

Clayborne Carson featured speaker at Sonora MLK celebration

By Pat Cervelli



MICHAEL COLOPY

Sunday, Jan. 11 will mark the 20th anniversary of the Motherlode Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee in Sonora. Since 1996, the group has presented a program to commemorate the work of Dr. King each January. The event has grown over the years and now about 400 people attend the free celebration at the Sonora High School auditorium. This year the featured speaker will be Dr. Clayborne Carson, the MLK, Jr. Centennial Professor of History at Stanford University and the founder of its *MLK Research and Education Institute* which houses the official MLK archives. His topic is income inequality.

Dr. King directly addressed income inequality in his later years when he was organizing the ***Poor People's Campaign*** in 1968. After observing that gains in civil rights had not improved the material conditions of life for most African-Americans, Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference began organizing the ***Poor People's Campaign*** to alleviate poverty for all Americans regardless of race: African-Americans, Whites, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans. In 1966, Dr. King and the SCLC resolved to expand the civil rights struggle to include demands for economic justice. Dr. King challenged the Vietnam War which not only violated his belief in non-violence but was draining money away from the anti-poverty programs of LBJ's *Great Society*. Dr. King said, "We believe the highest patriotism demands the ending of the war and the opening of a bloodless war to final victory over racism and poverty."

The ***Poor People's Campaign*** presented its demand to Congress for an "economic bill of rights," a \$30 billion anti-poverty package that included a commitment to full employment, a guaranteed annual income and more low-income housing.

In the midst of this effort, Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis where he went to march with African-American sanitation workers who, in the wake of the death of two of their workers, were demanding safe working conditions, the right to unionize and better pay. Dr. King viewed the struggle of African-Americans to unionize as an important step toward economic justice.

After Dr. King's death, dramatizing their needs and uniting all races under the common issue of poverty, ***Poor People's Campaign*** participants set up a 3,000-person tent city on the Washington Mall where they stayed for six weeks. The effort resulted in some positive gains.

Clayborne Carson has devoted most of his professional life to the study of Martin Luther King, Jr. He was selected by Coretta Scott King to edit and publish her late husband's papers. Under the leadership of Dr. Carson, the *King Papers Project* has produced seven volumes of *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, a definitive, comprehensive edition of Dr. King's speeches, sermons, correspondence, publications, and unpublished writings. Dr. Carson went on to found the *Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute* at Stanford University which houses the MLK archives.

As a young man, Dr. Carson was a civil rights and antiwar activist. His latest book is a memoir, *Martin's Dream: My Journey and the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* His first book, the award-winning *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, remains the definitive history of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. His other publications include *Malcolm X: The FBI File* and *African American Lives: The Struggle for Freedom*, a co-authored survey of African-American history.

Besides being an internationally-known King scholar, Dr. Carson has written a musical play, *Passages of Martin Luther King*, which was performed at several universities as well as in Beijing and in the Occupied Territories of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. He was an advisor for the PBS series on the civil rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize*. Other films for which he has served as advisor are the 1995 Oscar-nominated *Freedom on My Mind*, *Chicano!*, *Blacks and Jews*, *Citizen King*, *Negroes with Guns: Rob Williams and Black Power*, *Have You Heard from Johannesburg?*, and *Al Helm: Martin Luther King in Palestine*.

He has also developed the Liberation Curriculum initiative that has become a major source of educational materials about MLK and the ongoing struggles to achieve peace with social justice. He has lectured throughout the world on many topics related to non-violence and the African-American freedom struggle.

The Sonora event begins at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 11 at the Sonora High School Auditorium located at the corner of N. Washington St. and Shaws Flat Rd. The program will include music and the prizes for the essay contest. It will be followed by a reception with refreshments in the school cafeteria. Admission is free and the site is handicapped accessible. For more information, see the website mlmartinlutherkingjr.org, go to the facebook page, or call Pat Cervelli at 928-3494.