ABSTRACT

Freedom in the Thought and Work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Mentor: Daniel P. Payne, Ph.D.

The purpose of this dissertation is to discover Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s interpretation of freedom. King's life was dedicated to a pursuit of freedom for African Americans, the poor, and unfree people around the world. This dissertation takes a comprehensive approach to answering the question: What did King envision when he spoke of freedom? To answer that research question I address King's interpretation of freedom; the significance of freedom to him; and how he hope to apply freedom in the sociopolitical world? The answers to these questions are sought through the interpretation, and analysis of King's beliefs as presented in his writings. This dissertation asserts that King's interpretation of freedom is that people possess the innate ability to decide who they are and how they will be and that each person has the right to actualize her/his will in the phenomenal world. Important to his idea of freedom are some of the components included in the Human Development and Capabilities Approach—especially the conviction that people have the innate right to both substantive and instrumental freedoms. This dissertation argues that King's idea of freedom was rooted in his experience as an American, an African American and Black Christian; his

commitment to the ideas of Christian personalism; his belief that a good state will both protect and provide freedom; and that the moral law of God is on the side of freedom. Questions for further consideration arise out of this dissertation. Is King's dream too utopian? Is he attempting to overcome the harsh reality that one's existence is a struggle against the forces that are beyond human capability (e.g., Is he in a way denying death?). Another question that arises from this dissertation addresses the matter of a transcendent moral code. If King's interpretation of freedom is rooted in God's law, who is the human arbiter of God's law? With the growth of secularism in the United States and closeting of religious dialogue in the public square, is it possible to realize King's dream? These are important questions; however, they do not diminish from King's interpretation of freedom and the value he placed on realizing freedom in the world.

Freedom in the Thought and Work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was the first born child of teenaged parents from broken homes who never graduated from high school, had three children by the time they were twenty, divorced just after they reached the legal drinking age; and went on to marry and divorce multiple times. This led to a tumultuous early life for me as I lived at times with my mom, other times with my dad, another time with an aunt, and another time with the family of a friend. I write this to acknowledge the origins of this dissertation. My dad was able to experience freedom in America because of his work ethic, his father's connections in the Sheet Metal Workers' Union, and his ambition. My mom was unable to experience the same freedoms in America. Her family did not have any connections in industry and she did not have many marketable skills. She endured many abusive relationships with men who, along with the money she earned waiting tables and tending bar, provided what she and her children needed to survive. She is a free moral agent able to dream of who she wanted to be, but her *sitz im leben* kept her from believing she had a chance to turn those dreams into a reality. I did not believe she was free in the "Land of the Free."

My mom is not the only person who has faced significant challenges to the practice of freedom. There are thousands of Americans and millions of people around the world who endure much more pain and deprivation. It is my interest in people like my mom that inspired me to take on this endeavor to contribute to a cause that might make their lives better. How can you be free when you are chained by poverty, substandard education, abusive relationships, and limited access to a better way of life? It is with sadness and hope that I acknowledge that it is this cause that drives me.

I want to acknowledge and thank those people who helped me enjoy the freedom I enjoy today: my mom and dad who did the best with what they had; my Aunt Shirley; the Alexander family; the youth groups of Fundamental Baptist Church and Sun Valley Baptist Church; Kevin Doll and Beth King-Doll; the members of Shearer Hills Baptist Church and Dr. Keith Bruce; the members of Crossroads Baptist Church; Dr. Douglas Diehl, Stuart Clark, and Gary and Becky Crawford; the members of First Baptist Church of Friendswood; Norman Fry, Roger Patterson and Greg Lowery; and the wonderful families of Grace Baptist Church who helped me and my family walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death.

I want to thank the faculty of J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies. I am grateful that Dr. Derek Davis gave me an opportunity. I am particularly appreciative of the teaching and friendship I received from Dr. Charles McDaniel and Fr. Dr. Daniel Payne. Dr. Payne's assistance as the chair of my dissertation committee has not only been invaluable but also thought provoking and insightful. I also want to thank Dr. Robyn Driskell and Dr. William Mitchell for their leadership and encouragement.

I am humbled that members of the esteemed Baylor academic community have given their time and efforts to assist someone like me. I especially want to thank Dr. James SoRelle and Dr. Martin Medhurst for agreeing to be a part of my dissertation committee and not giving up on me as time passed. Dr. SoRelle's expertise has been especially valuable. I want to recognize Dr. Ralph Wood who allowed me to participate in a seminar that pointed me to sources of strength when I was weak.

I save my most important acknowledgements for last. I must acknowledge my wonderfully beautiful wife and friend, Kari Otto-Emblem. Kari and I have been through

hell and with her presence and the grace of God we have made it this far together. Kari, I want you to know that I love you. I also want to thank you for your faithful partnership and invaluable assistance during this arduous journey. You have truly been God's gift of *karis* to me.

I have four wonderful children: Seth, Kelsey, Caleb, and Summer. They, too, have been through tough times, and have proved to be fantastic young people whom I love, cherish, and thank God for every day. I love each one of you and I take great pride is saying I am your dad. Seth, you are incredible—your intelligence and genuine concern for people make me smile. Caleb, you amaze me—your willingness to put in the work to develop your natural abilities is going to take you a long way towards realizing your dreams. Summer, my baby girl—your unrelenting will and gracious spirit give you a strength that I admire.

My dear, departed daughter, Kelsey Elizabeth, faced significant challenges in her life that limited her opportunities to realize true freedom. Kelsey was born (November 4, 1996) with a significant hearing impairment and other neural impairments that impeded her communication skills and ability to learn. These significant challenges did not keep her from learning, laughing and loving. When an acute kidney disease attacked her body she fought it as she endured surgeries, infusions, and a score of prescriptions. Kelsey never let the challenges she faced subdue her indomitable will or harden her kind and loving disposition. Kelsey had to fight to enjoy life, and she did it gracefully. And then, on June 23, 2009, Kelsey Elizabeth died…My heart is still broken and my soul still grieves my greatest loss. I love you Kelsey.

Dedicated to the memory of
Kelsey Elizabeth Emblem,
my little girl
yet, a bigger person
than I'll ever be

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When African Americans returned from World War I after fighting for the basic rights of humanity in Europe, they hoped to enjoy those same basic freedoms at home. They were disheartened when they realized that although the threats to freedom in Europe had been thwarted, the enemies of freedom in the United States still flourished. The lessons learned by African American veterans of World War I were also learned by African American armed service members who returned from defeating the Axis powers of World War II—the American government used its resources to defend freedom around the world but was unwilling to use its resources to defend freedom at home. While thousands of African Americans armed service members risked their lives for freedom's sake, many African Americans refused to go to war and instead fought for their freedoms at home. Among these American civil rights fighters was Bayard Rustin, a gay African American socialist and pacifist who endured time in the penitentiary and risked his life for the sake of freedom. Rustin was one of the first civil rights workers to embrace the Gandhian methods of nonviolent resistance which led to a call for him to provide some assistance to a young Baptist pastor who was leading the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. Rustin's assistance was invaluable to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s success in leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Rustin grew up a pacifist and eventually embraced Gandhian methods of transforming social order, but more important to Rustin than peace was freedom. He explained his stance this way: "I'm a pacifist to this extent: I believe that the first and more important thing we can do is to discover the means of

defending freedom that men can use….There is something which is more valuable to people than peace. And that is freedom."[1]

Rustin's stance was the position taken by Rosa Parks, Edgar Nixon, Jo Ann Robinson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. King wrote about the successful boycott in his book *Stride Toward Freedom*.[2] The people who attended the rallies and mass meetings of the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s sang songs and shouted chants that focused on freedom. In 1964 students from across the United States penetrated the state of Mississippi to register African Americans on the voting rolls during Freedom Summer. The African American led Civil Rights Movement was disturbing the peace for the sake of freedom. Freedom was the goal. How was the desired end defined? How did Martin Luther King, Jr. know when that goal was reached? This dissertation answers the question: When King spoke of freedom, what did he envision? King's writings, speeches, and work in the Civil Rights Movement divulge the answer to the question. In this dissertation one not only finds an explanation of King's understanding of freedom, but also a summary of the meaning of freedom in the history of the African American community as voiced by some of its most prominent members. This dissertation holds that King believed that in the United States—in the *Land of the Free*—Americans created the conditions for unfreedom to violate true freedom. It also helps to bring definition to the dream that King spoke about on the Washington Mall in 1963; it presents the motivation behind

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[1] Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 292.

[2] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992).

King's involvement in the freedom movement; and it contends that King was convinced that freedom—true freedom, at least—must be realized in the sociopolitical world.

The genesis of this dissertation rests on my fundamental belief that people possess an innate yearning and ability to be free and participate in a free society; that Christianity teaches that people are free creatures of value; and that the amended American constitution promotes freedom for *all* its citizens. Furthermore, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a person whose rhetoric is worth considering when analyzing the ideal of freedom. In spite of the unfreedom that engulfed the African American community in the twentieth century, King believed that real freedom could be realized in this world. King provides a somber critique of the two greatest institutions in the West—the Church and the State—and a stunning challenge for these institutions to make good on their proposed promises.

Literature Review

In an essay published in 1965, August Meier challenges the idea that King was the leader of the Civil Rights Movement.[3] Meier writes about the perfunctory character of King's suffering for the cause and the inconsistencies between King's message of radical change and acceptance of inconsequential compromises. He also argues that the greatest gains made for the cause of civil rights were achieved not through the direct efforts of the SCLC but by the work of the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC. While doubting King wielded much power in the Civil Rights Movement, Meier argues that King's great contribution came through his ability to synthesize the messages of the radical and conservative strands of the Civil Rights Movement and communicate that synthesis to white America.

[3] August Meier, "On the Role of Martin Luther King" in *New Politics* 4, no. 1 (Winter, 1965), 1-8.

David L. Lewis wrote an exceptional biography of King's life.[4] Beginning with King's birth in Atlanta and ending with King's assassination in Memphis, Lewis described the life and work of MLK and he did so with the critical eye of an intellectual African American man. Lewis boldly addressed many of the issues overlooked by other King biographers. He wrote about King's intellectual acumen, his penchant for womanizing, the violence of King's nonviolent resistance, and the failures of some of the campaigns. To be fair, Lewis also stressed King's rhetorical brilliance, his bold public moral stances, and his ability to lead people to action. Lewis's critique, while sometimes condescending in tone, helps make this biography unique.

David Garrow wrote three books about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the American Civil Rights Movement. In the first book, Garrow described the events that provided progressive members of Congress the opportunity to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[5] He presented evidence to show how Jim Crow laws and practices in the southern United States violated the civil rights of African American citizens—in particular they violated their right to vote. He argued that the federal government did nothing to alleviate the oppression of African Americans because of complacency and the power southern Representatives and Senators in Washington D.C. He convincingly concluded that it took news cameras capturing the footage of violent confrontations between angry whites and passive blacks to provoke national leaders to enact legislation to protect the rights of African Americans to vote.

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[4] David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York: Praeger Press, 1970).

[5] David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Marting Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (*New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978).

In his second book about King, Garrow told the story of the almost unfettered power of the FBI under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover and how the Director wielded that power over Martin Luther King, Jr.[6] Garrow scrutinized the lack of oversight provided by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations over Hoover and the FBI who used tactics that violated the civil rights of Americans to gather information, and he made a persuasive argument for the complicity of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the FBI's "war" against King. He reasoned that Hoover went after King, with the approval of the Justice Department, for three reasons: King's relationship with Stanley Levison; King's personal improprieties; and the radical politics King espoused over the last few years of his life. The value of this book lies in its description of how a federal governmental organization, given minimal oversight, might run roughshod over the citizens it swore to protect.

In John J. Ansbro's book on Martin Luther King, Jr., he focused his attention on the influences that led King to his nonviolent commitment and how he used nonviolent tactics to bring about the civil social change he desired.[7] Ansbro argued that the Christian concept of *agape* love and Mahatma Gandhi's practice of *agape* through nonviolent resistance in both South Africa and India served as the foundation for King's own commitment to nonviolence as a way of life and as a guide for his involvement in the civil rights movement. Ansbro gave a detailed description of the theological, social, and philosophical influences that convinced King of the ultimate importance of the ideal of agape. He further summarized King's critiques of other African American responses to

[6] David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981).

[7] John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Strategies and Tactics for Social Change* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1982).

the evil of racism in the United States. Ansbro helps us better understand King's commitment to Gandhi's political satyagraha in the American Civil Rights movement and why King had to involve himself in the fight against injustice in America and around the world.

C. Eric Lincoln, compiled a number of essays in his book from authors personally affected by King and his influence in American and on the Civil Rights Movement.[8] The essays, presented in biographical sequence, contain commentary, analysis, and interpretation of the importance of those events to King, to the African American community, to civil rights in America, to what it means to be an American, and to what it means to be a citizen of the world. While one cannot assign to the book a particular thesis, the essays do reveal the character, complexity, and contributions of the man, Martin Luther King, Jr.

Frederick L. Downing makes King's pilgrimage of faith the focal point of his work.[9] He notes the significant influences on King's faith: his family, the Black church, his education, his teachers, his experiences as a civil rights leader, and his maturation as a person. He uses various tools to analyze the psychology of King's faith and notes the changes that drove King's faith trajectory to expand to become a faith focused on universal fraternity.

Garrow won the Pulitzer Prize for his third work on King.[10] In this thorough and stimulating work, Garrow details the work of King and the Southern Christian Leadership

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[8] C. Eric Lincoln, *Martin Luther King, Jr: A Profile* (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

[9] Frederick L. Downing, *To See the Promised Land: The Faith Pilgrimage of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

[10] David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986).

Conference (SCLC) in the American Civil Rights Movement. He covers the intricate details of the history of the SCLC from its infancy in Montgomery, through its highs and lows in the 1960s, to the loss of its leader in Memphis. While Garrow's book covers the same subject as Adam Fairclough's does, Garrow presents a more in depth look at each campaign, the zeitgeist surrounding the Civil Rights Movement, and at the indiscretions of the members of the SCLC. While Fairclough admittedly avoided the religious aspect of the SCLC, Garrow emphasized its spiritual motivations.

In *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference & Martin Luther King, Jr*., Adam Fairclough describes the "inner dynamics" of the SCLC and how its leaders "evolved and executed their strategic plans" in the major campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.[11] He suggested that too much attention and attribution has been given to King and not enough attention and appreciation has been given to other members of the SCLC and to the covert northerners who created the SCLC. He did not discount the importance of King to the SCLC; he only wanted to temper it by revealing the contributions of the group and its members to the cause. He focuses on the rational machinations of the SCLC leadership, believing that it was their reasoning that overcame the vitriol of their opponents. Fairclough teaches us that King's leadership in the Civil Rights movement depended on the contributions of the overt and covert members of the SCLC.

In October of 1986, scholars met in Washington D.C. at a conference titled, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: the Leader and the Legacy," to discuss the American memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In September of 1987, the *Journal of American History*

[11] Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Leadership Conference & Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

published five essays that originated from the conference. In the first essay, David J. Garrow focused the attention of his essay, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Spirit of Leadership," on the spiritual experience that King had on January 27, 1956, during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.[12] Garrow tells the story of how King heard God's call that night to stand for justice and to have confidence in knowing that God would be with him as he fought. Garrow claims that it was this experience that invigorated King to transform the culture and politics of the United States. In "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle," Clayborne Carson challenges the mythology of King and provides a more substantive explanation of King's contribution to the Civil Rights Movement.[13] Carson argues that it was the combination of King's entrenchment in the African American church and his high academic acumen that made King a valuable asset in the battle for the realization of African American rights. James H. Cone, in "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," chose to focus on the significance of King's work in the colonized countries of the world and the influence of liberation movements around the world on King's work.[14] Cone suggests that King's message gave hope to the citizens of third world nations and that the revolutions taking place around the world helped to stabilize King when his efforts did not bring about the transformational results he desired. The move for freedom, Cone writes, is a global movement of all the oppressed people of the world. In "Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the

[12] David J. Garrow, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Spirit of Leadership," in *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 438-447.

[13] Clayborne Carson, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle," in *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 448-454.

[14] James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World" in *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 455-467.

Future of America," Vincent Gordon Harding challenges historians to remind America of the radical message of King.[15] Harding fears that the national honors bestowed on King (i.e., Martin Luther King Day) have neutered the message of King. He believes that if America wants to honor King, it must take up his fight to unify a divided country by challenging its economic system and weakening its hawkish military; it must enact difficult measures to uplift the forsaken poor; and must respect the dignity of every human being by standing up for the rights of people of the world. The final essay from the roundtable is "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership," by Nathan Irvin Huggins.[16] Huggins addresses the complexities that surround the study of King: how do scholars handle his mythological status and how do they rationalize his commitment to his religious traditions and values? Huggins concludes that while King has been esteemed too highly, King is a person worthy of attention because of his vital contributions to the civil rights struggle.

The ultimate work on the subject of Martin Luther King, Jr. is Taylor Branch's colossal three-volume creation, *America in the King Years*.[17] In these well-researched books, Branch tells the multi-faceted stories of the life and work of King, the American Civil Rights Movement, the inner workings of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the Black Power movement, the Vietnam War, and the entrenched power of southern bigots. In each volume, Branch interweaves these stories into one incredible narrative

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[15] Vincent Gordon Harding, "Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Future of America," in *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 468-476.

[16] Nathan Irvin Huggins, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership," in *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 477-481.

[17] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998); *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

that not only tells the history of the United States from 1954 to 1968, but also places the reader in the middle of events as they take place—one almost feels like a voyeur. He does not apply any cosmetics to the portraits he paints of King, the Civil Rights Movement, the racists, the progressives, or the other major characters in the story. This voluminous anthology may intimidate some prospective readers, and sections of volumes two and three make for tedious reading, but any serious student of King, or the other subject matter previously mentioned, cannot overlook this incredible exposition.

James A. Colaiaco highlights the non-violent strategies taught and practiced by King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the preeminent campaigns of the American Civil Rights Movement.[18] Colaiaco argues that while King was a product of the zeitgeist of the Civil Right era, the Civil Rights movement would not have accomplished what it did without King's leadership in nonviolent resistance. He also argues that the lessons learned from Gandhi were indispensable to King's successful leadership of the movement and that advances were made for the cause of civil rights because of the peaceful, yet active, resistance to injustice. While Colaiaco opines that King's dream is still a dream, he argues that King's radical involvement in the strides toward freedom serve as an inspiration for continued involvement in the struggle.

In what may be the definitive single-volume biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., Stephen B. Oates provided the reader with a thorough, yet un-cumbersome, insight into the short life and work of the most publicly important Civil Rights leader.[19] Beginning with King's early life in Atlanta, Oates wrote about how family members, college

[18] James A. Colaiaco, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Apostle of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

[19] Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994).

professors, theologians and professors, and personal confidants influenced King and guided him in his leadership of the SCLC and the Civil Rights Movement in general. He gave an astute description throughout the book of the complex relationship King had with the white political establishment in the South and at the federal level. He also spoke to the important matter of King's "troubled soul" as he struggled to meet his personal expectations and the expectations of others. Oates gives us a complete biographical view of MLK's life.

Brian Ward and Tony Badger, two British scholars, edited a book of essays that challenge the common insights and analysis of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement.[20] In the four general subject areas addressed, the reader learns about the important contributions of civil rights leaders and campaigns that immediately preceded King's leadership in Montgomery; about the general orientations, successes, and failures of progressive whites in the South and their counterparts in the black community; about general American cultural phenomena and events that prepared a national audience to receive the message of King and the Civil Rights Movement; and about the British response to King and the American Civil Rights Movement. While these essays provide "important new insights into the origins, development, representations and international ramifications of the civil rights movement" (2), they more importantly show the complexity of the civil rights movement and the inadequacy of attempting to limit the movement to King, the SCLC, SNCC, CORE, Malcolm X, and other American icons.

[20] Brian Ward and Tony Badger,eds., *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

Clayborne Carson edited the posthumous "autobiography" of Martin Luther King, Jr.[21] In this book, Carson gathered the writings, speeches, and interviews of King and edited them into a cogent rendering of King's life in King's own words. This volume provides a unique, yet relatively uncritical, interpretation of the events surrounding King's life and the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the entire work, one senses the deep, spiritual commitment King had to the non-violent, revolutionary movement to bring about racial and economic equity reformation in the United States and even the world. What one does not get in the work is a look into the private life of King or a critique of some of King's questionable decisions and actions. This autobiography is an insightful resource.

Gerald D. McKnight tells the story of King's final campaign—The Poor People's Campaign—and Hoover's FBI's campaign to defeat King.[22] In his intriguing work, McKnight explains why and describes how King began to transform his tactics from early legal reform to more revolutionary activity. He also reveals how an unfettered FBI encouraged southern segregationalist and northern moderate members of Congress to oppose and obstruct the Poor People's Campaign. McKnight argues that the battle that surrounded the Poor People's Campaign was one that pitted citizens against their government more dramatically than any of King's other ventures.

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[21] Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. Clayborne Carson, (New York: Warner Books, 1998).

[22] Gerald D. McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

S. Jonathan Bass tells the story of the religious leaders King addressed in his renowned "Letter from Birmingham Jail."[23] Bass gave an overview of the events surrounding King's production and distribution of this important documentation. The greatest contribution of this book to the study of King and the Civil Rights Movement is its presentation of the stories of the seven Christian and one Jewish minister addressed by King. Bass shared the biographies of these eight men, the relationship these men had with each other and with their congregations, the attitudes these men held regarding the matters of segregation and integration, and the consequences they faced as a result of the letter. The work sympathizes with the plight of these men caught in the complexities of their time and in so doing showed the convoluted position of many moderate, southern religious leaders.

In contrast to Downing's work, Michael G. Long endeavors to take a look at King's political evolution.[24] Long takes an in-depth look at the events taking place in King's personal life and the knowledge he gains from his academic career and experience in the civil rights movement and provides an analysis of how these factors influence his understanding of the state and the state's role in either denying freedoms or protecting and providing freedoms. Long pays special attention to the influence of King's religious beliefs on his attitudes toward the state and suggests that King saw the state as a necessary evil.

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[23] S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King, Jr., Eight White Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

[24] Michael G. Long, *Against Us, But For Us: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the State* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

Lewis Baldwin edited a compilation of essays dealing with a variety of aspects from King's political belief system.[25] In the book Baldwin, Rufus Burrow, Barbara Holmes, and Susan Winfield discuss King's ideas regarding religion, American democracy, the rule of law, the need for political change, and personalism. This book provides very good summaries of important ideas espoused by King and the influences that helped him develop his views on the roles that the state and church in the United States play in meeting the needs and protecting the rights of the people.

In his book about King's involvement in and leadership of the Civil Rights Movement, Stewart Burns addressed the question of what inspired King to dedicate his life to the movement.[26] He suggested that the decision to give his life to the cause came one night as King encountered God in the kitchen of his house in Montgomery in the winter of 1956. Burns argues that it was King's belief that God called him and enabled him to be the leader of the Civil Rights Movement—a movement to save the United States from itself. Using Christian imagery, Burns proposed that King saw the Civil Rights Movement as the cross God called him to bear. This divine call mandated that King attempt to make the teachings of Christian scripture realized in the world. Therefore, he fought for the government to recognize the equality of all races; to provide relief for the poor; and to end war and rumors of war. Burns does not gloss over King's personal failures, nor does he fail to acknowledge the considerable successes of King's overall work.

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[25] Lewis V. Baldwin, ed., *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

[26] Stewart Burns, *To the Mountaintop: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Sacred Mission to Save America 1955-1968* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2004).

Marshall Frady's biography gives us a national reporter's honest and up-close look at King that includes his personal imperfections and his interpersonal complications.[27] This biography is about MLK the man more than about the Civil Rights Movement. Frady puts the reader in the room with King as he shares King's fluctuating, almost manic/depressive, emotions during the Civil Rights Movement's advances, withdrawals, and standstills. He helps the reader better understand the weight King felt as the leader of a movement to redeem America's soul.

An important work that distinguishes itself from the rest of this large field is *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* written by Rufus Burrow.[28] In this work Burrow writes about the influence of Christian personalism and the traditions of the black church in the life and work of King. Burrow argues that King was convinced that the person was primary, that freedom was inalienable, that morality was essentially objective as its source was God, and that morality was constantly challenged by the subjective, free will of individuals. Furthermore, when objective morality was upended by subjective free will, reasonable people could not help but stand up against the injustice. Burrow presents both King's optimism and pessimism regarding the ultimate actualization of freedom in the face of segregation, poverty, and militarism. This work is important as it reminds people of King's belief in an objective God and goodness that permeates the universe and King's conviction that the fight for justice would eventually result in victory. The weakness of Burrow's work is its failure to address the subjective nature of an individual's

[27] Marshall Frady, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

[28] Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

interpretation of objective morality and its lack of attention to the roles of institutions in the actualization of freedom in society.

In his book about Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas F. Jackson, argues that King equated civil rights with economic rights.[29] While others argue that King eventually focused on economic justice, Jackson contends that economic justice was central to King's struggle for justice from the very beginning. He cogently presents the case that King's roots in the social gospel of the black Baptist church, his education in liberal white schools, and his relationships with unions and democratic socialists solidified his commitment to guaranteed employment, elimination of classes, and the suspension of economic imperialism around the world. According to Jackson, King understood that civil rights depended on economic equality.

King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop, is a critical biography in which Harvard Sitkoff, focuses on the empowering and sustaining influence of the African American church on King's role as the symbolic leader of the Civil Rights Movement.[30] The most important contribution made by Sitkoff to the study of King is the demythologizing of the Civil Rights leader. Sitkoff details the contributions of other important Civil Rights actors (e.g., E. D. Nixon, Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, and Jim Lawson); the frustration that King's contemporaries had with his haphazard leadership style; the incongruences and consequences of King's infidelities; King's bouts with deep despair; and King's goal to radically reconstruct the United States. While Sitkoff recognizes King's flaws, he also

[29] Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007)

[30] Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008).

acknowledges that the Civil Rights Movement would have suffered without King's contributions to the cause.

My Contribution

The preceding authors provide excellent research regarding King's life, the Civil Rights Movement, the FBI, the United States during the life of King (including the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations), and insightful analyses of King's philosophical and theological nuances that is greatly appreciated. This dissertation offers the reader additional insight that not only will help them better understand Martin Luther King, Jr., but shed light on the value of freedom and the importance of persons and institutions working together to accomplish what is best for humankind. This dissertation's contribution to these important matters is a direct focus on freedom in the thought of Dr. King. Other scholars address the topics of King and freedom as parts of works dealing with issues of rights, religion, the state, and sociopolitical conditions around the world. This dissertation makes freedom the focal point—that focus is what distinguishes it from those endeavors that came before this work.

Methodology

To achieve the stated goals, this dissertation will present the work, the writings and the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., and provide an analysis and interpretation of their meaning—it is both an exegesis and an analysis of mostly primary sources. While this dissertation does not challenge the originality of King's work, there is an understanding that the authenticity of some these works is suspect. Michael Long, and others, are probably correct in stating that while King may have had assistance in

preparing his writings and speeches, "all material published under his name, reflects his point of view."[31] You will find in this dissertation a comparison of the American ideal of freedom with the reality of unfreedom experienced by African Americans; a consideration of the expectations of important voices from African American history; an analysis of King's idea of freedom through a rubric of some nineteenth, twentieth, and even twenty-first century thinkers; the influence of experience, family, community, personalism, Gandhi, and the civil rights movement on King's interpretation of freedom; and a deliberation of the role of persons and institutions in creating conditions of unfreedom and freedom.

Chapters and Their Focus

Chapter two summarizes the development of the ideal of freedom from the Civil War period through the 1950s. In this chapter you will read about some of the ideas about freedom from abolitionists, African Americans, women, and a variety of other minority groups. Chapter two especially focuses on the idea of freedom in the lives of African Americans from the years leading up to emancipation, through Reconstruction and the Harlem Renaissance, and into the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s.

Chapter three contains a description and analysis of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s depiction of freedom in his writings, sermons, and speeches. It presents King's ideas about the unalienable, existential freedom found in every person (i.e., *personality*) and King's quest to see that freedom actualized in the real lives of all Americans. The chapter argues that King believed freedom was the innate human quality to determine who one was and the right to act accordingly. It also contains a discussion of the

[31] Long, xx.

similarities between King's interpretation of freedom and the ideas of freedom in the Human Development and Capabilities Approach. This chapter explains why King saw segregation, discrimination, and capitalism affronts to freedom and it also considers the causes and implications of the obstructionism brought about by those who saw the sit-ins, marches, and prayer vigils as revolutionary provocations that disturbed peaceful race relations and threatened to destroy the fabric of the United States. It also presents King's argument about why America needed the kind of agitation he and others in the Civil Rights Movement used to challenge the *status quo*.

Chapter four examines the inspiration behind Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, willingness to risk his life to achieve the goal of actualized freedom. It gives special attention to King's role as a Christian pastor, his understanding of Christian praxis rooted in *agape*, and to his commitment to the philosophy of Christian personalism. It also thinks through why King's rejected pure positivism and accepted the Social Gospel's tie to the eternal. Chapter four ponders the dissonance in King's belief system about innate human goodness and the natural propensity for people to sin. It considers the place of the Christian church in advancing and obstructing freedom in the United States and the lessons King believed the church could learn from the critique proffered by Communism. It also considers King's understanding of the sin of unfreedom and the possibility of redemption found in following transcendent moral values.

Chapter five shares my interpretation of what the socio-political world would look like to Martin Luther King, Jr. King dreamt of a world where freedom was actualized for all persons—he called the fulfillment of his dream the "Beloved Community." Chapter five discusses King's appeal for "justice, fair play, and equality" as substantiation of

freedom and reflects on the transcendent nature of morality and how a democratic state committed to those values could overcome the conditions of unfreedom to create a world where persons would experience freedom. It considers the influence of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus Christ and Gandhi to King's fight for freedom and presents King's argument for the realization of the Beloved Kingdom in the here and now instead of in the great by-and-by. This chapter contends that King argues for positive freedoms to have the priority over negative freedoms—the general will is more important than the particular will. Furthermore, it contemplates King's unrealized dream of the "Poor People's Campaign," in which he had hoped to reshape the American economic system into a more equitable and socialist system in which the government guaranteed every citizen the basic necessities of life (e.g. the substantive freedom to enjoy a living wage, food, healthcare, a quality education, and living quarters).

This dissertation concludes in chapter six with a presentation of my original research question and provides answers and assessments of Dr. Martin Luther King's interpretation of freedom and the possibilities of its actualization.

Conclusion

This dissertation analyzes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s interpretation of freedom. In the process of answering the research question, it considers King's roll in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s; it gives a brief history of freedom in America and what a variety of African American leaders sought in their struggle to obtain freedom; it presents King's own thoughts on freedom and why he chose to work in the freedom movement as a pastor; and it gives King's description of a free society. In my analysis of King's ideal freedom I argue that he was convinced that the state and the

church have a real responsibility to meet the real needs of people and to protect a fundamental human right to freedom—to be able to determine who they are and act accordingly.

