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University Essays



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CLASS OF NONVIOLENCE



# Martin Luther King, Jr.

by Charles De Benedetti

Between 1955 and 1968, a black-led civil rights movement emerged across the United States, and especially in the American South, struggling to end racial segregation and to allow blacks fuller access to the largest promises of the national life. Joining millions of people from all races, creeds, and regions, this movement grew from several deep and tangled historical roots, including: the long black quest for freedom and equality; the egalitarian values inherent in the Declaration of Independence and other fundamental American documents; the strong emphases on social justice of many of America's religious faiths; and, most recently, the labor and liberal reform movements of the 1930s and 1940s. This movement found in Martin Luther King, Jr. a leader capable of transforming millions of inchoate aspirations into an engine of peaceful social change.

The movement's largely peaceful methods and positive results were not preordained. Almost certainly, in view of long-building black frustrations, there would have been a major civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, with or without the Reverend King. Yet, without King's leadership and moral authority, this movement might well have taken a far different course, perhaps even toward a racial bloodbath and severe political repression. Instead, King stepped into history and aggressively deployed the power of Christian nonviolence to move the country away from racial injustice and toward reconciliation. As was noted in a eulogy at his funeral in April 1968, he appeared as "a peaceful warrior who built an army and a movement that is mighty without missiles, able without an atomic arsenal, ready without rockets, real without bullets; an army

tutored in living and loving and not in killing." He was that rare phenomenon- "a leader who was willing to die, but not willing to kill." In the process of fighting for civil rights, he helped to shepherd his country through a time of trial and progress in race relations.

Fundamentally, King was an inclusive peacemaker. He sought not only to include as many supporters as possible within the civil rights movement, but also to bring about an eventual reconciliation with their opponents. He saw the circle of support for social justice, which he termed the "beloved community," expanding until it included virtually all Americans. Furthermore, King was an inclusive peacemaker in the sense that he strove to overcome his personal limitations for the sake of greater moral and political effectiveness.

The basic outline of King's life before the Montgomery Alabama bus boycott of 1955-56 can be summarized briefly. He was born in Atlanta on January 15, 1929. His parents were Alberta Williams King, the daughter of the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Martin Luther "Daddy" King, the assistant pastor who became pastor upon the death of his father-in-law in 1931. Ebenezer was a thriving church, and Martin grew up in a family with middle class comforts. He attended church faithfully and sang hymns at church meetings at a young age. Growing up in Atlanta, he also experienced white racism firsthand.

A precocious youth, King skipped his senior year in high school and entered the predominantly black Morehouse College in Atlanta at age 15. After graduating from Morehouse with a degree in sociology in spring 1948, he entered the largely white

Crozier Theological Seminary in suburban Philadelphia. Three years later, as valedictorian of his graduating class, he won a scholarship to attend the graduate school of his choice. That fall King entered Boston University's prestigious School of Theology, which awarded him the Ph.D. degree in 1955. In the meantime, he married Coretta Scott, a student at the Boston Conservatory, and accepted an appointment as minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, beginning in the summer of 1954.

As a youth, King's most difficult problem involved the choice of a vocation. He wanted to serve others and to make his mark in the world, but he was not sure how he should proceed. While attracted in some ways to the ministry, he did not like the pressure his father "was putting on him to succeed him as pastor at Ebenezer, and he doubted the relevance of his church's fundamentalist religion in modern America. He toyed with the idea of becoming a doctor, and after a bad personal experience with discrimination on a train trip, he considered becoming a lawyer so that he could help in breaking down the legal barriers that trapped blacks in a segregated subcaste.

In sum, during his first 27 years King developed numerous qualities that proved invaluable to him as a peacemaker. He felt a deep concern for the plight of the black masses, especially in his native South. He sustained a strong religious faith combined with a quest for greater spiritual depth and understanding. He maintained a continuing interest in his own intellectual growth and in learning about ways to bring about peaceful social change. He had an ability to communicate with people of diverse racial and educational backgrounds. And, perhaps most significant, he developed a commitment, strengthened in a time of crisis,

to continue to work for social justice even if it meant forfeiting his own life.

The decade beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott in fall 1955 and ending with the Voting Rights Act in summer 1965 marked the glory days for King and for the civil rights movement as a whole. It was during these years that King, the inclusive peacemaker, was most effective. The story of the civil rights movement during these years has been told many times; here the focus is on some key reasons for King's effectiveness, followed by a closer look at the two great events in civil rights in 1963: the springtime Birmingham Alabama campaign and King's "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C. in August.

One reason for King's effectiveness during these years was his continuing personal and intellectual growth. He broadened himself by visiting West Africa in 1957 and India in 1959. The visit to the "land of my father's fathers" was memorable, and led to what King called a "nonviolent rebirth" and to a continuing interest in Africa's welfare. His trip to India deepened his commitment to Gandhian principles, including an effort upon his return to put less emphasis on material comforts in his own life. In the midst of a hectic schedule, King took time for writing and reflection. In addition to many articles, he published two books about the movement- **Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story** (1958) and **Why We Can't Wait** (1964)-and a deeply spiritual book of sermons, **Strength to Love** (1964). During these years King was especially interested in learning more about human behavior and the psychological underpinnings of racism and violence. The relatively brief periods of time that King set aside for travel and for personal renewal helped to keep his speeches and writings fresh and cogent, and helped him, at

least until the mid-1960s, to avert a clear danger facing prominent peacemakers – exhaustion or burnout.

