

THE MAN REMEMBERED

By VERNON ROBINSON
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I HAVE FOUND four aspects of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and conduct an inspiration to me and others working for a better community. These aspects are the power of intellect, rhetoric, persistence and group effort, and they are King's legacy to me.

Martin King was a tremendous intellect, but he was more than that. He used this gift to teach others.

If one reads King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," scratched out on waste paper and smuggled out of prison, one cannot but be impressed at his evocation of history and theology to gently but firmly explain to his detractors that Christian answer required in response to unjust laws.

His intellect was one of caring rather than one of sterility. He conducted his life in the finest tradition of what one of my professors, the late Dr. Gordon Lippitt, referred to as "action research."

If we work hard at applying our intellectual gifts to better the lives of those who haven't shared in our opportunities, we will live up to King's example of the power of intellect.

If one remembers that King's "I Have a Dream" speech was only 10 minutes in duration and largely extemporaneous, one cannot but be awestruck by the power of rhetoric. The truly bright mind can not only grapple with the complex problems of the day but can also articulate a vision that can be understood by everyone, from the Ph.D.s to the no-Ds.

Even though we may never equal King's rhetorical gifts, we should still strive to grapple with those difficult problems and express a vision to give others hope who otherwise may run out of hope. By striving toward that level of excellence, we honor the oratory and writings of King.

If one reads King's biography, one cannot but notice the graphic depiction of a man truly driven. Even though lonely and harshly criticized, even though separated from his family 27 days of a month and dead tired, even though his life was threatened daily, he found the strength to carry on.

King was human, not flawless. Though the protest efforts in Albany and St Augustine were failures, he picked himself and the movement up after setbacks and continued to press onward.

I had a personal experience with the power of quiet persistence.

After many months of unsuccessfully trying to convince my colleagues of a particular point, I had yet another meeting, a three-hour drive away, to press my point. I hesitated to put more effort into what seemed sure to be another setback. But I went to that meeting at a church in eastern North Carolina and made the presentation -- and was successful.

As I looked up from my seat, about to drive off, I noticed a quote from the Book of Proverbs on the church marquee: "Without a vision, the people perish." Thus, the power of persistence is recognized in Scripture.

I must be an optimist, because I feel that my efforts can make a difference. So, too, it was with Martin King.

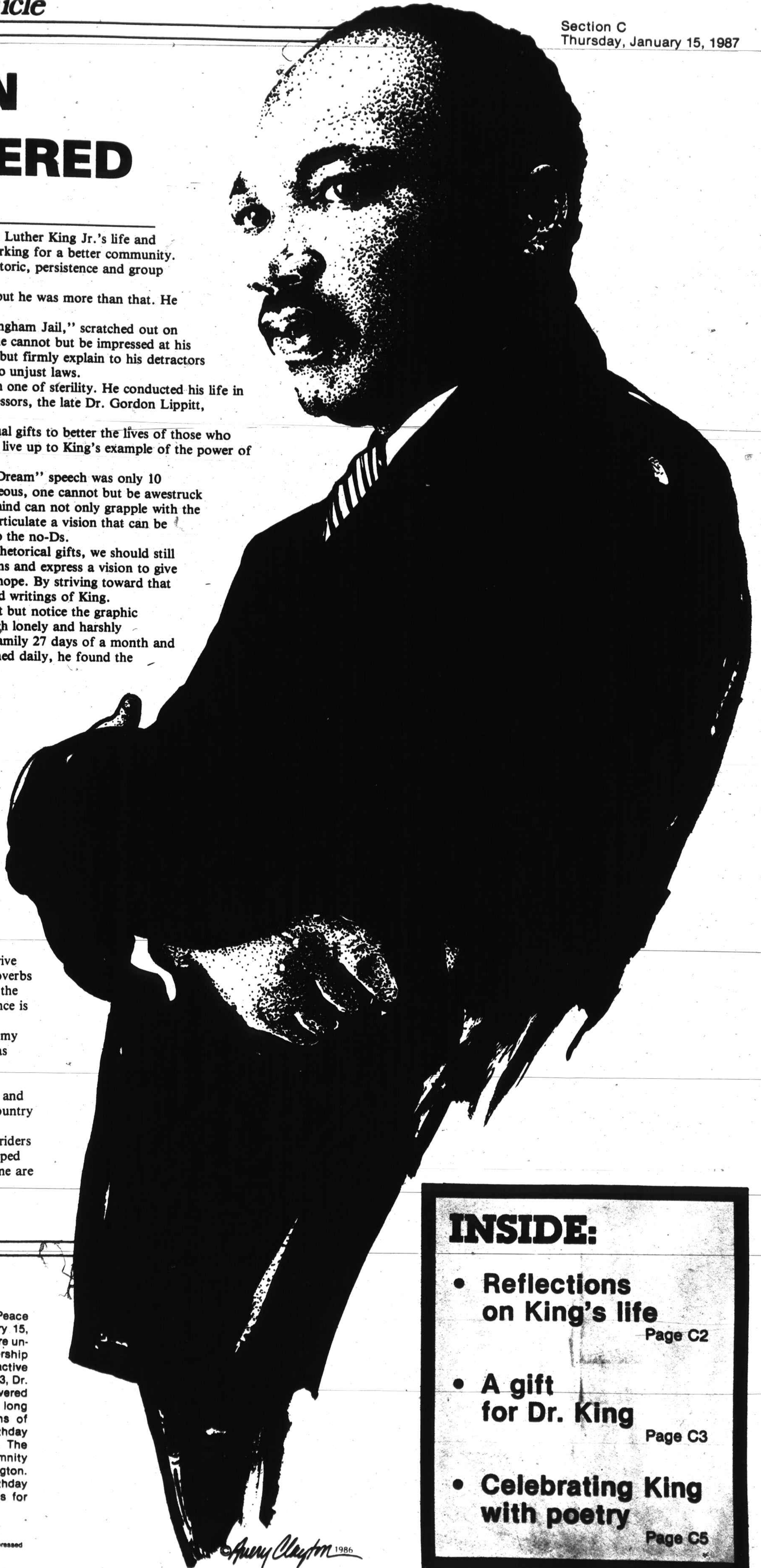
Any but the most egotistical of leaders recognizes that it is the group of individuals and their actions that make a community or a country or the world a better place to live.

Some people are heroic, like the freedom riders of the '60s and the Phillipine nuns who stopped tanks with their bodies and with prayer. Some are less dramatic but no less successful in their collective action.

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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (1929-1968)

Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr., 1964 Nobel Peace prize winner and human rights leader was born January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. His contributions to the world are unparalleled in modern times. Under his charismatic leadership more social change was realized during his thirteen active years than had been achieved in an entire century. In 1963, Dr. King led the famous March on Washington, where he delivered the legendary "I Have A Dream" speech which will be long remembered as one of the most eloquent expressions of human aspiration. On November 2, 1983 Dr. King's birthday was designated a national holiday for all Americans. The designation of a national holiday is an honor of rare solemnity previously granted to only one American, George Washington. The commemoration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday honors not only a truly noble American, but the ideals for which he lived and died: Peace & Justice for All.



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