There are two requirements for freedom to be realized in the phenomenal world: people must enjoy both instrumental freedoms and substantive freedoms. To meet the requirements of freedom—to fulfill the basic needs that allow people to experience freedom—individual liberty may need to be restricted for the common good. The restrictions King calls for are not nebulous restrictions based on independent human ideas, but are restrictions rooted in the moral laws of God. This dissertation gives the reader the opportunity to focus on the meaning and value of freedom for the individual and for the community.

This dissertation provides a substantive resource for future research concerning freedom, the role of the people in creating freedom, the role of the church in holding the state morally responsible, and the role of the state in protecting and providing real freedom for people around the world. This dissertation makes a substantive contribution to the study of Martin Luther King, Jr., and to the study and praxis of freedom.

CHAPTER TWO

Definitions of Freedom

Introduction

The Civil Rights Movement was a movement driven by the ideal of freedom. Freedom songs filled meeting halls. Freedom riders challenged segregation in interstate travel. Freedom Summer, 1964, brought progressive college students into Mississippi to educate citizens about their civil liberties, civil rights, and civic responsibility. Martin Luther King, Jr. ended his most enduring speech with the words, "let freedom ring." Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! "Freedom" was the goal, but what was freedom?

This chapter considers slavery and freedom and what freedom meant to some African American leaders who preceded Martin Luther King, Jr. This chapter will serve as a comparison to the interpretation of freedom espoused by King and as an example of the role that people play in creating conditions of unfreedom and freedom.

Freedom and Slavery

In 1828, Noah Webster defined *freedom* as "a state of exemption from the power or control of another."[1] Americans believed that this "state of exemption" was a fundamental and inalienable human right. Yet many people in the Unites States lived under the authority of political, social, religious, and economic systems in which they had no voice. White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men with economic means and property appointed themselves as the keepers of the gates to the various degrees of freedom. In

[1] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 60.

the early nineteenth century, states began to expand voting rights to all Anglo men without regard of their economic status. All others were under their control and therefore, according to Webster and the spirit of the age, not free. This *de jure* denial of freedom for women and for men of color did not go unnoticed by the violated. Their lives were vivid representations of the great American hypocrisy, and while they were denied the right to participate as full citizens and deprived of all the guarantees of the Bill of Rights, they still dreamed about freedom. They dreamed about freedom not only because of the human yearning to be free, but also because of the rhetoric of freedom that permeated the country from the podium and the pulpit. The equality of citizenship allowed common people to have a greater influence on the churches in the United States than they had in Europe, and the American spirit of democracy inspired the content of the sermons in the United States in such a way that men and women, both white and black, believed freedom was their right.[2] The ideal of freedom gave people hope and it also fed the fires of dissatisfaction that burned in the souls of the oppressed.

Rising out of the natural yearnings of the soul came the call and campaign to rectify the violations against the American promise of freedom to all people. Women's rights groups rose up to ensure that women were treated as people and not as the

[2] Nathan Hatch claims that Methodists and Baptists in the late eighteenth century "embraced slaves as brothers and sisters…" He goes on to quote from an anonymous slave, "I had recently joined the Methodist Church and from the sermon I heard, I felt that God had made all men free and equal, and that I ought not be a slave." He also points out three ways in which popular religion in America "articulated a profoundly democratic spirit" that generated a spirit of equality. (1) "They denied the age-old distinction that set the clergy apart as a separate order of men and they refused to defer to learned theologians and traditional orthodoxies." (2) "These movements empowered ordinary people by taking their deepest spiritual impulses at face value rather than subjecting them to the scrutiny of orthodox doctrine and the frowns of respectable clergymen." (3) "Religious outsiders, flushed with confidence about their prospects, had little sense of their limitations. They dreamed that a new age of religious and social harmony would naturally spring out of their efforts to overthrow coercive and authoritarian structures." Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 102 and 9f.

possessions of the men in their lives.[3] As the government began to recognize and then protect the personhood of women, many women expected to fully participate in a free America and began the long process of working to gain their suffrage. Abolitionists, both men *and women*, spoke out against slavery and, according to Eric Foner, "invented the concept of equality before the law regardless of race."[4] Slave owners and other proponents of slavery scoffed at the idea of racial equality and argued that one facet of their freedom included the responsibility to supervise those (i.e., women, children, and African Americans) incapable of handling personal freedom. Preachers in the South became the megaphones of slave owners using scriptural inferences to establish that African Americans were destined for and blessed through slavery.[5] In the North, African Americans were considered a lesser species of human and largely segregated from white society. Slaves, abolitionists, and many women, disagreed with the premise that certain

[3] One hears the desire of women for men to respect them as persons early in American history. Abigail Adams reminds John Adams to remember the personhood of women at the Philadelphia Constitutional Convention. She wrote, "I would desire that you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors…If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." John and Abigail Adams, "Women in the New Nation" from *The Letters of John and Abigail Adams*, (Start Publishing LLC, 2012), First Start Publishing eBook edition, Location 3172. Susan Juster suggests that the roots of this idea of equality between the sexes may have its roots in early American revivalism. She argues that newly converted individuals entered into a *liminal* state where "all rules have been overturned" and where the new believer "experience[s] a profound sense of freedom from social conventions and indeed from society itself." New converts in the evangelical churches became part of a kind of androgynous community of believers in which even *men* accepted the role of virgin, bride, and mother. Juster believes the liminal aspect of early evangelicalism was shunned as evangelicals became accepted by more mainstream America. Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 19; 51; and 6-7.

[4] Ibid., 87

[5] Benjamin Palmer voiced these sentiments in a speech delivered on a day of fasting and prayer in the Confederate States. He stated, "From first to last, their (slaves from the tribe of Ham) mental and moral characteristics, together with the guidance of Providence, have marked them for servitude; while their comparative advance in civilization and their participation in the blessings of salvation, have ever been suspended upon this decreed connexion [sic] with Japhet and with Shem." Benjamin M. Palmer, "National Responsibility Before God," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971), 179f.

people were unqualified to act as fully human and agreed with Frederick Douglass's belief that the United States had enslaved the doctrine of freedom in the bonds of race and ethnicity—certainly women added the bonds of sex and gender.[6]

The Constitution of the United States of America and the amendments made in its "Bill of Rights," did not directly address the oppression of slavery. As a matter of fact, the Constitution endorsed the oppressive claim that African Americans were less than human with its "three-fifths compromise" and the government agreed not to address the matter of slave trade and fugitive slave laws for at least twenty years after its ratification. Abolitionists argued that equality before the law reached back to the claim in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." The problem for abolitionists was that many Americans used the spurious claims of racists to validate the argument that African Americans were a less developed human species than were Caucasians.[7] Abolitionists had to fight against the mindset that not all men were created equal, because, if all men, even African American men, were human then all men must be equal, too.[8] If they are equal, then the guarantees of the Bill of Rights must apply to

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[6] Foner, 108.

[7] Thomas Gossett, in his book *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, reports Thomas Jefferson's hypothesis regarding racist science as presented in Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*. Gossett quotes Jefferson's conclusion, "I advance it, therefore, as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and of mind." Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963, 1997), 44.

[8] Stephen Gould notes that in a letter written to Henri Gregoire, Thomas Jefferson believed that even if African Americans were inferior to White Americans, they deserved the same freedoms. Jefferson wrote, "Whatever be their degree of talents, it is no measure of their rights." In a section of the letter not used by Gould, Jefferson further stated that African Americans, "are gaining daily in the opinions of nations, and hopeful advances are making towards their re—establishment on an equal footing with the other colors of the human family." Stephen J. Gould, "American Polygeny and Craniometry Before Darwin: Blacks and Indians as Separate, Inferior Species," in *The "Racial"Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 85. Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Henri Gregoire," http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=460 (accessed January 12, 2013)

them as they apply to any man who was a citizen of the United States. They further claimed that the government could not legally—much less morally—deny those rights to African Americans and that the government must use its authority and executive power to guarantee that African Americans enjoyed those rights by protecting them from violations and prosecuting violators. The abolitionists called on the state to act as a harbinger of virtue and liberty. Southerners saw the abolitionist position as a mutant evolution that threatened the—their—ideal of American freedom.[9]

Southerners believed that the matter of slavery was not a federal issue, but a state issue and as such, any interference by the federal government obstructed the free market and violated the principles of federalism and the individual rights of southerners. The Republican Party disagreed. The Republicans believed that slavery hampered economic growth and the personal prosperity of a majority of Americans. Abolitionists pushed the Republicans to include an anti-slavery plank as a part of their political platform and helped the new party increase its political power in northern state houses and in Washington, D.C. Progressives in Massachusetts successfully lobbied the state legislature to enact a ban on segregation in public education in 1855.[10] In the Missouri Compromise, the national Congress created laws that barred slavery in the new territories of the West. Even though the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) had made slavery a state's

[9] Michael Fellman presents the views of northerners and southerners during the settling of Nebraska and Kansas. He writes that southerners that that anti-slavery northerners were not interested in freedom, but in "stealing, running off and hiding runaway negroes…[and] taking to their own bed…a stinking negro wench." Fellman suggests that southerners believed "northerners sought to reverse the entire moral and social order, to enshrine the low and debase the high." Michael Fellman, "Rehearsal for the Civil War: Antislavery and Proslavery at the Fighting Point in Kansas, 1854-1856," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, eds. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 300.

[10] Michael J. Klarman, *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

issue and United States Supreme Court invalidated the Missouri Compromise and strengthened the cause of slavery in its *Dred Scott* (1857) decision, the political tandem of abolitionists and Republicans threatened southern freedom. Agitated southern demagogues convinced the populace that secession was necessary to secure their inalienable liberties. While the abolition of slavery was not the primary motivation for northerners to support the federal attempt to preserve the Union through a civil war, northerners eventually came to realize that the liberty they loved and professed was sullied by the chattel slavery that dominated the South. Union forces ultimately believed that they risked their lives to preserve the Union and to advance the cause of freedom in the United States. Confederate soldiers believed they risked their lives to preserve the freedom of the states, to protect the supreme position of Anglo-Saxon Protestants in America, and to safeguard the agricultural system that allowed white southerners to enjoy their distinctive way of life. One could say that freedom was both the victor and the vanquished of the Civil War.

The Civil War served as a significant juncture in the development of freedom in America. From the Revolution to the years leading up to the Civil War, Americans looked to the federal government to create and protect an environment in which citizens could freely enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They neither looked to nor trusted the institution of government to grant freedoms or improve society. They believed that freedom originated with a Creator and that free citizens who abided by the laws of a limited government served as the architects and building blocks of a better society. The Civil War showed a shift in the American mind, as people turned to the federal government to ensure freedom for all citizens although that meant violating the

rights of some states and some individuals. African Americans, utopians, and abolitionists had called for the government's involvement in American social and economic affairs for a number of years, believing the government had an obligation to protect and ensure the civil rights of all Americans and, at least for some among these interest groups, provide the property necessary to guarantee their economic security.[11] While the calls for governmental involvement had been communal in nature, the primary motivation for the Republican stance against slavery was the desire to enhance the ability of individuals to enjoy economic prosperity and, as Adam Smith surmised, slavery hindered economic progress.[12] The Republicans called on the government to outlaw chattel slavery because American history showed that free peoples had enslaved other peoples and the power they wielded and the prosperity they experienced at the expense of the enslaved was so great, that it blinded the slaveholders to the point they did not recognize the humanity of the enslaved and the truly oppressive nature of slavery. Since private citizens could not, or would not, work to ensure the freedom of all peoples, the

[11] Prior to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, whose president was Benjamin Franklin, called on Franklin to request that the Philadelphia Convention "abolish the slave trade." Franklin refused their request because of its political consequences. Following the Convention, abolitionist Samuel Hopkins wrote, "How does it appear in the sight of Heaven that *these states*, who have been fighting for liberty…, cannot agree in any political constitution, unless it indulge and authorize them to enslave their fellowmen." Merton L. Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 16. In 1854 Sherman M. Booth was convicted in federal courts of violating the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The Wisconsin Supreme Court declared the Act unconstitutional and freed Booth. *The Milwaukee Sentinel* opined, "Nobody any longer entertains respect for the Supreme Court, because in its legal decisions it has clearly violated every principle of right and justice, and rendered itself a mere machine for the advancement of the interests of one section of the country." Klarman, 25f. The Committee on Behalf of Freedmen petitioned Andrew Johnson to protect the rights of African Americans to provide opportunity for African Americans to possess their own property. In their petition they pointed out, "…Land monopoly is injurious to the advancement of the course of Freedom, and if Government Does not make some provision by which we as Freedmen can obtain A Homestead, we have Not bettered our condition." "Petition of Committee on Behalf of the Freedman to Andrew Johnson," in *Voices of Freedom: A Documentary History* 2nd ed., ed. Eric Foner (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 1:318.

[12] See Foner, *The Story*, 65.

federal government necessarily had to exert its authority and executive power to do for the people what they would not do for themselves. Experiencing freedom remained an inalienable right, but freedom was now viewed as: (1) a natural right for all citizens because of their humanity; (2) a right guaranteed to all citizens by the laws of the state; and (3) a right guarded by the federal government's executive power—to stand against freedom was to stand against the United States of America.

Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" and the Civil War freed African Americans from the bonds of chattel slavery, and the United States ratified the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing the practice. The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment *guaranteed* that the nation would acknowledge and protect the civil liberties and civil rights of all Americans—including African Americans—from state proscriptions. When the nation ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, the federal government and state governments opened the door to participation in the political process. The newly amended Constitution legitimized African American freedom but it did not remove prejudice and bigotry from the hearts of the people who resisted legislative reform. African Americans wanted more than the acknowledgement of their freedom—they wanted to experience freedom, so they stood up against resistance. They demanded the right to vote because the franchise put them "on equal footing with the whites" and gave them opportunity to have sympathetic representation in the various

levels of government.[13] They sought the right to testify in courts and sit in the jury box so that justice might be evenly dispensed.[14]

The newly amended Constitution promised freedom and African Americans worked to gain their freedom; nevertheless, access into the political, social, and economic systems of the United States was impeded by the naiveté of northern victors and the disgust of defeated southerners. Northern Republicans believed that the freed slaves could now enjoy the fruits of their labors, but they failed to recognize that without the land and resources needed to grow the fruit necessary to improve their plight, they were destined to live impoverished lives. Republicans further failed to appreciate how revolting southerners found the idea of living as equals with their former slaves and how counter-intuitive it was to them that African Americans had the ability not only to vote, but hold federal and state offices. Republicans, who now dominated the federal government, attempted to improve the plight of African Americans through the Military Reconstruction Act of 1867, which demolished the Confederate government and established a system for African Americans to successfully run for elective office. They also created the Freedman's Bureau to protect newly freed slaves from the revenge of white southerners and to assist them in the process of obtaining land, establishing standing before the courts, and educating the African American masses.[15] The Constitutional amendments, federal acts, and bureaucratic agencies created by the

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[13] Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard, 2003), 399.

[14] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 18f.

[15] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 22.

Republicans expanded the authority of the government to include the task of protecting the rights of minorities from governmental and mob infringement.[16]

An economic recession in the 1870s, political gains by southern Democrats in state and federal elections, and Hayes' one vote win in the 1876 election, allowed Democrats to negotiate a plan to end reconstruction policies (Compromise of 1877) and return political and legislative authority back to Anglo-Saxon men in the former confederate states (southern "Redemption"). As Democrats regained control, the freedoms that African Americans had gained and enjoyed following the Civil War began to dwindle as they sank into the pit of second-class citizenship. The first oppressive steps of the Democrats (1877) moved to disenfranchise African Americans by vesting authority in local officials to administer election laws and policies.[17] By establishing poll-taxes, good citizenship and educational requirements, and holding white-only state primaries, southern Democrats had effectively pushed African Americans, especially in the South, out of the political process, thus silencing their resistance to new efforts to restrict their inalienable freedoms.

Most Americans of European descent were unconcerned with the plight of African Americans as they struggled to find and enjoy their own freedom in "The Land of the Free." Freedom in America has always had ties to the ability to obtain economic independence, and Americans had dreamed of working the vast lands of the United States

[16] "The Reconstruction amendments transformed the Constitution from a document primarily concerned with federal-state relations and the rights of property to a vehicle through which members of vulnerable minorities could stake a claim to substantive freedom and seek protection against misconduct by all levels of government." Foner, 107.

[17] "As a voter the Negro was both hated and cajoled, both intimidated and courted, but he could never be ignored so long as he voted." C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow: A Commemorative Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54.

and her territories to gain that independence. As the nineteenth century came to a close, working the land was not rewarding for the majority of Americans, and the economic titans held powerful monopolies in American industry and the marketplace. A great number of people lost property and the ability to create independent wealth and moved from rural farms and small towns to urban centers to find economic freedom by selling one's labor for an appropriate wage. Americans began to accept their economic dependence on employment and the move from producer to consumer. They now found their freedom in: the security of their civil liberties, the protection of their civil rights, the promises of a good education, participation in the political process, the potential of obtaining a good paying job that would provide the means for necessities and pleasures, living free social lives, and worshipping according to their own consciences. This description of the great American dream defines, to a large extent, freedom in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. All Americans shared this dream; however, the United States denied the realization of the dream to most people of color—including African Americans.[18]

Freedom and the Oppression of African Americans

The Thirteenth Amendment and the Civil War may have ended slavery, but the war and legislation did not remove the bias and bigotry that a majority of Caucasians had

[18] Mark Noll has suggested that the disenfranchisement of African Americans in post-bellum America occurred because the national government was forced to resolve the issue of slavery when a divided Christian community could not. The Civil War increased the size and scope of the federal government and kept the religious community from exerting the kind of influence it had in anti-bellum America. Filling the space left void by the church was a growing industrial sector that pushed America forward: the market replaced morality as the driving force in the country. Noll writes, "If the war freed the slave and gave African Americans a constitutional claim to citizenship it did not provide the moral energy required for rooting equal rights in the subsoil of American society or for planting equal opportunity throughout the land." Mark A. Noll, *God and Race in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 66.

against African Americans. Some white *humanitarians* justified southern discrimination and segregation by positing that African Americans were incapable of "self-government, unworthy of the franchise, and impossible to educate beyond the rudiments."[19] Some believed that the "white man" carried the burden of saving African Americans from themselves and safeguarded freedom in America by ensuring that the underdeveloped "Negro" race did not violate the advanced Caucasian race. Chattel slavery died, but Jim Crow was alive and well. The institution of suspect voting laws and voter requirements, mob lynching, white judges and juries, a substandard educational system, and the validation of segregation by legislatures and the Supreme Court established Jim Crow as the de facto guardian of freedom in the South. White Americans constructed the boundaries for a second-class citizenship meant to reinforce the assumption of African American inferiority. Black Americans believed they were equal to their white counterparts and, given the opportunity, would prove their human aptitude. This opportunity was denied. Subject to oppressive conditions and denied the opportunity to advance, African Americans existed in the absurd nether world of frustration, degradation, and deterioration.[20] Jim Crow laws kicked African Americans to the ground, and its advocates stepped on them and pushed them down the social, economic, and political ladder as they exercised their enigmatic liberty in the name of freedom.

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[19] Woodward, 95.

[20] W. Forest Cozart expressed the frustration of many African Americans:

> Man was created free and God never intended that man should be held in human slavery, as all men were made of one blood, free and equal, God did not make an inferior man, therefore, there are no inferior races, only in places where surrounding conditions, circumstances and the lack of opportunity for mental and physical developments is denied them, or is unobtainable, under such conditions any race in course of time on account of ennui would deteriorate. W. Forrest Cozart, *The Chosen People* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1924), 16.

As the threats of World War I ventured over the horizon, African Americans expected the door to the American dream to crack open and give them the opportunity to enter. In the twenty years that preceded the war, the United States had ended its international isolationist policy as it used the doctrine of "Anglo-Saxon" superiority to justify strides to defend freedom and take democracy to places like Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii.[21] These endeavors to preserve and promote freedom around the world were often seen as imperialist ventures by native peoples who were treated as inferiors by Americans. People of color around the world did not see freedom advance alongside the American military; they saw white people oppressing native peoples to control resources and open up new markets for business.[22] As the Germans and their Central Power allies

[21] Some people believed that "Anglo-Saxon Superiority" was a gift from God to be used to bless a fallen world. Count Arthur de Gobineau may be the origin of this idea as he attempted to understand the rise and fall of nations. Michael Biddiss suggests that Gobineau believed that the cause of the "degeneration" of a nation was "miscegenation between races" (i.e. the mixing of racial groups). Gobineau argued that the mixing of blood between superior and inferior people groups reduced the quality of the superior group but raised the quality of life for the inferior group. When this mixture of blood lines occurred, societies could form. As Biddiss points out, Gobineau was certain that without the influence of "the 'illustrious branch' of Aryan stock," no civilization would exist. Other people were not as egotistical as Gobineau. Instead of focusing on Anglo-Saxon *superiority*, they focused on an Anglo-Saxon *destiny*. Thirty years after World War I, Reinhold Niebuhr promoted the idea of the great responsibility of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain and the United States to continue to protect and spread democracy. In 1943 he wrote, "…various nations and classes, various social groups and races are at various times placed in such a position that a special measure of the divine mission in history falls upon them. In that sense God has chosen us in this fateful period of world history." Niebuhr understood that the Anglo-Saxon destiny put Britain and America in a "precarious moral…position" that could only be justified "if it results in good for the whole community of mankind." He argued that without "a religious sense of humility and responsibility," Britain and America would fail in the same manner Communism had failed in Russia and China and Nazism had failed in Germany. Michael D. Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), 114, 117. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Anglo-Saxon Destiny and Responsibility," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 304, 306-307.

[22] W. E. B. Dubois led a Pan-African movement to voice the dissatisfaction of people of color from around the world with the advances of European and United States forces and businesses to steal resources and take advantage of cheap labor. This movement eventually culminated in the Bandung Conference of 1955 where representatives from colonized and previously colonized nations of the Third World met to take a stand against the imperialistic advances of both the Allied Powers and the Soviet Union. They recognized that they could act as one voting bloc in the United Nations to protect their personal liberties and national sovereignty. Azza Salama Layton, *International Politics and Civil Rights Policies in the United States, 1941-1960* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36, 67-73.

threatened the freedom of their European neighbors, the Allied powers, including the United States, spoke out against the imperialist threat and promised to defend freedom around the world.[23] African Americans listened to the rhetoric of freedom spouted from the mouths of representatives, Senators, and the President and they hoped and trusted that if the American government would send troops around the globe and spend tremendous amounts of money to secure the freedom of people in far-away countries, that same government would ensure that those same natural freedoms were guaranteed and guarded within its own boundaries.[24] So, many of them migrated from southern farming communities and cities to the urban centers of the North to flee southern oppression and pursue the American dream by joining the armed forces and finding work in the manufacturing sector. They soon realized that even a war for freedom's sake (i.e., World War I) could not overthrow the bias and bigotry that regulated freedom in most of the United States.

African American military personnel returned from the war and discovered even greater resistance to equal treatment of African Americans under the law. A reinvigorated Ku Klux Klan arose in Georgia and worked to spread its brand of racial and

[23] In President Woodrow Wilson's "War Message" address to Congress on April 2, 1917, we find an example to such claims. In his speech, Wilson claimed that the American motivation for participating in World War I was "the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion." He argued that, "Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to the peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force…." He further suggested that "Only free peoples can hold their purpose and their honour steady to a common end and prefer the interests of mankind to any narrow interest of their own." Woodrow Wilson, "World War Message to Congress," http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's_War_Message_to_Congress (Accessed October 29, 2012).

[24] Kelly Miller, a professor at Howard University, scoffed at President Wilson (who Thomas Borstelmann describes as a man with "Southern roots and strong segregationist commitments…") for championing freedom in Europe while ignoring freedom in the United States. Miller wrote, "Why democratize the nations of the earth if it leads them to delight in the burning of human beings after the manner of Springfield, Waco, Memphis, and East St. Louis, while the nation looks helplessly on?" Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22.

religious bigotry around the nation.[25] The continued expansion of segregation through Jim Crow laws in the South and the racially restrictive housing policies in the North kept most whites and blacks from intermingling and allowed stereotypes to define the moral and psychological character and describe the intelligence and vocational aptitude of the other group. Anyone, whether black or white, who challenged the stereotype was berated, given a negative epithet, and/or threatened with social, economic, or physical violence. For these segregationists, freedom meant the right to exist in and protect a life free from excessive entanglement with those who believed differently and possessed racial characteristics that differed from their own appearance. Furthermore, they believed that freedom for the minority group meant the minority group had the privilege to live in a free country where they could pursue life, liberty, and happiness as long as they did not violate the folkways and mores of the majority. African Americans rejected this definition of *freedom,* and some among them risked facing the retribution that came along with deviating from the norm.

Although racists and segregationists worked to deny African Americans the fullness of American freedom even in the North, the North did provide greater social and

[25] "In the postwar era there were new indications that the Southern Way was spreading as the American Way in race relations." Woodward, 115. Nancy MacLean explains that the rise of the new Ku Klux Klan began in Georgia for basically two reasons: (1) William Joseph Simmons aspired to resurrect the Klan and (2) the lynching of a Jewish man who had previously had his death sentence commuted by the Georgia governor in 1915 (the man had been convicted of murdering a white woman). Thomas Pegram suggests that the rebirth of the Klan was "rebuilt upon twentieth-century developments such as mass entertainment and leisure, patriotic voluntary associations, advertising and the go-go economic style of the 1920s. Moreover, the cultural balkanization of the urban, industrialized, pluralistic United States into a racialized, religious tribalism…produced a greater range of potential enemies for the new Klan to confront." He believes the real growth of the "second Klan" came about as a result of a marketing campaign that used the cinema (e.g. *The Birth of a Nation*, *The Toll of Justice*, and *The Trainer Within*) to capture the imagination of the masses. Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 11f. Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 7-8.

political freedoms than did the South. Black Americans were restricted to living in certain sections of northern cities and were largely denied the opportunity to work as skilled laborers and earn the higher wages that came with those positions. However, they were allowed to socialize and, in some cases, go to school with white Americans, register to vote, and run for political office without the fear of losing their jobs or the threats of violence to their persons or their families. The jobs created and made available during the war allowed for a black middle class to grow in many cities, and the economic relief they found gave them the opportunity to put more of their time and resources into the plight of their people. The urban, black ghettos that developed during the northern migration were fortified by the middle class and served as incubators for African American protest and insulated African American political, intellectual, and labor leaders from the bigoted oppressors who quenched the fires of liberty that threatened Jim Crow's absolute rule in the South. These leaders believed that freedom was unalienable and that the restrictions placed on their freedoms by the government and by the majority violated not only the United States Constitution, but also violated the personhood of people of color in America and around the world. The ideology that motivated the nation to join the fight for freedom in Europe, spurred African American leaders to demand that the nation treat black people as first-class citizens—to allow African Americans the freedom to live without the oppression brought on by bigotry and sustained by Jim Crow in the South and de facto segregation in the North.

Even before the war, these northern leaders found sympathetic allies among northern progressives who took their cause to state and federal legislators and executives and introduced some of these leaders to political leaders and bureaucrats. A group of

white progressive professionals joined a handful of African American leaders to establish the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 for the primary purpose of securing the enforcement of civil rights for African Americans via legal campaigns.[26] The NAACP fought for the political freedoms of African Americans; to free them from the de facto caste system in the United States, and to rid society of racial insults.[27] The work of the NAACP, the push against the status quo by black veterans and by many members of the black middle class, and the rise of Communism around the world led to several legal victories for the cause of African American equality.

Many of the leaders in the African American community believed in the self-evident truths espoused in the Declaration of Independence and protected by the Constitution and were willing to risk their lives to protect them and overthrow those governments that denied them to people around the world. They supported the ideal of the natural rights of all people that President Franklin Roosevelt presented in his January 6, 1941, State of the Union address. He called these rights the "Four Freedoms": freedom of speech and expression; freedom of worship; freedom from want; and freedom from fear.[28] As the United States monitored the malevolent actions of the Axis Powers and argued about how involved they wanted to be in the escalating conflict, members of the African American community debated how they would involve themselves in the international defense of democracy and the four freedoms. The frustrating experience of returning home from fulfilling their patriotic duties during World War I only to face

[26] Meier and Rudwick, 129.

[27] Du Bois, 56.

[28] Glinda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008), 358.

ramped-up oppression convinced many in the African American community that the oncoming war was an imperialist battle to protect the freedoms of the Caucasian people of the world. Critics of a divided America were reticent to give whole-hearted support to the battle against fascism in Europe and Asia when the government seemingly ignored the fascism that infected democracy in America.[29] The leadership of the NAACP, the editors of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and A. Philip Randolph saw progress in race relations, economic conditions, and the protection of civil rights as the new bureaucracies of the New Deal transformed the American political, social, and economic landscape.[30] James Weldon Johnson, the president of the NAACP, pushed African Americans to support the oncoming global conflict because they had, "both a practical and moral obligation to defend the rights of other minorities, as well as (their) own," and they fulfilled this obligation by opposing Fascism, "with (their) utmost strength."[31] Johnson voiced the opinion of the NAACP and conservative groups among African Americans. They saw every democratic advance as an advance toward equal citizenship and freedom for all people. The *Pittsburgh Courier* initiated the "Double V" campaign in 1942: "The first *V*

[29] Langston Hughes proclaimed that, "Democracy is going to wreck itself if it continues to approach closer and closer to fascist methods in its dealings with Negro citizens—for such methods of oppression spread." Sterling Brown pointed out, "…in a war against an enemy whose greatest crimes are based on spurious race thinking, this democracy indulged in injustice based on race thinking just as spurious." He went on to say, "This war (WWII) is the Negro's war as much as it is anybody's. If the Axis were victorious, Negroes would be forced from present second-class citizenship to slavery." Langston Hughes, "My America" and Sterling A. Brown, "Count Us In" in *What the Negro Wants,* ed. Rayford W. Logan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 307, 339.

[30] Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GI's, and Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 18f.

[31] Quoted in Gilmore, 168.

is for victory over our enemies from without, the second *V* for victory over our enemies within."[32]

A. Philip Randolph believed that the government needed to prove its commitment to freedom by, "resolutely refus(ing) to curb the civil liberties of its citizens."[33] Randolph decided that he and other African Americans needed to hold President Roosevelt accountable to his claim that, "Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere."[34] When Roosevelt refused to heed the call of Randolph and other African American leaders to desegregate the military and combat the discriminatory hiring practices of companies holding military contracts, Randolph decided to push the President to practice democracy at home before protecting democracy abroad. He organized a national movement of African Americans to march on Washington on July 1, 1941, to protest various ways in which the government violated African American civil liberties. Randolph stirred the embers of freedom in the souls of African Americans, and the calls for equality and desegregation increased in number and volume. Roosevelt realized that Randolph's March on Washington Movement was more than a ruse, and on June 25, 1941 issued Executive Order 8802 to ban discriminatory practices private companies that received government contracts and to create the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC).[35]

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[32] Quoted in ibid., 364.

