

Dr. King's Dream Amplified **(A Historical Synopsis of Denver's and** **Colorado's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)**

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April 4, 1968, the day that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., worldwide humanitarian, was assassinated, spurred an unstoppable and unapologetic movement to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a nationwide holiday in the United States of America. The Colorado Black Community, the clergy, civil rights organizations, elected officials, freedom fighters, and people from all walks of life launched an effort forward for this great American to be so honored because of his ability to change our nation and the world which was destined to forever be headed in a wrong direction by not acknowledging, respecting, regarding, and living out the ideal that all men and women are created equal. A law had to be created in Colorado to make that effort a reality. That path to accomplish a legal holiday in Colorado was championed by leaders in the Colorado General Assembly, who, over the years, included: Colorado State Senator George W. Brown, Colorado State Representative Wellington E. Webb, Colorado State Representative King M. Trimble, Colorado State Representative Arie P. Taylor, and ultimately Colorado State Representative Wilma J. Webb. These leaders began introducing, in the House of Representatives and in the State Senate, Tributes and Memorials to other elected officials who, by their support and by their votes, would have the responsibility and the honor to grant such a holiday. Early on, only one introduced bills to pass a law that would honor Dr. King with an official holiday. That elected Colorado State Representative was Wellington E. Webb.

Representative Wellington E. Webb introduced three bills in the Colorado House of Representatives. Each of them was postponed indefinitely, which means essentially that each was defeated. In 1975, when the Democrats had the majority membership, he successfully passed House Bill (HB) 1100 out of the House of Representatives for adoption in the Senate, only to be postponed indefinitely by the Senate State Affairs Committee. A second attempt was introduced in 1976 by HB 1041, and it was postponed indefinitely by the House State Affairs Committee. A third effort was made in 1977 by Representative

Wellington Webb introducing HB 1062 which was his final attempt to pass a bill to adopt a law for the Dr. King Holiday. It was postponed indefinitely by the House State Affairs Committee.

All three efforts were valiant and courageous first steps to have a bill of major impact presented by a Black elected official, where no such endeavor had ever been contemplated or presented before or at that time.

Wellington Webb's acumen for leadership and involvement in government and political service is attributed, in large part, to his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Helen M. Gamble, who was an active participant in politics. She came from a world of the most of competitive politics, where in Chicago, she mastered the art of being involved in electing candidates and getting goods and services to all of Chicago's constituents. She brought her experience to Denver and Colorado, where she encouraged and tutored Wellington Webb to be involved in Politics if he wanted to see genuine and positive change occur. His civic achievements after his service as a Colorado State Representative are his appointments as the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies, the Regional Director of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and his elections as Denver City Auditor in 1987, and after his walking through the neighborhoods of Denver talking directly to the citizens, Wellington E. Webb was elected as Denver's 42nd Mayor in 1991.

In 1979, then Colorado State Representative King M. Trimble also introduced a bill to adopt a holiday to honor Dr. King. As was the fate of the previous bills introduced by Representative Wellington Webb, it was doomed and was postponed indefinitely.

Representatives Wellington Webb and King Trimble were the only two members of the legislature who introduced bills between 1972 and 1979.

In 1980, a fresh face was elected to the Colorado House of Representatives who championed the battle to adopt the holiday to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a legal holiday. She was first elected in April of 1980 by a Democratic Vacancy Committee to replace outgoing State Representative King M. Trimble, who left the legislature during his mid-term as a representative. to serve as a member of Denver City Council. Then she was elected by House District 8 citizens in November of 1980 to the Colorado House of Representatives. In 1981, upon her first session of the General Assembly, Colorado State Representative Wilma J.

Webb did not miss a year during the first four years of her service as a State Representative of introducing a bill to officially honor Dr. King with the distinction of celebrating the great American humanitarian that he was.

Representative Wilma Webb had a unique advantage and dedication to the task of making Dr. King's holiday because she had met Dr. King on at least two occasions when he came to Denver, and she was also a good friend to Mrs. Coretta Scott King. Representative Wilma Webb was mostly deeply devoted to the ideals that Dr. King lived and died for, and she was intent on doing what was righteously and strategically effective in adopting a law to celebrate Dr. King.

In her intrepid demeanor, Representative Wilma Webb was equal to the task that was before her. Her spirit was like that old Negro Spiritual, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," and nobody, not even the powerful Speaker of the House, was able to turn her around. In punishment for her success in getting HB-1201 adopted by the General Assembly, the Speaker even went so far as to refuse to re-appoint her to her position on the most powerful committee in the legislature, the Joint Budget Committee. She had to sue the Speaker of the House in court where she won the decision to be seated on the Joint Budget Committee, in which her Democratic colleagues had both elected and appointed her to serve on. She introduced four bills to honor Dr. King. Each one had to go through the legislative process of being a new bill, being one of a legislator's limited number of bills that he or she could introduce per session, filed, presented before committees, voted out of the committee, fought for on the floor of the House of Representatives, adopted by the Senate also, and approved finally by the House of Representatives, then, within 10 days it either could or not necessarily be signed by the Governor of the State.

