

Remarks of PBA President Kenneth J. Horoho Jr.
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Tribute
January 15, 2007
Pittsburgh

Good morning, Mr. Mayor, distinguished guests and fellow citizens:

History is filled with significant events that have shaped our future and, more importantly, with outstanding leaders who have shaped our destiny.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s contributions to our society place him among these great leaders of all time.

During his short life, Dr. King helped people realize and rectify the injustices that were tarnishing the American landscape.

The vision of our Founding Fathers, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, was far from reality in the 1950's when a young Dr. King first set out to pursue his dream of a land where all Americans would be truly "free at last."

In those days, African-Americans were relegated to positions of second-class citizenship by restrictive laws.

If they dared to break these laws, African-Americans often were the victims of intense police brutality.

It was not the finest hour for our justice system, either. The legal system at the time often failed these victims, which led to a widespread disillusionment with America's institutions of government.

America truly needed a Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Within a short span of 13 years – from 1955 until his tragic death in 1968 – he was able to expose many wrongs and extricate America from them. His tactics of non-violent, passive resistance as a means of promoting change were the right prescription for our country at the right time.

He provided hope when there was none. He provided reason when there was none. He provided unity when there was none.

This great leader also showed this country how to heal its many wounds and how to work together to build, rather than destroy, itself. Thanks to his brave efforts, federal legislation was passed to provide access and legal protection for minorities in the areas of public accommodations, voting rights, education, housing and transportation.

As we join together today in the spirit of Dr. King, we are reminded of the fact that people need to make history, not just study it. And many of you here today – thanks to your own personal leadership efforts- have indeed made history here in Pittsburgh, throughout our great commonwealth and beyond

Yet as we all know, the struggle continues. Today, almost forty years since Dr. King's death, the headlines point out instances of injustice, pockets of intolerance, and widespread public loss of confidence in America's institutions.

Consequently, the legal profession must assume leadership in assuring that the blessings of liberty are experienced by all of our citizens.

I have been hosting breakfasts for minority lawyers across Pennsylvania; the first one was in November in Pittsburgh last week, 140 minority lawyers and judges joined me in Philadelphia. And on Wednesday I will break bread with the minority lawyers in Harrisburg. This effort will culminate in the Pennsylvania Bar Association Minority Bar Conference to be held right here in Pittsburgh, March 23-25. I am working very hard with Ed Diggs, this year's chair of the PBA Minority Bar Committee, Carl Cooper, and many other lawyers and judges in this church to make this not only a premier event of this bar association year but a premier event for the City of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania.

Along my journey as President of the State Bar Association, I have reminded all lawyers that it is of critical importance that we reach out to all Americans and help them understand how the law protects their rights and responsibilities and how they need to participate in our democracy to keep it strong.

We, as lawyers, must recognize a very important fact: As America's population grows more diverse, its citizens need to have officers of the court with whom they can identify. While our society is becoming more diverse, with people of color are likely to reach majority status during the next 35 to 50 years, the legal profession must keep pace. The Pennsylvania Bar Association is committed to making sure that there are opportunities for minority lawyers to succeed and grow as members of Pennsylvania legal community.

I can think of few other times in the history of this nation when diversity in the legal profession was as critical. I think of few other times in the history of this Commonwealth when it is as critical for minority lawyers to seize the role of leaders and to take advantage of opportunities that exist to elevate not just our profession, but most importantly our communities and citizens.

As we move forward to address these and other challenges, let us remember that our mistakes and the inequities of the past must guide, and not control, our future.

Winston Churchill once said: "If we open a quarrel between the past and present, we shall find that we have lost the future."

We all know that actions speak louder than words.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, I invite all of you, and those outside of this church, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian-American and other ethnic groups, to join us at the Pennsylvania Bar Association as we accept our leadership challenge to make history.

I challenge us to honor the spirit and determination of the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., by moving from aspiration to action. Let us pursue and fulfill Dr. King's dream of guaranteeing freedom and justice for all.

Indeed, the very future, our children's future, and the very fabric of our society depends on it.

I have been honored by the opportunity to address you here today. Thank you.