[33] Quoted in ibid., 349.

[34] Quoted in ibid., 358.

[35] Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 136.

African Americans were generally pleased with Roosevelt's actions and Executive Order 8802 convinced them to support America's war efforts to protect freedom and extend democracy around the world. They were also skeptical, believing that the Executive Order could be a ploy that would gain their support for the war and then dissipate when the war ended. When Randolph realized that the threat of his March on Washington had proven successful, he called off the protest. In 1942, in an attempt to appease disgruntled southern Democrats, Roosevelt agreed to move the FEPC (which had an impressive record for protecting employment rights in its first year) from the executive branch to the legislative branch where southern segregationists could weaken the committee.[36] Members of the March on Washington Committee and Pauli Murray (of the socialist Workers' Defense League) pushed to continue the March on Washington Campaign as a means to force the federal government to fulfill its promise to desegregate federal institutions and agencies and also to protect their civil rights across the country.[37] They were, as Martin Luther King, Jr. would later state, tired of receiving checks that promised freedom but once cashed were returned for insufficient funds.[38] They did not resist the oppressive American culture because they wanted to fight—they fought for freedom because they "want(ed) the peace to be free of race and color restrictions, or imperialism and exploitation, and inclusive participation…in their own government."[39]

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[36] Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for FEPC* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 104.

[37] Ibid., 142f.

[38] Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1986), 217.

[39] Charles H. Wesley, "The Negro has Always Wanted the Four Freedoms," in *What the Negro Wants*, 111.

This dissatisfaction with partial freedoms greatly influenced the modern civil rights movement.

African American Interpretations of Freedom

What were African Americans looking for in their struggle for freedom from the Civil War through the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s? This section of the chapter contains a variety of answers to this question from African Americans from various epochs and various regions of the country.

The first answer is found in the years leading up to the Civil War. During these years black and white abolitionists successfully argued that slaves were human beings and were thus endowed with certain unalienable rights. (Amistad Case-March 1841) One of the significant African American voices during this time was that of Frederick Douglass. For Douglass, the first step toward freedom meant the end of slavery, and the second step meant "giv[ing] the freedmen of the South every civil and political right with their white brethren…including the right to vote."[40] Douglass, like all African Americans, believed that slavery violated every aspect of human decency and denied slaves their human dignity. He argued that to overcome the biases created by slavery the people of the United States, black and white, needed to work together to "advocate for the Negro his most full and complete adoption into the great national family of America."[41] He further argued that if, "you save the Negro you save the nation. Destroy

[40] Frederick Douglass, "The Mission of the War," in *New York Tribune* January 14, 1964. http://www.nytimes.com/1864/01/14/news/frederick-douglass-on-the-mission-of-the-war.html?pagewanted=all. (Accessed March 12, 2013).

[41] Frederick Douglass, *Douglass' Monthly*, June, 1963. http://www.accessible.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=builtPage&AAWhere=DOUGLASSMONTHLY.18630600_001.image&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printBuiltImagePage.jsp&AACheck=1.233.3.0.3 (Accessed March 12, 2013).

the Negro and you destroy the nation, and to save both you must have but one great law of liberty, equality, and fraternity for all Americans without respect of color."[42] He believed that segregation was anathema to freedom's cause. He said, "A nation within a nation is an anomaly. There can be but one American nation…and we are Americans."[43] Freedom for Douglass meant living in an integrated nation where people of all colors, genders, and religions had equal opportunities and protections under the law.

After southern Democrats successfully ended Reconstruction, they began an effort to construct two Americas—an America for Caucasians and an America for all others. In response to these efforts, a nationalist movement that was birthed in the years leading up to the Civil War reared up in the African American community. This nationalism was "grounded in the ideals of liberty, freedom, equality, self-government, and Christianity," and sought to establish a place where African Americans could live freely.[44] These nationalists called for an emigration of African Americans to unpopulated lands in North America or to Liberia.[45] Henry Adams expressed the desires of these early nationalists. He said, "It is the idea, the thought, that pervades our breast, that at last we will be free; free from oppression, free from tyranny, free from bulldozing, murderous southern

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Meier and Rudwick, 23.

[44] Ibid., 198.

[45] The movement to emigrate slaves to the *African home* began in the eighteenth century in New England with little success. According to Dickson Bruce, the first actual emigration of African Americans took place under the leadership of Paul Cuffe in 1815. Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., "National identity and African-American colonization, 1773-1817." *Historian* 58, no. 1: 15. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed March 12, 2013), 15-28. The American Colonization Society began in the northern slave bordering states in 1816 with the goal of returning freed slaves to Liberia. President Abraham Lincoln was a proponent of the emigration cause. Phillip Magness and Sebastian Page address this matter and present information about Lincoln's colonization agenda. Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 1.

whites."[46] For nationalists, freedom meant the ability to live and participate in the various aspects of society without the restrictions of racial boundaries and the fear of bigoted oppression. Moreover, they also believed that African Americans were at least equal to whites in intelligence and ability and did not need the patronization or presence of whites to thrive as a people.[47]

Booker T. Washington believed that the end of slavery gave African Americans the freedom to strive toward greater freedom. He believed that freedom was ideally an innate and unalienable aspect of being a person, but he also believed that white Americans held on tightly to their prejudices, and that grip would only open when African Americans proved that they were worthy of that freedom. He was a strong proponent of racial pride and solidarity because African Americans needed a unified effort to earn the rights of full citizenship and the respect of an arrogant and distrustful white community[48] African Americans did not have to earn the right to be free because freedom was innate—it was not granted by others, it was inborn. Washington believed that African Americans needed to *earn* the right to have their freedom recognized by other Americans. The political and social recognition of freedom was, for him, an outgrowth of a reasonable and responsible handling of freedom by the individual and, in the case of African Americans, a people group. He did not claim that this necessity was

[46] Quoted in Hanh, 334.

[47] The move for emigration of African Americans—as well as for people of color around the world—was revived by Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) in the 1910s and 1920s. Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica (1914) and came to the United States in 1916 to promote his cause. Garvey called on people with African origins to return to Africa and reclaim their ancestral land from European governments. Marcus Garvey, "The Negro's Greatest Enemy," in *African American Political Thought 1890-1930: Washington, Du Bois, Garvey, and Randolph,* ed. Gary D. Wintz (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 169-78.

[48] Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1900), 158.

just; he claimed it was simply the reality of the situation. Freedom for Washington was a responsibility and a right: it was a responsibility in that people needed to prove their ability to live freely and it was a right in that government and society were obligated to grant the rights of full-citizenship to those who proved they could handle their freedom.

W. E. B. Du Bois, the sociologist, socialist gadfly and outspoken critic of Washington's ideology, believed that freedom was only freedom when it included the liberty to live without fear of oppression and without fear of want. In the *Souls of Black Folks* he wrote, "By 'freedom' for Negroes, I meant and still mean, *full economic, political and social equality with American citizens…with no discrimination based on race or color*."[49] In *Darkwater*, he shared his life's creed which included this statement: "I believe in liberty for all men; the space to stretch their arms and their souls, the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine, and the ride on the railroads uncursed [sic] by color…."[50] He pushed Americans to create one America out of the two Americas created by slavery and maintained by Jim Crow. Through his research of blacks in America Du Bois showed to the nation the dissonance that existed in the souls of African Americans as they struggled to synthesize their black selves with their American selves. To merge these "two souls," the American government needed to create an optimum politico-social atmosphere in which a person's basic needs were satisfied. In optimum conditions, all Americans would work for a wage that "maintained a decent standard of living"; demand that all citizens have a voice in

[49] W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom," in Logan, 65.

[50] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920) Kindle Edition, Location 54.

government; and enjoy social equality.[51] For Du Bois, whose overall ideology hovered somewhere between socialism and communism, freedom was both the object of human longing and a condition created, maintained, and managed by human institutions—especially by the institution of government.

Following the First World War, communists had a significant influence on the definition of freedom held by many members of the African American intelligentsia.[52] They tended to interpret freedom as the ultimate goal of the proletariat—African Americans and other people of color—struggle to wrestle control of their lives and wellbeing from the grip of the bourgeoisie—the racists and racist government of the United States. Communists saw racism as the tool the capitalists used to keep the worker in her or his place. According to Lovett Fort-Whiteman, "Racial oppression sprang from slavery and shored up the postbellum southern economic structure. Freed people provided a vital cheap labor force, and whites honed new measures to keep them there."[53] For Fort-Whiteman and other communists, freedom meant the death of capitalism. They attempted to work through labor unions to establish camaraderie with other laborers in their fight for the working person against slave wages. Communists stood with African

[51] Du Bois, "My Evolving Program," 69. By social equality, Du Bois meant the freedom to befriend anyone without the restrictions of race or socio-economic standing; the freedom to live, eat, and travel where one pleases; and the freedom to choose one's own source of education, worship, and art.

[52] Jeff Woods claims that the Communist influence in the African American community began through labor movements like the Share Croppers' Union that formed in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1928 in response to "the calls of the Moscow Congress of the Communist International for 'self-determination of the black-belt' in the United States." The blooming relationship between Communism and some members of the black community was highlighted by the "Scottsboro Affair" in Scottsboro, Alabama. After the spurious decision of the juries to convict nine black boys of raping two white women and the death penalties handed down to eight of them by the courts, the Communist Party of the United States announced they would provide for the defense and financing of a retrial of the "Scottsboro Boys." Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 19f.

[53] Quoted in Gilmore, 45.

Americans in their struggle against the injustice of oppressive laws and practices (e.g., Communists provided financial support and legal counsel for the "Scottsboro Boys"). To further counter the oppression of white Americans and the American government, communists like Harry Haywood, following the teachings of Joseph Stalin, argued that since the American South, "constituted a nation unto itself," African Americans in the South could justify a revolution against the establishment and secede from the United States.[54] Freedom for African American communists meant living in a society free of economic and racial distinctions among its members.

Harold Cruse and other leaders in Harlem were *Black* Communists who espoused a "revolutionary nationalism" that "(bridged) the gap between black nationalism and Marxism."[55] They did not espouse submitting their wills to the will of Moscow, but they did see freedom as living uninhibited by the bourgeois chains that held people back from their natural, Rousseauian savage self. Cruse proposed that the American ideals of individual rights and private property produced the racial and economic problems that inflicted African Americans and obstructed "the democratization of economic relations between the white power and the black ghettoes."[56] Cruse and others argued that if African Americans did not contest the individualism of the American Constitution and grab onto "an anti-capitalistic ideology" the movement toward freedom was doomed.[57] For African Americans to be free, the *masses* needed to give up their pursuit of the

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[54] Gilmore, 62.

[55] Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative of History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 31.

[56] Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: Quill, 1984), 95.

[57] Cruse, 367.

"American Dream" and form a racial cooperative that stood in solidarity with other working-class people against the "(capitalistic) determinants behind discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion."[58]

A. Philip Randolph—the Harlem radical, union organizer, and trusted civil rights leader—was a democratic socialist who, like Du Bois, believed that a person's freedom depended on the social conditions that surrounded him. He thought that freedom for African Americans meant equality in citizenship. "Negroes must be free in order to be equal and they must be equal in order to be free….The existence of the one is a condition to the existence of the other." He maintained that freedom required economic security, "There can be no true political democracy where equality is the ascendant note until there is a comparable dispersal of economic equality in our social order."[59] Economic equality, Randolph proposed, was tied to social justice. He wrote, "Freedom requires a material foundation….Social justice and economic reform have become inextricably intertwined in our time."[60] The economic "reform" he sought included the elimination of the power of profit and the socialization of industry and the nationalization of land in America.[61] Randolph believed that freedom ultimately meant the free participation in a democratic political system and the assurance that the government would provide the opportunity for its citizens to meet their material needs.

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[58] Ibid., 397.

[59] A. Philip Randolph, "March on Washington Movement Presents Program for the Negro," in Logan, 137.

[60] Quoted in Jervis B. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 311.

[61] Anderson, 232.

Racial tension in the United States intensified as 1941 came to a close. The day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor a black man was dragged through the streets of Chicago. Many African Americans voiced their anger by suggesting the Japanese attacks were justified because of America's violation of their civil rights. They wanted democracy to begin in the United States before it was defended abroad. Charles Wesley framed their desires this way, "I would rather die for democracy here than in Germany."[62] As African American discontent grew and urban riots sprung up across the country, a number of white and black leaders gathered in Durham, North Carolina to discuss what Caucasians called the "Negro problem." Following the summit, the collection of leaders published the "Durham Manifesto," which identified the demands of disgruntled African Americans: the end of the poll-tax and the white primary; the termination of police brutality and voter intimidation; the inclusion of black citizens in juries and labor unions; and the cessation of all segregation in American society.[63] White America was not sympathetic to the aspirations of black Americans; and the idea of ending segregation challenged the sensibilities of even moderate whites.

Some of the African American representatives in Durham wanted to expand and add depth to the "Durham Manifesto" and counter the idea that the racial friction in the United States was a "Negro Problem." Fourteen respected African Americans agreed to contribute essays to a book edited by Dr. Rayford Logan, a World War I veteran and leading African American scholar. The book, titled *What the Negro Wants*, identified the systemic roots of racial unrest and the understanding of freedom in the minds of African

[62] Wesley, 110.

[63] Gilmore, 370.

Americans. George Schuyler used his essay to challenge the thesis that the racial tension in the United States was a "Negro Problem." He argued that it was Caucasian Americans who had violated the natural rights of African Americans and other minorities and thus bastardized American democracy and true freedom around the world. He wrote, "The problem confronting the colored people of the world is how to live in freedom, peace, and security without being invaded by Caucasians justifying their actions by the myth of white racial superiority."[64] White Americans initiated and sustained a two class citizenship in the United States rooted in unsubstantiated prejudice and unjustifiable segregation.

In one way or another, all of the authors pointed to segregation and prejudice as the primary causes of racial tension in America. Economics and sociology professor Dr. Gordon Hancock named prejudice as the fundamental cause of segregation and argued, "If prejudice is eradicated, segregation as a system will collapse; if segregation is abolished without the eradication of prejudice, the race relational situation would scarcely be improved…."[65] Frederick Patterson, the president of Tuskegee Institute and advisor to President Roosevelt, noted that most African Americans detested segregation because it "implied inferiority or unworthiness" and resulted in inferior provisions in education, transportation, and housing.[66] Roy Wilkins, the secretary—and future executive secretary—of the NAACP, wrote that the primary goal of the NAACP was to put to death

[64] George S. Schuyler, "The Caucasian Problem," in Logan, 283.

[65] Gordon B. Hancock, "Race Relations in the United States: A Summary," in Logan, 243.

[66] Frederick D. Patterson, "The Negro Wants Full Participation in the American Democracy," in Logan, 261.

racial segregation in all of its forms.[67] Leslie Hill, an educator and leader of various national black student organizations, defined segregation as, "any convention or ritual or etiquette that preserves or extends the social distance between groups of human beings. It is not only spatial, institutional, physical. It is also a spiritual phenomenon."[68] A. Philip Randolph demanded "the abrogation of every law" that made a racial, ethnic, and religious distinction.[69]

Most of the authors agreed with Logan's claim that, "Negroes in the United States want first-class citizenship."[70] Leslie Hill added, "Negroes want to be accepted by our American society as citizens who in reality belong, who have the respect of their fellow man and equality of opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[71] Doxey Wilkerson—an educator, labor leader, and member of the Communist Party—wrote, "The Negro wants to be free. He wants freedom from every form of discrimination on account of race and color. He wants complete economic, political, and social equality—in short, full democratic rights."[72] According to Logan, "first-class citizenship" meant: equality of opportunity in the work place; equal pay for equal work; equal protections under the law; equal opportunity at the ballot box (i.e., the end of the poll-tax and white primaries); recognition of human equality; and the end of segregation.[73] Other

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[67] Roy Wilkins, "The Negro Wants Full Equality," in Logan, 113-32.

[68] Leslie Pinckney Hill, "What the Negro Wants and How to Get It: The Inward Power of the Masses," in Logan, 87.

[69] Randolph, 161.

[70] Rayford W. Logan, "The Negro Wants First-Class Citizenship," in Logan, 14.

[71] Hill, 71.

[72] Doxey A. Wilkerson, "Freedom—Through Victory in War and Peace," in Logan *What the Negro Wants*, 193.

[73] Logan, "The Negro Wants First Class Citizenship," 14.

contributors added to this list the following expectations: equal opportunity and resources in education; the right to fight in all branches of the military; the end of racial generalizations and caricatures in the press and media; racially inclusive churches; the right to socialize in all public places without fear of violence or degradation; open housing practices; the eradication of lynching; federal assistance through social security and welfare programs; and the end of police brutality against minority groups.[74]

An invaluable voice in the African American community, who was greatly influenced by the voices of the Harlem Renaissance, was Bayard Rustin, a long time peace activist and disciple of both A. J. Muste and A. Philip Randolph. Rustin believed that freedom for African Americans was a life lived without the restrictions of segregation. He thought segregation was a system of slavery and a manifestation of capitalism that free people needed to resist and reform. Segregation directly violated the natural rights of humans and, agreeing with Locke, was "an act of war."[75] Thus, to be free meant to live in a thoroughly integrated society that provided equal opportunities for all its citizens without respect to race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation and whose economic goal was equality and social security instead of individual wealth.[76] Rustin believed that free people not only had the right to vote, but also had the responsibility to

[74] Rayford W. Logan includes essays by Charles H. Wesley, Willard S. Townsend, Doxey A. Wilkerson, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Sterling A. Brown in *What the Negro Wants* that express the desires of various members of the African American community.

[75] Bayard Rustin, "Civil Disobedience, Jim Crow, and the Armed Forces," in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 28.

[76] "I believe the great majority of the Negro people, black people…are seeking to become full-fledged citizens." Bayard Rustin, "Bayard Rustin Meets Malcolm X," in Carbado and Weise, 165.

create a political party whose candidates valued equality.[77] Free people not only lived in the same neighborhoods, attended the same schools, and rode on the same seats of public transportation, but also had an equal opportunity in the work place and governmental assistance to overcome centuries of economic inequalities.[78] Economic inequality was, according to Rustin, a greater opponent to freedom than was racial bigotry because economic insecurities animate "latent racial hostility."[79] Economic, political, and social equality defined freedom for Rustin.

Conclusion

Freedom is an important aspect of the American ideal—America's great claim is that she is the "land of the free." This chapter has revealed that, like truth in a post-modern world, the definition of freedom is relative to one's *sitz-im-leben*. In every situation the definition of freedom is to a large degree determined by the force(s) a person or group of people found oppressive: the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church; the King, the Parliament, and the national government; barons of industry; bigots and racists; communism and the spirit of capitalism; and death. Apparently, people desire to live without the constraints they do not place on themselves. As long as African Americans have had a voice in America, they have struggled to *free* themselves from the fetters that restricted their human being—the fetters of slavery, Jim Crow, economic disparity, social

[77] "There is something fantastically unreal and at the same time tragic about fighting desperately at the risk of one's livelihood…to gain entrance to a polling booth…to indicate a choice between the present Democratic and…Republican party." Bayard Rustin, "New South…Old Politics," in Carbado and Weise, 101.

[78] "Only through the formulation of a national program to eliminate poverty and racial discrimination can we lay the basis for a good, let alone a great, society." Bayard Rustin, "The Mind of the Black Militant," in Carbado and Weise, 139.

[79] Bayard Rustin, "Reflections on the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr." in Carbado and Weise, 187.

inequality, and political isolation. The "land of the free" had proved to be an oppressive force against an African American minority which grew weary and agitated with the blatant violation of their natural rights. African Americans believed that the United States had lost her way, and many within their community suggested paths back to the right direction—to the direction of freedom.

Martin Luther King, Jr. understood the contentious relationship that existed between the American ideal of freedom and the unfreedom that polluted African American existence. King was both certain and hopeful that freedom would eventually conquer unfreedom: certain because he believed that actualized freedom was the fulfillment of the will of God and hopeful because if people created the conditions of unfreedom, they could also work to create the conditions of freedom.

CHAPTER THREE

King and Freedom

> This determination of Negro Americans to win freedom from all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing for freedom that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world. The rhythmic beat of the deep rumbling of discontent…is at bottom a quest for freedom and human dignity on the part of people who have long been the victims of colonialism and imperialism.
>
> --Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations"

Introduction

America's federal system of government provided little assistance to Americans of African descent. The decision of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to apportion congregational representation by the state's population led to arguments about the inclusion of slaves in the census count. To move the discussion along, the delegates agreed to appease the southern delegates with the infamous three-fifths compromise—slaves would be included in the census but count as only three-fifths of a person. In the *Dred Scott* decision of 1857, the United States Supreme Court ruled that no person of African descent would ever be a full citizen of the United States and enjoy its civil liberties and civil rights as they were considered to be more like property than like people. In the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (1895), the Supreme Court gave legitimization to the belief that African Americans were at best second-class American citizens and justified the Jim Crow laws that polluted the United States. African Americans were not considered equal to Americans of European descent in their person or in their citizenship and therefore, African Americans did not determine who they were in America.

This chapter focuses on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s interpretation of freedom and its counterpart, American unfreedom. I argue that King was convinced that the experience of African Americans proved that the essential elements of innate and actualized freedoms of many Americans were violated in the land of the free. This chapter argues that for King freedom fundamentally meant the ability to be in accordance with whom one was and not determined to be according to another's expectations; freedom meant the ability to act according to one's own free will. Whom one is, according to King, ought to be determined by the interaction that occurs between the will of the individual and the will of God. Because an individual was a person—created and loved by God—he or she has the innate ability and right to be. Thus, he could say, "To rob a man of his freedom is to take from him the essential basis of his manhood. To take from him his freedom is to rob him of something of God's image."[1] In these maxims one finds the fundamental premise for King's strong drive to see freedom become reality in the lives of African Americans and all other people everywhere.[2]

A Personal Experience

As is the case for most people, events from childhood stood out in King's memory and served as an inspiration to fulfill his vocation. He remembered the feelings

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Birth of a New Nation," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: vol. 4, Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 156.

[2] King shared this reality in a sermon delivered in Pasadena, California in 1960. "I am convinced that our struggle is not the struggle merely for the freedom of the seventeen or eighteen million black men and black women, but is a struggle to save the soul of the United States…What we are doing is something that the government of this nation should welcome because America cannot remain a first-class nation so long as she has second-class citizens." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," in Carson, vol. 6, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948-March 1963,* 396.

of humiliation and frustration that followed the degrading treatment that he and his father received at an Atlanta shoe store. Throughout his life he winced when he remembered the pain that accompanied the news from one of his best friends, a white boy, that he could no longer be his friend because he was white and King was black. He learned the reality of segregation and the inequitable position of African Americans, and he learned to "abhor" the situation. Reminiscing about his childhood he noted that even then he considered segregation "both rationally inexplicable and morally unjustifiable…because the separate was always unequal, and partly because the very idea of separation did something to [his] sense of dignity and self-respect."[3] As a child he understood that "the problem of race is indeed America's greatest moral dilemma."[4] Race was not the real problem; the problem was the attitudes of superiority that some Americans held in regard to those Americans of another race. The problem that frustrated him throughout his life was the inequality brought on by racial attitudes and economic disparity.

King, following the lead of his father and other respectable African Americans, decided to attempt to find solutions to the problem rather than allow the problem to merely fester. When King was seventeen years old, he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* in which he presented his understanding of what the African American community desired when they talked about freedom. He wrote,

> We want and are entitled to the basic rights and opportunities of American citizens: The right to earn a living at work for which we are fitted by training and ability; equal opportunities in education, health, recreation, and similar public service; the right to vote; equality before the law; some

[3] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 20f.

[4] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: vol. 6, Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948-March 1963,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 326.

> of the same courtesy and good manners that we ourselves bring to all human relations.[5]

One notices in this presentation a somewhat conservative message that does not include any language promoting desegregation or integration. His statement carries the impression of the African American middle class citizens in Atlanta who expected the white majority to respect them as persons, but did not challenge the system of segregation because they wanted to keep the peace—they wanted to avoid violent confrontations to help maintain profitable businesses in the black community. Eventually King came to recognize that a placid façade that allowed for personal profit and limited social uplift did not provide permanent solutions to social problems, nor did it calm the undercurrent of discontent that filled the very being of many African Americans who recognized economic prosperity was no substitute for freedom.

King's first pastorate and first venture into the national spotlight was in Montgomery, Alabama where he pastored Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and led the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956). When King spoke about freedom in these years, he used biblical imagery, poetic language, and a conciliatory tone as he defended the personality of African Americans, criticized segregation, and challenged the Jim Crow mores of the South. During the mass rally the night before the bus boycott began, King intoned,

> …there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. There comes a time…when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. There comes a time when people get tired

[5] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Kick Up Dust," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.:vol. 1, Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 121.

> of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing amid the piercing chill of an Alpine November.[6]

In this excerpt King concentrates his attention on a distinguished people group whose personhood (i.e. personality) was challenged by the prejudicial actions, mores, and folkways of others. It was this challenge to personhood that disturbed King.

Personality is a vital aspect of King's interpretation of "freedom." When King spoke of personality he spoke about that aspect of the human being endowed by the Creator that made people human and united them as people in the human community. Personality was the free will to determine who one was and to decide whether to do right or wrong. King scholars have pointed to his personal experiences, his life in the African American Church, his undergraduate work at Morehouse, and his graduate work at Boston University as the sources for his conviction that it was human personality that demanded respect, freedom and justice.[7] I believe that his ideas about personality, God, and freedom were additionally influenced by the teachings of Gandhi, whom he studied

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[6] Martin Luther King, Jr., "MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: vol. 3, Birth of a New Age, December 1955-December 1956,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: 1997), 72.

[7] Lewis Baldwin argues,

> As important as Boston University was for King's theological development, it did not make him a personalist. By definition he was a personalist long before he began seminary and graduate theological studies. That is, his personalism was initially spun in his parents' home in Sunday school classes and worship services at Ebenezer Baptist Church, in courses under the instruction of Benjamin E. Mays and George Kelsey at Morehouse College, through the witness and example of his father and maternal grandfather, and in other areas of the black community. Rufus Burrow, Jr., "Personalism, the Objective Moral Order, and Moral Law in the Work of Martin Luther King, Jr," in *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion,* ed. Lewis V. Baldwin (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 218.

> Benjamin Mays, the President of Morehouse College—where King did his undergraduate work—in Atlanta from 1940-1967, was not a scholar in personalism, but, probably because of his Christian belief system, he was convinced "that human life is sacred and that each individual is of intrinsic worth and value." At Boston University King studied under two personalist scholars, Edgar S. Brightman and L. Herald DeWolf. Benjamin E. Mays, "Democratizing and Christianizing America in This Generation," in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Autumn, 1945) http://www.jstor.org/stable/2966024 (accessed January 30, 2013), 13-33.

at Crozier and in Montgomery during the bus boycott. All of these influences worked together to convince him that "When we truly believe in the sacredness of human personality, we won't exploit people, we won't trample over people with the iron feet of oppression, we won't kill anybody."[8] King repeated this important theme in speeches and in sermons like the one he preached at Dexter on May 17, 1956.

> God has a great plan for this world. His purpose is to achieve a world where all men will live together as brothers and where every man recognizes the dignity and worth of all human personality. He is seeking at every moment of His existence to lift men from the bondage of some evil Egypt, carrying them through the wilderness of discipline, and finally to the promised land of personal and social integration.[9]

Freedom was, for King, an innate and unalienable right attached to God's design for the human person that when violated upsets the balance of nature because, he believed, "The thing that makes man man is his freedom."[10]

Personalism

Before one is able to comprehend King's understanding of freedom one must investigate his understanding of God. He believed God was the source of life, the Creator of humanity, the origin of ideals and values, and was *the* great *personality* in the

[8] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in *The Trumpet of Conscience* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 74.

[9] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Death of Evil upon the Seashore," in Carson, *Birth of a New Age*, 261f.

[10] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Can a Christian be a Communist," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 448.

universe.[11] His penchant for personalism began as a boy growing up in Atlanta and attending his dad's church—Ebenezer Baptist Church. Rufus Burrow points out that his mother's confirmation of his self-worth, his father's unwillingness to accept second-class treatment, and the cooperation exhibited by the African American community because of their concern for the other person taught him some of the basic principles of personalism before he even knew what he was learning.[12] King was a disciple of Boston University Professor Dr. Edgar S. Brightman. The philosophy of personalism had a significant influence on King's theology and anthropology. He defined personalism as "the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality—finite and infinite."[13] Personalists had an ideological definition of personality using the "categories of spirit, mind, will, love, and reason."[14] They used these categories, to remove the materialistic restrictions of "space and time" from defining what it ultimately meant to be

[11] Brightman defined *personality* as "a complex but self-identifying, active, selective, feeling, sending, developing experience, which remembers its past, plans for its future, interacts with its subconscious process, its bodily organs, and its natural and social environment, and is able to judge and guide itself and its objects by rational and ideal standards." Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Nature and Values: The Fondren Series for 1945 Southern Methodist University (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press,1945),* 53. Foundational to Brightman's Christian personalism were the concepts of *ideals* and *values*. He defined ideals as "a conception of an end which may be realized, a goal which I acknowledge as my chosen good" and as "a general concept of a type of experience which we value." *Nature and Values*, 72 and Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940),* 90. He defined a value as "whatever is actually like, prized, esteemed, desired, approved, or enjoyed by anyone at any time. It is the actual experience of enjoying a desired object or activity. Hence, value is an existing realization of desire." *A Philosophy of Religion*, 88.

[12] Rufus Borrow", Jr., "Personalism, the Objective Moral Order, and Moral Law in the Work of Martin Luther King, Jr."in *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 217f.

[13] Martin Luther King, Jr., "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 480.

[14] Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), 107.

human.[15] He was especially drawn to Christian Personalism which submitted that humanity was "a society of interacting and communicating selves and persons united by the will of God;" to be person is to be "*persons-in-community*."[16] They put forth the argument that "the ground of reality is a supremely rational and supremely loving Person…God, the only Eternal Person."[17]

Christian Personalism helped King develop a reasonable analysis and conception of God and God's relationship to humanity.[18] Christian Personalists believed that God was the "chief exemplification of what it means to be person. Not a person, but Person: the fundamental cause of all persons--human and non-human."[19] They suggest that one is not able to experience a fulfilled life outside of God's guidance because God is what humanity strives to become. King said, "To say God is personal is not…to attribute to him the finiteness and limitations of human personality; it is to take what is finest and noblest in our consciousness and affirm its perfect existence in him."[20]

While his conception of God is thoroughly personalist, it is also in harmony with the teachings of Gandhi. Gandhi taught the Satyagrahis that "Truth is God" and that

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[15] Lewis Baldwin asserts that personalism is "fundamentally a metaphysics" that views persons as "the highest… intrinsic values." Personalism holds "that *person* is the supreme philosophical principle—that principle without which no other principle can be made intelligible." Baldwin, 216.

