

Following a King

feature

By Sharonda Sheppard

It can undoubtedly be said that the peak of Black societal advancement in America occurred under the late, great Dr. Martin Luther King. A charismatic and proficient leader, Dr. King, along with his loyal counterparts, aided the Black race into reaching higher heights in a racism-infested society. Reflecting upon his legendary achievements such as the Alabama bus boycott of 1955 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Dr. King died as an undisputed legend; not only in Black America, but in all of America.

However, Black Americans today have found themselves unable to claim a leader with whom the majority of the race can relate. As they still press for social, political, and economic advancement, their movement ahead has been considered by some as being "a little sluggish." Confronted with the unfortunate continuance of Black on Black violence, the low ranks in the school system, arrests of Black youth, and increasing number of teenage pregnancies, Black America screams out for a new leader.

Black America has been left to question the lack of leadership within the Black community. According to UNC African-American Studies professor, Perry Hall, it is no question that Black America has not seen another charismatic leader since the death of Dr. King.

"Dr. King is a hard act to follow," Hall says. "But, Reverend Jesse Jackson managed to carry King's legacy to another level with his run for presidency in the 1980's."

Hall commented on Jackson's run for presidency as being "historic" but also stated that "Jackson's moment of appearance has passed."

Minister Louis Farrakhan from the Nation of Islam has been looked upon as a potential leader for the Black community. Under his guidance, he managed to gather a million Black men in Washington D.C. for the Million-Man March of 1995. This spiritual gathering was said to have been the cause of a significant decrease in Black violence.

"Louis Farrakhan is the single, most dynamic leader on the scene who has displayed much effectiveness," Hall comments.

The question left to be asked is "What qualities make a considered leader a good leader?" One often has to

reflect back and analyze the qualities that made Dr. King a successful and profound leader. According to Professor Hall, one reason for King's effectiveness was his ability to work productively alongside others. King worked strenuously with loyal counterparts such as the late NAACP president Medgar Evers, Jesse Jackson, Hosea Williams, and Reverend Ralph Abernathy. King also received the aid of President Johnson in passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1964. According to Professor Hall, neither Jackson nor Farrakhan has the kind of stature that King possessed in order to draw the big names of powerful people.

Black America has been left to question the lack of leadership within the Black community.

According to UNC African-American Studies professor, Perry Hall, it is no question that Black America has not seen another charismatic leader since the death of Dr. King.

Hall also says that King held the quality of good communication. His superb communication skills allowed him to "speak in a fashion that would touch the heart of common folks but also touch the heart of the elite. He was a calm and rational

figure which enabled him to get through to a lot of people." He mentioned that in order for a new leader to be as productive, they would have to "have the courage of their convictions, like Louis Farrakhan; but they would need to have a little more tolerance. They will need to be able to find common ground and be able to present society to Black people in a way that Black people will understand."

Most important of all, Hall said that good leadership comes from the people-Black people. "Leaders depend upon the leadership of their constituents." During the Civil Rights Movement, Black people were on the move a little more than Black people are today. They were prompted by their current position in a racist society. Black America's determination to move forward in the 1960's despite all obstacles is what pushed them ahead. Dr. King, however, was a guide or a coach as they shoved forward. He was their mouthpiece to an almost deaf society, which kept Black America motivated to push harder.

"If Black had not been on the move in the 60's, there is a chance that Dr. King may not have been as effective," Hall said "Black America today has got to get on the move. It's going to have to start with people in the community—building from the ground up."