During 1966, King largely refrained from criticizing the Vietnam War. He was preoccupied with the Chicago campaign, and distracted by growing demands of young black militants for black power. He made some guardedly critical statements regarding U.S. war policy. But it was not until early 1967, after doing careful study of the history of the conflict, that he made the war the theme of several major addresses. In February, he told an audience in Los Angeles that: “the bombs in Vietnam explode at home: they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America.” In a sermon at his church in Atlanta, he said that he could “study war no more,” and urged blacks opposed to the war to “challenge our young men with the alternative of conscientious objection.” “The world now demands a maturity of America that we may not be able to achieve,” King continued. “The New Testament says, ‘Repent.’ It is time for America to repent now.” Before a crowd of 3,000 in New York’s Riverside Church on April 4, he portrayed the war as a moral tragedy perpetrated by “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government.” Americans had failed to recognize the Vietnamese opposition to the Vietnam War was still a minority view even among his liberal civil rights allies and supporters. Black leaders, including Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and Whitney Young of the National Urban League, attacked King’s position, while normally sympathetic newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post blasted the Southern Christian Leadership Conference leader for commenting on matters they considered irrelevant to social justice issues. King, however, believed

that his opposition to the war was consistent with his concern about the oppressed and his commitment to nonviolence. He thus decided to stand on principle against a war that was draining so much of the power and potential of black America.

Like Vietnam, the rise of Black Nationalism presented difficult dilemmas for King. He supported many of the ideals of Stokely Carmichael and other black nationalists: pride in black history, emphasis on unity and improvement of living conditions within the black community, and constructive use of black economic and political power. But he did not like the slogan “Black Power” that had corrupted the imagination of many young blacks after Carmichael first used it at a Mississippi rally in 1966. King believed that the slogan had too many negative connotations, and that it would feed the growing white backlash against civil rights. He also believed that it would be impossible for blacks to continue to improve their status in American society without white support. And, even if they could make it on their own, Black Power’s emphasis on separatism and its implicit endorsement of violence went against King’s commitment to an inclusive Christian community.

King responded in detail to Black Power ideas during winter 1967 in his last full-length book, **Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?** He was careful to acknowledge the Black Power arguments that whites had systematically oppressed blacks, and that blacks had made many gains through self-help and racial pride. But he strongly rejected black nationalism’s basic premises:

*“In the final analysis the weakness of Black Power is its failure to see that the black man needs the white man and the white man needs the black man. However much we may try to*

*romanticize the slogan, there is no separate black path to power and fulfillment that does not intersect white paths, and there is no separate white path to power and fulfillment, short of social disaster, that does not share that power with black aspirations for freedom and human dignity. We are bound together in a single garment of destiny. The language, the cultural patterns, the music, the material prosperity, and even the food of America are an amalgam of black and white.”*

King’s book epitomized the changes in the black movement during the time since he had completed **Why We Can’t Wait** three years earlier. In that book, King had written primarily about the black struggle for equal rights. Now he was writing much more about the systemic problem of economic inequality and the need for massive federal expenditures to “fight poverty, ignorance, and slums.” Equally important, in **Why We Can’t Wait**, King was speaking for white liberals and for the overwhelming majority of blacks, North and South, with only the relatively small Black Muslim movement in serious opposition. Now he clearly was writing to respond to the growing nationalist movement and to rally the supporters of his nonviolent, integrationist approach. King still possessed a respected voice, but increasingly it was one voice among many.

King’s insistence in **Where Do We Go From Here** on large-scale federal programs to end poverty in America provided the focus for the last year of his life. Clearly his vision was now more radical, for he was advocating not only equal rights but also a coalition of the poor to demand economic justice. Earlier, as he was maintaining his coalition of blacks and white liberals (including wealthy white contributors); he had not talked about restructuring the economic system. Now he did so. As he told

journalist David Halberstam in spring 1967, “I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of the South, a little change here, a little change there. Now I feel quite differently. I think you’ve got to have a reconstruction of the entire society, a revolution of values.”

This vision, which David Levering Lewis recently called “the promise of nonviolent populism,” informed King’s planning for the Poor People’s Campaign in Washington in 1968. In order to force the government to face up to the continuing problem of poverty in America, King proposed to bring poor black, whites, Puerto Ricans, Indians, and Chicanos to the capital. Initially, plans called for people to come from various parts of the nation and demand the passage of SCLC’s \$12 billion “Economic Bill of Rights,” which included such things as guaranteed jobs for the able bodied, livable incomes for the legitimately unemployed, and a firm federal commitment to open housing and integrated education. If their efforts failed, thousands more would come and create “major massive dislocations” in the city.

King was unable to carry out what he had called his “last, greatest dream.” He was shot down by a white racist assassin on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, where he had gone to lend support to the city’s striking garbage workers. Yet, even if he had not been killed, the odds were against the success of the Poor People’s Campaign. For one thing, the attitudes of most officials and northerners were extremely hostile. For another, it would have been very difficult to unite poor people of such diverse ethnic and regional backgrounds and to raise the funds required to sustain them in Washington until victory was achieved. But King had not gone with the odds in his other campaigns. Under incessant threat of death, he did not ever have good reason to believe that he

would live through them. In faith, he had strived since 1955 to help to bring about the “beloved community.” In faith, he would continue to do so until he was “free at last.”

