



Nelles return to Washington to reaffirm his commitment

"A part of the reason I wanted to return was to witness a partial fulfillment of King's Dream and I believe that it is exemplified in Barack Obama."

For Barney Nelles, the former director of Family Service of Racine, Inc., said it was like a burning desire to return to a place where it had all started for him. As a young social worker on the streets of Milwaukee, Nelles had gone to Washington D.C. in August of 1963 to hear a young southern Baptist preacher by the name of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. call for an end to segregation and Jim Crowism. There he stood, 27-years-old at the time, listening to the famous "I Have A Dream" speech of the famed civil rights leader of that era. "It really changed my thinking. I had an undergraduate degree in business. I think going to hear Dr. Martin Luther King's speech influenced me to make a commitment to be of service to people, rather than being in the business world."

Nelles and the deceased Father Groppi, a Milwaukee civil rights activist, would drive non-stop to be a part of the more than the 250,000 people who came from all points of the country to hear Dr. King's call for all people to be treated equal. That was the part of King's speech that remains etched into his mind. "King said that all men are created equal and they should have the same opportunities. He was very concerned about the equality for all people, as a part of that, he was concerned that people be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," he explained.

Nelles makes the trip back to Washington

At the age of 72, Nelles, a Marshfield, Wisconsin native, made the pilgrimage back to the hallowed grounds to hear the inauguration speech of President Barack Obama, the first African-American elected into the highest office in the nation. "A part of the reason I wanted to return was to witness a partial fulfillment of King's Dream and I believe that it is exemplified in Barack Obama."

Nelles, said that he definitely did not believe that he would see a black man as president in his lifetime. "Things are better, but there is much more work to be done, yet we have made significant steps forward." He said that his trip this time was more up lifting. "People were very cheerful, positive, and I understand that there was not a single arrest during the event. People were very kind to one another, and that speaks of the brotherhood that was shown on that day."

He said that because of discrimination in America at the time, King's speech woke up the consciousness of the American people. Today, Obama's message calls for healing. "It doesn't happen frequently, but certain people come along that have the characteristics and ability to bring people together. We see that in Barack Obama, he has the charisma and skills to convince people that we must sit across the table, and we are in this

Former Parkside student writes book on "Who I Am"

Michael Eric Owens' latest literary work is titled YES, I AM, WHO I AM: A New Philosophy of Black Identity. Professor of History Laura Gellott sums up this recent work thusly: Owens' book "is the result of much reading, research, and deep reflection. Part history, part memoir, part meditation, it is ultimately a hope filled summons to Blacks to embrace and claim their full identity as Americans. Michael Owens' critique of 'African American' as identity is sure to provoke, and to raise further questions as the reader follows Owens' journey of discovery towards a usable Black identity for contemporary America."



Owens is describes as an agent of truth, who confronts the Black identity crisis with courage and dignity.

Born and raised in the inner-city of Milwaukee, Michael Owens experienced first hand the many challenges facing minorities today. Following a successful career in the United States Navy where he achieved Sailor of the Year honors, he attended the University of Wisconsin-Parkside earning degrees in History and Political Science, as well as the Outstanding Graduate Award. He received his Master of Library & Information Science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Heather Frederick, Professor of Psychology, describes Owens "as an agent of truth, who confronts the Black

identity crisis with courage and dignity. YES, I AM WHO I AM is a thoughtful exposé that ventures beyond a historical account of the Black experience in America to offer a solution; a timely read for anyone who calls themselves an American."

Owens is the Manager of Library Operations at the prestigious Ralph Ellison Library in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He is also a distinguished scholar, writer, speaker, and activist who has used his voice and literary passion to illuminate the untold stories of Black America. Owens' charisma and eloquence make him a leading voice on race relations in the 21st century.

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