[16] Rufus Burrow, Jr. *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006),* 155.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Baldwin quotes King, "[Personalism] gave me a 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." Baldwin, 214.

[19] Burrow, 76.

[20] Martin Luther King, Jr., "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: vol.4 The Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 425. For personalists, "personality [was] the only adequate category available to describe God, the Supreme Cause of the universe and the only perfect personality. All finite personalities are faint copies of the Supreme Personality." Smith and Zepp, 101.

"bliss" is discovered in the human search of Truth because it is in the pursuit of Truth that people encounter freedom from slavery to selfish, sensual satisfaction.[21] God is, according to both King and Gandhi, whom we ought to be.[22] In a sense, God is the morality that governs the universe.

King believed that "God is much higher than we are. But there is something in God that makes it so that we are made in his image. God can think; God is a self-determining being. God has purpose. God can reason. God can love."[23] King's use of these anthropomorphic descriptors revealed his belief that people were more than mere things; people were reasonable, creative, and self-determining beings; thus, people were like God. God instilled within humans spiritual genetics that compelled them to be like God, and God calls upon them to act divinely; nevertheless, human beings are not God. Humans are finite, but God imparts the divine qualities of the great personality into the personalities of all individuals—they are innate human qualities that prove humanity is joined to God and allow for a united human community to strive toward the goal of divine values. It is in the pursuit of pleasing God that people experience freedom.[24]

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[21] M. K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance: Satyagraha* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), 38.

[22] Lewis Baldwin states,

> King insisted… It is in God, not in human beings, that we get our best idea of the essence of *person*. The human person gives us our best clues to the meaning of *person*, to be sure. But the true essence of *person* is to be found only in God or the Absolute....In God, these (self-consciousness and self-direction) reach a perfection that far surpasses that of human persons, who are but faint images of essential personhood. Burrow, *Personalism,* 220f.

[23] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Living Under the Tensions of the Modern Life," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 268. Brightman understood God as "the Source and Continuer of Values" and "the unbegun and unending energy of the universe (who is) conscious rational will a conscious purpose that is coherent, selective, and creative." Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, 209-226

[24] Gandhi taught that "Devotion to this Truth [God] is the sole justification for our existence." Gandhi, 38.

King believed that God was necessary, personable, and intrinsically accessible to humanity through the many avenues revealed by the various religions that existed throughout the world.[25] Like Gandhi, King believed that people had a natural yearning for God. Gandhi believed that religion was the soul's search for Truth. He wrote, "It is the permanent element in human nature…and leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself."[26] The search is necessary because life is filled with challenges. King believed that when people struggled through dire straits, God, through the auspices of religion, gave people "[the] internal resources to face the problems of life. It gives [the individual] the awareness that he is a child of God."[27] Gandhi validated King's point by teaching that, "All is vain without God's help. And if God is with [your] struggle no other help is necessary.[28] No other help is necessary because every person requires God's assistance; so, dependence upon God brings people together in what appears to be a solitary existence. In the creation stories found in the book of Genesis, God states that it is not good for individuals to be alone. Religion, according to King, "endows us with the conviction that we are not alone in this vast, uncertain universe."[29]

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[25] Christian Personalists defined religion as "concern about experiences which are regarded as of supreme value; devotion toward a power or powers believed to originate, increase, and conserve these values; and some suitable expression of this concern and devotion, whether through symbolic rites or through other individual and social conduct." Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, 17.

[26] Gandhi, 109.

[27] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Mastering our Fears," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 321.

[28] Gandhi, 251.

[29] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Antidotes for Fear," in *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 123.

A good life necessitated relationships—relationships between individuals and personal and corporate relationships with God.[30] As a personalist, he believed that "reality is through and through social, relational, or communal" and is made up of individuals "who interact, communicate, and are united by the will of God."[31] People were meant to live life through these interactions with other persons instead of allowing life to merely pass by as they traveled to their terminal point. The good life, what Christians called "an abundant life," was realized by those who affected the world in which they lived and realized that the good life had both spiritual and rational dimensions that required significant dependence on God.[32] King believed that "life is something that you create. Existence is the mere raw material from which all life is created. Therefore if life ever seems worthwhile to you it will not be because you found it that way, but because, by the help of God, you made it so."[33] A person who did this exercised her/his freedom in a positive manner. Dependence on transcendent strength was necessary to live this kind of life and was an unequivocal obligation in the quest to experience ultimate victory—*real freedom*, that is, to live in a world where people could claim the rights of freedom and be able to act accordingly.

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[30] "The social nature of human existence, according to personalism, is grounded in the nature of the Divine Personality. Although God does not need person for his existence, it is also true that God's 'moral nature is love, and love needs comradeship. God…is love; He is…the Great Companion.'" Smith and Zepp, 113.

[31] Burrow, 157.

[32] An "abundant life" (a term used by Jesus in the Gospel of John 10:10) was spiritual and rational because it recognized that life was more than that which was natural but it was also bound by its rational place in the natural world- the heavenly was tied to the terrestrial. Brightman wrote, "…the good life is devotion to reason in the realm of choice, which is something higher and more rational than devotion to reason in the realm of sense." Brightman, *Nature and Values*, 82.

[33] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Creating the Abundant Life," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 188.

God may have intended for all people everywhere to experience freedom, but apparently God could not guarantee that all people experienced that freedom. Actualized freedom was the result of human activity and decisions by innate human freedom. Personalists held that people were born free because "the intention of the Creator is that persons come into existence as free being and with the capacity to be self-determined moral agents."[34] The unfreedom of human existence is the result of human action and not of God's intention. God's will regarding freedom was undermined by human free-will and performance. The actual experience of freedom may have been denied, but innate freedom and the desire to exercise freedom could not be denied. He wrote, "There seems to be a throbbing desire, there seems to be an internal desire for freedom within the soul of every man… Men realize that, that freedom is something basic."[35] The desire for freedom not only beamed from the souls of Americans of all colors and classes, it also sprung from the souls of "oppressed people all over the world."[36] Freedom was a valuable commodity held dear by all people. On several occasions King quoted *Othello*: "Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis, something, nothing; 'twas mine, 'tis his, has been the salve of thousands; But he who filches from me my freedom robs me of that which not enriches him, but make me poor indeed."[37] Freedom is free because it is innate—God is free and God instilled that same quality in every person—thus it ought to come without a price, yet freedom was more valuable than gold.

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[34] Burrow, "Personalism," 223.

[35] King, "Birth of a New Nation," 156.

[36] King, *Stride*, 191.

[37] King, "Birth of a New Nation," 157.

The Raison d'etre of Politics

What is it about Freedom that makes it such a valuable commodity? In a previous chapter I discussed various understandings of freedom in America, but the question, "What is freedom?" has a philosophical aspect that I have not yet addressed. I will not address the arguments for or against the idea that people possess a free will. [38] This metaphysical aspect is extraneous to King's idea about freedom in that he held *a priori* that humans, as representations of Personality, are free moral agents who find fulfillment in community with one another. King's work in the Civil Rights Movement was on behalf of freedom in the community—all people in the body politic.

Freedom, as Hannah Arendt has stated, is a "crucial" question about which political philosophy must be concerned.[39] She believes that freedom is a thoroughly political matter; "the *raison d'etre* of politics is freedom."[40] Freedom is crucial to politics because, as Isaiah Berlin states, politics resides in the realm in which "moral notions" are applied "in the sphere of political relations."[41] Morality and politics are vital aspects of living in community that affect the type and amount of freedom people

[38] Hannah Arendt points out that proving the existence of "the free-willing agent" is almost an impossibility because this agent "never appears in the phenomenal world, neither in the outer world of our five senses nor in the field of the inner sense with which I sense myself." Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 145.

[39] Arendt, 145.

[40] "The question of politics and the fact that man is being endowed with the gift of action must always be present to our mind when we speak of the problem of freedom; for action and politics, among all the capabilities and potentialities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists, and we can hardly tough a single political issue without, implicitly or explicitly, touching upon an issue of man's liberty." Arendt, 146.

[41] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) 2. http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/fileadmin/wiso_vwl/johannes/Ankuendigungen/Berlin_twoconceptsofliberty.pdf. (accessed February 3, 2013).

experience. Freedom is a "moral notion" subject to human interpretation and application. It is a political question in that people determine "who gets [freedom], when, how."[42]

Berlin suggests that moral notions regarding freedom are, to a large part, determined by how one deals with the matter of "obedience and coercion."[43] What and to whom do people surrender to live in civil society? Is civil society for me or am I for civil society? These questions are important because they speak to the matter of human freedom. There is general agreement that human passions disturb order in society. For order to exist in the body politic, people must be compelled (coerced) to deny some passions and abide by the rules of the community. Freedom and coercion exist in a tenuous relationship. Berlin argues that to coerce a person is to deprive that person of freedom.[44] The question the body politic must answer is how much freedom and what type of freedom the body will deny.

Human progress and political perspective play a significant part in determining the moral notions that justify the suspension of liberty. Benjamin Constant, writing in the early nineteenth century about the subjective nature of freedom, contrasted modern liberty with ancient liberty (e.g. Rome). He argued that the modern understanding of political liberty (modern for Constant) meant: (1) the right to subject only to written laws; (2) the right to express one's opinion; (3) the right to associate with others; (4) the right "to exercise some influence on the administration of the government;" and (5)

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[42] Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who gets What, When, How* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1936).

[43] Berlin, 2.

[44] Berlin, 2.

independence in the private sphere.[45] The focus on individual liberty in the modern understanding of freedom was inconsistent with the more communal end of ancient freedom, which was "the sharing of social power among the citizens of the same fatherland."[46] In ancient time people lived for the state, while in the modern state people lived for personal happiness. Arendt suggested that the ancient understanding of freedom meant the ability "to move, to get away from home, to go out into the world and meet other people in deed and word."[47] To "go out" intimates a place to go. That "place to go" was "a politically guaranteed public realm" in which free people could relate.[48] She goes on to describe Constant's *modern liberty* as understanding freedom as the "quintessence of activities which occurred outside the political realm." In other words, "freedom begins where politics ends."[49] She said that the modern ideal of freedom attempts to separate freedom—the *raison d'etre* of politics— from politics.[50] Government does not protect freedom; it instead protects "the life process, the interests of society and its individuals."[51]

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[45] Benjamin Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to the Moderns* (1816) (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, INC., 2011), 6. http://www.oll.libertyfund.org/title/2251. (accessed February 3, 2013).

[46] Constant, 10.

[47] Arendt, 148.

[48] Ibid., 149. Arendt noted, "In Greek as well as Roman antiquity, freedom was an exclusively political concept, indeed the quintessence of the city-state and of citizenship." 157.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 150.

[51] Ibid.

Berlin looks at the question of freedom through the lenses of *positive* perspective (a freedom to…) and *negative* perspective (a freedom from…).[52] Those who come at freedom from the negative perspective (or Constant's modern perspective) seek the answer to the question, "What is the area within which [people] should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?"[53] From the negative perspective, freedom means to be able to exist without interference from another person or group of persons in some sphere of life—the greater the sphere, the greater the freedom.[54] The question that those from the positive perspective seek to answer is, "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?"[55] In the positive sense, freedom means "[giving] way before collective will," with the realization that "restrictions on individual rights would be amply compensated by participation in social power."[56] Berlin claims that both perspectives agree that "some portion of human existence must remain independent of the sphere of social control" and that invasion of that sphere "would be despotism"—is it despotism to deny equal access to opportunity to participate in the body in the body politic; or, is it despotism to limit the individual's pursuit of happiness?[57] Constant argued that the positive (ancient) perspective ultimately "demands that the citizens should

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[52] Benjamin Constant used the categories of *ancient* liberty versus *modern* liberty when distinguishing these two important distinctions of understanding freedom in the aptly titled document, *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to the Moderns*.

[53] Ibid., 2.

[54] Ibid., 3. Constant describes this as "the enjoyment of security in private pleasure." 10.

[55] Ibid., 2.

[56] Constant, 12.

[57] Berlin, 5.

be entirely subjected in order for the nation to be sovereign, and the individual should be enslaved for the people to be free."[58] He contended that submission to a national sovereign hindered human progress. He suggested that individual liberty would lead to less and less dependence on the state. He said that "Our freedom must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private independence."[59] Arendt tends to agree. Arendt examines the "fatal consequences for political theory" that occurred when philosophers began to equate free will with freedom.[60] She argues that the ascetic determination to willfully restrict the body from surrendering to passions (the will-to-power) eventually exposes itself in the phenomenal world in a political will-to-power used by tyrants to force people to surrender their passions (i.e. liberties) for the good of the body politic.[61]

Jean-Jacques Rousseau preached this very message. According to Rousseau, the selfish ambition instigated by the idea of personal liberty alienates the person from the state and from herself. He believed social alienation was a problem because "the social order is a sacred right which is the basis of all other rights," and alienation from the self is to live in a state of slavery.[62] The Social Contract allows the body politic through the enforcing of the general will to redeem the individual and strengthen the community.[63]

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[58] Constant, 11.

[59] Ibid., 10.

[60] Arendt, 162.

[61] Ibid., 163.

[62] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the Discourses,* trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1993), 182.

[63] Rousseau, 190f.

Freedom is found by submitting to the will of the sovereign or by the use of coercion to be "forced to be free."[64]

Arendt argues that in Rousseau's world there is no freedom because people are unable to act according to their desires—people are actually compelled to deny their desires. Arendt believes that freedom exists only when the desires of the mind are realized in the phenomenal world, that is, "Political freedom…consists in being able to do what one ought to will."[65] I believe Rousseau would counter that Arendt is arguing for slavery, that is, slavery to corrupted passions manipulated by the arbitrary nature of the state.

Leo Strauss brings another perspective to freedom. Strauss looks at the historical evolution of freedom from dependence on God to govern the passions (i.e. virtue) to freedom from "compliance with a pattern antedating the human will" so that each person may comply with her/his own *pattern*.[66] Strauss makes a distinction between freedom from the passions—which are imperfect because they do not meet the standard that is God—and freedom from a higher moral order (i.e. secularism).[67] Yet, he argues, people are not truly free, because they become dependent on how people have practiced their freedom in human history: how has the exercise of free human passions either hampered or enhanced the practice of freedom in the world?[68] The idea of freedom has become

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[64] Ibid., 194.

[65] Arendt, 161.

[66] Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 244f.

[67] Edgar Brightman makes a similar argument when talking about those who oppose reason and love. He argues that "The real enemy of God is…the indifferent one who forgets God." Brightman, 153.

[68] Ibid., 245.

"entirely relativistic."[69] Humans create and crush freedom according to their wills free of divine constraints. He suggests that a return to "premodern integrity" is necessary if people are to truly experience freedom because without a return to their fundamental elements, freedom is an uncertainty.

Constant and Arendt argue from the negative perspective of freedom for the liberty of the individual. Rousseau argues from the positive perspective of freedom for order in the community. Strauss argues from a perspective that sees freedom as being dependent upon eternal values.

Constant, Strauss, and Rousseau may disagree on means and ends, but they both argue for protecting the individual's opportunity to act—Rousseau argued for protecting the right of the community to act for the common good, Constant argued for the right of the act according to her or his particular will and Strauss argued for people to act in accordance with a transcendent moral code. Does the community, which, as Arendt points out, lasts longer than me, regulate how I should act; am I "the captain of my own soul"; or is it best for me to live according to God's law?[70]

I believe that King's answer to this question would be, "Yes." King's ideal of freedom is similar to the kind of freedom proposed by economists and humanitarians like Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum in their human development and capabilities approach to freedom.[71] According to this approach, people need the "adequate social

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[69] Leo Strauss, "Relativism," in *The Rebirth*, 17.

[70] Arendt, 156 and William Ernest Henley, "Invictus."

[71] Sabina Alkire describes the capabilities approach as "a proposition, and the proposition is this: that social arrangements should be evaluated according to the extent of freedom people have to promote or achieve functionings they value." Sabina Alkire and Séverine Deneulin point out several key characteristics of the human development and capabilities approach: (1) it "contains three central concepts: functioning, capability, and agency"; (2) it is "multi-dimensional, because several things matter at the same

opportunities" to "effectively shape their own destiny and help each other."[72] Sen tends to define freedom against the unfreedoms of poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunity, social deprivation, neglect of public facilities, and intolerance of repressive states.[73] To avoid unfreedom, the opportunities for people to experience individual freedom must be enhanced. Part of that enhancement comes when one understands that individual freedom is a "two-way relation between (1) social arrangements to expand individual freedoms and (2) the use of individual freedoms not only to improve the respective lives but also to make the social arrangements more appropriate and effective."[74] Sen's approach to freedom is similar to the positivist approach as individual liberty is limited by the common good because the common good is the best assurance of individual good. He defends his position by explaining his understanding of the two aspects of freedom: substantive freedom and instrumental freedom. Substantive freedoms means the avoidance of "such deprivations as starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality" as well as the indulgence of such enhancements as "being literate and numerate," participation in the political machine, and enjoying the security of protected civil liberties.[75] Instrumental freedoms include the political freedom of self-government; the opportunity to enjoy the "[utilization of]

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time"; (3) it "combines a focus on outcomes with a focus on processes" (the foci are equity, efficiency, participation, and sustainability); (4) it assesses policies and progress in terms of capabilities; and, (5) it selects "relevant capabilities" according to corresponding situations. Sabina Alkire and Séverine Deneulin, "The Human Development and Capability Approach," in *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency*, ed. Séverine Deneulin and Lila Shahani (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 2009), Kindle Edition, Location1304 and Location - 819.

[72] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 11.

[73] Ibid., 3.

[74] Ibid., 31.

[75] Ibid., 36.

economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange"; social opportunities for education and health care; "the freedom to deal with one another under guarantees of disclosure and lucidity"; and the security of a "social safety net for preventing the affected population from being reduced to abject misery."[76] For a person to enjoy individual liberty both substantive and instrumental freedoms must be provided and protected by the state, and these responsibilities require financial appropriations and political will.

Sen argues that there is an "extensive interconnectedness between political freedoms and the understanding and fulfillment of economic needs."[77] This, I believe, was King's message to America, that it is not responsible for governments to promote individual rights without recognizing a responsibility to provide the resources necessary to experience those rights in the phenomenal world. I believe King would agree with Sen that to deny these resources is to deny individual liberty. Sen, writing about how "personal freedom for all is important to a good society," states, "This claim can be seen as being composed to two distinct components, to wit, (1) *the value of personal freedom*: that personal freedom…should be guaranteed for those who 'matter' in a good society, and (2) *equality of freedom*: everyone matters and the freedom that is guaranteed to for one must be guaranteed for all."[78] King would certainly agree.

Social responsibility does not limit freedom, it expands freedom. This positivist slant on freedom is congruent to King's belief that freedom is the product of human decisions and activity. Human decisions and activity had created conditions that gave

[76] Ibid., 38-40.

[77] Ibid., 147.

[78] Ibid., 233.

birth to unfreedom; therefore, human will and action, with the guidance and strength of God, could work to create conditions of freedom. He believed it was not too late for the United States government to provide "adequate social opportunities" for all Americans to "effectively shape their own destiny and help each other."[79] Freedom was the "the *raison d'etre* of politics."[80]

America: Home of the Unfree

For three hundred years, the United States had forthrightly denied freedom to people of African descent. Relief came to African Americans in 1865 when the United States government banned the practice of slavery; however, the federal support for freedom of the once enslaved was shallow, and the ringing words of freedom sounded hollow to the newly emancipated. African Americans were denied the resources necessary to shape their own destinations. King pointed out, "The pen of the Great Emancipator had moved the Negro into the sunlight of physical freedom, but actual conditions had left him behind in the shadow of political, psychological, social, economic and intellectual bondage."[81] He noted that America's promise of freedom had a "mocking emptiness" in the souls of those who still had to struggle to exercise their freedoms through bus boycotts, sit-ins, incarcerations, and beatings at the hands of public servants.[82] Even significant Supreme Court decisions in the twentieth century, like *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), were not enforced by the

[79] Ibid., 11.

[80] Arendt, 146.

[81] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, Location 293.

[82] Ibid., Location 142.

federal government when rebutted and resisted by local and state governments. Commenting on the promise of the Court's decision and the reaction of segregationists, he wrote, "Democracy must press ahead, out of the past of ignorance and intolerance, and into the present of educational opportunity and moral freedom."[83] The federal government had to act on behalf of freedom against the ignorance that impeded freedom.

In spite of opposition, King remained optimistic and believed that the *Brown* decision did "open the Red Sea" to allow "the forces of justices [to] move to the other side."[84] He was exasperated when the move "to the other side" was hampered when the Court ruled in the *Brown v. Board of Education II* (1955) that school districts must implement *Brown* with "all deliberate speed." He knew from history and personal experience that "all deliberate speed" meant the continued delay of *de facto* freedom for present and future African Americans. He was disappointed with the policies implemented by a majority of school districts that were no more than token efforts to meet the minimum expectations of desegregation. He said, "Tokenism is a promise to pay. Democracy, in its finest sense is payment."[85] He was disappointed but not defeated; he knew that democracy would win over delay because contained within the idea of "all deliberate speed" was the seed of expanding democracy.

The culprits which continually attempted to steal away the God-given worth (i.e. personality) of African Americans were segregation (*de jure* and *de facto*), Jim Crow laws, and bigotry. Racists who held power or who were firmly planted in poverty resented any progress for African Americans (or other minorities) and used their power

[83] Ibid., Location-218.

[84] King, *Stride*, 82.

[85] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location-411.

and vitriol to enforce segregation across the country. King believed that if a powerful group could strip away a person's or group's certainty of their value as people secured in the eternal, they could dominate that group through whatever ruse they had established. Segregation was the ruse established in America to deceive African Americans into believing they were less human than were White Americans.[86] King believed that segregation imprisoned the personality of African Americans by suggesting that blacks were somehow inferior to whites in mental acuity and evolutionary progress. Segregation imprisoned the bodies of African Americans in nice black neighborhoods, horrid black ghettos, and regressive black rural communities. It attempted to imprison their minds and their futures through a second-rate educational system. It attempted to break their wills by treating them as second-class citizens in public facilities, on public transportation, and by denying them equal access to the political process. It also denied ease of access to the substantive freedoms necessary to enjoy individual liberty.

Segregation

Segregation flourished because of "irrational fears" like "loss of preferred economic privilege, altered social status, intermarriage, and adjustment to new situations."[87] It "inflicted the Negro with a sense of inferiority, deprived him of his personhood, and denied him his birthright of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[88]

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[86] In a speech to a group of women from the National Baptist Convention, King stated, "Segregation has been an instrument all along to remind the Negro of his inferior status. Its presupposition is that the group that is segregated is inferior to the group th[at] is segregating." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Vision of a World Made New," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 183.

[87] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Antidotes for Fear," in Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 120.

[88] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Our God is Able," in King, *Strength to Love*, 110.

These fears were "irrational" because no empirical evidence existed to prove the natural superiority of one race over another race. All Americans, no matter their ancestral heritage, sought a fulfilling life in a free society that provided equal respect and protection of unalienable rights. Therefore, King took on the challenge to dispel the lies of segregation.[89] He told his audiences that segregation was the "not-too-distant cousin of slavery" that pressed African Americans to believe that they deserved their inferior place in the American social structure and attempted to convince them to accept the existing state of affairs—King believed that this was "the ultimate tragedy of segregation."[90] He hoped to shed light on the reality that many white Americans attempted to avoid: that segregation violated the "ideals of democracy and Christianity" and was fundamentally "evil."[91] Segregation was "the Negroes' burden and America's shame."[92] Quoting President Kennedy, he wrote, "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities."[93] King went on to say that those who were satisfied with the *status*

[89] "In our nation today a mighty struggle…to conquer the reign of an evil monster called segregation and its inseparable twin called discrimination…(These monsters) strip millions of Negro people of their sense of dignity and rob them of their birthright of freedom." King, *Stride*, 37.

[90] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Love in Action," in King, *Strength to Love*, 45 and King, *Stride*, 37.

[91] King, *Stride*, 191. There were some moderate White-Americans who did take a stand against segregation. At the 1954 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission overwhelmingly voted to a report about the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Charles Marsh point out the following statement in the report, "[The *Brown* decision is] in harmony with the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens, and with the Christian principles of equal justice and love of all men." Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 98.

[92] Ibid., 110.

[93] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 439.

quo invited "shame as well as violence," and those who challenged the system "recognize(ed) right as well as reality."[94]

Segregation's death grip was loosened, according to King, when African Americans reevaluated themselves and came to believe they were somebody not because of their "specificity" but because of what he called their "fundamentum."[95] *Fundamentum* is a term King used on several occasions to express the idea that a person's value was not determined by the will or work of the government or the social conditions surrounding her or him, but was instead determined by God's concern for the worth of all people everywhere. It was in claiming the maxim that Jesus loves "all the little children of the world; red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight," that African Americans gained self-respect and "the determination to struggle and sacrifice until first-class citizenship becomes a reality."[96]

King believed that freedom required the end of racial discrimination in America. He thought that discrimination was the signature of an oppressive society that created an impoverished minority. King understood that discrimination deceived the oppressors into believing that they were superior to those they tormented. This "false sense of superiority" provided a warped perspective of their humanity and the humanity of the oppressed. Those who practiced discrimination lacked the "genuine humility, honesty, and love" that belonged to individuals who understood what it meant to be human while at the same time denying the humanity of the oppressed by treating them as means to an end instead of as an end—they substituted the humane "I-Thou" relationship for the

[94] Ibid., Location 441.

[95] King, *Stride*, 190.

[96] Ibid.

inhumane "I-It" relationship.[97] Since discrimination deprived the racist and the oppressed of genuine love, freedom could not exist; as love was for King the most important ingredient of actualized freedom.

He appreciated northern support for the end of segregation in the South, but he chastised businesses and labor unions in the North and South for the institutionalization of racial discrimination in their employment practices.[98] He was convinced that there was an "intimate" relationship between racial discrimination and unemployment.[99] The racism that reinforced discrimination inhibited white business owners, shop foremen, and restaurant managers from either hiring black workers or allowing them to advance in the company or union. Therefore, the government had to "remove from the body politic this cancerous disease of discrimination" and replace it with the practices of a free society: equal opportunity; social security; racial harmony; and communal sensitivity.[100] For African Americans to practice individual freedom the government had to commit to ensuring and protecting both the instrumental and substantive freedoms of all Americans.

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[97] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Religious Leaders Conference," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 199. Apparently King was familiar with the work of Martin Buber. Buber wrote about the two "primary words" of existence: *I-Thou* and *I-It*. He suggests that, while both *I-Thou* and *I-It* are natural, when people exist in *I-Thou* relationships the person and the world exist in a better state because in *I-Thou* relationships there is an understanding that "My *Thou* affects me, as I affect it." There is a natural unity in *I-Thou* and a natural separation in *I-It*. When people refuse to allow the spirit-filled *I-Thou* relationships to exist and are instead satisfied with soulless *I-It* relationships, the world suffers because people will exist as matter (a soulless existence) instead of as humans (a soul-filled existence). Love (and hate) can only exist in the souls of people—in *I-Thou*. Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 1958).

[98] "The tragic truth is that discrimination in employment is not only dominant throughout the South, but is shamefully widespread in the North, particularly in great urban communities which often pride themselves as liberal and progressive centers in government and economics." Ibid., 198.

[99] "Intimately related to discrimination is one of its worst consequences—unemployment." King, "Impasse in Race Relations," in *The Trumpet*, 11..

[100] King, "Address at the Religious Leaders' Conference," 202.

Vice President Richard Nixon invited King to address this matter in a speech before a group of religious leaders meeting to discuss President Eisenhower's Committee on Government Contracts (1957).[101] In his speech, King submitted that discrimination was immoral and murderous. He said, "It is a deliberated strangulation of the physical and cultural development of the victims! Few practices are more detrimental to our national welfare….Few practices are more sinful."[102] While the American majority wanted to blame the impoverished for destroying property and committing violent acts against others, King argued that it was the majority that created the conditions that led to these outcomes. He ascribed the creation of slums to "the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society; Negroes live in them, but they did not create them."[103] Quoting Victor Hugo King wrote, "If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness."[104] Racism attempted to block out the light of freedom from entering the everyday lives of racial minorities. Thus, urban riots erupted because residents of the various ghettos had limited employment opportunities, did not have an opportunity to possess property and therefore did not respect property; thus, they did not respect other people because they did not feel as if they were people themselves.

[101] The purpose of the committee was to devise a plan to eliminate discrimination by those employers who won government contracts. See the introduction to King's "Address at the Religious Leader's Conference, 197.

[102] Ibid., 198.

[103] King, "Impasse in Race Relations," in *The Trumpet*, 8.

[104] Ibid.

Resisting the Tyranny of Unfreedom

A loud majority of African Americans would no longer consent to oppression, so they set their wills and readied their bodies to grapple for actualized freedom. As King looked back at human history he knew that freedom once taken would only be returned at a price because, "freedom is never given out, but it comes through the persistent and the continual agitation and revolt on the part of those who are caught in the system."[105] The establishment attempted to extend limited freedom to African Americans that kept them in a "permanently unequal and permanently poor" position in society.[106] Even limited freedoms infuriated many white Americans who did not appreciate African Americans approaching their rung on the social ladder. King pointed out that "white backlash declared true equality could never be a reality in the United States."[107] White resistance found sympathetic partners in most of the southern members of the federal legislature and various state governments. The path to actualized freedom was obstructed in Montgomery and Washington D.C., but that did not sway the stalwarts of the Civil Rights Movement from their commitment to realized freedom. King challenged African Americans to "compel unwilling authorities to yield to the mandates of justice."[108] Many African Americans answered his call because they "were outraged by inequality; (and) their ultimate goal was freedom."[109] They savored victories in Birmingham and on the mall in Washington, D.C., and wallowed in despair following the bombing of 16th

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[105] King, "The Birth of a New Nation," *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: vol. 4 Symbol of the Movement,* Carson, 162.

[106] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Impasse in Race Relations," in King, *Trumpet*, k-163.

[107] Ibid., 9.

[108] Ibid., 15.

[109] Ibid., 5.

Avenue Baptist Church and the subsequent deaths of four little girls. African Americans "became more sharply aware that the goal of freedom was still distant and [their] immediate plight was substantially still an agony of deprivation."[110] The goal was distant—it may have been beyond their immediate reach—but the goal was still in sight and hope still remained that they would one day possess it.

To stride closer to the goal, King attempted to convince white Americans that black Americans were committed to America and western democracy.

> America, in calling for our freedom we are not unmindful of the fact that we have been loyal to you. We have loved you even in the moments of your greatest denial of our freedom. In spite of all of our oppression, we have never turned to a foreign ideology to solve our problem….For you, America, our sons sailed the bloody seas of two world wars. For your security, America, our sons died in the trenches of France, in the foxholes of Germany, on the beachheads of Italy and on the islands of Japan. And now America, we are simply asking you to guarantee our freedom.[111]

African Americans had for four hundred years proved their patriotism by offering their very lives to protect the nation that repressed them. In the twentieth century African Americans travelled the world fighting to either protect or provide freedom and democracy for large segments of humanity. King noted the irony of African Americans fighting for freedoms they were denied in their own country.[112] African Americans only wanted to enjoy the same freedoms that they risked their lives to defend.