On Sunday, February 4, 1968, exactly two months before his death, King delivered a very personal message to the congregation at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where he and his father served as co-pastors. The topic was what he would want said at his own funeral, what he believed his life added up to. Because his words bear so directly on assessing King as peacemaker, they deserve quoting at some length:

*“Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize. That isn’t important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards. That’s not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school. I’d like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I’d like for somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love somebody. I want you to say the day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity. Yes, if you want to say that I was a ‘drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. That I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won’t have any money to leave behind. I won’t have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind. And that’s all I want to say.”*

The clearest, most powerful theme in this message is King’s desire to be remembered as a person who sought to live his Christian

faith, to obey God’s word as he understood it. Although he appears to have succeeded in this quest, King was far from perfect. He knew the ordinary pressures and temptations of life. He suffered a deep sense of guilt, and periodically knew the agony of depression. He lived through jailings, failures, hatred, and abuse, most of it delivered by his fellow Christians. Yet, as he affirmed in his sermon, he tried to remain faithful to his Christianity and to hope for fuller human community which he believed that it nurtured.

How effective was King as a peacemaker? He surely was correct in his contention that peace within societies is not merely the absence of overt violence (what - he called “negative peace”); instead, peace must involve conscious efforts to build community and bring about greater social justice (“positive peace”). He also was correct to note that means and ends are interrelated, that only nonviolent methods are likely to lead to a more just and peaceful society. Like Gandhi, King’s teachings and actions are likely to be studied and discussed as long as there are nonviolent movements for social change.

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# Loving Your Enemies

## by Martin Luther King, Jr.

*The following sermon was delivered at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, at Christmas, 1957. Martin Luther King wrote it while in jail for committing nonviolent civil disobedience during the Montgomery bus boycott. Let us be practical and ask the question. How do we love our enemies?*

First, we must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. It is impossible even to begin the act of loving one's enemies without the prior acceptance of the necessity, over and over again, of forgiving those who inflict evil and injury upon us. It is also necessary to realize that the forgiving act must always be initiated by the person who has been wronged, the victim of some great hurt, the recipient of some tortuous injustice, the absorber of some terrible act of oppression. The wrongdoer may request forgiveness. He may come to himself, and, like the prodigal son, move up some dusty road, his heart palpitating with the desire for forgiveness. But only the injured neighbor, the loving father back home, can really pour out the warm waters of forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning. It is the lifting of a burden or the canceling of a debt. The words "I will forgive you, but I'll never forget what you've done" never explain the real nature of forgiveness. Certainly one can never forget, if that means erasing it totally from

his mind. But when we forgive, we forget in the sense that the evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship. Likewise, we can never say, "I will forgive you, but I won't have anything further to do with you." Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again.

Without this, no man can love his enemies. The degree to which we are able to forgive determines the degree to which we are able to love our enemies.

Second, we must recognize that the evil deed of the enemy-neighbor, the thing that hurts, never quite expresses all that he is. An element of goodness may be found even in our worst enemy. Each of us has something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against ourselves. A persistent civil war rages within all of our lives. Something within us causes us to lament with Ovid, the Latin poet, "I see and approve the better things, but follow worse," or to agree with Plato that human personality is like a charioteer having two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in a different direction, or to repeat with the Apostle Paul, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

This simply means that there is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies. When we look beneath the surface, beneath the impulsive evil deed, we see within our enemy-neighbor a measure of goodness and know that the viciousness and evilness of his acts are not quite representative of all that he is. We see him in a new light. We recognize that his hate grows out of fear, pride, ignorance, prejudice, and misunderstanding,

but in spite of this, we know God's image is ineffably etched in being. Then we love our enemies by realizing that they are not totally bad and that they are not beyond the reach of God's redemptive love.

Third, we must not seek to defeat or humiliate the enemy but to win his friendship and understanding. At times we are able to humiliate our worst enemy. Inevitably, his weak moments come and we are able to thrust in his side the spear of defeat. But this we must not do. Every word and deed must contribute to an understanding with the enemy and release those vast reservoirs of goodwill which have been blocked by impenetrable walls of hate.

Let us move now from the practical how to the theoretical why: Why should we love our enemies? The first reason is fairly obvious. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction.

So when Jesus says "Love your enemies," he is setting forth a profound and ultimately inescapable admonition. Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies-or else? The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

Another reason why we must love our enemies is that hate scars the soul and distorts the personality. Mindful that hate is an evil and dangerous force, we too often think of what it does to the person hated. This is understandable, for hate brings irreparable damage to its victims.

We have seen its ugly consequences in the ignominious deaths brought to six million Jews by a hate-obsessed madman named Hitler, in the unspeakable violence inflicted upon Negroes by bloodthirsty mobs, in the dark horrors of war, and in the terrible indignities and injustices perpetrated against millions of God's children by unconscionable oppressors.

But there is another side which we must never overlook. Hate is just as injurious to the person who hates. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.

