And this is why King inspires young Jiri Wilson to struggle for social justice.

Student takes the struggle to the street

By KUSH AZRAEL

Staff Writer

In the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr., a new breed of social activists fighting for freedom, justice, and education has emerged. Those have given up on the ability of our youth to lead the struggle should look no further than Collinwood High School Senior Jiri Wilson.

This is a different country than it was when Dr. King called on the United States to look into its soul and make its reality match its ideas. We live in a society that is better and in some ways more complex than the one King labored so hard in. Barack Obama is the first Black president and Blacks are executives at some of America's largest corporations. Black spending power has risen above $900 billion.

Today's discrimination is subtler and harder to confront directly. But, this is where 18 year old Jiri Wilson comes in.Wilsonis not your average teenager. He's an activist with the Oppressed People's Nation based inEast Cleveland.

"I give out school clothes, school supplies, free hot dogs and hamburgers, and participate in rallies," he said proudly.Wilsoninsists that one can not teach concepts of knowledge and understanding to people who are naked and hungry, mentally and physically.

Started in 2008, OPN has such activities as free movie nights and free clothing along with rallies for injustices committed against Black people and fighting to save the last library in East Cleveland.

The proud teen said he does it for "the people."

Wilson was brought in by his cousin, the chairman of OPN, Ernest L. Smith who sees the youth as a vital element in changing society for the better.

"The youth are the future. We realized it was the youth in the '60s that helped change the conditions of our community," said Smith. "The young people are the energy of the world but we don't know as youth what to put that energy toward."

He also believes it is important to deprogram the youth by not talking at them but instead talk with them.

It seems to have worked well with Wilson, who sees education, along with the media's portrayal of Blacks and incarceration as the major social injustices facing Blacks today.

"I think schools should put more Black history in books because they don't teach us Black history, they only talk about Dr. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X. They don't tell us about Marcus Garvey or the Black Panther Party," saidWilson.

"If nobody is raising kids up in the city and they're only [guided by rap music and rap artists], then us activists have to come along and educate the kids that they can be more than a statistic."

Wilsonfeels that in a society where there are so many racial disparities the law has to get on the side of Black people. That's why the young activist wants to see more Black politicians.

"We have all these rappers and athletes but how many people do we have to help determine our future, said Wilson.

He would like to see more young people involved in activism and urges them to learn politics, starting with the law "instead of watching BET, which doesn't show any educational Black history on it."

Wilsonalso believes that Black people are oppressed because they are afraid of change, that they have let the "system" run over them and would do good to see the power of unity.

That's very similar to Dr. King's vision, who was well known for his ability to get people to come together. In 1955, King rose from a newly arrived minister in Montgomery, Ala. to a figure of national prominence. It was King who dramatized theMontgomerybus boycott with his decision to make it the testing ground, before the eyes of the nation, of his belief in the civil disobedience teachings of Gandhi.

And this is why King inspires young Jiri Wilson to struggle for social justice.

“What I respect about Martin Luther King is his non-violent and peaceful way. Martin Luther King wanted equality and justice for everybody.”