The four bills that she introduced and carried were as follows:

- In 1981 the Honorable State Representative Wilma J. Webb introduced and carried HB 1218 which was postponed indefinitely by the House State Affairs Committee. A large impromptu gathering of over 300 people led by an organization named Umoja came to two committee Hearings and testified in favor of the holiday. Yet, it was defeated on a party-line vote with Republicans opposing the holiday.

- In 1982 the Honorable State Representative Wilma J. Webb introduced and carried HB 1090 which was postponed indefinitely by the House State Affairs Committee. One of the State Representatives who had given his word to vote for the holiday bill did not keep his word and the bill once again failed on a tie vote to be voted out of the Committee.
- In 1983 the Honorable State Representative Wilma J. Webb introduced and carried HB 1270. In the House State Affairs Committee Hearing, Representative Wilma Webb signed Dr. King up posthumously to testify as a witness in favor of the bill through a recording of his speech entitled “American Is Essentially A Dream”. For the first time the bill was first voted favorably out of the Committee and on to the Floor of the Colorado House, and was forwarded on to the Colorado Senate for the first time in a decade. Although votes were favorable to adopt the bill on the in the Senate overall, appallingly, the bill failed to be passed out of the Senate State Affairs Committee; and,
- IN 1984, STATE REPRESENTATIVE WILMA J. WEBB SUCCESSFULLY INTRODUCED AND CARRIED HB 1201 WHICH WAS ADOPTED BY THE COLORADO 54TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON MARCH 26, 1984.

On April 4, 1984, within 10 days after the General Assembly adopted HB 1201, Governor Richard D. Lamm signed the Bill into law. The Signing Ceremony was attended by over 300 people in the Old Supreme Court Chambers in the Colorado State Capitol.

Just like Dr. King would have wanted it to be, the crowd was made of people from all walks of life – elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, the Clergy of all faiths, civil rights organizations, the business community, the arts community, the education community, people of all races and genders, and people from all parts of Colorado. It was a glorious day.

In 1985, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, widow of Dr. King and President of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Non-Violent Social Action Center came to Denver. This time she came to request Representative Wilma Webb to convene a meeting with Governor Lamm to make a request of him. Governor Lamm granted the meeting where Mrs. King requested Governor Lamm to create the Martin Luther King, Jr. Colorado Holiday Commission. He granted our request.

The first Commission was established as the largest Commission ever established in Colorado, having over 79 members appointed by the Governor. Representative Wilma J. Webb was appointed by Governor as the Commission's Chairperson. She worked very closely with Mrs. King in planning for the Inaugural Holiday to take place in January 1986.

Representative Wilma Webb and the Commission planned an Inaugural Celebration to be for six days leading up to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, which was to be celebrated on every third Monday of each year thereafter. In 1986, the first official celebration, was on Monday, January 20, 1986.

It was a glorious celebration, graced by dignity, truth, humility, inclusiveness, and righteousness of purpose as reflective of the life and legacy of Dr. King.

In providing direction on how we would honor Dr. King and all those ignored people of color, disenfranchised, the poor, and women who had not been acknowledged for their individual and collective contributions to the building of America, Representative Wilma J. Webb said, "Well, we have to celebrate the celebration of the abolishment of slavery, all of the efforts of the civil rights movement to remove segregation, the March from Selma to Montgomery, the peacemakers, those who would stand up for justice, and all of the people who have fought and who have worked on making it possible for all people to be able to vote.

So, we must celebrate that those things have happened. We must also march forever to always stand up for justice for all in the future." With this spirit the Inaugural Holiday was created, executed, and became a model for future celebrations throughout the nation.

We began on Wednesday, January 15, 1986, with "Peace and Justice Day," where we had panels to discuss the on the status of civil rights and what current issues needed to be addressed at that time.

On Thursday, January 16, 1986, we shared our unity with the King Center and Washington, D.C. on "National Observance Day." On Friday, January 17, 1986, through our first social responsibility luncheon, "Business, Labor, and Government Day," we brought business and labor together to encourage their working closer to provide for jobs and better wages, and for a better economy which reached every level of income bracket of people.

On Saturday, January 18, 1986, athletes who were runners wanted to participate through our "Run for The Dream." Thousands of runners began their run from City Park running throughout the city for the dream to become a reality starting with their 3K and 5K races. Ironically, a Native American won the race that day.

