

Walleye Warriors WB MLK speech

At our pre-spearing Witness for Non-Violence public meeting in Milwaukee in March 1989, Walt Bresette gave a keynote speech along with African-American Lutheran minister Kenneth Wheeler.

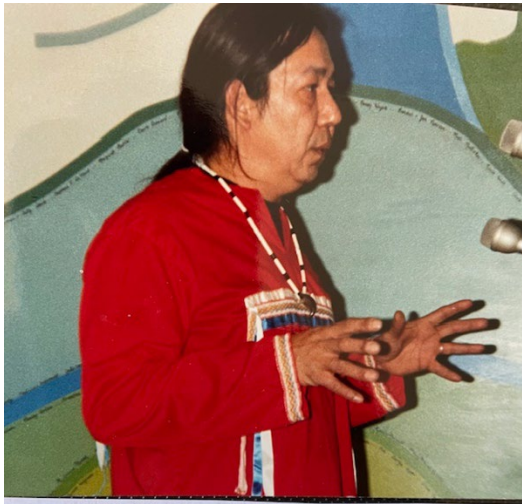


Photo by Ellen Smith; used with permission

March 18, 1989: Walt keynotes a "Celebration of Chippewa Treaty Rights" at the Action Center, with James Yellowbank and Rev. Kenneth Wheeler.

Walt recollected:

I was in the army when Martin Luther King was assassinated, stationed near [Washington] D.C. They put us off limits, but I snuck out before they closed the gates the next day ...

I don't even know why, I didn't know why I was so upset. I didn't know why the tears 'cause I didn't know this man from no one. [I] heard a few speeches by him. I was a kid.

I remember I went across the Key Bridge in D.C. at eight, nine o'clock in the morning. Things were like they always were. I was driving around and pretty soon people started walking a little faster. About ten o'clock, people were running and the sirens were going. At eleven o'clock, it was just total chaos...the city was beginning to burn. And I just drove around and watched it. I watched Washington, D.C., burn.

About twelve o'clock noon, I had no idea where I was. I pull into this driveway and this Black man jumped on the hood of my car. He looked at me. I looked at him. I said, "I'm on your side."

He said, "Well, then, get the hell out of here." So I did. I turned around and eventually found my way back to the Key Bridge and drove across and looked back and there was D.C. burning. I don't know if I felt good but [it] felt necessary to somehow bear witness to that tragedy. And I don't even know why....

Martin Luther King had at least three fundamental faiths I think we'd all do well to consider. I think he believed firmly, absolutely, in Jesus. He had a spiritual faith. Whether we're agnostic, non-Christian, whatever our beliefs are, you got to turn to somebody like him and say, why was

he able to do the things he did. I think because of that faith.... It's through that faith, whatever it might be, and you really got to believe. You can't let the Reverend pray for you. You have to pray for yourself...from the heart and from what you know in your mind. This [meeting room] is kind of like a [crowded] sweat lodge...we've got to lean on each other's shoulders.

I think the second faith that he had was the firm belief in love and nonviolence as a fundamental truth of change. And there's got to be something to that, too. He couldn't have done what he did, moved even a little Chippewa from northern Wisconsin who he wasn't even thinkin' about, to the kind of fundamental change in my life, without some power. And I think that fundamental faith in love and nonviolence is something we should all consider. Not just on the posters. Not just to do more fundraising and get more people involved.... You...me...you got to feel it, you got to believe it!

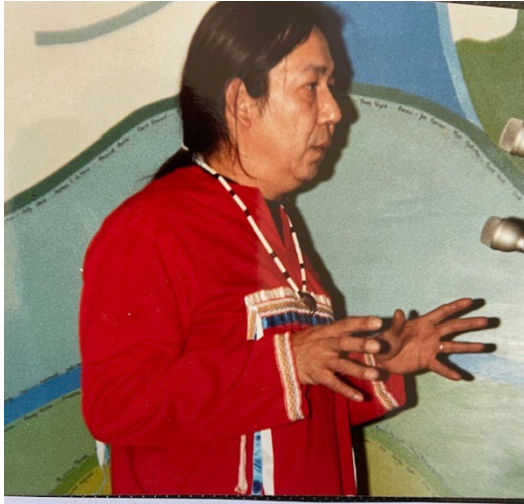
And I know he had a third belief, an absolute faith in the U.S. Constitution. I know that. He believed that no matter what needed to be done, that entrenched in that Constitution was the ability to display the truth of [those] rights that were being hidden, that were being pushed down. This issue is tied to that belief, too. You know, we may be a flea on the ass of an elephant, as Chippewa people, as semi-sovereign, domestic people. But as long as that elephant goes along, we're going with it in that political sense. As long as that Constitution is there and it says it protects our rights, and if those rights are allowed to be lost, or taken, or intimidated out of being exercised, then that elephant is one step closer to disaster. Which means you're one step closer to disaster.

Walleye Warriors: The Chippewa Treaty Rights Story, chapter 6, "The River Opens to the Righteous"; Beech River Books 2024 permission



Dr. Jimmy Jackson (1931-2018) *MLive* [Muskegon] (file photo permission granted) at his African American History Museum in Muskegon, Michigan.

In January 1989, the Witness for Non-Violence invited longtime civil rights activist Dr. James Jackson of Muskegon, Michigan, to come to Milwaukee to discuss his Witness for Peace trip to Nicaragua, followed by a Witness training the next day for the upcoming Chippewa spearfishing season.



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