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[110] Ibid., 6.

[111] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Fiftieth Annual NAACP Convention," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.:vol. 5, Threshold of a New Decade January 1959-December 1960* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 249.

[112] "While the Negro is not so selfish as to stand isolated in concern for his own dilemma, ignoring the ebb and flow of events around the world, there is a certain irony in the picture of his country championing freedom in foreign lands and failing to ensure that freedom to twenty million of its own." King, *Why*, Location 265.

Some of those who opposed King did not oppose the ends for which he strived, but instead opposed the speed with which he attacked the old system. They told King and other civil rights activists to slow down; to apply some moderation in their strides toward freedom. He replied that moderation was a good quality if by moderation they meant, "moving towards the goal of justice and freedom with wise restraint and calm reasonableness."[113] However, he vehemently opposed moderation if it meant, "slowing up in the move for justice and capitulating to the whims and caprices of the guardians of a deadening status quo."[114] He said that African Americans had "long dreamed of freedom" were tired of being mistreated, segregated, and "being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression" in the "prison of segregation and discrimination."[115] To those who called on King and the SLC to "Wait," he responded, "We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights…Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait.'"[116] African Americans were well aware of the work of the "white power structure" to "keep the walls of segregation and inequality substantially intact" while determined African Americans intensified their efforts to break down those same walls.[117]

In the first mass meeting of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King proclaimed, "We come here tonight to be saved from the patience that makes us patient with anything less

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[113] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 343.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Shattered Dreams," in King, *Strength*, p. 92 and King, *Stride*, 61.

[116] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 1261.

[117] King, "Impasse in Race Relations," in *The Trumpet*, 9.

than freedom and justice."[118] In the introduction to his book *Why We Can't Wait*, King reminded his readers that the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed one hundred years before the publishing of his book, but "just peace" had still not been won for African Americans. He wrote, "Equality had never arrived. Equality was a hundred years late."[119] African Americans knew that a stable, whole person could not exist in the disjointed state of living as "half slave" and "half free" and that is why they expected immediate corrections to America's dysfunctional democracy and why they spurned the overtures of racists to send them to Africa to experience the freedom they desired.[120] "The Negro is saying that the time has come for our nation to take that firm stride into freedom—not simply toward freedom—which will pay a long-overdue debt to its citizens of color."[121]

No Freedom, No Peace

"Agitators!" That was how resistors categorized King, other civil rights leaders, and politicians who interfered with the mores and folkways of segregationists in the South and North. A common accusation against these interpolators by both black and white citizens was that they came into quiet communities and stirred up controversy that disturbed peaceful race relations. Whites claimed that even blacks understood that Jim Crow laws and systems of segregation were good for both races and that both races were satisfied with their places in the social structure. King strongly disagreed. He observed

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[118] King, *Stride*, 62.

[119] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location-131.

[120] "…the Negro wants absolute and immediate freedom and equality, not in Africa or in some imaginary state, but right here in this land today…" King, *Why*, Location-2086.

[121] Ibid., Location-2046.

"Everyone underestimated the amount of violence and rage Negroes were suppressing and the amount of bigotry the white majority was disguising."[122] There was no peace; there was merely a peaceful veneer covering bitter resentment. To avoid conflict, members of the white and black communities adapted to the mores of society and coalesced to reinforce the *status quo*. King resisted the temptation to wear a mask of peace to cover his passion for freedom, true peace and forthrightly stated, "I confess that I never intend to become adjusted to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination…"[123] He said that African Americans did not want to "accept [the] state of subordination" that came with their faux peace.[124] The disingenuous peace promoted by the establishment meant: (1) second-class citizenship; (2) silence in the face of injustice; (3) adjusting to the status quo; and/or (4) accepting economic and political exploitation.[125] This was not peace, but a byproduct of physical, social, emotional, and even patriotic intimidation.[126] He argued that true peace was more than the absence of conflict; true peace also included the presence "of some positive force."[127] The positive force of which he spoke was justice.[128] Gandhi preached a similar message to his

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[122] King, "Impasse in Race Relations," in *The Trumpet*, 7.

[123] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Transformed Nonconformist," in King, *Strength*, 27.

[124] King, *Stride*, 40.

[125] Martin Luther King, Jr., "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 258.

[126] "A blanket of conformity and intimidation conditioned young and old to exalt mediocrity and convention. Criticism of the social order sill imbued with implications of treason." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Youth and Social Actions," in *The Trumpet of Conscience: The King Legacy* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2010), 45.

[127] King, "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," 258.

[128] King told the white establishment in Montgomery, "…you have never had real peace in Montgomery. You have had a sort of negative peace in which the Negro too often accepted his state of

followers when he spoke about *soul force*: the transcendent charge and source of strength for believers to oppose the state when its laws become "lawless and corrupt."[129] People have a duty to resist unfreedom and demand true freedom.

The African American ideal of justice was unimportant to the conservative people of the South: they thought African Americans ought to be satisfied and thankful that they were no longer slaves; had an opportunity for an education; could find a job; and own a home. They wondered what else African Americans could want. King responded to their inquiry by letting them know that African Americans wanted first-class citizenship and they wanted it *now*. He openly wondered why the establishment believed it was acting mercifully and justly by distributing bits and pieces of justice and freedom over a protracted period of time. He asked, "I would like to ask those people who seek to apportion to us the rights they have always enjoyed (if) the framers of the Declaration of Independence intended that liberty should be divided into installments…Does not (servitude) have to end totally before (freedom) begin(s)?"[130] True peace could not exist in this environment because certain people denied other people the opportunity to engage the innate freedom to be.

Faux peace brought no real satisfaction and had to be resisted. Free people, King posited, resisted false peace in such a way that their resistance did not violate the personality of another person. There were members of the African American community who did not appreciate King's progressive program for justice and freedom. Like the

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subordination. But this is not true peace. True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." King, *Stride*, 40.

[129] Gandhi, 16 and 174.

[130] King, *Why*, Location-2040.

middle-class black community in Atlanta during King's childhood, they thought that complying with Jim Crow laws allowed them to live in relative peace and opened doors to a brighter future for their children. He called these people "softminded" because they believed adjusting to oppression was the best way to deal with oppression. He countered their position by stating, "(W)e cannot win the respect of the white people in the South or elsewhere if we are willing to trade the future of our children for our personal safety and comfort."[131] If African Americans knew anything, they knew, "that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."[132] The resistance against the *status quo* was the natural outcome of the new perspective that African Americans had of themselves—they no longer considered themselves inferior to other Americans and would no longer passively consent to economic and political abuse.[133] They were ready to take a stand against injustice. He said, "There is a raging fire now for the Negroes and the poor of this society."[134] He saw in America a system that treated people as merely laborers and consumers (i.e. means) and not as people (i.e. ends). He said that the reason the SCLC targeted lunch counters during the Birmingham Campaign was because, "There is a special humiliation for the Negro in having his money accepted at every department in a store except the lunch counter."[135] African

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[131] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Tough Mind and a Tender Heart," in King, *Strength to Love*, 18.

[132] King, "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," p. 259 and *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 1254.

[133] Commenting on the strife that arose as the White Citizens' Councils resisted the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, King noted, "It is probably true to say that there would be no crisis in race relations if the Negro continued to think of himself in inferior terms and patiently accepted injustice and exploitation. But it is at this very point that the change has come." King, "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 322f.

[134] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence and Social Change," in *The Trumpet of Conscience: The King Legacy* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2010), 55.

[135] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 800.

Americans expected other Americans to treat them as people with intrinsic worth, and King wanted to be an advocate for their cause. When local authorities arrested him for stirring up trouble, he said he was proud that his criminal activity, "instill(ed) within (his) people a sense of dignity and self-respect."[136] Justice, dignity, and respect were more important than peace was.

King vindicated the "agitation" about which resistors complained by establishing that, "noncooperation with evil is just as much a moral duty as is cooperation with good."[137] One important aspect of the genius contained within King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," was his argument that justified the Civil Rights Movements' violations of what he considered immoral law. In the letter he wrote, "I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.'"[138] He turned to Thomas Aquinas to help explain the differences between *just* and *unjust* laws. He wrote that a *just law* "is a man-made code that squares with the moral law of God;" while an *unjust law* "is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law."[139]

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[136] King, *Stride*, 149.

[137] Ibid. This same sentiment was espoused by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and motivated him to take part in a conspiracy to assassinate Adolph Hitler. J. Deotis Roberts sums up Bonhoeffer's position, "Any form of totalitarianism that will force humans to cast aside religious and moral obligations to God and subordinate the laws of justice and morality to the state is incompatible with the meaning of life and Christian love." Roberts then argues, "Bonhoeffer had become convinced that, if need be, a Christian must offer his or her life to prevent this from becoming the order of things to come." J. Deotis Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 109.

[138] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail," <web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf>. August, 2010.

[139] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 1265.

His description of "unjust law" reminds the reader that King viewed the world as both material and spiritual. He argued that a *just* law honored human personality and offered the opportunity to be in freedom and an *unjust* law violated human personality and freedom. He also distinguished a *just* law from an *unjust* law by noting that, "An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself… (it is) *difference* made legal."[140] A just law, on the other hand, is a law agreed upon by all groups and that compels obedience from both minority groups and majority groups. With these ideas in mind, one better understands why King believed that, "All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality" of all people.[141]

King compared the work of the Civil Rights Movement with the work of Socrates who created tension in the minds of individuals so that they could escape "the bondage of myths and half-truths" and grasp on to "creative analysis and objective appraisal."[142] Like Socrates, the SCLC saw, "the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood."[143] He proposed that just laws are more likely to exist when minority groups are given the opportunity to participate in the lawmaking process.[144] African Americans had to fight for those necessary rights of

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[140] Ibid., Location 1292.

[141] Ibid., Location 1285.

[142] Ibid., Location 1239.

[143] Ibid., Location 1240.

[144] King argued, "Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters…even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population (in some counties), not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?" King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 1298.

political participation to "Save the soul of America." King and the SCLC believed they could accomplish this task because "God walks with us," and God established "absolute moral laws" that would "ultimately conquer its conqueror," because "God is able."[145]

Democracy and Freedom

It was freedom and justice that inspired the birth of democracy in the western world. People placed their trust in democratic governments to guard freedom and provide a blind system of justice. The Caucasian men who founded the United States established a type of democracy that guarded their freedoms and delivered a system of justice that penalized those who violated them, their loved ones, and their properties. While the spirit of democracy pushed governments to protect the freedom of all people, people chose to limit democracy to those who they deemed worthy of the benefits and responsibilities of freedom and justice. Nevertheless, the spirit of democracy could not be tamed by the whims of people or possessed and distributed by a privileged group of people. The Civil Rights Movement was proof of this reality. King believed that the movement was destined, "to complete a process of democratization which our nation has too long developed too slowly, but which is our most powerful weapon for world respect and emulation."[146]

King saw *true* American democracy as the greatest tool to overcome the great enemies of humanity: discrimination, segregation, poverty, and war. Democracy provided nations the best opportunity to validate the personality and equality of all people everywhere. He believed that history would judge a nation's true greatness by how it

[145] King, "Our God is Able," 111.

[146] King, *Stride*, 197.

treated people. He thought that America could not be a "first-class nation" if it allowed for "second-class citizenship."[147]

In Montgomery the African American community sought reforms that would provide a path to first-class citizenship. The reforms were, by today's standards, not radical. They asked for courteous and humane treatment on public transportation and the hiring of African American bus drivers on "predominantly black bus routes."[148] The demands during 'Operation C" in Birmingham may also seem mundane in today's world. They wanted to desegregate public businesses, restrooms, and drinking fountains; nondiscriminatory hiring practices in business and industry; the District Attorney to drop charges against demonstrators; and "the creation of a biracial committee to work out a timetable for desegregation in other areas of Birmingham life."[149] When the local business leaders convinced the newly elected city leaders to grant these demands, King considered these somewhat minor advances as important accomplishments because of the enormity of the fortress they were attempting to breach. He said, "It was a fuse—it detonated a revolution that went on to win scores of other victories."[150] Democracy promised a free and just government, but democracy is not an object that once set in motion continues to deliver its promises. Democracy is constantly acted upon by people to either perform its duties or deny its potential. King realized that by insisting that America provide equality "to jobs, housing, education, and social mobility," that the

[147] Ibid., 127.

[148] Ibid., 63.

[149] King, *Why We Cannot Wait*, Location 1632.

[150] Ibid., Location 1829.

African Americans were moving America to act more democratically by allowing minorities the opportunity to experience "a full life" as "a whole people."[151]

King understood that if African Americans were to experience the freedom promised by America the government must intentionally act on their behalf. He was aware of President Eisenhower's position that legislation could not engrain morality into the American public square. However, he thought this argument was an excuse to promote the status quo and countered the argument by noting that legislation could be used to regulate human behavior.[152] "The law cannot make an employer love, but it can keep him from refusing to hire me because of the color of my skin."[153]

He further understood that the government's agenda was set by the dominant political party. Wanting to use his position as the leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to help African Americans across the nation, King testified at the Democratic National Convention on August 11, 1956, and recommended that they add the following objectives to their party's platform:

1. That this party pledge itself to the support of all of the Civil Rights legislation necessary to protect the full citizenship rights of Negroes.
2. That the Federal Government take the necessary steps to insure every qualified citizen the right to vote without threats and intimidation.
3. That the Federal Government take the necessary executive and legislative action to implement the desegregation decisions of the Supreme Court.

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[151] Ibid., Location 1906.

[152] "Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated….Let us not be misled by those who argue that segregation cannot be ended by the force of law." Martin Luther King, Jr., "On Being a Good Neighbor," in King, *Strength*, 37.

[153] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention of the National Bar Association," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 268.

4. That the Federal funds be withheld from public schools and public facilities where there is willful refusal to comply with the Supreme Court's desegregation decisions.
5. That there be a revision of the Senate rule on cloture, thus restoring the rule of the majority and thereby removing the chief stumbling block of passage of civil rights legislation.[154]

In these recommendations King expressed his belief that if the federal government fulfilled its responsibilities, it would become the ally that African Americans required to achieve the freedom they desired. In the first two points King pointed out the reality that the government had neglected to execute the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. He merely suggested that the Democrats require the government to fulfill its constitutional obligations. He believed that if African Americans were to experience the first-class citizenship they desired and deserved, they not only had to have the right to vote, they needed the government to guarantee they would have the freedom to vote—that was their civil right. Once African Americans could freely vote, King thought that segregation in public transportation would disappear; wages would increase; police brutality would end; violent resistance would stop; more progressive representatives would win federal elections; and justice would serve as the foundation of the federal and state courts.[155]

In the third and fourth points he addressed the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision and the attempts of southern states to ignore the order of the Court through delaying tactics and token programs. *Brown* was significant because it "brought hope to many

[154] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Testimony to the Democratic National Convention, Committee on Platform and Resolutions," in Carson, *Birth of a New Age*, 338.

[155] Martin Luther King Jr., "To the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," in Carson *Symbol of the Movement*, 359.

disinherited Negroes who had formerly dared only to dream of freedom" and it "enhanced the Negro's sense of dignity and have him greater determination to achieve justice."[156] If the Southern resistance was to squash *Brown* they would squash an important component to a peaceful resolution to the national struggle for racial justice.

King's fifth proposal targeted southern Senators who used the threat of filibuster to block civil rights legislation that would force states to repeal Jim Crow laws and tie federal aid to compliance with federal laws. King thought that these propositions were not revolutionary; they were simply mandatory in a democratic society. Equal education, a truly representative government, economic opportunities would allow African American families to feel secure and believe that their children could make their dreams come true.[157]

His support for federal interpolation into matters that previously had been under the auspices of the state challenged southern sensibilities and raised the ire of even moderate southerners. King believed that states violated the fundamentals of universal justice and natural rights when they used their police powers and the language of the Tenth Amendment to justify Jim Crow and segregation. Furthermore, he believed that the federal government was obligated to overstep the constitutional limits of the Tenth Amendment to defend the self-evident truth of human equality and the unalienable rights

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[156] King, *Stride*, 191.

[157] "We, the Negroes, need some simple things in order to realize the huge potential. We need equal education which the Supreme Court declared can only be realized if it is unsegregated. We need representative government so that the laws we legislate and obey are our own. We need economic opportunities so that we [sic] can bring up our families in security, encouraging our children to higher levels of education with the assurance that it can be available." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 408.

of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; thus fulfilling the requirements of the Fourteenth Amendment.[158]

Economics and Freedom

King saw that in America life, liberty and happiness were bound to economic opportunity which led him to oppose *laissez-faire* economics. In one of the papers he wrote as a seminarian, King noted,

> I am convinced that capitalism has seen its best days in America….It is a well-known fact that no social institution can survive after it has outlived its usefulness….It has failed to meet the needs of the masses…In fact what is more socialistic than the income tax, the T.V.A., or the N.R.B. What will eventually happen is this: labor will become so powerful…that she will be able to place a president in the White House. This will in all probability bring about a nationalization of industry. This will be the end of capitalism.[159]

His primary critique of capitalism was that it took "necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes."[160] In a personal letter written to Coretta while he was courting her, King mentioned his appreciation for the Communist critique of capitalism and western democracy. He wrote, "I am much more socialist in my economic theory than capitalistic." He appreciated the socialistic system because he thought that racial justice was "the inseparable twin" of economic justice.[161] He did not believe that capitalism was fundamentally evil, he thought that it had served its purpose and that a new, better system

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[158] "A vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws will bring an end to segregated public facilities which are barriers to a truly desegregated society." Martin Luther King, Jr., "On Being a Good Neighbor," in *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 38.

[159] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Four Papers on Preaching Issues," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 104f.

[160] Martin Luther King, Jr., "For All…A Non-Segregated Society," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 125.

[161] King, *Stride*, 90.

needed to replace it. Later in the letter he noted that he looked forward to necessary radical changes in American economics because "The misuse of capitalism may also lead to tragic exploitation."[162] He wrote, "I would certainly welcome the day to come when there will be a nationalization of industry. Let us continue to hope, work, and pray that in the future we will live to see a warless world (and) a better distribution of wealth…"[163]

King believed that the end of *laissez-faire* capitalism was the accumulation of wealth;[164] therefore, a correction was necessary to move the aim of the American economic system to the betterment of the entire community of people.[165] "We must admit that capitalism has often left a gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, has created conditions permitting necessities to be taken from the many to give luxuries to the few."[166] He noted that African Americans were over represented among the many with little because from the very beginning of their presence in North America, they were treated as "merely depersonalized cog(s) in a vast plantation machine."[167] This kind of depersonalization compelled America to modify its economic system, because the

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[162] Martin Luther King Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in King, *Strength*, 139.

[163] Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter to Coretta Scott," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 126.

[164] "…material growth has been made an end in itself, and, in the absence of moral purpose, man himself becomes smaller as the works of man become bigger." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Youth and Social Action," in King, *Trumpet*, 44.

[165] "Our unswerving devotion to monopolistic capitalism makes us more concerned about the economic security of the captains of industry than for the laboring men whose sweat and skills keep industry functioning." King, "On Being a Good Neighbor," 32.

[166] Martin Luther King Jr., "How Should a Christian View Communism?" in King, *Strength*, 103.

[167] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," in King, *Strength*, 81.

American dream was rooted ultimately in "the dignity and worth of human personality," and the human personality "cannot be explained in terms of dollars and cents." [168]

King suggested that an equitable distribution of wealth would greatly assist in the process of making the marketplace moral. He believed that a forced correction was necessary because "The universalism at the center of the Declaration of Independence has been shamefully negated by America's appalling tendency to substitute 'some' for 'all.'"[169] This tendency to deny freedom to some was especially "appalling" to King because he believed that all people are "child(ren) of God."[170] While he tended to justify his position about the distribution of wealth on a religious basis, he knew that his position opened him up to charges of socialism.[171] He did not deny his position; however he did rebut the charges against him with his own charge against them—he called them materialists who denied the innate value of the human person. He chastised them for "casually pass(ing) by the Negro who has been robbed of his personhood, stripped of his sense of dignity, and left dying on some wayside road."[172] The government had a responsibility to ensure the social security of all its citizens.

One of the many accusations faced by white and black Americans who challenged the status quo in race relations and *laissez-faire* economics was that they were communists attempting to infiltrate American society. King faced the charge. The

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[168] King, "Transformed Nonconformist," ," in *Advocate of the Social Gospel,* Carson, 198., *The Measure of a Man* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 16.

[169] King, "On Being a Good Neighbor," 32.

[170] King, *The Measure of a Man*, 16.

[171] "(Supporters of Capitalism) will judge every move toward a better distribution of wealth and a better way of life for the working man to be socialistic." King, "On Being a Good Neighbor," 32.

[172] Ibid.

accusation did not come without some substantiation—Communists openly courted African Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. Some African Americans, like W. E. B. Du Bois, embraced Communism because of the oppression of western democracy; other African Americans, like A. Phillip Randolph, shunned Communism and vigorously opposed it. King rejected Communism because "it [was] avowedly secularistic and materialistic" and used "destructive means [to] bring about constructive ends."[173] He believed that the root of secularism was materialism, "which contends that reality may be explained in terms of matter in motion" and is thus "opposed to both theism and idealism."[174] Communism's denial of the divine and opposition to the eternal allowed for the development of the "destructive means" (e.g. intimidation and violence) that the Communist party used to refuse freedom to the masses.[175] In spite of its failures, King did believe that it brought some necessary corrections to the American context. He thought Communism offered a positive corrective to an inert democracy. Explaining his position he wrote

> 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 the weaknesses of traditional capitalism, contributed to the growth of a definite self-

[173] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 147 and King, "Letter to Coretta Scott," 125.

[174] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Man Who Was a Fool," in King, *Strength*, 73.

[175] "The thing that makes man man is his freedom. This is why I could never agree with communism as a philosophical system because it deprives man of freedom. And if a man is not free, he is not fully man. If a man does not have the capacity to deliberate, to decide, and to respond, as Paul Tillich would say, he is not a man, for a man is man because he is free. And, therefore, communism is on the wrong road because it denies freedom." King, "Can a Christian Be a Communist," 448.

> consciousness in the masses, and challenged the social conscience of the Christian churches, I responded with a definite "yes."[176]

He thought Communism challenged western imperialism by promoting social justice and at least attempted to "eliminate racial prejudice" by "transcend(ing) the superficialities of race and color."[177] American democracy was superior to Communism; however, America would benefit by listening to Communism's valid criticisms and making necessary corrections.

Freedom for Humanity

Freedom was more than an American phenomenon; in the twentieth century a score of formerly colonized countries in Asia and Africa fought for and won their freedom. The struggle for an integrated American society was an important element of the revolution for freedom taking place around the world.[178] In an article published in *The Progressive*, King noted, "Indeed, the determination of Negro Americans to win freedom for all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world."[179] Therefore, oppressed peoples must work passionately and unrelentingly for first-class citizenship.[180] The treatment of black

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[176] King, *Stride*, 95

[177] King, "Can a Christian Be a Communist," 449.

[178] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 222.

[179] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Burning Truth in the South," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 448.

[180] "We must work passionately and unrelentingly for first-class citizenship. We must stand up positively, courageously, with bold and grim determination to be free." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter to G. W. Sanders," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 229.

Americans by white Americans had a tremendous influence on the movement of freedom around the world.

King believed that these victories for freedom were a part of the advance of history that was delivered by the desire of the spirit that moved the universe.[181] "God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race, the creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers and *every* man will respect the dignity and worth of all human personality."[182] It was God's work in the being of individuals that stirred the desire for freedom into actions for freedom. King may have understood freedom as the innate right for an individual to be in accordance with one's own will, but he also believed that an individual could not be outside the community of all other individuals. People were intrinsically linked to each other by the eternal personality that united all creation; therefore, King taught that the violation of justice anywhere threatened fundamental justice everywhere.[183]

King explained that all of the people of the world were experiencing the "contemporary struggle between good in the form of freedom and justice and evil in the form of oppression and colonialism."[184] Due to the divine symbiotic relationship between all people, the eternal stepped into the temporal to inspire and equip people to

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[181] "We must believe that there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole. There is a creative power that works to bring low gigantic mountains of evil and pull down prodigious hilltops of injustice. This is the faith that keeps the nonviolent resister going through all of the tension and suffering that he must inevitably confront." King, "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," 325.

[182] King, "The Three Dimensions," 576.

[183] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remarks Delivered at Africa Freedom Dinner at Atlanta University," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 204.

[184] King, "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," in *Advocate of the Social Gospel,* Carson, 198 80.

toil for the causes of justice and freedom. He stated that there was, "something in the very nature of the universe that assists goodness in its perennial struggle with evil."[185] He made this point in a speech before the NAACP on June 27, 1956. He said that America must grant freedom and justice to African Americans because the universe demanded it and morality compelled it.[186] "Since justice is God's will, the stars in their courses support what we stand for. The arch of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."[187] Writing about the struggle to ensure the longevity of the gains made during the Birmingham campaign, King wrote, "I have no despair about the future…We will reach the goal of freedom…because the goal of America is freedom…because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands."[188]

For the Love of Freedom

King believed that love was the foundation upon which people built a free society and was the fountain from which people drew the motivation and strength to work for freedom. When King spoke of love he specifically spoke of the Christian ideal of *agape,* which he defined as "understanding, creative, redeeming goodwill for all men…It is the love of God operating in the human heart."[189] The idea of *agape* was preached by Jesus

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[185] Ibid., 79.

[186] King told the attendees of the 1956 NAACP national convention, "The motive for America giving freedom and justice to the Negro cannot be merely to compete with godless communism. We must do it because it's part of the ethical demands of the universe…We must do it; it must be done because it is right to do it." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Montgomery Story," in Carson, *Birth of a New Age*, 308.

[187] King, "Address at the Fiftieth Annual NAACP Convention," 249.

[188] King, *Why We Can't Wait*, Location 1458.

[189] King, "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," 325.

Christ, who said that the second greatest commandment (the first being to love God) was to love your neighbor as yourself.[190] Jesus taught his followers that they had a responsibility to others: he expected them to maintain I-Thou relationships with others. The other that Jesus called on his followers to love was everyone from closest friend to fiercest enemy. Gandhi may have also influenced King on this matter as he called on his followers to practice active love—what he called *ahimsa*. King recognized this and challenged people to practice *agape*: to "love all (people) not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, but you love them because God loves them."[191] Love was powerful and was, "the key to the solution of the problems of our world, love even for enemies."[192]

When addressing the "key problem" of segregation, King argued that segregation was a poison that "greatly distorted" the "white man's personality" and "scarred" his soul.[193] The solution to the problem and the resolution to the "tensions, insecurities, and fears" of white America was an application of love by African Americans to the hearts of European Americans.[194]

He stated that, "Only through our adherence to love and nonviolence will the fear in the white community be mitigated."[195] African Americans could not win the battle against segregation with violence or others kinds of retribution. That kind of reaction

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[190] Mark 12:30-31, Today's New International Version.

[191] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in King, *The Trumpet*, 75.

[192] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 422f

[193] King, *Stride*, 105.

[194] Ibid.

[195] King, "Antidotes for Fear," in *Strength,* 121.

allowed for the continued expansion of hate. These claims are most likely rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ who taught his followers to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."[196]

The principle of loving your enemies also has similarities to Gandhi's teaching that hatred destroyed life and *ahimsa* redeemed life. Those who practiced Satyagraha could not hate their enemies, but instead hold the lives of their enemies "as sacred as those of [their] dear loved ones." Hate had to be replaced by active love: Christian *agape* and Gandhian *ahimsa*. Action against corruption, segregation, discrimination, and racism was required—not acting would also allow for the continued expansion of hate—but action had to be just and loving. He said, "Without love, justice becomes cold and empty; without justice, love becomes sentimental and empty. We must come to see that justice is love, correcting and controlling all that stands against love."[197] Loving action was necessary to redeem the soul of America.[198]

Freedom must be Actualized

Freedom is ultimately rooted in the eternal God. The roots of freedom are essentially spiritual but the truth of freedom is realized in the phenomenal world. Its existence does not depend on great human institutions like the church and state; however, its realization does. King argued that freedom comes from God and actualized freedom is the will of God, therefore, the church and a democratic state ought to be natural allies

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[196] Luke 6:27-28, Today's New International Version.

[197] King, "Address at the Religious Leaders' Conference," 201.

[198] This is another Gandhian idea. Gandhi taught that, "non-cooperation is intended to pave the way to real, honorable and voluntary co-operation based on mutual respect and trust." Gandhi, 163.

of the Civil Rights Movement. Experience betrayed this expectation as some of the greatest opponents came from the religious community and the political community.

King was aware of the vast number of times in human history that religious institutions violated freedom and justified slavery and segregation. He knew that religious institutions were the product of human creativity and therefore subject to the human inclination to sin. He also knew that the drive of the SCLC to save the soul of America required a great awakening of the religious community to fulfill its responsibility to do the will of God on earth as God's will was fulfilled in heaven. The church had to work for freedom and push the American government to protect freedom and provide a place for people to act in accordance to their free wills.

King understood that the Federal statutes that followed the SCLC campaigns in Birmingham and Selma and the work of SNCC and other more radical groups during "Freedom Summer" in Mississippi were not the panacea for American racism, segregation, and discrimination. He knew that the Civil Rights Movement must continue to struggle onward toward freedom; however, he also believed that African Americans were more committed to the struggle tha they had ever been before and that more people from other racial and ethnic groups were also committed to the cause of freedom and justice. "Our freedom was not won a century ago," he stated, "it is not won today; but some small part of it is in our hands, and we are marching no longer by one and twos but in legions of thousands, convinced not it cannot be denied by human force."[199]

[199] King, "Impasse in Race Relations," 4.

Freedom was an inherent aspect of being human that was "neither derivative from nor subjected to the state."[200] He expressed the dream of the African American community to realize their innate freedom this way, "It is a profound, eloquent and unequivocal expression of the dignity and worth of all human personality."[201] Speaking at a NAACP banquet recognizing young people who peacefully resisted Jim Crow laws King said, "They have recognized that freedom is a priceless possession which every man must possess if he is to be truly human."[202] Later in the same speech he noted, "…the absence of freedom is the presence of death."[203] When the government denied freedom they committed "moral and spiritual murder" and when an individual did not resist the violation of her or his personal freedom he or she "committed an act of moral and spiritual suicide."[204] He went on to note that the "struggle for freedom…is a struggle to maintain one's very selfhood" and that risking physical death to gain personal freedom was worth the consequence.[205] King included in the speech an oft quoted line from a Negro Spiritual: "Oh, freedom, Oh, freedom, and before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go to my Father and be saved."[206] Democracy, the free market, and private property rights were not the chief end of a just society: the person was the end because the person "is a child of God" who innately had the right to make decisions and possess

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[200] Martin Luther King, Jr., "To the Montgomery County Board of Education," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 271.