A third reason why we should love our enemies is that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.

The relevance of what I have said to the crisis in race relations should be readily apparent. There will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies. The darkness of racial injustice will be dispelled only by the light of forgiving love. For more than three centuries American Negroes have been battered by the iron rod of oppression, frustrated by day and bewildered by night by unbearable injustice and burdened with the ugly weight of discrimination. Forced to live with these shameful conditions, we are tempted to become bitter and to retaliate with a corresponding hate. But if this happens, the new order we seek will be little more than a duplicate of the old order. We must in strength

and humility meet hate with love.

My friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way.

While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.

To our most bitter opponents we say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."

# Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam

By Martin Luther King, Jr.

An address at Riverside Church  
New York City, Tuesday, April 4, 1967

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam, many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. At the heart of their concerns this query has often loomed large and loud: Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix, they say. Aren't you hurting the cause of your people, they ask. And when I hear them, though I often understand the source of their concern, I am nevertheless greatly saddened, for such questions mean that the inquirers have not really known me, my commitment or my calling. Indeed, their questions suggest that they do not know the world in which they live.

There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both black and white—through the Poverty Program. Then came the build-up in Vietnam, and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as Vietnam continued to draw

men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.

Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the young black men who had been crippled by our society and sending them 8000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would never live on the same block in Detroit. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor. I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government.

Somehow this madness must cease. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam and the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of

the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop must be ours.

This is the message of the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam. Recently, one of them wrote these words: "Each day the war goes on the hatred increases in the hearts of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans, who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism."

In 1957 a sensitive American official overseas said that it seemed to him that our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution. During the past ten years we have seen emerge a pattern of suppression which now has justified the presence of U.S. military "advisors" in Venezuela. The need to maintain social stability for our investments accounts for the counterrevolutionary action of American forces in Guatemala. It tells why American helicopters are being used against guerrillas in Colombia and why American napalm and Green Beret forces have already been active against rebels in Peru. With such activity in mind, the words of John F. Kennedy come back to haunt us. Five years ago he said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we

as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. When machines and computers, profit and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered. The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just. A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from re-ordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.

This kind of positive revolution of values is our best defense against communism. War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons.

We must not engage in a negative anti-communism, but rather in a positive thrust for democracy, realizing that our greatest defense against communism is to take: offensive action in behalf of justice. We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice which are the

fertile soil in which the seed of communism grows and develops.

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wombs of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." We in the West must support these revolutions. It is a sad fact that, because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch anti-revolutionaries. This has driven many to feel that only Marxism has the revolutionary spirit. Therefore, communism is a judgment against our failure to make democracy real and follow through on the revolutions that we initiated. Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.

Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence - when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition.

# Pilgrimage to Nonviolence

By Martin Luther King, Jr.

Often the question has arisen concerning my own intellectual pilgrimage to nonviolence. In order to get at this question it is necessary to go back to my early teens in Atlanta. I had grown up abhorring not only segregation but also the oppressive and barbarous acts that grew out of it. I had passed spots where Negroes had been savagely lynched, and had watched the Ku Klux Klan on its rides at night. I had seen police brutality with my own eyes, and watched Negroes receive the most tragic injustice in the courts. All of these things had done something to my growing personality. I had come perilously close to resenting all white people.

I had also learned that the inseparable twin of racial injustice was economic injustice. Although I came from a home of economic security and relative comfort, I could never get out of my mind the economic insecurity of many of my playmates and the tragic poverty of those living around me. During my late teens I worked two summers, against my father's wishes—he never wanted my brother and me to work around white people because of the oppressive conditions—in a plant that hired both Negroes and whites. Here I saw economic injustice firsthand, and realized that the poor white was exploited just as much as the Negro. Through these early experiences I grew up deeply conscious of the varieties of injustice in our society.

So when I went to Atlanta's Morehouse College as a freshman in 1944 my concern for racial and economic justice was already substantial. During my student days at Morehouse I read Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience* for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil

system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. This was my first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance.

Not until I entered Crozier Theological Seminary in 1948, however, did I begin a serious intellectual quest for a method to eliminate social evil. Although my major interest was in the fields of theology and philosophy, I spent a great deal of time reading the works of the great social philosophers. I came early to Walter Rauschenbusch's **Christianity and the Social Crisis**, which left an indelible imprint on my thinking by giving me a theological basis for the social concern which had already grown up in me as a result of my early experiences. Of course there were points at which I differed with Rauschenbusch. I felt that he had fallen victim to the nineteenth century "cult of inevitable progress" which led him to a superficial optimism concerning man's nature. Moreover, he came perilously close to identifying the Kingdom of God with a particular social and economic system—a tendency which should never befall the Church. But in spite of these shortcomings Rauschenbusch had done a great service for the Christian Church by insisting that the gospel deals with the whole man, not only his soul but his body; not only his spiritual well-being but his material well-being. It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried. It well has been said: "A religion that ends with the individual, ends."

After reading Rauschenbusch, I turned

to a serious study of the social and ethical theories of the great philosophers, from Plato and Aristotle down to Rousseau, Hobbes, Bentham, Mill and Locke. All of these masters stimulated my thinking—such as it was—and, while finding things to question in each of them, I nevertheless learned a great deal from their study.

