

Silence is betrayal

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By Guillermo Alvarado

The 93rd anniversary of the birth of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was celebrated on Monday. The African-American religious leader was one of the most important men in the modern history of the United States who led the fight for all human beings to be equal, regardless of their race or social and economic condition.

The 1964 Nobel Peace Prize laureate shook the structures of the dominant system in the world's most powerful nation by demanding that the abolition of slavery, proclaimed by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 in the midst of the Civil War, should go from the dead letter to everyday practice.

One hundred years had passed since Lincoln's announcement, but in "the land of the free" millions of black people were by no means free and lacked the same opportunities as whites for equal access to education, health and employment.

Luther King became immortal after his assassination in 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, and as it happens with all people that the empire cannot avoid, they have devoted themselves to make him a kind of saint, unrepeatable, inaccessible and, therefore, inimitable.

Even his most remembered speech, "I have a dream", has been emptied of its content and left as a simple plea for the right to vote.

Anyone who reads it carefully will discover in it profound ideas, as when he said that "There will be no rest or tranquility in America until Negroes are guaranteed their rights as citizens."

"The whirlwinds of rebellion, Luther King anticipated, will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the splendid day of justice arises," a concept current nearly 60 years later.

Beyond mere attendance at the polls, he fought for economic equality for all members of society and, as journalist David Brooks pointed out, linked racism to the capitalist system and imperial power.

In 1967, a year before his assassination, he asserted that "The fact is that capitalism was built on the exploitation and suffering of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor, both black and white, here and abroad."

He was also a staunch opponent of the unjust war against Vietnam where the powers-that-be sent young men to die whose common denominator was poverty, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Questioned by some members of his group, who feared that anti-warism would weaken the fight for civil rights, Martin Luther King uttered one of his most brilliant and solid thoughts: "There comes a time when silence is betrayal".

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