[201] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Negro and the American Dream," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 508.

[202] King, "Address at the Fiftieth Annual NAACP Convention," 248.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid., 249.

the substantive and instrumental freedoms necessary to act on those desires.[207] He argued that the state was made for the people and was entrusted with the duty of protecting the freedom of all people. If the state did not guarantee freedom to all people, it "relegate(d) (people) to the status of a thing"—it promotes I-It relationships instead of I-Thou relationships.[208]

Things cannot be free because they cannot determine what they are. King stood in the romantic, liberal tradition of Rousseau and held that people had the innate and inviolable right and ability to make that determination. Like Rousseau, King believed that the will and actions of people had created a world in which the state of natural freedom had been violated by selfish ambition and underappreciated by the body politic. King's dream was to reverse the tide of unfreedom by inspiring people to use human volition and activity to make freedom an actualized reality in the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given King's interpretation of freedom and compared it with the African American experience of unfreedom in the United States. I explained that freedom was important to King because of personal experience, his Christian faith, and his commitment to Christian personalism. I argued that King has a positivist perspective of freedom that is, to some degree, held by practitioners of the human development and capabilities approach. I gave King's arguments against the unfreedoms of segregation, discrimination, and economic disparity. I presented King's view that the Civil Rights Movement in America was a part of a larger worldwide movement toward real freedom.

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[207] King, *Stride*, 93.

[208] Ibid.

I also discussed the roles that democratic government, an equitable economic system and a faithful religious community could play in turning the tide of human history in favor of King's dream of actualized freedom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Why King Worked for Freedom

> *(*My call) was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the ministry.
>
> --Martin Luther King, Jr., "My Call to the Ministry"

> I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world. This is the end of life. The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may. (June 5, 1957)
>
> --Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Most Durable Power"

Introduction

Martin Luther King Jr. could have worked to build a better world as an educator, lawyer, or politician, but because of his strong belief in God and conviction that people needed God and God needed people, he chose to be a religious leader in his community to help ensure that the civil rights movement maintained a transcendent dimension. He decided to become a Pastor because he believed that all life was valuable; that the lives of individuals and the institutions of society needed changing; that the spirit of God provided the means to bring about the necessary ends; and that the Christian church was the instrument that God used in the African American community to produce positive change. Pastors had the opportunity to lead individuals and congregations to act on behalf of the eternal values of justice and freedom.

If King was right about freedom—if people did create the conditions of unfreedom and yet had the capacity to create the conditions of freedom—then people needed leaders to guide them out of the *Egypt* of unfreedom and into the Promised Land

of freedom. King believed he was called to be one of those leaders. In this chapter I focus on the *Reverend* Dr. Martin Luther King and how his Christian faith informed his philosophical personalism and his commitment to Christian *agape* (i.e. Gandhian *ahimsa*) and motivated and empowered him to do the work he did on behalf of freedom. I also consider the role of the church/religious community in overcoming the conditions of unfreedom; in challenging the state to benefit freedom; and in helping actualize freedom in the phenomenal world.

A Message of Christian Love

King believed that as a pastor he had two primary responsibilities: "On the one hand I must attempt to change the soul of individuals so that their societies may be changed. On the other I must attempt to change the societies so that the individual soul will have a chance."[1] This two-fold and two-tiered duty was necessary because the social dilemmas that strained American life and frustrated the American dream were brought about by damaged individuals building and living in an imperfect community.[2] He believed that individuals existed in a damaged state as a result of personal and corporate sin: individuals and government had violated the objective laws of God and created the

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Preaching Ministry," in Carson, 72.

[2] L. Harold DeWolf acknowledge the imperfections of the human community. He wrote, "Despite all the evident sin and absence of faith in individual lives, the group life of the world is in some respects worse." He claimed that, "Every nation…displays an arrogant pride and thoughtless selfishness which most of its people heartily despise." Speaking of national economics, DeWolf noted, "materialistic ends are dominant and…individualistic purposes are ultimate." He most certainly influenced King's thought on this matter. L. Harold DeWolf, *A Theology of the Living Church: A Comprehensive Systematic, Theology, Interpreting the Christian Faith for Men and Women of Our Day* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953), 303 and 304.

conditions for the spread of unfreedom in America.[3] However, America was not without hope because God was on the side of freedom and as a pastor, King believed it was his responsibility to lead America out of the unfreedom of Egypt, through the wilderness of cultural revolution and into the Promised Land of realized freedom.

People were flawed and the source of these problems was found "in the hearts and souls of men" who needed a healer to repair their broken estate.[4] Human brokenness was the result of people using their freedom to make choices to choose to act contrary to God's moral order. Lewis Baldwin points out that King believed people were "created for good and to do good."[5] King was convinced that the solution for repairing the flawed human condition depended on the work of God in the world.[6] The attempts made by humanity to heal its brokenness had fallen short and were destined to continue to fail unless the transcendent was in the details. He thought that too many empiricists and progressives were doing the good work of turning ideals into values by improving wages, working conditions, and living conditions without much consideration for the soul and

[3] The Chairperson of King's dissertation committee was L. Harold DeWolf who published his *A Theology of the Living Church* in 1953—while King was still a Ph.D. candidate at Boston University and a year before King became the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. DeWolf was one of the important Christian Personalists in the early twentieth century and, next to Brightman, was probably the most influential theologian in King's academic career. Dewolf defined sin as (1) "To act contrary to my own judgment of what I do" (he called this "formal sin) and (2) to disobey the will of God (he called this "material sin"). L. Harold DeWolf, *A Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 180. Personalists would have understood formal sin and material sin as the choice of free individuals to violate eternal values.

[4] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Rediscovering Lost Values," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Rediscovering Precious Values July 1951-November 1955*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 249.

[5] Lewis Baldwin, *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 213.

[6] Rufus Burrow writes that King thought that "God is the ultimate source of, and key to, the solution to human problems, including sin. Human problems and sin exist because of autonomous moral agents who are called into existence by God, and who choose to behave contrary to God's expectations." Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2006), 103.

without the guidance and assistance of God.[7] He shared the progressive dream of "a warless world, better distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color."[8] He thought that these ideals were necessary for life and freedom; however, he believed people could not do it on their own. He said, "My friends, if we are to go forward we must go back and find God. We must put God back into the center of our thinking."[9] Religion helped people concentrate on God and inspired them to work to make God's eternal values a reality in creation.[10] Without God the foundation of human morality was frail, so King insisted on the inclusion of God in answers to humanity's predicaments.[11] He believed that the Christian religion provided the best message and means to accomplish his desired ends because behind the Christian belief in Jesus Christ

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[7] Brightman addressed this issue in the 1945 Fondren Lectures at Southern Methodist University. He wrote, the building of a world of values is an eternal task…the task of the control of suffering and redemption from sin are goals of eternal divine purpose—goals in which the norms are laws of health and joy and growth. This vision is not popular in the modern world." Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Nature and Values* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 87.

[8] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Symbol of the Movement January 1957-December 1958* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 88.

[9] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Going Forward by Going Backward," in *The Paper of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Advocate of the Social Gospel September 1948-March 1963* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 63.

[10] King's understanding of religion seems consistent with that of Brightman. Brightman held that people were religious because they experienced "great and permanent value" that they believed were bigger than they were—they came from God or gods. Human experience revealed the existence of not only value, but also evil. The experience of values led people to believe they had a soul—that they were more than just a body—and that there was eternal purpose to human existence. Ultimately the realization of eternal values would lead to a religious experience that would ultimately lead to religious action to see those values realized in the world. For Brightman, "every religious experience (was) an experience of value." Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), 85.

[11] Personalists believed that, "Without the existence of God, the moral order would collapse and ideals would be obliterated…A god without moral concern might be all-powerful and all-knowing, but he could never be an object of religious faith. Religious faith is primarily concerned with the moral character of God." Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr.: *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), 110.

was the idea that "God [was] on the side of truth and justice."[12] Furthermore, Christianity expressed with certainty the hope that "in the long struggle between good and evil, good eventually will emerge as victor."[13]

God should not only be a part of the solution, but ought to be the preeminent motivation for the effort. The goal of spiritual fulfillment was possible because of divine like love that Christians called *agape*. The ideal of *agape* is Christianity's contribution to humanity's efforts to heal human brokenness. King believed that *agape* was, "the glue that binds persons together in the beloved community."[14] As stated in the previous chapter, King defined *agape* as, "understanding, creative, redeeming goodwill for all men…the love of God operating in the human heart."[15] The racism, discrimination, and segregation that blighted the character of America existed because too many Christians did not allow the love of God to operate in their hearts much less in their communities. When some people refused to love other people, they violated the will of God which was the foundation of the moral law that governed human relations.[16] The moral law was significant because it served as the "universal norm which human beings should use as the basis of decisions."[17] Because it was a "universal norm," it was "a law;" and because

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[12] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations: Address Delivered at the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 325.

[13] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," in *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 78.

[14] Burrow, 160.

[15] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," in King, *Strength*, 52.

[16] "Love is the essence of the moral law, and thus the moral law supports the principle of the inherent value of human personality…Black people should be given their freedom not because it is politically expedient but because the moral law of the cosmos demands it. God acts in history to assure the triumph of love and justice." Smith and Zepp, 112.

[17] Ibid., 110.

it involved "the will to choose," it was a "moral law" that served as a "manifestation of ultimate reality" that was "not made by human beings," but instead "discovered by them."[18]

The obvious differences between people of various races and genders often made people uneasy and fearful of the other because they often did not understand the differences and wanted to protect their place in the social structure. This anxiety and fear led members of one people group to dislike members of another people group and also aroused irrational actions. Their irrationality led to the absurdity of obstructing the advances of the other in the community's social structure—their efforts led to separation and created enmity between themselves and the others.[19] Fear overcame love and material attraction superseded the attraction to values.

Those who practiced *agape* overcame the tendency to malign others who were different given that one did not "*agape*" other people because they were necessarily attracted to them but, "because they possess some type of divine spark; we love every (person) because God loves (every person)."[20] King noted that Jesus taught his followers to *agape* even their enemies.[21] *Agape* was the inspiration behind his commitment to non-violence in his work in the civil rights movement and the foundation behind his forceful

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[18] Ibid.

[19] "Men hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they do not know each other; they don't know each other because they are so often separated from each other." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 460.

[20] King, "Loving Your Enemies," 52. "When you come to the point that you look in the face of everyman and see deep down with in him what religion calls the 'image of God,' you begin to love him in spite of. No matter what he does, you see God's image there." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 318

[21] *Agape* "is understanding, redemptive goodwill for all men, so that you love everybody, because God loves them…when the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, you must not do it." Ibid., 320.

stance against the Vietnam War. He stated as much when he wrote, "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 by the light of forgiving love."[22]

The Focus of Agape

The practice of Christian *agape* also challenged King to purposefully care for others. Jesus told his followers to, "Love your neighbor as yourself." When asked who one's neighbor was, Jesus responded that every person—including those at the bottom of the social structure because of their sexual, racial, ethnic, and religious differences—was every other person's neighbor. Following the teachings of Jesus and the lead of Walther Rauschenbusch, King was "a profound advocate of the social gospel."[23] He was an advocate of the social gospel because of his deep conviction that the message of Christianity addressed both the temporal and eternal states of the human condition and the social gospel was committed to these very objectives. As a promoter of the social gospel, he was committed to being a good neighbor who "looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers."[24] King believed that Christianity had for too long focused too much attention on getting people into heaven and not enough attention to improving the living conditions

[22] King, "Loving Your Enemies," In *Strength,* 55.

[23] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Preaching Ministry," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 72.

[24] Martin Luther King, Jr., "On Being a Good Neighbor," in *Strength*, 33.

of people on earth.[25] He agreed that Christians "must certainly work with individuals and seek to change the soul;" however, he thought that the work to change the soul was incomplete if they did not, "deal with the social conditions that corrupt the soul."[26] He referenced the life and teachings of Jesus Christ to establish the primacy of the social aspect of the Christian gospel. He noted that Jesus wanted all people to "have physical well-being, economic security, food, clothing, and health."[27] He was convinced that Jesus had a bias in favor of the poor and that Christians needed to emulate Jesus by joining, "any protest against unfair treatment of the poor," and by enlightening greater society to the reality that, "Christianity itself is such a protest."[28] King was disappointed with the popular church in America because it had "lagged behind" in fulfilling its responsibility to the least in society.[29] Sadly, the church had proven its social impotence time and again: "Slavery could not have existed in the United States for 250 years" nor would "Segregation…exist today" if the people who made up the church did the true work of the church.[30] The Social Gospel Movement began because a collection of Christians grew more and more frustrated with the inhumane living conditions of the

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[25] Burrow noted, "Martin Luther King, Jr. was less concerned about what happens to the soul and body after life on earth that what happens to them in this world…God is concerned primarily about what goes on in the world and how people relate and behave." Burrow, 52.

[26] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Can a Christian Be a Communist," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 451.

[27] Martin Luther King, Jr., "First Things First," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 143.

[28] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 93 and King, "Can a Christian Be a Communist," 449.

[29] This is a point made by Brightman: "Too often the church has sided with the oppressor…has hesitated to speak out against injustice to the poor…supported war and been indifferent about its causes and cure. Too often the oppressed have been befriended by atheists, while the church has denounced the sins of the poor and has regarded the injustices they suffer as no concern for the church." Brightman, *Nature and Values*, 96f.

[30] King, "Can a Christian Be a Communist," 450.

impoverished. They recognized that the hope of heaven that they offered in their sermons did nothing to improve those conditions, so they made it their objective to stand up for the poor and powerless and to become a dynamic force that challenged and transformed "the political world, the economic world, and indeed the whole social situation."[31] King was committed to this cause and dedicated his life to it, stating, "I will never rest until all of God's children can have the basic necessities of life."[32]

King believed that when people participated in the struggle for freedom they were simultaneously striding toward an abundant life. The strides people were taking toward freedom were not only temporal steps, they were also eternal steps because the fight for freedom was God's fight against the evil and injustice in the world: "God is on the side of right….God is with the struggle for the good life, victory is inevitable….(If) you gain this feeling that God is with you, all of the powers in hell below and all of the evils…can't destroy you because you have a faith."[33] He was certain that God was the source of an abundant life and therefore it was more important for him to be on God's side than to have God on his side—God's eternal values were more important than selfish ambition or material satisfaction. He decided to join in the march toward freedom as a pastor because he believed in God; he believed that "God is at work in the universe;" and he believed God's will and might were necessary requirements for victory.[34]

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[31] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Religion of Doing," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 172.

[32] King, "Can a Christian Be a Communist," 451.

[33] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 404.

[34] King, "The Death of Evil," in *Strength,* 84.

One of King's favorite sermons to preach was the first sermon he preached at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery—"The Three Dimensions of Life." In the sermon King posited that a complete life was made up of a harmonious relationship between three lines connected by three points—he posited that life was triangular. A complete life needed length (the individual person), breadth (other persons), and height ("the supreme infinite person—God").[35] King wanted people to realize that they had a responsibility to not only care for themselves, but to also care for the needs of others because all humanity was interconnected and linked to God by the transcended values of reason and love.[36] He speculated that real life did not begin until a person "[rose] above the narrow confines of…individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."[37] The problem with many white Americans and even middle class African Americans was that their undivided devotion to the length of life led them to hold wealth and political power in higher regard than they held other human beings. They inadvertently had allowed their drive for wealth and power to not only separate them from other people, but also separate them from God and from eternal values. Thinking they were free, they were instead slaves to self-regard and had allowed this sinful condition to establish injustice, discrimination, and oppression as the norms of this broken society. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness remained distant ideals instead

[35] King, "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," 397f.

[36] Edgar Brightman was convinced that there were two values that are the "fundamentally unchangeable goals of all human action. The must be called intelligence and co-operation, or respect for truth and respect for personality, or reason and love (the *logos* and *agape* of the New Testament)." Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *Nature and Values: The Fondren Lectures for 1945* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 72. These values are seen in King's interpretation of freedom: reason is seen in the belief that there is a transcendent moral code and love is seen in the attempt to create the conditions of freedom.

[37] King, "The Three Dimensions," 399.

of realized values. Healing for broken individuals and a fragmented America would only occur when those in power understood the importance of the "other-regarding dimension" and "reach[ed] beyond [their] self-interest…[and] reach[ed] up high enough to discover God."[38] Existence depended on material resources but an abundant life was contingent upon having a spiritual foundation that was built upon a personal conversion.[39] Thus, people needed to replace the goal of material satisfaction with the goal of spiritual fulfillment that was realized in caring for self, concern for the other, and dependence on the divine.[40]

The Human Aptitude to Love

The scientific and romantic positivism that drove secular society to work towards a utopian world was a tempting proposition for King. Like other Christian personalists, he believed in the fundamental goodness of humanity and wanted to believe that institutional modifications would change the hearts and minds of people, thus creating a more perfect world. The influence of his father's preaching and the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr tempered his idealistic exuberance and led him to conclude that "Man is not able

[38] Ibid., 400f. King learned "the other regarding dimension" of an abundant life from the examples given at home by his mother and grandmother; from the exertions of his grandfather and father on behalf of the members of Ebenezer Baptist Church and from the spirit of cooperation in the African American community in Atlanta. He also learned the importance of others from professors like Edgar Brightman who wrote, "Where the live and love of worship are real and not merely formal, they will arouse in the worshipper a new desire to share the best of life and love with all God's children, of every race, and creed and kind….Worship is a means of bringing a 'new heaven and new earth.'" Brightman, 156f.

[39] For Christian Personalists, a conversion meant, "the application of rational love." Brightman, *Nature and Values*, 86. The conversion occurs when people surrender to the "appeal to spiritual forces." The appeal of these spiritual forces is to accept the challenge to "control…suffering" and to redeem the world of sin. These tasks are accomplished when individuals strive for the goals of "health and joy and growth" in the face of a world that resists such progress. Brightman, 86 and 87.

[40] "Our hope for creative living lies in our ability to reestablish the spiritual ends of our lives in personal character and social justice." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Man Who Was a Fool," in *Strength*, 76.

to save himself or the world."[41] King believed that sin had tainted the human condition and as a result of sin's influence, "some of the image of God has left us."[42] So humanity needed God and God needed humanity. Rufus Burrow noted, King believed "it was important that persons work cooperatively and in conjunction with God to rid society of social evils" because God had "matchless power" and God "want[ed] and need[ed] the cooperation of free self-determined beings in the struggle to overcome injustice."[43] God called on humanity to practice God-like love (i.e. a*gape*), but sin introduced self-absorption and selfish ambition into the human personality; thus pushing *agape* beyond the reach of human aptitude alone.

Like the positivists and romanticists, he believed that people were born free, yet everywhere in chains; but, unlike Rousseau, the chains were not the sole result of human institutions and the social conditions they created but were also the result of the selfish tendencies of people to turn away from the goodness of God's values toward the evil of injustice.[44] He surmised that people were "called into existence by God as free beings with the capacity to be self-determining moral agents."[45] Furthermore, "much of the evil which we experience is caused by man's folly and ignorance and also by the misuse of his freedom."[46] "Freedom is not absolute. The human will is weak and vacillatory

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[41] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Our God is Able," in *Strength*, 108.

[42] Martin Luther King, Jr., "What is Man?" in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 178.

[43] Burrow, 113.

[44] King noted, "Somehow the 'isness' of our present natures is out of harmony with the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts us. So we are sinners…As individuals we are sinful but when we interact in society, it becomes even greater." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Christian Doctrine of Man," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 335.

[45] Burrow, 173.

[46] King, "Our God is Able," 108.

[sic].”[47] The chains could not simply be removed so that humanity could return to a natural state; King stated that people were “sinner(s) in need of God’s grace.”[48] Not only did he think people needed God’s grace, but people also needed God’s power to overcome lies with the truth; to practice peace instead of war; and to equitably distribute personal and corporate wealth to benefit all members of the human family.[49] He said, “Man by his own power can never caste out evil from the world. The humanists hope is an illusion, based on too great an optimism concerning the inherent goodness of human nature.”[50] This “humanist illusion” was also one of the weaknesses that King found in the godless communist position: “Man has revolted against God, and through his humanistic endeavors he has sought to solve his problem by himself only to find that he has ended up in disillusionment.”[51] He believed, “God is still around. And all of our new knowledge cannot decrease his being one iota.”[52] In the empiricist attempt to understand life and the cosmos, they had “gradually (come) to feel that God was an unnecessary item on the agenda of life.”[53]

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[47] Martin Luther King, Jr., “Human Freedom & Divine Grace,’” in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 587.

[48] King, “The Christian Doctrine of Man,” 334.

[49] “And it boils down that we are sinners in need of God’s redemptive power. We know truth, and yet we lie…We know the way to peace, and yet we go to war. We have resources for great economic systems where there could be equitable distributions of wealth, and yet we monopolize and take it all for ourselves and forget about our brothers. And when we come to see ourselves, we discover that all of us are sinners.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “Man’s Sin and God’s Grace,” in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 384.

[50] Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Answer to a Perplexing Question,” in *Strength to Love*, 129.

[51] Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter to Coretta Scott,” in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 126.

[52] Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Man Who Was a Fool,” in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 418.

[53] King, “Our God is Able,” 107.

King appreciated the advances made possible by human scientific endeavors but frequently critiqued scientific progress because in many cases it surpassed moral progress (i.e. people used the wonder of science to create bombs that annihilated people).[54] He often quoted David Thoreau's maxim regarding western progress: "Improved means to an unimproved end."[55] King understood that science was attempting to understand the laws that ruled the physical world so that people might be able to control the material world; however, he also believed that the world was more than what could be ascertained by the senses.[56] He wrote, "We need to go back and pick up the principle that all reality hinges on moral foundations. We must rediscover the value that there are moral laws of the universe just as abiding as the physical laws."[57] James Cone noted, "For Martin King, telling the truth meant proclaiming God's judgments on America for its failure to use its technological resources for the good of humanity."[58] The moral laws that governed the universe gave King hope because those laws were transcendent laws that pointed to a God who was greater than the evil that impaled the human condition.[59] God

[54] "(America) You have allowed the material means by which you live to outdistance the spiritual ends for which you live. You have allowed your mentality to outrun your morality. You have allowed your civilization to outdistance your culture, and through scientific genius you have made of the world a neighborhood. But through your moral and spiritual genius, you have failed to make of it a brotherhood." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letters to American Christians Delivered to the Commission on Ecumenical Missions and Relations, United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 340.

[55] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Going Forward by Going Backward," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 159f.

[56] On more than one occasion King stated, "If civilization is to survive she must rediscover the moral and spiritual ends for living." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Civilization's Great Need," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 88.

[57] King, "Going Forward," 160.

[58] James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Sept., 1987):465.

[59] "In spite of the presence of evil and the doubts that lurk in our minds, we shall wish not to surrender the conviction that our God is able." King, "Our God is Able," 108.

provided the resources to overcome human brokenness that were beyond humanity's innate aptitude. "Without dependence on God our efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest night."[60]

Humanity may have been in revolt against God's eternal values, but King believed that people had an innate longing to act well and strive toward their natural destiny because of their natural constitution. He said, "[Humanity's] attachments to…the demonic [are] always disturbed by [their] longing for the divine. As [they]…[dwell] in the lowest valley something reminds [them] that [they] [are] made for the highest star."[61] King submitted that people were conflicted creatures containing components of high eternal values that revealed the personality of God, yet they reveled in the low sinful values that "we forever seek to hide."[62] People were conflicted, but not defeated. Life was more than the continual reenactment of Sisyphus' frustration. As long as a part of God's personality made up the substance of human personality people had a chance to achieve victory—to have their visionary dreams become a reality.

The (Un)Focused Church

As a pastor, King led a local gathering of African American Christians and participated in the leadership of the Christian communities of Montgomery and Atlanta and the conglomeration of African American Baptist churches around the nation. When

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[60] King, "The Man Who Was a Fool," 75.

[61] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Divine and Human Mutuality: Man's Helplessness Without God," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 368f.

[62] "We discover that there is a private aspect of our lives forever in conflict with the personal aspects of our lives. We all have a private self that we don't want the public self to discover. There is a privacy about all of us that we are ashamed of, that we forever seek to hide, and that we would never want to become public. This is the sin of man." King, "Man's Sin and God's Grace," 384.

Americans speak about the church, they tend to reference the building in which a group of religious people meet to worship their God. Several Americans understand "the church" to be a group of people committed to worshipping and following the teachings of their particular God. Still other people understand that the church is one of the many representations of the religious institution that works with other institutions to provide services that help society function as smoothly as possible. King thought the "church" was a religious institution made up of people who followed the teachings of Christ and that it was a spiritual institution, tied to the eternal spirit who ultimately ruled the universe, which worked with other institutions to provide services for communities and nations.

The church was a significant factor in King's socialization, which, he, however, unsuccessfully attempted to escape as a teenager. He appreciated the importance of the church in the African American community but was embarrassed with the emotional outbursts that dotted African American worship services because they were irreverent, unbecoming, and irrelevant in the struggle to improve the human condition. These feelings grew stronger the longer he spent time studying in the academic world and considering the economic and social conditions of most African Americans, other minorities, and the poor in America. He believed people truly needed God for something more than a palliative for life's realities—God provided what the individual lacked and restored what people wrecked.[63] Humanity needed the vision and power of God to

[63] Brightman stated: "Religion is not abstract idealism, it is concrete and practical. It asserts that ideals are not only abstractly valid in the Platonic kingdom of ideas, but also they are to some extent realizable and realized in the world of actual existence." Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, 113.

transform the conditions of the world, and the church was one of the primary tools he believed God worked through to bring about that change.

One of the reasons that the church was losing its social significance was because it "ignor[ed] the need for social reform" and was "divorced from the mainstream of human life."[64] King was not a dualist; he believed that both the material and spiritual aspects of creation were conceived in goodness and that the well-being of one was tied to the well-being of the other. The church could not dispense the seeds of the Kingdom of God in the world as long as they kept their hands lifted high instead of using them to reach out to others.[65] The tragedies of life were real and unavoidable; therefore, people needed divine assistance to overcome them and continue on their journey through life. King argued that, "Religion does not aim to save us from the troubles…of life…but it aims to support us under them and to teach us the divine purpose in them…It assures us that life has meaning because God controls the process of life."[66] The church needed to work to help make this promise of restoration a reality in the world.

The redemption that God brought to the human condition was real and demanded more than an outpouring of emotion during a worship service; God's redemption demanded a personal commitment to universal ethics that spanned time and eternity. Following the lead of Brightman, King believed that "the supreme consummation of worship and the very goal and purpose of the universe" was "the Community of Love" or

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[64] King, "The Answer to a Perplexing Question," 131.

[65] King believed that the Kingdom of God was the goal of humanity. The Kingdom of God was the reality God intended for the world—a place where there is no difference between goals, words, and deeds. He summed it up this way, "There is a voice saying to every generation, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you. And then you matriculate into the Kingdom of God." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 80.

[66] King, "Creating the Abundant Life," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel,* 191.

"the Beloved Community."[67] People around the world were suffering under the tyranny of unfreedom caused by overwhelming passion for the self and independence from the community. A change, a conversion, needed to occur in the hearts of people—they needed to repent and make the turn toward God's will of freedom for all.[68] God imbedded personality in every person, personality tied humanity together, and any sensitivity to innate personality would cause one to work to redeem those who suffered in unfreedom. King put it this way, "Christ is more concerned about our attitude towards racial prejudice and war than he is about our long processionals. He is more concerned with how we treat our neighbor than how loud we sing his praises."[69] Worship was worthless unless it brought about a drive to bring about righteousness--God's eternal values--in the life of the worshipper and compelled the worshipper to oppose injustice. In a sermon King preached to this Dexter Avenue congregation in 1954, he said,

> My friends man is body as well as soul, and any religion that pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them…and the economic order that cripples them, is a dry, passive do nothing religion in need of new blood…I plead for a church that shall be a fountainhead of a better social order. We can talk all we want to about saving souls from hell and preaching the pure and simple gospel, but unless we preach the social gospel our evangelistic gospel will be meaningless.[70]

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[67] Burrow, 164.

[68] Leo Strauss discusses the idea in his essay, "Progress or Return." In the essay he points out that *repentance* means "the return from the wrong way to the right one." He continues, "Man is originally at home in his Father's house. He becomes a stranger through estrangement, through sinful estrangement. Repentance, return, is homecoming." Leo Straus, "Progress or Return," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 227. While I doubt Strauss had any influence on King, I do believe that King would concur with this sentiment—people indeed needed to return to the original intent of God's plan for humanity

[69] King, "A Religion of Doing," 173

[70] King, "What is Man?" 176.

King did not mean to only address African American Christians with this message; white Christians who practiced segregation, discrimination, and violent oppression supposedly worshipped the same Christ of the African American church.[71] He said the problem with these white Christians was the same problem with many African American Christians, "they worship Christ emotionally and not morally. They cast his ethical and moral insights behind the gushing smoke of emotional adoration and ceremonial piety."[72] Philip Hamburger suggests that the church in America largely stayed out of the slavery argument because of the protestant belief in the separation of church and state—slavery was a political matter not a spiritual matter.[73] King regularly compared these immoral white Christians to Dives—the rich man from a parable found in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke—"Dives is the white man who refuses to cross the gulf of segregation…Dives is the American capitalist who never seeks to bridge the economic gulf between himself and the laborer."[74] The eternal compensation for both

[71] White Christians could justify their position because of their belief in "soul competency" and their belief that Christian salvation was primarily for the individual and for the community. E.Y. Mullins speaks to both points. He believed that *soul competency* meant, "All men have an equal right to access to God." Regarding conversion, Mullins wrote, "Primarily, the religious relation is a relation between God and the individual." Mullins, however, did believe that religion had a social relation, but it was secondary to the individual relationship. E. Y. Mullins, *The Baptist Faith*, ed. H. W. Tribble (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1935), 45.

[72] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Pride Versus Humility: The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 232.

[73] Hamburger does reference a memorial containing some 3,000 signatures from New England clergy presented to Congress in March of 1854 to speak against the Nebraska bill (a bill that would have opened Kansas and Nebraska to slavery). He further notes that southerners excoriated these pastors from violating the principle of the separation of church and state—they had the right to present their opposition as private citizens but not as representatives of the church. Hamburger quotes a Methodist Church member who wrote, "it is not competent for the Church, in her organized capacity, to array herself against the powers that be, or any of the civil duties legitimately growing out of the constitution under which we live, when they do not conflict with the law of God. Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 244f and 266.

[74] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Impassable Gulf: The Parable of Dives and Lazarus," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 238.

Black and White Christians was not determined by the number of worship services they attended or the vigor of their worship experience, but instead was determined by putting the teachings of Christ into practice and making a palpable difference in American life by turning ideal democracy into the value of democracy.