### **The Challenge of Marxism**

During the Christmas holidays of 1949 I decided to spend my spare time reading Karl Marx to try to understand the appeal of communism for many people. For the first time I carefully scrutinized **Das Kapital** and **The Communist Manifesto**. I also read some interpretive works on the thinking of Marx and Lenin. In reading such Communist writings I drew certain conclusions that have remained with me to this day.

First, I rejected their materialistic interpretation of history. Communism, avowedly secularistic and materialistic, has no place for God. This I could never accept, for as a Christian I believe that there is a creative personal power in this universe who is the ground and essence of all reality—a power that cannot be explained in materialistic terms. History is ultimately guided by spirit, not matter.

Second, I strongly disagreed with Communism's ethical relativism. Since for the Communist there is no divine government, no absolute moral order, there are no fixed, immutable principles; consequently almost anything—force, violence, murder, lying—is a justifiable means to the “millennial” end. This type of relativism was abhorrent to me. Constructive ends can never give absolute moral justification to destructive means, because in the final analysis the end is preexistent in the mean.

Third, I opposed communism's political totalitarianism. In communism the individual ends up in subjection to the state. True, the Marxist would argue that the state is an “interim” reality which is to be eliminated when the classless society emerges; but the state is the end while it lasts, and man only a means to that end. And if any man's so-called rights or liberties stand in the way of that end, they are simply swept aside. His liberties of expression, his freedom to vote, his freedom to listen to what news he likes or to choose his books are all restricted. Man becomes hardly more, in communism, than a depersonalized cog in the turning wheel of the state.

This deprecation of individual freedom was objectionable to me. I am convinced now, as I was then, that man is an end because he is a child of God. Man is not made for the state; the state is made for man. To deprive man of freedom is to relegate him to the status of a thing, rather than elevate him to the status of a person. Man must never be treated as a means to the end of the state, but always as an end within himself.

Yet, in spite of the fact that my response to communism was and is negative, and I considered it basically evil, there were points at which I found it challenging. The late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, referred to Communism as a Christian heresy. By this he meant that communism had laid hold of certain truths which are essential parts of the Christian view of things, but that it had bound up with them concepts and practices which no Christian could ever accept or profess. Communism challenged the late Archbishop and it should challenge every Christian—as it challenged me—to a growing concern about social justice. With all of its false assumptions and evil methods, communism grew as a protest

against the hardships of the underprivileged. Communism in theory emphasized a classless society, and a concern for social justice, though the world knows from sad experience that in practice it created new classes and a new lexicon of injustice. The Christian ought always to be challenged by any protest against unfair treatment of the poor, for Christianity is itself such a protest, nowhere expressed more eloquently than in Jesus' words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

I also sought systematic answers to Marx's critique of modern bourgeois culture. He presented Capitalism as essentially a struggle between the owners of the productive resources and the workers, whom Marx regarded as the real producers. Marx interpreted economic forces as the dialectical process by which society moved from feudalism through capitalism to socialism, with the primary mechanism of this historical movement being the struggle between economic classes whose interests were irreconcilable. Obviously this theory left out of account the numerous and significant complexities—political, economic moral, religious and psychological—which played a vital role in shaping the constellation of institutions and ideas known today as Western civilization. Moreover, it was dated in the sense that the capitalism Marx wrote about bore only a partial resemblance to the capitalism we know in this country today.

### **Toward a New Social Synthesis**

But in spite of the shortcomings of his analysis,

Marx had raised some basic questions. I was deeply concerned from my early teen days about the gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, and my reading of Marx made me ever more conscious of this gulf. Although modern American capitalism had greatly reduced the gap through social reforms, there was still need for a better distribution of wealth. Moreover, Marx had revealed the danger of the profit motive as the sole basis of an economic system; capitalism is always in danger of inspiring men to be more concerned about making a living than making a life. We are prone to judge success by the index of our salaries or the size of our automobiles, rather than by the quality of our service and relationship to humanity—thus capitalism can lead to a practical materialism that is as pernicious as the materialism taught by communism.

In short, I read Marx as I read all of the influential historical thinkers—from a dialectical point of view, combining a partial "yes" and a partial "no." In so far as Marx posited a metaphysical materialism, an ethical relativism, and a strangulating totalitarianism, I responded with an unambiguous "no"; but in so far as he pointed to weaknesses of traditional capitalism, contributed to the growth of a definite self-consciousness in the masses, and challenged the social conscience of the Christian churches, I responded with a definite "yes."

My reading of Marx also convinced me that truth is found neither in Marxism nor in traditional Capitalism. Each represents a partial truth. Historically Capitalism failed to see the truth in collective enterprise, and Marxism failed to see the truth in individual enterprise. Nineteenth century Capitalism failed to see that life is social and Marxism failed and still fails to see that life is individual and personal. The Kingdom of God is neither the thesis of

individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both.

### **Muste, Nietzsche and Gandhi**

During my stay at Crozier, I was also exposed for the first time to the pacifist position in a lecture by A. J. Muste. I was deeply moved by Dr. Muste's talk, but far from convinced of the practicability of his position. Like most of the students of Crozier, I felt that while war could never be a positive or absolute good, it could serve as a negative good in the sense of preventing the spread and growth of an evil force. War, horrible as it is, might be preferable to surrender to a totalitarian system—Nazi, Fascist, or Communist.