On Sunday, January 19, 1986, The Clergy of Metropolitan Denver, including all faiths, hosted our Interfaith Service at Temple Emanuel Synagogue where Dave Brubeck and our 100-voice choir led by Commissioner Joyce M. Davis joined in a service of religious unity through sermons and songs celebrating our "United Nations Day."

And, on MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 1986, an estimated crowd of 15,000 Coloradoans gathered at the Martin Luther King, Jr. sculpture in Denver City Park for the Martin Marade. The term "Marade" was coined by Commission Chairperson Representative Wilma Webb, whose meaning is to parade and celebrate the victories achieved in combating injustices that had occurred, and march non-violently to always confront injustices in the future wherever they may be.

The Inaugural Holiday, where the Martin Marade began, has been held every year to the present, and is the largest march and parade celebrating Dr. King, excepting Atlanta, the birthplace and final resting place of Dr. King. The crowds have averaged 60,000 people every year, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is celebrated all over the world, our nation, and our State of Colorado.

We also fed over 2,000 homeless people and have every year since on Martin's Day. We also unveiled the official portrait of Dr. King by Artist Irving Watts, which was placed into perpetuity in the Colorado State Capitol.

Thanks to the commitment of Colorado State Representative Wilma J. Webb to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s work and life, and to her will and determination, and to her intrepid demeanor and unstoppable perseverance, we now legally and officially celebrate one of America's greatest humanitarians, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Honorable Wilma J. Webb was compelled to become more active in making a difference for people upon the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She was first moved to politics when Mrs. Rachel Noel, the first Black member of the Denver Public School Board in the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. King, passed a

resolution for the Denver Public Schools to be de-segregated. Wilma Webb was one of the young parents who provided testimony to support Mrs. Noel's resolution which did pass. She was deeply involved in the Black community by providing for poor children to receive clothing and food, and other amenities that they were not privileged to have. She also involved herself in encouraging people to register to vote.

She became active in the Democratic Party by becoming a Committeewoman, a Democratic District Captain, the elected Colorado State Democratic Party Secretary. She was then encouraged to run to be elected to the Colorado House of Representatives. In 1980, she ran for the District 8 Seat and she won. She was re-elected to six terms, serving for 13 years in the Colorado House of Representatives.

Never serving in the majority, she still managed to carry 44 significant bills, and, in addition to carrying and passing the bill to adopt Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, passing many substantive bills including the first and only Comprehensive Anti-Substance Abuse Law, the Granting of Subpoena Power to the Colorado Civil Rights Commission and Division, and Granting the Elderly the Ability to Remain in their Own Homes Rather Than in Nursing Homes. Representative Webb also served for four years on the Legislature's most powerful committee, the Joint Budget Committee.

She became Denver's first woman and first Black woman to be First Lady of Denver in 1991. In 1997, she was appointed by President William Jefferson Clinton to be the first woman to be the Secretary's Representative for Region VIII, covering the States of Colorado, Montana, Utah, Arizona, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Wyoming, of the U.S. Department of Labor.

She gave of herself personally 18 years in leadership in the efforts of institutionalizing the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She still remains active.

In 1998, As the Chairman and President of the Commission, Wilma Webb, in order to maximize institutionalization of the King Holiday, she determined that it would be most beneficial for the organization to be spun off into the community at large.

The different elements of the commission, the Parade and civil rights concerns, the Interfaith Service and its membership of different faiths, the business

community segment which held the Business Social Responsibility Luncheon, where most of the funds were raised for education scholarships, were all disbursed back into the communities which they represented.

In that spin off they were each awarded funds to carry forward the success of Dr. King Day and what Dr. King worked and gave his life for. They all have been effective and successful in their purposes and goals. The Marade was a spin off to The Urban League of Metropolitan Denver whose Executive Director was Annelle Lewis, who was succeeded by Michael Hancock.

In 1999, the Marade was then reincorporated into a newly formed King Commission whose Chairman today is Dr. Vernon Howard.

Dr. Howard has been superb in his mission to keep the Dream alive. At this writing the Holiday was adopted 36 years ago, and continues to be celebrated with fervor, respect, and legacy. It is meritorious in that the State of Colorado, along with our nation, is becoming better in brotherhood because of the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Those who have stood on his shoulders to keep his dream alive are doing so through this holiday for all of America.

Pioneers and extraordinarily dedicated believers in Dr. King and the idea that all men and women are created equal, have worked fervently to assure that generations to come will have the benefit of the legacy of Dr. King.

There are millions of people of good will willing to work to make a positive change where injustice exists, and where all of us can live in peace. Some of the persons whose shoulders we have stood on in Colorado are people whose names are rarely mentioned in this successful advancement in making our world more perfect. We all owe them a debt of gratitude.

Much like Dr. King, Wellington and Wilma Webb, and so many others, inspire many to do our individual and collective best to see that life is better for everyone. They are living the dream.

Yes, The Dream lives on and is not in Vain!
