

REMARKS

OF

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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

ON

JANUARY 10, 2013  
WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Laura [Colon-Marrero]. Good morning. I want to welcome everyone to this observance honoring Dr. King. I also want to thank Kevin Jenkins and the planning committee for organizing today's program – this promises to be another terrific event put on by our special emphasis program managers. Thanks, also, to Laura, Todd [Garrison], and the Equal Employment Opportunity Office staff for their work in coordinating these activities, and for the excellent work they do throughout the year to promote diversity and inclusion in OJP.

And a special welcome to our guest speaker, Jeff Johnson, for joining us today. I'm very much looking forward to introducing him in just a few moments.

The theme of today's observance is "Non-Violent Social Change: How Far We've Come, Where Do We Go From Here?" I think this is a fitting theme, and one I'm certain Dr. King would be very pleased to hear embraced today. Forty-eight years ago – not long after the shocking events of Bloody Sunday – he led thousands of men and women on a two-week march from Selma to Montgomery. In a speech at the end of the march, he reminded listeners that non-violence is a timeless principle. "The battle is in our hands," he said. "And we can answer with creative non-violence the call to higher ground to which the new directions of our struggle summon us."

The struggles he articulated were poverty, poor housing, lack of jobs, and the fight to obtain the vote. Sadly, today, those struggles continue in too many pockets of America. And as we know too well from our own work in OJP, we can add to the list the very serious challenges we face in our criminal and juvenile justice systems, where young black men continue to be significantly over-represented. And statistics from the CDC show that homicide is not only the leading cause of death for young African American men, but it outranks the next four leading causes combined!

Clearly, the struggle has not ended. But we're not sitting idly by at OJP. Through the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, we're engaged with communities across the country in dealing with the issues that contribute to youth and gang violence. We're working with the White House and other federal agencies through the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program, the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, and the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative to help turn neighborhoods of distress into neighborhoods of opportunity. And through our efforts under the Second Chance Act, the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, and the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, we're working to make sure communities are equipped to help returning inmates reintegrate and that they're well positioned to reduce recidivism.

This isn't easy work, as the Attorney General often reminds us, and solutions won't come quickly. In some areas, the problems are deeply entrenched, and resources are not always readily available. But we have seen that these problems are not insurmountable by any means, especially when a broad coalition of committed stakeholders works together.

In his speech at Montgomery, Dr. King cautioned that "[t]he road ahead is not altogether a smooth one. There are no broad highways that lead us easily and inevitably to quick solutions." But he also said, "[i]f we will go on with the faith that non-violence and its power

can transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows, we will be able to change all of these conditions.”

I hope that that we will be inspired by his words to continue working for positive change and to look ahead to a brighter tomorrow.

It’s a pleasure now to introduce our keynote speaker, Mr. Jeff Johnson. His voice is probably familiar to many of you as a guest commentator on the Tom Joyner Morning Show. He’s also a frequent lecturer and has worked in communities across the country to effect social change.

He’s also an award-winning journalist, an MSNBC contributor, and executive editor of Politic365.com. And he’s the Chairman and CEO of the Jeff Johnson Institute for Urban Development, which is leading a five-year project to recruit and develop 80,000 black mail teachers.

He has a host of other accomplishments, awards, board appointments, and other achievements to his name, but I don’t want to cut into his time any further. Let’s give a warm welcome to Mr. Jeff Johnson.

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