During this period I had about despaired of the power of love in solving social problems. Perhaps my faith in love was temporarily shaken by the philosophy of Nietzsche. I had been reading parts of **The Genealogy of Morals** and the whole of **The Will to Power**. Nietzsche's glorification of power—in his theory all life expressed the will to power—was an outgrowth of his contempt for ordinary morals. He attacked the whole of the Hebraic-Christian morality—with its virtues of piety and humility, its otherworldliness and its attitude toward suffering—as the glorification of weakness, as making virtues out of necessity and impotence. He looked to the development of a superman who would surpass man as man surpassed the ape.

Then one Sunday afternoon I traveled to Philadelphia to hear a sermon by Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University. He was there to preach for the Fellowship House of Philadelphia. Dr. Johnson had just returned from a trip to India, and, to my great interest, he spoke of the life and teachings of Mahatma

Gandhi. His message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half dozen books on Gandhi's life and works.

Like most people, I had heard of Gandhi, but I had never studied him seriously. As I read I became deeply fascinated by his campaigns of nonviolent resistance. I was particularly moved by the Salt March to the Sea and his numerous fasts. The whole concept of "Satyagraha" (Satya is truth which equals love, and agraha is force; "Satyagraha," therefore, means truth-force or love-force) was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationship. The "turn the other cheek" philosophy and the "love your enemies" philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was.

Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love, for Gandhi, was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and nonviolence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking for so many months. The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, the revolutionary methods of Marx and Lenin, the social-contracts theory of Hobbes, the "back to nature" optimism of Rousseau, the superman philosophy of Nietzsche, I found

in the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

### **An Encounter With Niebuhr**

But my intellectual odyssey to nonviolence did not end here. During my last year in theological school, I began to read the works of Reinhold Niebuhr. The prophetic and realistic elements in Niebuhr's passionate style and profound thought were appealing to me, and I became so enamored of his social ethics that I almost fell into the trap of accepting uncritically everything he wrote.

About this time I read Niebuhr's critique of the pacifist position. Niebuhr had himself once been a member of the pacifist ranks. For several years, he had been national chairman of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. His break with pacifism came in the early thirties, and the first full statement of his criticism of pacifism was in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Here he argued that there was no intrinsic moral difference between violent and nonviolent resistance. The social consequences of the two methods were different, he contended, but the differences were in degree rather than kind. Later Niebuhr began emphasizing the irresponsibility of relying on nonviolent resistance when there was no ground for believing that it would be successful in preventing the spread of totalitarian tyranny. It could only be successful, he argued, if the groups against whom the resistance was taking place had some degree of moral conscience, as was the case in Gandhi's struggle against the British. Niebuhr's ultimate rejection of pacifism was based primarily on the doctrine of man. He argued that pacifism failed to do justice to the reformation doctrine of justification by faith,

substituting for it a sectarian perfectionism which believes "that divine grace actually lifts man out of the sinful contradictions of history and establishes him above the sins of the world."

At first, Niebuhr's critique of pacifism left me in a state of confusion. As I continued to read, however, I came to see more and more the shortcomings of his position. For instance, many of his statements revealed that he interpreted pacifism as a sort of passive nonresistance to evil expressing naive trust in the power of love. But this was a serious distortion. My study of Gandhi convinced me that true pacifism is not nonresistance to evil, but nonviolent resistance to evil. Between the two positions, there is a world of difference. Gandhi resisted evil with as much vigor and power as the violent resister, but he resisted with love instead of hate. True pacifism is not unrealistic submission to evil power, as Niebuhr contends. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflicter of it, since the latter only multiplied the existence of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop a sense of shame in the opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart.

The next stage of my intellectual pilgrimage to nonviolence came during my doctoral studies at Boston University. Here I had the opportunity to talk to many exponents of nonviolence, both students and visitors to the campus. Boston University School of Theology under the influence of Dean Walter Muelder and Professor Allan Knight Chalmers, had a deep sympathy for pacifism. Both Dean Muelder and Dr. Chalmers had a passion for social justice that stemmed, not from a superficial optimism, but from a deep faith in the possibilities of human beings when they

allowed themselves to become co-workers with God. It was at Boston University that I came to see that Niebuhr had overemphasized the corruption of human nature. His pessimism concerning human nature was not balanced by an optimism concerning divine nature. He was so involved in diagnosing man's sickness of sin that he overlooked the cure of grace.

I studied philosophy and theology at Boston University under Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. Both men greatly stimulated my thinking. It was mainly under these teachers that I studied personalistic philosophy—the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position. Personalism's insistence that only personality—finite and infinite—is ultimately real strengthened me in two convictions: it gave me metaphysical and philosophical grounding for the idea of a personal God, and it gave me a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.

Just before Dr. Brightman's death, I began studying the philosophy of Hegel with him. Although the course was mainly a study of Hegel's monumental work, **Phenomenology of Mind**, I spent my spare time reading his **Philosophy of History** and **Philosophy of Right**. There were points in Hegel's philosophy that I strongly disagreed with. For instance, his absolute idealism was rationally unsound to me because it tended to swallow up the many in the one. But there were other aspects of his thinking that I found stimulating. His contention that "truth is the whole" led me to a philosophical method of rational coherence. His analysis of the dialectical process, in spite of its shortcomings, helped me to see that growth comes through struggle.

