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From the Baltimore Sun

New ways to follow King

By Cheryl Dorsey

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As we reflect this week on what the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. stood for, it is worth considering some of the more innovative offshoots of his original campaign for civil rights.

The movement for social justice, which he so successfully nourished and led, created the environment that gave root to many of today's social entrepreneurs.

As the baby boomers prepare to retire, the nonprofit sector is thinking about "next-generation" leadership. Issues of recruitment and retention loom large as we ponder the replacement of those who fueled, shaped and led nonprofits and activist groups in the almost 40 years since Dr. King's death.

When Dr. King wrote that "the hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists," he likely did not foresee the many ways in which the courageous spirit of the Freedom Riders and civil rights activists would evolve over the ensuing decades.

Today, "disciplined nonconformists" often take the form of nonprofit innovators or social entrepreneurs who boldly tackle long-standing social problems with zeal and determination. The heritage of civil disobedience and the growth of the nonprofit sector have given birth to a new era of social innovation. Young leaders' ideas, which are often untested, may drive new approaches that strike a blow against hunger for starving farmers in Kenya, or help close the achievement gap between children of color and their white brothers and sisters throughout the United States.

It is not a stretch to argue that Dr. King paved the way for entrepreneurs such as Wendy Kopp, one of my organization Echoing Green's first fellows, who turned her undergraduate thesis at Princeton University into Teach for America. An ambitious education reform program launched 15 years ago, Teach for America has a \$55 million annual budget to field 4,400 young teachers in our nation's neediest schools each year, reaching more than 375,000 students.

The King legacy also lives on in the entrepreneurial spirit of Karen Tse, an attorney and ordained minister who started International Bridges to Justice. Sparked by her experience in rebuilding the legal system in Cambodia after its decimation at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, Ms. Tse's work helps ensure that ordinary citizens have basic rights to legal representation and protection from mistreatment at the hands of the law.

And the King legacy opened the door for global innovators such as his fellow Morehouse College graduates Anthony Jewett and Michael Williams II, who recently founded Bardoli Global to transform the face of America abroad - and broaden the horizons of our own students of color. Their goal is to increase drastically the number of African-American and Latino students who study abroad each year, boldly aiming to send 150,000 to other countries by the year 2017.

As these young people create new ventures or move up the ranks of existing nonprofits, the King example reminds us that we have an obligation to help provide emerging leaders with the experiences, opportunities and support to live out their dreams of having a positive impact on the world.

Yet in a society that pushes college graduates disproportionately toward careers in sales, marketing and finance, young people who are inclined to take Dr. King's path to social change often confront an information gap. According to a recent study conducted by New York University professor Paul Light, 62 percent of graduating college seniors are interested in careers related to public service, yet only 9 percent know a great deal about how to go about finding a job in the nonprofit sector.

Whether we are professors, administrators, nonprofit executives, philanthropists or simply mentors, there are ways for many of us to help. Those looking to effect social change need to know where the resources are - in books, on the Web, through grant-makers or simply from the guidance of wise counselors.

More than 40 years ago, Dr. King rightly exhorted that "true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring." Those who take on this challenge will fuel us to move beyond the noble work of charity to achieve the daunting task of social change. It is our obligation to support them.

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