The Church—the most significant representation of religion in American life—often allowed the political and economic status quo to establish its social agenda and provide the ambition for its future. It had developed a tenuous relationship with the American economic and political power structure in which it had used the establishment to benefit itself and had been used by the establishment to endorse and promote a variety of political causes. The Church had become part of the status quo and would often justify the status quo by adding a Christian mission to the political, social, or corporate objective of the establishment.[75] For instance, the white church could justify slavery because it gave them an opportunity to share the Christian story with Africans and African Americans. Along the same line, they could justify western expansionism (i.e. imperialism) because it not only opened doors to industry, but it also opened nations up to the Christian gospel.[76] The relationship was tenuous in that not all Christians agreed with the stand of the church. Christians had been both advocates and opponents of slavery and imperialism. The abolitionist movement was largely driven by white

[75] Richard Niebuhr called this kind of activity by the church—which he believes goes at least back to the Reformation—"Constructive Protestantism" or "The kingdom of God in America." He says, "It represents not so much the impact of the gospel upon the New World as the use and adaption of the gospel by the new society for its own purposes." H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937), 9.

[76] In an essay criticizing U.S. expansion, William Fullbright quotes part of President McKinley's justification for annexing the Philippines. McKinley believed "the Lord told him it was America's duty 'to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellowmen for Christ also died." J. William Fullbright, "The Arrogance of Power" in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, ed. Conrad Cherry (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 330.

Christians and justification for slavery and then segregation was largely supplied by white Christians. Two Christian groups used the same scripture and similar Christian traditions to justify diametrically opposed positions. Which group was *more* true to the teachings of Christian scriptures and the church? King suggested that the abolitionists did the work of the true church because they proved that their ultimate allegiance was to God and eternal values and not to the earthly institutions that contradict the will of God by tying human value to material accumulation.

The political, social, and corporate establishment had violated God's values and innate human personality and the fundamental tenets of *logos agape*; therefore, the practices of the nation were evil. Instead of joining the establishment, the church needed to provide a necessary critique to the establishment and challenge it to live by its professed values. He said, "The Church must forever stand in judgment upon every political, social, and economic system, condemning evil wherever they exist."[77] The problem with the church in America was its contentment with the status quo, and King believed that this unfortunate reality was the greatest tragedy of the era.[78] A church faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ could not rest "until segregation and discrimination are banished from every area of American life."[79] The church could no longer function as the de facto priest of the American government endorsing the components of American life that supported the faux racial/minority peace that the government

[77] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Condemnation," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 199.

[78] "I cannot close this message without saying to you that the problem of race is indeed America's greatest moral dilemma. The churches are called upon to recognize the urgent necessity of taking a forthright stand on this crucial issue." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 326.

[79] Ibid.

portrayed to the other nations around the world. King called on the church to act as a prophet from God that sought "to transform both individual lives and the social situation that brings to many people anguish of spirit and cruel bondage."[80]

The Communist Contribution to Freedom

One ideology that did offer the Western establishment an unwanted and counter-cultural critique was Communism. While King's Christian foundation would not allow him to embrace Communism, he appreciated its prophet-like critique of American democracy and challenged the church in America to offer more than a construct for enduring hell on earth.[81] He noted that Communism pushed the church to be more concerned about social justice and to put forth more effort to correct the social inequalities that he thought scarred American society.[82] He pointed out that Communism was overtly atheistic.[83] He further indicated that many Americans exercised a practical atheism in a secularist and materialistic society that King believed was more dangerous than that of Communism. He noted that Christians in America tended to "affirm the

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[80] King, "The Answer to a Perplexing Question," 131.

[81] "…we can never give our allegiance to the Russian way of life, to the communist way of life, because communism is based on an ethical relativism and a metaphysical materialism that no Christian can accept…a philosophy where somehow the end justifies the means." King, "Loving Your Enemies," 317. "(Communism) challenged me to have a growing concern about social justice….The Christian ought always to be challenged by any protest against unfair treatment of the poor…" King, "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 476.

[82] "With the passionate concern for social justice Christians are bound to be in accord (with Communism). Such concern is implicit in the Christian doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The Christian ought always to begin with a bias in favor of a movement which protests against unfair treatment of the poor, for surely Christianity is itself such a protest." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Communism's Challenge to Christianity," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 148f.

[83] An *atheist* was not necessarily a person who denied the existence of some divine or transcendent being, thought, or karma. An atheist was a person or ideal that maintained a "complete skepticism about any value in life." Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, 202.

reality of God with [their] lips and deny His existence with [their] lives."[84] He thought that Christians had given up on making a difference in the present world of their existence and concentrated too much of their attention and efforts on attaining the comforts to come in the life that sprung up following their deaths. He thought that these atheistic Christians focused too much on the sin that incapacitated humanity and permeated the material world and allowed this obsession to lead to "anti-social" behavior that kept them uninvolved in political and social reformation.[85] Communists were committed to the present struggles of the world that they perceived through existence and they were willing, "to lay down their lives for a cause that they believe…is going to make the world a better place."[86] King thought it was a shame that Christians did not practice their faith in the possibility of realized values with the same intensity. If Christians whole heartedly adhered to the teachings of Jesus Christ and "live(d) up to the basic principles of Christianity" he believed they would have already made the world "a better place."[87] Always a person of hope, he did not believe that the failures of the church's past portended that failure must continue into the future: God was on the side of right and was still able to work through a broken church and a broken people to redeem a broken world. He called on the church to confront the challenge communism proffered by

[84] King, "The Man Who Was a Fool," 417.

[85] "(I)t should be said that whenever believers are antisocial or socially indifferent they are being false to the first articles of almost universal religious faith—the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." Brightman, *Nature and Values*, 97.

[86] King, "Can a Christian Be a Communist," 452.

[87] Ibid.

"bear[ing] witness to the spirit of Christ" and "fashioning a truly Christian world."[88] The church was down, but not defeated.

King did not believe that the way to defeat communism was through a Cold War backed by nuclear armaments; he instead believed that America could bring about the demise of Communism by practicing the teachings of Christ in a damaged world. Communist "secular materialism, ethical relativism, and political totalitarianism" were impotent in transforming a broken world.[89] A Christian commitment to do the difficult work of turning professed ideals into realized values. "If we accept the challenge with devotion and valor, the bell of history will toll for Communism, and we shall make the world safe for democracy and secure for the people of Christ."[90]

The Church's Contribution to Freedom

Instead of working to defeat Communism, the *Church* in America—a complex institution made up of scores of factions—sometimes united with other religious groups to work toward a common goal but most of the time the *Church* operated as independent fissures in conflict with their *brethren*. King thought that this conflict was unnecessary and contradicted with the basic tenets of religion. Religion was supposed to unite temporal personalities together by securing them to the great eternal personality. The church was made up of individuals united to God through Jesus Christ who broke down the walls that separated the various races, sexes, and ethnic groups that made up the human population. Religious groups were not meant to attack each other, they were

[88] King, "How Should a Christian View Communism," 106.

[89] When asked about his position on Communism, King would use these three points as his fundamental argument against it. See King, "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,' 475.

[90] King, "How Should a Christian View Communism," 106.

meant to counteract the evil in the world that opposed the fundamental *logos*/*agape* of God. Instead of opposing other religious groups, King believed, "the church [was] supposed to be the most radical opposer [sic] of the status quo in society."[91] If the church did not oppose evil in the world it really had no purpose in the world. The conservative and evangelical branches of the church had spent their social capital supporting slavery, racially bigoted laws, and *laissez faire* capitalism. The moderate middle of the church had remained neutral in the contest. The church was losing the respect of the people and was becoming irrelevant in the struggle to transform society. The majority of Christian leaders resisted King's attempt to rebuild the people's trust in the church and reinvigorate this dying institution by challenging it to join the struggle to change the social folkways and mores of the nation.

King believed that the fundamental philosophy of Christianity focused on the eternal values of truth, beauty, good, and human worth. He thought that Christianity taught that all creation had value; that all humans were "supremely worthful"; that all life is good; and that the law of love must rule in life.[92] For King, the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ served as the ultimate example of God's eternal love breaking into the temporal realm of humanity. King said that the cross was "an external expression of the length to which God (was) willing to go to restore a broken community."[93] It was Jesus' cross that acted as a reminder that, "there is an element of

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[91] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Four Papers on Preaching Issues," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 106.

[92] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Philosophy of Life Undergirding Christianity and the Christian Ministry," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 110f.

[93] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Walk Through the Holy Land: Easter Sunday Sermon," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 171.

tragedy in life, there is a cross in the center of it."[94] The cross in the center of the lives of African Americans was the oppression brought on by the doctrine of white supremacy by means of Jim Crow laws and segregation.[95] This "*cross*" attempted to push African Americans to believe that they were somehow inferior to white Americans—that they were somehow not fully human. King believed that the power to rise from the destruction of this cross came from the Good News of the cross of Christianity which was definitively "committed…to the worth of the individual."[96] The enemies of Jesus chose the cross as a way to squash the momentum of his movement that challenged their traditional ways. James Cone points out that lynchings in the South—such as the lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955—were symbolic attempts by enemies of *agape* to crush the new movement toward freedom. Both the enemies of Jesus and the enemies of freedom were dismayed when instead of crushing their enemies, they enlivened them.[97] The Christian message was one that taught about how God was at work bringing the world together through the cross of Jesus Christ—there was "no crown without a cross."[98] The cross and subsequent resurrection revealed to the world that God held "the reins of the universe…when the light goes out at one hour, it comes on at another with the power of (God's) being. And this is the hope that keeps us going…"[99]

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[94] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Unfulfilled Hopes," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 360.

[95] James Cone has written a superb book about the significance of the cross and the lynching tree—the American equivalent to the Roman cross. He sums up its significance this way, "Both the cross and the lynching tree represented the worst in human beings and at the same time 'an unquenchable ontological thirst' for life that refuses to let the worst determine our final meaning." James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 3.

[96] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Seeking God," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 410.

[97] Cone, *The Cross* 65f.

[98] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Birth of a New Nation," in Carson *Symbol of the Movement*, 163.

[99] King, "A Walk Through the Holy Land," 175.

The cross, and the lynching tree, stood in-between unfreedom and freedom. Ultimately, King was convinced that the cross was "the power of God unto social and individual salvation."[100] The cross was proof that freedom had hope to rise in the midst of unfreedom.

King rebuked both white and black supremacists for spewing the foolishness that one segment of humanity was superior to another segment of the human community.[101] He said, "Black supremacy is as bad as white supremacy. God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown and yellow men, God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race."[102] King was steadfast in his declaration that God saw each individual as absolutely valuable.[103] He argued that "God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race and the creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers and every man will respect the dignity and the worth of human personality."[104] King disagreed with the ideas of racial superiority and national exceptionalism because

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[100] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Suffering and Faith," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 444.

[101] In a Lenten sermon that King delivered to the Detroit Council of Churches, he addressed both white and black supremacy. Regarding white supremacy he said, "For what is white supremacy but the foolish notion that God made a mistake and stamped an eternal stigma of inferiority on a certain race of people…(and)that certain people are to be relegated to the status of things rather than elevated to the status of persons." He had similar ideas regarding black supremacy, "Black supremacy is based on a great deal of foolishness. It is the foolish notion that the black man has made all of the contributions of civilization and that he will one day rule the world." Instead of superiority, King argues that God was "interested in the freedom of the whole human race and the creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers and every man will respect the dignity and the worth of human personality. Whenever we fail to believe this, we indulge in a tragic foolishness." Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Man Who Was a Fool: Sermon Delivered at the Detroit Council of Churches' Noon Lenten Services," in Carson, *Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 416.

[102] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Thirty-Fourth Annual Convention of the National Bar Association," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 269.

[103] Burrow notes, "Personalism teaches that persons are the highest intrinsic values." He further stated that King held two basic convictions: "God is personal and that persons have inestimable and inviolable worth, because they are summoned into existence and loved by God." Burrow, 7 and 67.

[104] King, "The Man Who Was a Fool," 416.

all people were children of God with innate personality. King said that God's will was for every person to "respect the dignity and worth of all human personality." He further proposed that if people continued to tear down the personhood of other people God would, "take charge" and "rise up and break the backbone of your power."[105] He was convinced God was real and God was working through him and others committed to eternal values to bring about the radical changes that would redeem the soul of America.

Christianity was a religion that brought people who had once been separated from God and from each other by sin and evil together in unity through the universal powers of love, power and justice as personified in Jesus Christ. According to King, Christianity taught that the ultimate sin in the world was separation because without interaction or communion one cannot truly exist.[106] "Sin is the revolt against God; sin is at bottom separation….It is the creature trying to project himself to the status of creator. It is the creature's failure to accept his limitations…and it ends up in tragic separation."[107] One of the worst manifestations of sin in America was segregation; "Segregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all have in Christ. The underlying philosophy of Christianity is diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of segregation."[108] In other words, segregation violated the foundations of both Christianity and the American democratic republic. It violated Christian doctrine because it sought to cheapen the worth

[105] King, "The Birth of a New Nation," 165f.

[106] "The metaphysics of Personalism maintains that the individual never experiences self in total isolation. Rather, the self always experiences something which it did not invent or create, but finds or receives from its "interaction and communication with other persons." Burrow, 157.

[107] King, "Man's Sin and God's Grace," 382.

[108] King, "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 343.

of African Americans by rejecting their personhood and denying them the opportunity to truly exist; with the opportunity to exist, the American promise was merely a dream.

The Church's Contribution to Unfreedom

Instead of inoculating itself from the disease of segregation, the church in America tended to use its sacred writings to justify slavery and segregation during the various epochs of American history. It had somehow convinced itself that slavery was complementary to the moral law of God. It justified its beliefs with arguments like those used by former Baylor University president George W. Baines, who stated that God had given white Christians, "the right to buy and own slaves as a perpetual inheritance…. We know that our Lord and the apostles recognized the institution of slavery as lawful, and made provisions both for masters and slaves in the first churches."[109] It further held that slavery was moral because it was through the avenue of slavery that the heathen Africans came to know the Good News of the Christian faith and the better ways of the Christian Western Civilization.[110] While scripture, tradition, and the goal of evangelization were the stated justification for the Christian support for slavery, in reality racism was the impetus for justifying Christian slave holders. Blatant racism pervades an article written in the *Texas Baptist* by J. A. Kimball in 1860 titled "Slavery." In the editorial he contended that Africans needed Europeans to pull them out of their barbarous state and sustain them in a life of civility because they are not evolved enough to

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[109] George W. Baines, "The Great Political Crisis Has Come," in *The Texas Baptist*, January 3, 1861.

[110] Anderson Buffington stated this view before a gathering of Texas Baptists in 1856. He said, "When we remember that the original design of the importation of Africans to the Christian shores of America was purely to Christianize them…we feel that in laboring for their salvation we are co-laborers with God." "Proceedings of the Baptist State Convention," (Anderson, TX: Texas Baptist Office, 1856), 15.

accomplish the feat on their own. He used an example of freed slaves in the American northeast who wandered about as drunks and thieves "degraded below the level of humanity and beyond the reach of gospel means" to justify his racism.[111] Many Christians in the South were convinced that the slave owner was a slave's best friend because the slave owner did not leave the child-like African American to fend for herself. Kimball posited, "(Negroes) are dependent as children and their energies must be directed by a superior race…their physical and moral training must necessarily be that which we bestow upon them."[112] These "well meaning" Christian leaders thought that although slavery may have slighted Africans and African Americans of their human rights, it was a minor indiscretion when compared to the social and eternal gains slave owners bestowed upon them.

In an article I wrote on the position of Texas' Baptists with regards to slavery and segregation, I noted the similarities between the positions of Christians in the 1860s and Christians in the 1960s. Like abolitionists who opposed slavery, many moderate Christians opposed segregation; unlike abolitionists many of these moderates believed that the federal government needed to allow the evolution of social mores and not the mandate of the federal government to bring about the end of segregation. E. S. James, the editor of *The Baptist Standard* from 1954 to 1966, unashamedly stood against segregation, but believed federal civil rights legislation that mandated integration was "unreasonable and unneeded."[113] While he believed that businesses, religious

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[111] "Slavery," in *The Texas Baptist*, October 25, 1860.

[112] J. A. Kimball, "Report on the Religious Condition of the Colored People," in the *Baptist State Convention of Texas: 1861-1862* (Houston: E W. Cave Publishers, 1863), 6.

[113] James played a significant part in the efforts to integrate Baylor University in 1962.

institutions, and academic institutions *should* be opened to people of every race, the option to do so was, "with the owner rather than the customer" and should be done by "volition rather than compulsion."[114] Many Christians believed that segregation was the natural state of humanity. They spoke out against both forced segregation and compulsory integration and spoke for the right of every individual to decide whether or not they segregated themselves from certain people or integrated with those same people. Other Christians used racist logic to justify America's segregationist practices arguing that God segregated humanity when God "made [one person] black, the other white."[115] King disagreed, "I understand that there are Christians among you who try to find biblical bases to justify segregation and argue that the Negro is inferior by nature. Oh, my friends, this is blasphemy and against everything that the Christian religion stands for."[116] Segregation, as a form of separation, was sin as it broke the divine chain that linked humanity, but also declared that certain segments of the human community were less than human. King believed that Christianity broke down the barriers between people and brought ultimate unity in the *agape* of Jesus, the Christ.

James spoke out against segregation, but his own racism came out in his argument that interracial marriage was immoral because it threatened to disturb God's intended state for humanity.[117] Like James, many well-meaning and kind-hearted American Christians disagreed with King's argument that separation was sin. American

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[114] E. S. James, "Desegregation, Yes – by Legislation, No," in the *Baptist Standard*, July 24, 1963.

[115] "Letter to the Editor," in the *Baptist Standard*, July 24, 1963, 4-5.

[116] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in *Strength to Love*, 140.

[117] James suggested that God had established "the five colors of men" and that those distinctions "have been on the earth since long before the beginning of detailed national history. They will all likely be here when the end shall come." E. S. James, "Desegregation and Intermarriage," in the *Baptist Standard*, January 15, 1964, 5.

Christendom of the evangelical and moderate form saw sin as the cause of the separation that existed between God and people and between people and people. Unity could only exist where sin did not exist: the unity of humanity could only exist in heavenly conditions. They saw some forms of separation as natural characteristics of being human in temporal conditions; neither the church nor the state could remove separation in the nation because people were sinful and sin led to separation. They thought that the government needed to create and maintain an atmosphere in which all people had the opportunity to be treated fairly and have an equal opportunity to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and an important aspect of this freedom was the right of the individual to befriend, marry, live next to, work with, and do business with anyone he or she chose. The individual could also decide to deny these same benefits to whomever they chose. Just as God could love Jacob and hate Esau, they could love and hate the people they chose.

The views of many American Christians, especially those that were evangelical in nature, were not all that different from the views of most political conservatives in America in that they valued the rights of the individual over the uplift of the community. They believed that *de jure* segregation was a political matter and not a moral matter. They thought that the government ought to settle the matter through constitutional means. *De facto* segregation, on the other hand, was a moral matter outside the purview of government because morality, like salvation, was personal and not communal. Evangelicals tended to believe that Jesus died to save (i.e. to overcome the consequences of sin) the individual from personal sin and that Jesus would eventually redeem society when he returned to earth and establish the visible kingdom of God. In the meantime,

"saved" individuals committed themselves to living righteously—to worship their God; to live lives that were unstained by the sin that oozed from the secular world; and by loving their neighbor as themselves. The individual, not the government, was responsible for her or his own actions, families, education, finances, and religion.[118] They believed that the paramount responsibility of the government was to make God honoring decisions that would naturally safeguard the God-given rights of every individual—freedom, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Christians were duty bound to pray for and support a responsible government; however, should the government violate individual liberty—especially freedom of conscience (i.e. religion)—Christians were duty bound to resist it because a violation of individual liberty was a trespass against God and they were supposed to obey God over any human authority. Since the individual was the primary interpreter of the will of God, the individual determined whether or not the government was true to its vocation. Therefore, they justified opposing the *Brown* decision and upholding Jim Crow mores based on their conviction that the individual's conscience superseded governmental authority.

Saving America from Her Sin

While King preached the Christian message of salvation through Jesus Christ, the meaning of his message differed from the message of most Evangelical Christians. His idea of salvation was much more communal and included a wider range of temporal

[118] Doug Hudgins, the pastor of the prestigious First Baptist in Jackson, Mississippi from 1946-1969, advanced this kind of Christian praxis. Charles Marsh notes that Hudgins "preached a gospel of individual salvation and personal orderliness, construing civil rights activism as simply irrelevant to the proclamation of the Jesus Christ as God." Marsh later notes, Hudgins and other Christian leaders of his ilk "placed an almost exclusive emphasis on individual regeneration and the competency of the soul before God." This belief helped to justify their resistance against the Federal Government validating the individual's ability to make important decisions for herself/himself. Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 89 and 91.

targets. Much of the reasoning behind the Evangelical understanding of the location of salvation—the afterlife or heaven—had to do with their understanding of sin and their eschatology. Sin completely incapacitated people from reaching a place where eternal ideals became experienced values. The ultimate realization of values needed miraculous intervention of a transcendent God and, while disagreeing on exact time and place, Evangelicals tended to believe that this intervention took place in a spiritual dimension and would be completed in the *eschaton*. King thought this belief system was neither relevant nor rational: it was irrelevant because it ignored the priority of *agape* and it was not rational because its attention was focused on a place and time beyond human comprehension. Human salvation had to be rational and rooted in love.[119] King believed that the Evangelical understanding of salvation did not meet either requirement.

King was sure that that sin was separation and that the "sins" addressed by Evangelical Christendom were merely the presenting problems of the primary problem of separation—the supreme sin. Since separation was sin, then people could find righteousness in unity and through meaningful relationships with all others. The problem in America was that two cancers threatened the health of the nation by promoting separation: segregation and capitalism. Segregation separated people by physical, ethnic, and religious differences and capitalism created the separation between those with the economic means and those with menial means. In both instances one group of people attempted to establish itself as superior to another group of people. Those divine

[119] According to Smith and Zepp, personalists held that:

> Reason and love are absolute norms and "fixed ends." If reason were not an absolute, science would be impossible; if love (i.e., respect for personality) were not an absolute, all value would be eliminated. If reason and love were universally sought as "fixed ends," they would produce unity and peace...King's confidence in the success of nonviolence was predicated upon his conviction that a reasonable and loving God acts in history to assure justice and freedom. Smith and Zepp, 108.

qualities that united humanity were squelched by human artifices. The antidote to America's cancer was rooted in God and available to every person: personality. Divine personality was infused in every individual and linked all people into one human network. Racial and economic inequalities threatened the security of the human network and hindered the advancement of the human race. Separation weakened humanity, King said, because all people, "[were] tied in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affect[ed] one directly, affect[ed] all indirectly."[120] The wellbeing of humanity depended on the kind of interaction taking place between people. America would be a greater nation if every person was sincerely concerned with the plight of every other person because of the interdependence of human existence. America would be a righteous nation when America was a unified nation. King was, therefore, not as concerned with the eternal consequences of sin as he was to sin's very real temporal consequences because it was the temporal consequences that blighted the divine personality within every human being. He had to preach and fight against segregation because he saw it as, "a blatant denial of the unity which we have in Christ. It substitutes an 'I-it' relationship for the 'I-thou' relationship….It scars the soul and degrades the personality."[121] Segregation was the tyrant that held America captive.

The people had to overthrow the tyrant; the walls of separation had to be torn down; and the chains of segregation had to be broken by the prisoners they tried to confine. As a pastor, King often used biblical language and imagery to make this point and inspire the masses. Like many pastors in the African American Christian tradition,

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[120] King, "The Man Who Was a Fool," 417.

[121] King, "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in *Strength,* 141.

King often would reference the Pentateuch and its telling of the Hebrew Exodus from Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land of freedom: "There is something in the soul that cries out for freedom…that reaches out for Canaan. Men cannot be satisfied with Egypt. They tried to adjust to it for a while. Many men have vested interests in Egypt, and they are slow to leave"[122] King was speaking to moderate white Christians afraid of causing social upheaval and to black Americans who would rather maintain the status quo instead of risk the consequences of standing up to "the man." Black and White Christian Americans not only allowed segregation to thrive in the secular realm, but protected it within the walls of their places of worship. King told them that segregation had to be excommunicated from the church so that the church could begin the task of working to redeem the soul of America.[123] If the church did not do the work of God, God would get the work done another way.[124] King did not want to wait for the creation of that new way, so he worked as a pastor because he believed the church, in spite of its sins, offered the best hope for humanity.

In this chapter I considered the religious influences on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s interpretation of freedom and the religious motivations behind Martin Luther King, Jr.,

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[122] King, "The Birth of a New Nation," 156f.

[123] Martin Luther King, Jr., "First, you must see that the church removes the yoke of segregation from its own body." "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 141.

[124] King made this point in one of his sermons.

> God comes in the picture even when the Church won't take a stand. God has injected a principle in this universe. God has said that all men must respect the dignity and worth of all human personality, "And if you don't do that, I will take charge." It seems this morning that I can hear God speaking. I can hear Him speaking throughout the universe, saying, "'Be still, and know that I am God.'" And if you don't stop, if you don't straighten up, if you don't stop exploiting people, I'm going to rise up and break the backbone of your power…" King, "The Birth of a New Nation," 165f.

commitment to the ideal of freedom. This chapter paid special attention the concept of *agape* and its powerful influence in King's life and its invaluable contribution to the regulation the human will and the actions of persons. This chapter also discussed the history of unfreedom in the American church and the promise of creating better conditions of freedom in the future. King believed freedom was an innate gift of God to every person that required actualization in the phenomenal world. History had proven that people had used their individual freedom to inhibit freedom instead of enhance freedom. If people, motivated by *agape*, would commit to God's moral law, freedom could be enjoyed by persons around the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

King and the Beloved Community

Introduction

Following the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Mississippi governor James P. Coleman sent a pretentious telegram to Martin Luther King, Jr. requesting that King reconsider a speaking engagement before the African American community in Jackson, Mississippi, because, "conditions are…tranquil…and in view of your record your presence here will be a great disservice to our Negro people."[1] King responded by first admonishing Governor Coleman to check his facts, because King had not accepted an invitation to speak in Jackson, and then he suggested that the governor consider King's public record of maintaining the peace and showing great concern "about achieving justice, fair play and equality for all people through legal and non-violent methods…in our struggle for justice."[2] In this response one reads that King's struggle for freedom had an end in view. The sins of America's past needed to be replaced with the righteous qualities of "justice, fair play and equality." This metamorphosis required time, personal exertion, and eventually King's life. King had a dream that he spoke of on the mall in Washington, D.C. in August of 1963. He dreamt of freedom and worked for its realization in the civil rights movement (see chapter two). The night before he was

[1] Telegram from Governor James P. Coleman to Martin Luther King, Jr. in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Birth of a New Age December 1955 to December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 220

[2] Telegram from Martin Luther King, Jr. to the Honorable J. P. Coleman in Carson, *Birth of a New Age*, 221.

assassinated, King spoke of his Mountain Top view of the Promised Land that he could see from Memphis, Tennessee. He lived in a nation suffering under the enslavement of unfreedom and hoped to lead the people into that Promised Land of actualized freedom (see chapter four). This chapter considers the actualization of King's dream in the real world by contemplating the topography of his envisioned Promised Land. It asserts that King imagined a world where the idea of freedom that burned in the souls of humanity would be enjoyed in the world where they experienced freedom in everyday life—in a place he called the Beloved Community. This chapter also discusses how the activity of the state is a necessary component to the fulfillment of his dream in that the state has a responsibility to protect the access to instrumental freedoms and to provide for substantive freedoms when persons are unable to enjoy them without assistance. King believed in democracy because he believed in the equal value of all people; I conclude with a discussion of King's understanding of democracy and its obligation to freedom.

A Prophetic Message for America

Why were "justice, fair play, and equality" important to King? These ideals were important because they were congruent with the values that undergirded human existence. His Judeo-Christian faith promoted these ideals in the writings of the Old Testament prophets, in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the letters of the New Testament.[3] These inviolable values obliged people to reinforce them and defend them when threatened. He decided he could not be a spectator watching injustice eat away at

[3] The prophet Amos writes in 5:24, "But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (KJV); Jesus is quoted as saying in Luke 10:27, "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (KJV); and the Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (KJV).

those fundamental values and decided to continue the tradition of African American pastors like Vernon Jordan and his father, Martin Luther King, Sr., and stand up against injustice, inequality, and hatred.[4]

When King served as the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, his young, idyllic mind envisioned a free world that could become a reality if he and others honored the inalienable rights and eternal values rooted in his Christian faith and used by the American founders to undergird American democracy. He believed that the writers of the Constitution expected the American government to exhibit them in both legislation and in law enforcement. Because the United States of America claimed to abide by these rights and values, King could dream of a "completely integrated society, a community of love and justice" and believe in its fulfillment.[5] He even had a name for this new integrated society: "The Beloved Community."[6]

The Beloved Community was the contemporary version of what Jesus had called the "Kingdom of God," as it too was a community "organized according to the will of

[4] Here he followed the teaching of Gandhi who held that the right stance to take in these situations was to "withdraw cooperation from the state that has become corrupt." M. K. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance: Satyagraha* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 4.

[5] Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr.: *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press: Valley Forge, PA, 1974), 119f.

[6] Smith and Zapp, 129. King did not originate the concept of the Beloved Community. The name "Beloved Kingdom" originated with Josiah Royce. Royce proposed that human salvation was found in the community. Rufus Burrow writes that for Royce, "The salvation of the individual man is determined by some sort of membership in a certain spiritual community…a divine community, in whose life the Christian virtues are to reach their highest expression and the spirit of the Master is to obtain its earthly fulfillment." Royce called this salvific community "the Beloved Community." He further notes that since King never referenced Royce, he most likely heard of this "beloved community" from Brightman and DeWolf while going to graduate school in Boston. Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2006), 162 and 164.

