervaded Texas would have vanished on the weekend John Kennedy was shot. Texas may have suffered shame and embarrassment. But the gun is still in the glove compartment of the family car, segregation is still an article of faith save where federal authorities have brought about token integration. And the John Birch Society still defaces the landscape and sullies the mails with hate propaganda.

\* \* \*

When the last eulogy has been said for Dr. King, when the noble, suffering face of Coretta King has faded from the public prints, the true test of the national conscience begins. We have 21,000,000 Negroes, a rising race eager for the light. The report of the U.S. Riot Commission has asked for "national action on an unprecedented scale." The course of this social revolution will be made harder by the hostility Negro rioting has provoked. After the ghetto uprisings of last summer a Lou Harris poll reported that 90 per cent of the white population felt that the Negroes were "moving too fast."

The gravest problem facing the Negro community now is to move forward with deliberate speed—without stirring fresh hatred and fear among whites. Congress could help. And the memory of Dr. King's dream could prod us onward.