In 1954 I ended my formal training with

all of these relative divergent intellectual forces converging into a positive social philosophy. One of the main tenets of this philosophy was the conviction that nonviolent resistance was one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their quest for social justice. At this time, however, I had merely an intellectual understanding and appreciation of the position, with no firm determination to organize it in a socially effective situation.

When I went to Montgomery as a pastor, I had not the slightest idea that I would later become involved in a crisis in which nonviolent resistance would be applicable. I neither started the protest nor suggested it. I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman. When the protest began, my mind, consciously or unconsciously, was driven back to the Sermon on the Mount, with its sublime teachings on love, and the Gandhian method of nonviolent resistance. As the days unfolded, I came to see the power of nonviolence more and more. Living through the actual experience of the protest, nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life. Many of the things that I had not cleared up intellectually concerning nonviolence were now solved in the sphere of practical action.

### **The philosophy of nonviolence**

Since the philosophy of nonviolence played such a positive role in the Montgomery movement, it may be wise to turn to a brief discussion of some basic aspects of this philosophy.

First, it must be emphasized that nonviolent resistance is not a method for cowards; it does resist. If one used this method because he is afraid, he is not truly nonviolent. That is why Gandhi often said that if cowardice

is the only alternative to violence, it is better to fight. He made this statement conscious of the fact that there is always another alternative: no individual or group need ever submit to any wrong, nor need they use violence to right the wrong; there is the way of nonviolent resistance. This is ultimately the way for the strong man. It is not a method of stagnant passivity. The phrase "passive resistance" often gives the false impression that this is a sort of "do-nothing method" in which the resister quietly and passively accepts evil. But nothing is further from the truth. For while the nonviolent resister is passive in the sense that he is not physically aggressive toward his opponent, his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade his opponents that he is wrong. The method is passive physically, but strongly active spiritually. It is not passive resistance to evil, it is active nonviolent resistance to evil.

A second basic fact that characterizes nonviolence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The nonviolent resister may often express his protest through noncooperation or boycotts, but he realizes that these are not ends in themselves; they are merely means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent. The end is redemption and reconciliation. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness.

A third characteristic of this method is that the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil. It is evil that the nonviolent resister seeks to defeat, not the person victimized by the evil. If he is opposing racial injustice, the nonviolent resister has the vision to see that the basic tension is not between races. As I like to say to the people in Montgomery: "The tension in

the city is not between white people and Negro people. The tension is, at bottom, between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. And if there is a victory, it will be a victory not merely for 50,000 Negroes, but a victory for justice and the forces of light. We are out there to defeat injustice and not white persons who may be unjust."

A fourth point that characterizes nonviolent resistance is a willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back. "Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood," Gandhi said to his countrymen. The nonviolent resister is willing to accept violence if necessary, but never to inflict it. He does not seek to dodge jail. If going to jail is necessary, he enters it "as a bridegroom enters the bride's chamber."

One may well ask: "What is the nonviolent resister's justification for this ordeal to which he invites men, for this mass political application of the ancient doctrine of turning the other cheek?" The answer is found in the realization that unearned suffering is redemptive. Suffering, the nonviolent resister realizes, has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities. "Things of fundamental importance to people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering," said Gandhi. He continued: "Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears which are otherwise shut to the voice of reason."

A fifth point concerning nonviolent resistance is that it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him. At the center of nonviolence stands

the principle of love. The nonviolent resister would contend that in the struggle for human dignity, the oppressed people of the world must not succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter or indulging in hate campaigns. To retaliate in kind would do nothing but intensify the existence of hate in the universe. Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate. This can only be done by projecting the ethic of love to the center of our lives.

In speaking of love at this point, we are not referring to some sentimental or affectionate emotion. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense. Love in this connection means understanding, redemptive good will. Here the Greek language comes to our aid. There are three words for love in the Greek New Testament. First, there is eros. In Platonic philosophy eros meant the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine. It has come now to mean a sort of aesthetic or romantic love. Second, there is philia which means intimate affection between personal friends. Philia denotes a sort of reciprocal love; the person loves because he is loved. When we speak of loving those who oppose us, we refer to neither eros nor philia; we speak of love which is expressed in the Greek word agape. Agape means understanding, redeeming good will for all men. It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative. It is not set in motion by any quality or function of its object. It is the love of God operating in the human heart.

Agape is disinterested love. It is a love in which the individual seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbor (1 Cor. 10-24). 'Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people, or any qualities people possess. It begins by loving

others for their sakes. It is an entirely "neighbor-regarding concern for others," which discovers the neighbor in every man it meets. Therefore, agape makes no distinction between friend and enemy; it is directed toward both. If one loves an individual merely on account of his friendliness, he loves him for the sake of benefits to be gained from the friendship, rather than for the friend's sake. Consequently, the best way to assure oneself that love is disinterested is to have love for the enemy-neighbor from whom you can expect no good in return, but only hostility and persecution.