God."[7] The Beloved Community was similar to Thomas More's "utopia" in that all citizens were treated equally and the common good was the ultimate concern of individuals and Marx and Engle's classless societies (with the obvious exceptions of the inclusion an all-encompassing deity and the absence of a radical revolution) in that one group of people would not seek to dominate another group for economic gain. It was an idea broached by Paul Tillich, whose theology was one of the topics of King's dissertation, when he explained his idea of *kairos*—those moments in time when, "the Kingdom of God breaks into history conquering destructive structures of existence."[8] Prejudice, bigotry, unrestrained capitalism, and a seemingly unconcerned government had worked together throughout American history to destroy the structures of existence for minorities and the poor. King hoped the Beloved Community would not only halt the corrosive tendencies of most American institutions, but also heal America's brokenness. Tillich did not believe in the permanent establishment of the Kingdom of God because he thought that the destructive forces of human nature would institutionalize a situation's synthesis and make an idol out of God's solutions. King was more optimistic than was Tillich regarding the goodness of human nature and permanence of humanity's salvation. He believed God willed human salvation and God's love was more robust than human sin. He was convinced that although the destructive structures of bigotry, racism, poverty, and war obstructed the growth of the Beloved Community, the transcendent power of *agape* could subdue those destructive forces and create fertile ground in which

[7] "The vision of the 'Beloved Community' was the organizing principle of all of King's through at activity. His writings and his involvement in the civil rights movement were illustrations of and footnotes to his fundamental preoccupation with the actualization of an inclusive human community." Smith and Zepp, 119

[8] Paul Tillich, "To Love as Men: Anatomy of Peace," 22.

the Beloved Community could burgeon. The Beloved Community was possible, but the actions of some free people would obstruct its ultimate realization.[9] He understood that the human will had a propensity to turn away from God's will for the world; but he also believed that a conflagration of religion, politics, and economics could help mold the minds and will of people to make strides toward freedom—toward closer "approximations" of the Beloved Community.

From the beginning of his public life as a pastor in Montgomery and leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), King pursued the idea of the Beloved Community. Unlike those of the ilk of Marcus Garvey or Elijah Mohammed who called for the separation of the races, King dreamed of an integrated society.[10] King showed this inclination in Montgomery where he willingly worked with the white members of the Alabama Council on Human Relations (ACHR)—a prominent actor in the boycott. King appreciated the ACHR because it used "research and action" to transform the economic, educational, and vocational systems in Alabama to provide "equal opportunity for all the people of Alabama."[11] The Council, primarily motivated to create a healthy business

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[9] "King preached about what is achievable regarding the community of love. Although he clearly did not believe there would ever be a perfect manifestation of this community in the world, he was also convinced that there could be greater approximations of it. The problem, as he saw it, had less to do with human resources and ability, and everything to do with human will." Burrow, 169.

[10] James Cone believes the differences between integrationists (King) and nationalists (Mohammed) was how they handled W. E. B. DuBois's conundrum of the "double-consciousness" of "Africans in America." Cone suggests that integrationists take hold of both their African and American qualities and hope that African American leaders will "prick the conscience of whites, showing the contradictions between their professed values and their hypocrisy and will grant blacks the same freedom that they themselves enjoy." Nationalists, on the other hand, reject their American identity and hold tightly to their African qualities and maintain that "blacks don't belong with whites, that whites are killing blacks, generation after generation. Blacks should, therefore, separate from America, either by returning to Africa of by going some other place where they can create sociopolitical structures that are derived from their own history and clulture." James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 3 and 4.

[11] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992, 32

environment, attempted to use the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and promises of the American Constitution to embolden a silent majority of moderate citizens to protect the fundamental rights of all of God's children and grant every person the "equal opportunity to contribute to and share in the life of our nation."[12] Even though the ACHR's understanding of equal opportunity was not the same as King's understanding of equal opportunity, the Council acted as an agent of the Beloved Community because it worked on behalf of "all the people." King fought for equal opportunity, not because he wanted to expand the market place, but because of the fundamental equality of all people as receivers of an equal measure of divine personality. The ACHR wanted elected officials at the city, county, and state levels to relieve racial strife by repealing Jim Crow laws and they also called on business owners in Alabama to hire African Americans because the government was granting more manufacturing contracts to desegregated businesses headquartered in communities where there was a sense of racial stability. Furthermore, they hoped to convince local politicians to open up the front doors of businesses to African American consumers whose currency was the same as that used by the white community. They were concerned about the consumer and not so much concerned about the person—they were looking for personal gain and not protecting the value of the other person. King appreciated the direction of the ACHR even though he disagreed with their motivation. King was an opponent of *laissez faire* capitalism, because it proliferated selfish ambition, the hoarding of capital, and the separation of the

[12] King, *Stride*, 32

haves and have not's.[13] Nevertheless, any move toward the integration of the human community was a step in the right direction.

Freedom and the Beloved Community

King's goal in America was to grab hold of the country and get it stepping in the direction of true freedom. If Americans were to be in step with freedom, they needed to head toward a new destination and examine the means by which they travelled there. King did not believe freedom had its origins in the market place; freedom had its origins in the eternal personality that governed the earth. The market could be used as a tool to enhance the actualized freedom of all people, but ought not to be treated as if it were a god. He believed that freedom was found not in the gross exercise of individual liberty, but in the generous practice of agape between persons in the beloved community. He said, "We must prepare to live in a New World….We must rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns, with a broader concern for all humanity…this new world is a world of geographical togetherness.[14] King's dream was both an American Dream and a universal dream that was rooted in the values of his Christian faith which anticipated that its adherents would practice *agape*.[15] In the philosophical debate regarding the association between virtue, liberty and equality, King valued virtue

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[13] "It is my opinion that we do. I am convinced that capitalism has seen its best days in America and…in the entire world…(Capitalism) has failed to meet the needs of the masses." "Four Papers on Preaching Issues," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Advocate of the Social Gospel September 1948 – March 1963*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 104.

[14] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Birth of a New Age," in Carson, *Birth of a New Age*, 342.

[15] "King's vision of the Beloved Community was rooted not only in the American Dream, but, more importantly, it was rooted in his religious faith…King's conception of the Beloved Community was grounded…in the millennial hope of Judeo-Christian religion." Smith and Zepp, 128. Smith and Zepp ascribe to this millennial hope "a concern for communal life, corporate faith, social justice, and a hope for a transformed society." Smith and Zepp, 129.

and the ideal of equality more than he valued liberty. Liberty was the exercise of the particular will of the individual which was too often used to pursue evil ends.[16] Liberty needed the guidance of virtue and a concern for the other (i.e. equality) His emphasis on virtue, rooted in an objective deity, was necessary to compel people to avoid the separation of sin and pursue the righteousness of community. His push for equality found its source in the spirit that drove history toward fraternity. The spirit of fraternity was constrained by human will, and the human will was fundamentally selfish. Fraternity, which challenged the particular will, required the regulation of individual liberty for the common good—the regulator of individual liberty is the will of God.[17]

The human will was properly regulated when the individual and the society were committed to the practice of *agape*. *Agape* was the governing force that inspired and empowered people toward the "fashioning of a truly Christian nation."[18] *Agape* is freedom in its active state. In a *Christian nation* the people practice *agape* by purposefully showing legitimate concern for the other as a fellow child of God and willingly risking the loss of resources for the benefit of the other person—they are being free by making decisions to abide by the will of God and to go and do the work of God.

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[16] "King new that as long as there are morally autonomous beings in the world, there will always be the occasion for sin. There will always be the possibility that people will misuse their freedom in ways that contradict the ethics of the beloved community…human freedom is the occasion for both blessings and curse." Burrow, 171.

[17] King did not agree with Gandhi that self-denial was an essential component in the life of a Satyagrahi. Gandhi expected those who sought for truth and practiced *ahimsa* to also practice *brahmacharya* –the restraint of "physical and mental sexual desire" and "complete control over all the senses." King had a more dualist view of humanity than Gandhi and was willing to do those things that satisfied the desires of his body—he willingly smoked, drank, and had sex. Gandhi believed that it was "foolish" to "intentionally dissipate vital energy in sensual enjoyment." 95, 97, and 44.

[18] Martin Luther King Jr., "For All…A Non-Segregated Society: A Message for Race Relations Sunday," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 125.

It was the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, witnessing to the prophetic tradition, who could not stand down when those with power used their power to create unnatural inequalities—they had to act on behalf of justice because the spirit of Christ required them "to live and behave in ways that contribute to the actualization of the community of love."[19] King was certain that the citizens of a truly Christian nation had to live in such a way that freedom was constructed into a reality. Freedom allowed Americans to pursue a more righteous American dream that appreciated the eternal values and treasured persons more than possessions.

Children of God and Citizens of the World

King was a proponent of the American dream, but he was not however, a proponent of American exceptionalism. King saw himself as a citizen of the world whose own well-being was tied to the well-being of all the other citizens of the world. His Christian Personalism taught the equal value of all people because of the eternal personality that bound all people in a symbiotic circle that did not allow for a "selfish profit motive," a "prostituded [sic] conception of nationalism," or any acceptance of racial superiority. Instead it would revolve around the "sacredness of human personality" and the "chief aim" of protecting and improving life.[20] He supported the basic premises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that all people everywhere had a fundamental right to substantive freedom: to food, housing, health, social security, and personal security. The American Dream, like freedom, was personal and corporate. The person had the right to be who he/she wanted to be and believe what he/she wanted to

[19] Burrow, 163.

[20] Benjamin Elijah Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 160f.

believe without the anxiety that comes along with fear of survival or threat of retribution: a good government was obliged to create and protect this kind of free society because its values were in line with the values of God. The individual did not have the right to amass personal wealth while others languished in hunger and poverty nor did the individual have the right to coerce another individual to adhere to a certain belief system or lifestyle. As persons, people possess the innate right to freedom in its substantive and instrumental aspects. I believe King would agree with Leo Strauss that the modern ideals of freedom are a problem for humanity because of their relativistic nature. True freedom must be regulated by transcendent values that supplant the whimsical nature of individual free will. The American Dream was, for King, the hope that all people would live in one united, free, and satisfied world.[21]

The dream of one united world was rooted in King's personalism and African American theology. Like other Christian Personalists, King believed that "reality (was) personal, persons (had) inviolable dignity, to be (was) to be free, reality (was) social, and the universe (was) friendly to values"—the universe yearned for freedom.[22] Since all people yearned for freedom, King dreamed of a world that lived in the condition of freedom. The core of King's ideal of freedom in the Beloved Community lay in four principles: (1) "the impartiality of God"—that is, God cared for all people with the same fervency; (2) "the sacramentalist idea of the cosmos"—that is that God provided the strength to endure the difficult realities of life; (3) a strong belief in the value of the human personality; and (4) "each person is a distinct ontological entity who

[21] Leo Strauss, "Relativism," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17.

[22] Burrow, 90.

finds…fulfillment and purpose through personal and social relationships based on the *agape* ethic"—that is, that all people are important members of a larger whole.[23] These convictions drove him in his attempt to help develop a free world in which every human was treated as a person of equal worth and dignity. Ultimately, one cannot be free unless all are free and all cannot be free until everyone is free. A free world required a united world.

Segregation, Jim Crow, the resistance of various racists groups, and a deep infatuation with the free market hindered advancements toward the Beloved Community in the United States but did not keep it out of King's dream. He believed that if United States citizens held on to the American Dream and would submit their will to the eternal moral code that governed the world, they could also grab on to his dream of the Beloved Community—both dreams sought to allow people an equal opportunity to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The American Constitution promised civil liberties and protected civil rights; established a system of checks and balances to protect citizens from an abusive government; and allowed for people to peacefully protest when the government was derelict or oppressive. In the various campaigns in which he and the SCLC participated, King was conscientious of not violating the rule of law that undergirded the Constitution because he believed that his compliance would prove his patriotism and his willingness to operate within the established system.[24] American ideals were wonderful but American indiscretions were woeful. The status quo had to be challenged and transformed.

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[23] Burrow, 172.

[24] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Testimony to the Democratic National Committee on Platform and Resolutions" in Carson, *Birth of a New Age*, 337.

The Beloved Community was the goal King worked to achieve, but the more he worked toward its attainment, the more resistance he faced. He found that the realization of his dream had failed to materialize "because sin exists on every level of man's existence, the death of one tyranny is followed by the emergence of another tyranny."[25] He was often frustrated but never defeated. Like Sisyphus and his stone, King approached the crest of realizing his dream, only to have his dream crushed when the docile moderates and hostile resistors extinguished the flames of freedom. Moderates suggested that a peaceful path to integration would eventually emerge as people and society evolved. Unlike many of his progressive friends, he was convinced that freedom was not inevitable. In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" he stated, "Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation."[26] Too many people and organizations were afraid of the fight or wanted to maintain the façade that nice people will eventually act nicely.[27] Fear was not a justifiable argument to accept an unacceptable status quo.[28]

When attempting to justify the various protests led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), King noted that the use of "creative methods" by the

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[25] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Death to Evil on the Sea Shore," in *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 83.

[26] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail," <web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf>. August, 2010.

[27] "More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." – Letter from Birmingham Jail

[28] Gandhi had taught that cowardice was not an acceptable alternative to injustice. He wrote, "I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence." Gandhi, 132

modern civil rights movement helped African Americans "achieve full citizenship rights" by "arousing the dozing conscience of the white community and hoping to ultimately achieve the beloved community and the type of brotherhood that is necessary for us to survive in a meaningful manner."[29] He meant to awake a slumbering government. King understood that politicians wanted their constituents to re-elect them, so they stood up against the instigators of Southern and urban riots, but did nothing about the causes of these social fissures. He was convinced that the federal government had "the power to establish the legal undergirding that can insure progress;" however, they lacked the political will to use their authority to enforce the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of "equal protection under the law."[30] The SCLC believed they were obliged to force the government's hand to act in accordance with its founding principles.

The Beloved Community provided the appropriate spirit of protest and supplied the proper profile for America to move forward. It was more than an impossible dream; it was the goal of the movement of history. He was aware of the advance of democracy around the world as previously colonized countries gained their independence and developed democratic governments. He was convinced that the Divine personality who instilled natural rights in humanity also breathed out the American spirit that drove history towards the goal of equal valuation of the personality of all human beings. He believed that the foundations of this coming kingdom had been laid in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, federal statutes, and in the jurisprudence of the federal

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[29] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Revolt Without Violence—The Negro's New Strategy," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 392f.

[30] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at the Religious Leaders' Conference on 11 May 1959," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Threshold of a New Decade January 1959-December, 1960,* ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 200.

courts. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided a framework to continue the construction of his dream.

Resisting Unfreedom

Some Americans charged that King's attempt to "arouse dozing consciences" was extreme. He responded that "creative extremism" was necessary for the realization of a righteous end.[31] Here Gandhi's teachings regarding *Satyagraha* surely influenced King. Gandhi taught that "Those who believe that they are not bound to obey laws which are repugnant to their conscience have only the remedy of passive resistance open to them."[32] The government was doing nothing to address the tyrannical tendencies of a bigoted nation. The majority needed to awake the will to protect the natural rights of all the citizens of the United States of America.[33]

Evil perpetuate the world and creates conditions of unfreedom. Proponents of freedom must resist those who willfully violate human personality for the good of the Beloved Community. The road to freedom is a struggle—the cross is a symbol of that struggle. King noted that "privileged classes do not give up their privileges voluntarily…they do not give them up with strong resistance."[34] The privileged had devalued the person and overvalued their wealth and privilege. Oppressed people develop in these conditions of unfreedom and are deceived into believing that their

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[31] "So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?... Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists." Letter from Birmingham Jail

[32] Gandhi, 19.

[33] "Strength does not come from physical capacity, but from an indomitable will." Gandhi, 133.

[34] Martin Luther King, Jr., Interview by Richard D. Heffner for "The Open Mind," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 127.

freedom depends on possessing the same privilege of the wealthy classes. King was keenly aware of the bitterness that ate at the soul of many African Americans and was cognizant of the power of bitterness to ruin relationships between people. He warned that bitterness had to subside if the Beloved Community was to become a reality.[35] A violent reaction, or even an absolute Marxian revolution, was a real possibility. However, the values of the Kingdom did not allow for a violent struggle: the fight for freedom required that its fighters respect human worth and eternal values by avoiding violence against another.[36] King believed this was accomplished through a commitment to non-violent resistance. The two great warriors of this kind of battle were Jesus and Gandhi. Jesus provided the soldier's manual in the Sermon on the Mount and exemplified it in the events leading to his death on a cross. Gandhi brought those teachings to life in the twentieth century and exemplified how they could be applied in oppressive societies like South Africa and India.[37] King read Gandhi while in seminary but it was not until Bayard Rustin and Glen Smiley gave King intensive training in Gandhian teachings and practices that he was able to successfully implement non-violent resistance into the

[35] "We must prepare to go into this new age without bitterness…[bitterness] will be just a perpetuation of the old way…the end is the creation of a beloved community." King, "Birth of a New Age," 344.

[36] This is a belief rooted in Gandhi's commitment to *Satyagraha* (holding on to truth). Gandhi wrote that *Satyagraha* was "the vindication of the truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent, but on one's self." Gandhi, 6.

[37] King submitted that "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to live the love ethic of Jesus above mere intention between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale." Martin Luther King, Jr., "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 478.

modern civil rights movement.[38] Non-violent resistance was a viable option because it redeemed the vitriol of violence. Gandhi taught that, "Civil disobedience is a sovereign method of transmitting this (latent violence) undisciplined, life destroying latent energy into discipline life-saving energy whose use ensures absolute success."[39] Protest was not meant to be destructive force, but a means to achievement.

Many people equated non-violent resistance with passivity and others equated any resistance with violence, so King often clarified the differences. He said that non-violent resistance: (1) was not for cowards because resistance was necessary; (2) did not "seek to defeat or humiliate," but instead sought to win friendship and increase understanding; (3) attacked the "forces of evil" and not the people imprisoned by those forces; (4) avoided both external and internal forces; and, (5) "(was) based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice."[40] Non-violent resistance was not for those bent on revenge—it required that people have the strength to resist the temptation to exact vengeance and to instead forgive and possess the willingness to suffer to save the soul of one's offender.[41]

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[38] Bayard Rustin introduced himself to King while King was leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Because of the threats against King and his family, he allowed local men to carry weapons as they provided security for him and he kept a pistol in his home. Rustin doubted King understood the fundamentals of non-violence and therefore introduced him to Smalley who taught him Gandhian non-violence. The efforts of Rustin and Smalley led King to give up his weapons and solidified King's commitment to non-violence.

[39] Gandhi, 239.

[40] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence and Racial Justice" and "Remarks in Acceptance of the Forty-Second Spingarn Medal at the Forty-eighth Annual NAACP Convention," in Carson, *The Symbol of the Movement*, 121 and 232.

[41] "The Satyagrahi seeks to convert his opponent by sheer force of character and suffering. The purer he is and the more he suffers, the quicker the progress." Gandhi, 188.

Instead of reacting to oppression with violence, King called for the violated to respond with love.[42] King's fight was against evil, unjust laws, crooked institutions, and dilapidated social structures. He claimed to hold no ill will against the people caught up in the destructive tow of these dehumanizing forces. This kind of non-violent response was rooted in the depth of human existence because human existence was affixed to the divine.[43] It was that *divine* personality that differentiated the human species from all other species and gave "the dignity and worth of all human personality."[44] The protest against injustice had to be a non-violent protest as a violent protest was an evil response to evil and would therefore prove that the Beloved Community did not exist. Victory in the non-violent campaign against injustice was realized not when enemies were annihilated, but victory was a reality when enemies became friends.[45] King believed that only just means could bring about the just ends of the beloved community. He was not only committed to "the tactics of non-violence," he also sanctioned what he called "the spirit of non-violence" because non-violent efforts without non-violent motivations would bring about, "a new kind of violence."[46] Like Gandhi, he believed that "violence is the negation of (the) great spiritual force, which can only be cultivated and wielded by

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[42] "…use love as your weapon…Always avoid violence." King, "Paul's Letter to American Christians," in Strength, 142.

[43] "Non-violence means reliance on God, the Rock of Ages. If we would seek His aid, we must approach him with a humble and contrite heart." Gandhi, 58

[44] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Negroes are Not Moving too Fast" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990), 180

[45] During the Indian revolution for independence, Gandhi noted that freedom would not come until every Indian held the life of every English person, including English soldiers, "as sacred as those of our dear loved ones." Gandhi, 154.

[46] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Statement to the Press at the Beginning of the Youth Leadership Conference," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 427.

those who will entirely eschew violence."[47] Violence was "eschewed" because in harming another one was harming herself. When the bell tolled, it tolled for all—this was a lesson that he believed all people, especially members of White Citizens Counsels and bigoted politicians, needed to learn.

Entrance into the Beloved Community returned people to the state of nature. In their original state people were spiritual, communal, and reasonable. Economic inequality, materialism, and the human proclivity toward selfishness brought about the conflict and oppression that stained the human landscape and strained human relations. King's push for freedom was a push for equality and an equal and united people would populate the Beloved Community. Where inequalities have existed in human history, the leveling of the social structure has at least been arduous and often fatal. King often opined, "Even a casual look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertion and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."[48] It was this struggle for justice—a struggle for a free society consisting of an appreciation of the equal status of all human personality by all human personalities—that King and the SCLC were dedicated. It was a struggle that demanded organization, a respect for the rule of law (as long as the rule of law was fundamentally just), and a willingness to protest against injustice in its many forms. King's plan to bring about a closer realization of the Beloved Community was to "struggle through legislation; gain the ballot; urge the federal government to use all its constitutional power to enforce the law…; invest big

[47] Gandhi, 34.

[48] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at Public Meeting of the Southern Christian Ministers Conference of Mississippi," in Carson, *Threshold of a New Decade*, 284.

money in the cause of freedom; and have the moral courage to stand up and protest against injustice wherever we find it."[49]

King recognized that the struggle would become tiresome, so he called on committed protestors to continue their fight for "first-class citizenship" with *agape*, passion and verve until they had removed "every vestige of segregation and discrimination from our nation."[50] When the freedom fighters grew weary and frustrated, King challenged them to find their strength in God and to keep their focus on the goal of the Beloved Community.[51] He called on them to, "continue to work passionately and vigorously for your God-given and constitutional rights…You cannot in good conscience sell your birthright of freedom for a mess of segregated pottage."[52] Referencing the philosophy of Tillich and the teachings of Gandhi, he encouraged them to keep a tight grip on the "courage to be" because it was that courage that "helps you to go on in spite of it all."[53]

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[49] King, "Remarks," 232.

[50] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in *The Trumpet of Conscience,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 74.

[51] Gandhi challenged Satyagrahis to do the same, "God is the only help for the helpless…God tries His votaries through and through, but never beyond endurance." Gandhi, 189.

[52] King, "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 142.

[53] King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 76. In his book *The Protestant Era*, Tillich wrote that human personality gives the individual the "power over one's self, not to be bound to one's given nature." (115) That is, human personality gives the individual the power *to be*. The ability *to be* means that people have the capacity to look into the abyss of nothingness and continue to express their humanity. (See *Courage to Be*, 30 and 21) Gandhi spoke of *Soul Force* and how *Soul Force* existed beyond the conditions of the temporal and "still lived on" in of "the ward of the world." Gandhi, 16.

The Beloved Community was a palpable solution to the problems of people rooted in the transcendent personality that conducted the affairs of humankind. By holding this position, King challenged both materialistic progressives and other worldly Christians. He told the secularist progressive that sin was a real aspect of the human condition and its presence would not willingly permit the establishment of a righteous (i.e. just) society.[54] To those who endured the difficulties of the present for the eternal reward of the future he said, "one day the idle industries of Appalachia will be revitalized, and the empty stomachs of Mississippi will be filled, and brotherhood will be more than a few words at the end of a prayer…"[55] The Beloved Community could not be realized without the incorporation of the immanent and transcendent realities that made people who they were. King alluded to this necessity when he stated, "A vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws will bring an end to segregated public facilities which are barriers to a truly desegregated society, but it cannot bring an end to fear, prejudice, pride, and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society."[56] It took the spirit, or personality, of God at work in people and in the community of people to overcome the results brought about by the sin of separation. While many within the evangelical and African American Christian tradition believed that ultimate redemption would not come until the end of time, King believed it had to come within time. He believed it could be realized, not only through education and legal compulsion, but also

[54] Burrow notes "…[King's] sense of the depth and prevalence of human sin caused him to be adamant in his claim that there is no place in the world that he beloved community will roll in on the wheels of inevitability. Responsible persons, aware of their moral autonomy, will have to work relentlessly and cooperatively with each other and with God in order to attain it." Burrow, 172

[55] King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 77.

[56] Burrow, 38.

because the spirit of God was present in the world and could transform the human heart. Transformation of the heart was necessary because, he wrote, "True integration will be achieved by true neighbors who are willingly obedient to unenforceable obligations."[57] The church and the state needed the other to bring these conditions about in America and around the world.

Government was an important component in creating conditions of freedom. Lewis Baldwin suggests that King's "black experience" helped him realize the importance of "combining politics and religion for the creation of a more peaceful, just, and inclusive society."[58] During his undergraduate studies at Morehouse, King was certainly influenced the president of the college, Benjamin Mays. Mays, in his 1945 (three years before King graduated) commencement address at Morehouse, encouraged the graduates that if that class would be intentional in their efforts to live by the values of God and work to make democracy properly function, they could "democratize and Christianize America in one generation."[59] He reminded the graduates that the Church originated with God and affirmed the sacredness of human life and the "intrinsic worth and value" of each individual.[60] These values were to "set the standard of the secular order"—a prophetic voice in the nation.[61] He called on the government to live up to the principles established in the Constitution and its Bill of Rights. He expected an active

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[57] Martin Luther King, Jr., "On Being a Good Neighbor," in *Strength to Love,* 38.

[58] Lewis H. Baldwin, "On the Relations of the Christian to the State: The Development of Kingian Ethic," in *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 125.

[59] Benjamin E. Mays, "Democratizing and Christianizing American in This Generation," in *The Journal for Negro Education* Vol. 14 No. 4 (Autumn, 1945), 528. (527-534)

[60] Ibid., 529.

[61] Ibid.

government that would provide the substantive freedoms for the people.[62] He proposed that Americans were "as democratic as we live and we are as Christian as we act."[63] Baldwin believes that King had a "nuanced understanding of the complexities of the American history and her documents of Freedom" (i.e. Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Emancipation Proclamation).[64] King was aware of the inconsistency in the praxis of their ideals, but he was still able to use their "noble ideals" as sources "to validate a movement of freedom."[65] He further expected Christian morality to influence public policy.[66] King understood that freedom was an innate quality of human existence that needed political assistance to thrive.

Changing social conditions was a necessary ingredient for freedom but was not enough on its own. If the Beloved Community were only a tactile reality or construct, people would more readily give up their struggle for freedom or exact revenge from their offenders. The Kingdom brought depth to life. The willingness to endure the cruelty of those who resisted the advancement of the Kingdom without seeking revenge was rooted in the eternal and not the temporal and it was that "capacity to suffer" that would "one

[62] Mays put forth a progressive agenda for the federal government. He called on the government to: work with private industry to provide "full employment"; "establish a minimum annual per-capita expenditure and minimum class room expenditure" for children; work with private industry to eliminate slums; "provide proper hospital care for every citizen"; and "abolish segregation." Mays, 529-531.

[63] Mays, 531.

[64] Baldwin, 126.

65 Ibid.

[66] Baldwin goes so far as to claim that for King, "the separation of politics from religion remained as foreign to him as the isolation of art from human struggle…the very survival of the nation ultimately hinged on the capacity of government and religion to work together for the common good." Baldwin, 158.

day…win our freedom."[67] The willingness and ability to suffer was an element of Gandhi's non-violent resistance. He taught his Satyagrahis "to convert [their] opponent by sheer force of character and suffering. The purer he is and the more he suffers, the quicker the progress."[68] A strong character meant one was faithful in their pursuit of truth (God) and by suffering one was trusting God for the victory and not violent force. A purely mundane stand against oppression would not be enough to bring about the realization of a world where all personalities respected and valued all other personalities: people needed to have "absolute faith 'in the ultimate morality of the universe, and [the belief] that all reality hinges on moral foundations.'"[69] It was people who trusted in God and who were committed to the essence of *agape* who would bring about the ultimate transformation of a broken world. Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, Jr., noted that King held that the Judeo-Christian teachings of creation ("all persons are created in the image of God and are therefore inseparably bound together"); social justice ("justice and righteousness in this-worldly terms, and expected to be achieved within history"); and *agape* ("redeeming good will for all men…It is the love of God operating in the human heart"…*Agape* will do whatever is necessary to originate and perpetuate community) proved that God was concerned with the mundane and expected people to use the resources provided by the eternal to help bring about the Beloved Community.[70] The more Nietzschean Nation of Islam and young leaders of the Student Nonviolent

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[67] King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 75. Gandhi taught, "Freedom is a fruit of suffering." He also argued that "No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering." Gandhi, 269 and 113.

[68] Gandhi, 188.

[69] Burrow, 193.

[70] Smith and Zepp, 130-31.

Coordinating Committee considered this idea the deception or shtick of the weak; King considered this idea as a necessity and just as real as any empirical reality.

Because the battle was more than physical, people did not have to accept the status quo, and people did not have to give up hope merely because the systems that surrounded them constantly disappointed them. The hope of the spiritual gave the people an opportunity to choose another way—a way that was rooted in the infinite and not subject to the poor choices of free people. The weak had an alternative to forced or blind submission to the will of the strong. It was King's belief in "an objective moral order" that instilled in every individual a strong desire to choose virtue over selfish ambition, greed, and inequality. The tie that bound all people also compelled the one to act on the behalf of the other when immoral laws and actions subjected the other to inhumane conditions. People had created the conditions of unfreedom by moving away from the moral law (thus they were immoral). Persons could now choose morality over immorality because they are compelled to follow the moral law to create the conditions of freedom.

Real Problems Demand Real Solutions

The profound inequalities that inspired King's actions and challenged King's dream of the Beloved Community had to be resolved by real efforts and experienced in definite ways. Following the Civil War, recently emancipated African Americans spread the word that the American government was going to compensate the former slaves by giving them forty acres of their own and a mule to help work the land. Whether the claim came from a misinformed Freedman's Bureau worker or a conniving politician, the perceived promises never materialized. Many African Americans hoped to earn the

respect of Anglo-Americans by risking their lives and shedding their blood in the various battle theaters of World War I and World War II only to be frustrated when their hopes were not realized either. The promises of jobs in public transportation in Memphis; the promise of integrated public recreation facilities in Birmingham; the promise of open housing practices in Chicago followed the same fate of land, mules, and respect. King was well aware of broken promises and shattered dreams, so he challenged the status quo and called for the federal government to provide reparations for African Americans and other social uplift programs for the most financially deprived peoples of the United States. These were necessary steps toward the redemption of America's soul.

The scope of the Beloved Community's reforms extended beyond the travesties of segregation and Jim Crow, as it also included the inequalities of *laissez faire* capitalism.[71] King disagreed with conservative politicians and free market economists who thought the government's responsibility to the people was to merely provide conditions for individuals to pursue their dreams. Freedom, according to King, consisted not of just one component: it consisted of both instrumental freedom but also substantive freedom. The immorality of the capitalist free market was, according to King, the impetus behind the urban unrest around the country. He noted, "Prosperity gluts the middle and upper classes, while poverty imprisons more than thirty million Americans and starvation literally stalks rural areas of the South.[72] "King's visions of the future included a society which would be free not only from the malformation of persons resulting from racial

[71] "King was aware that in order to actualize that vision, the structures of economic injustice so characteristic of capitalism had to be eliminated and supplanted by those that would produce economic justice…King's views reflect an early and consistent concern…for an egalitarian socialistic approach to wealth and property." