

Reflections on the Dream Reborn

Van Jones

This year, I was proud to help launch a new, national organization, Green For All. Our advocacy organization is committed to building an inclusive *green economy*, one that would be strong enough to lift millions of people out of poverty.

Green For All wanted to do something special on April 4, 2008 – to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

So we did something unusual. We brought more than 1,000 people to Memphis, the Southern city where he was assassinated. And then and there we declared the Dream ... REBORN.

Furthermore, we vowed that – this time – the Dream will uplift both the people AND the planet.

It was beautiful. The “Dream Reborn” conference was the first “green” summit to honor MLK and explicitly link his vision of justice to

the emerging green economy. For everyone who attended, it seemed to be a life-changing experience.

For years, conventional wisdom has held that no “green conference” could attract people of color or low-income people. It was assumed that attendance at such summits would always be 90 percent white and overwhelmingly affluent.

Not this time. More than 70 percent of the 1,200 attendees were people of color. And more than half of all attendees were of modest means; as a result, they qualified for some level of “scholarship” support to attend the three-day event. Thanks to the generosity of Green For All’s supporters, we were able to raise enough money to financially support hundreds of people who would not have been able to come otherwise.



More than 1000 participants pose after a weekend-long Dream Reborn conference. Photos courtesy of Green for All.



What do you know about Martin Luther King? What was his dream? What do you see in the “Dream Reborn” poster? What do you think is the dream of the people who attended this conference?

As a result, the conference didn’t just LOOK different. It FELT different. From the main stage, we heard drums, prayers, choirs, poetry, and speeches that sounded more like passionate “civil rights” sermons. From the audience, we heard cheers, chants, shouts and sometimes sobs.

During the workshops, people crammed themselves into every chair, covered every bit of floor space, stood along the walls—hungry to learn how they could make their own neighborhoods and cities bloom as green oases of prosperity.

During the day, the plenaries, panels, and workshops were packed and over-flowing with people of color, labor leaders, and white people from struggling communities. And at night, slam poets grabbed the microphones, dance music took over the sound system, and laughter filled the sidewalks and streets around the conference center. Outside of a church revival, I have never seen so many people of color laughing, crying and hugging.



Majora Carter (right), pictured here with a participant of the Dream Reborn Conference, is the director of Sustainable South Bronx. Watch a 10-minute talk about environmental justice given by her at <www.ted.com>.

In fact, I have never experienced the kind of energy I felt throughout the conference. I wasn’t alone. Civil rights veterans in attendance were openly weeping; they said they had experienced nothing like it since the 1960s.

Something powerful shifted on April 4th.

Dr. King was only 39 when an assassin gunned him down. He has been gone for 40 years now, longer than he was ever here. Since his murder, two generations of adults, plus a rising batch of teenagers, have been born. We each have a duty to re-imagine the Dream for a new century—and to make it into a reality. On April 4th, a critical mass of us decided to do just that.

Van Jones, founder and president of Green For All in Oakland, California, is committed to creating green pathways out of poverty, while greatly expanding the coalition fighting global warming. See <www.vanjoness.net> and <www.dreamreborn.org>.