Another basic point about agape is that it springs from the need of the other person - his need for belonging to the best of the human family. The Samaritan who helped the Jew in the Jericho Road was "good" because he responded to the human need that he was presented with. God's love is eternal and fails not, because man needs his love. St. Paul assures us that the loving act of redemption was done "while we were yet sinners," that is, at the point of our greatest need for love. Since the white man's personality is greatly distorted by segregation, and his soul is greatly scarred, he needs the love of the Negro. The Negro must love the white man, because the white man needs his love to remove his tensions, insecurities and fears.

Agape is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. Agape is a willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. Agape is a willingness to go to any length to restore community. It doesn't stop at the first mile, but goes the second mile to restore community. The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces

that that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community creating reality that moves through history. He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. Therefore, if I respond to hate with a reciprocal hate I do nothing but intensify the cleavage in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love. If I meet hate with hate, I become depersonalized, because creation is so designed that my personality can only be fulfilled in the context of community. Booker T. Washington was right: "Let no man pull you so low that he makes you hate him." When he pulls you that low he brings you to the point of working against community; he drags you to the point of defying creation, and thereby becoming depersonalized.

In the final analysis, agape means recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process, and all men are brothers. To the degree that I harm my brother, no matter what he is doing to me, to that extent I am harming myself. For example, white men often refuse federal aid to education in order to avoid giving the Negro his rights; but because all men are brothers they cannot deny Negro children without harming their own. They end, all efforts to the contrary, by hurting themselves. Why is this? Because men are brothers. If you harm me, you harm yourself.

Love, agape, is the only cement that can hold this broken community together. When I am commanded to love, I am commanded to restore community, to resist injustice, to meet the needs of my brothers.

A sixth basic fact about nonviolent resistance is that it is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice. Consequently, the believer in nonviolence has

deep faith in the future. This faith is another reason why the nonviolent resister can accept suffering without retaliation. For he knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship. It is true that there are devout believers in nonviolence who find it difficult to believe in a personal God. But even these persons believe in the existence of some creative force that works for universal wholeness. Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole.

# King and Pacifism: The Other Dimension

## by Colman McCarthy

Why the uproar over the remarks of Jesse Helms on Martin Luther King, Jr.? The North Carolina senator, in raising questions about King's character and his links with Communists, was temperate compared with what we have heard before. J. Edgar Hoover said that King was "the most notorious liar in the country." In 1965, Sheriff Jim Clark, the keeper at the time of Alabama's attack dogs and water hoses, said that "an agitator" like King "is the lowest form of humanity."

During the Senate debate on whether to honor King with a national holiday, Helms, in his twisted way, actually helped the cause. His speeches assured publicity. Without the oversized mouth of Helms, the issue might have passed unnoticed.

King's reputation was damaged more by the supporters of the holiday legislation than by its opponents. He was praised as only a civil rights leader. Sen. Edward Kennedy said that "King worked tirelessly to remove the stain of discrimination from our nation."

King was much, much more than that. At the core of both his thinking and of his commitment as a Christian clergyman was pacifism, as practiced through the techniques of organized nonviolent confrontation. His constituency was not limited to blacks. Liberals like Kennedy do a disservice to King. In limiting their praise of him to civil rights they sanitize the record.

It was King the pacifist who said in April 1967 that "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today (is) my own government." That statement was not quoted on the Senate floor. Nor was his statement that we are ". . . a society gone mad with war. If America's soul becomes

totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read 'Vietnam.' It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over."

At some moment, the city of Washington will need a statue of King to go along with his national holiday. Several of King's thoughts are suitable to be chiseled into stone, with a number of sites around town being appropriate for the statue.

In front of the Pentagon, why not a bronzed King saluting the flag with these words underneath: "War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons."

Or perhaps the King statue should be placed between the Treasury and the Department of Commerce, with this thought: "Capitalism may lead to a practical materialism that is as pernicious as the theoretical materialism taught by communism."

Maybe Congress will want the King presence on the lawn before the Capitol. If so, King's quote—uttered in early 1968 when the House and Senate were cutting social programs and increasing military spending—is fit: "The Congress is sick."

For a fourth possible site, there is the new memorial for the 59,000 Americans who died in Vietnam. Put in stone King's memorable words about the troops being sent to Southeast Asia: "Before long they must know that their government has sent them into a struggle among Vietnamese, and the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure while we create a hell for the poor."

These aren't the soothing nosegays found in quotation books under "Patriotism"

where the comments of George Washington, our only other leader to be honored with a national holiday, can be found by schoolchildren. By categorizing King as only a civil rights leader, the Senate of 1983 has pulled off what King himself would not allow his detractors to get away with in the 1960s. After his tactics of nonviolence led to the passage of the 1961 civil rights law, voices of respectability told King to stick to race and leave antiwar dissent to others.

It was the new way of telling blacks to stay in their place. King replied that racism and militarism are diseases spread by the same germ: the contempt of the powerful for the weak. With the world armed with nukes, he said, "It will be worthless to talk about integration if there is no world to integrate."

If the Senate liberals avoided the real King, Ronald Reagan will certainly do so when he signs the bill for the holiday. That leaves it up to the followers of King. To accept him as anything less than a revolutionary pacifist will mean that we are getting just another irrelevant plastic hem.

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