

## **A Grateful Perspective**

### **Marion / The Proletarian / The Egalitarian — Rest in Peace**

When Marymount College bestowed posthumous honorary degrees to the widows of both Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, it celebrated the occasion with the battle cry for the popular storming of the Bastille during the French uprisings in the 1700's, "Long live the passionate revolution for creative intelligence!"

The posthumous recognition for our newly departed brother, Marion S. Barry, should read the same. A product of Mississippi's abject poverty and the 60's student rebellion, he ever refused to settle for a mere middle class revolution. For him it was not about creating a buffer caste between the white establishment and the deprived black community. It was about lifting the burden from the shoulders of the last oppressed woman, child, and man in an unfair economic and social *status quo*.

It was my good fortune to be among the "Prayer for the Nation" congregation at Howard University's Rankin Chapel on November 9th this year to hear from his wheelchair what may have been Marion's last public summary of his moving political accomplishments and deep personal regrets. That gave me an opportunity to hand him my newly discovered copy of his own fifty year old type-written statement to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) on the urgent necessity for greater black political participation. Long before his own political career was born, that archival 1965 manuscript was the manifesto that governed the whole of what was to become his storied public life.

In it he questioned, if the people most affected by poverty relief programs were not part of the political structure would not those programs become little more than tokens rather than hammers to forge change? He answered his rhetorical question with the unambiguous, "I for one am ready to get involved!" And he went on to predict that in many areas of the South, whenever the pending 1965 voting rights bill passed there would be attempted terror and intimidation just like the rampages of the Klu Klux Klan and night riders had been unleashed in the 1870's, with the newly-added perversion of sweet talking federal appeasers mouthing "Cum By Ya," seeking to woo and manipulate the new black voters, like the carpetbaggers of old.

As a man of the people it is no wonder that he tragically manifested some flaws. We can all cite aspects of Marion's life style that we would like to edit out, but none dare amend or tamper with the fact of his public compass fixed ever steadfast on the liberation of his and all others of the forgotten. — Because he was a professed religious adherent, I am sure he would not object to me citing this biblical cry as a proverbial caution to be taken to heart by those who might follow, "Oh Jerusalem, Oh Jerusalem, How often would I have gathered you under my wings as a brood hen her chicks. But you would not." It is well for all of us to remember one need not be perfect to be able to pursue greatness still.

Shakespeare spoke for Marion as well when he put these final words on Othello's lips:

“Soft you; a word or two before you go.  
I have done the state some service, and they know 't  
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;”  
*Othello* Act 5, Scene 2

Long live the passionate revolution for intrepid, and creative intelligence so vividly displayed in the major building blocks of Marion's life!

Marion's original May 1965 pledge of half a century ago to SNCC has been abundantly fulfilled now and the people, all the people, should be generous enough to be glad and give him thanks.

Timothy L. Jenkins  
1960's SNCC Organizer in Mississippi and  
Citizen of the District of Columbia