

## 1968: Mahalia, Martin...Gloria, Tom Perspectives John Teevan August 23, 2024

I told my story of running into Mahalia Jackson at the 1968 Chicago Convention, but there is more. In 1963 MLK was working on the famous “I Have a Dream” speech though it did not have that title because he was not sure exactly what he was going to say. He had many options, and consulted with a few friends, but he had not settled it. He was sure he would open with the point that even 100 years after Abe Lincoln (speaking at the foot of the Lincoln monument in DC) “we are not free.” Right after **Mahalia Jackson sang a MLK favorite**, “I’ve Been Boked and I’ve Been Scorned,” he spoke.

**MLK:** “It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given its colored people a bad check, but we refuse to believe that the Bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. We have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency....” He then went on to say that they could not simply go back home.

There was a pause as MLK seemed to be deciding among the possible threads of his speech. That’s when Mahalia Jackson, a friend for years since they met in Alabama, spoke in a clear voice, “Tell them about the Dream, Martin! Tell them about the dream.” She had heard him speak of the dream before and was bold to suggest it at that moment on August 28, 1963.

MLK set aside his notes and turned his speech up a notch, if possible, and began to soar. “

**“I still have a dream.** It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.” And America rose up. Thank God for Mahalia Jackson.

**Gloria:** Now fast forward to 2022 and another famous singer and song writer, Gloria Gaither. She and Bill Gaither have written enough memorable songs of praise and worship that they rival or exceed by sheer volume and breadth of impact the works of hymn and song writers like John Wesley and John Newton.

When I was interim President of Grace College and Seminary in 2022, Gloria Gaither decided to invite (summon) the presidents of Indiana’s Christian colleges to her office in Alexandria, IN. About a dozen of us showed up. Two topics: She wanted to know what we are a) doing about the mental health of college students today. She knew that music was very effective but b) what else were we doing? Are we cooperating with each other? She wanted more counseling to help people. She was not just making a point about numbers. She went on to ask each of us how we listen to student needs and respond. She took notes.

I was struck by her humility...not a fancy building but by her directness...and by the urgent sincerity of her care for the very people we care for while they are enrolled in our colleges. The ‘finger on the pulse’ that she and Bill had for earlier generations of Christians was enormously well expressed in the Gaither music. Now she cared about a few thousand Christian college students too. Thank God for Gloria Gaither!

**Only a month after the Chicago Democratic convention** I was renting a basement apartment with seven other men in Winona Lake, IN. I was ready for good biblically focused teaching from a biblical worldview, but I was not prepared for the political and sub-cultural aspects of living in Indiana in 1968.

I had not applied for an absentee ballot, so I drove to Park Ridge, IL to cast my vote. Humphrey barely lost the popular vote, but he lost the Electoral College by a vote of 301-191. That same fall, Grace invited Tom Skinner to our annual Missions Conference, and I was asked to drive him around. Skinner later gave a remarkable keynote speech “The Liberator Has Come” at the Urbana ’70 conference which I attended.

I thank God for Tom Skinner, Gloria Gaither, Mahalia Jackson, and Martin Luther King.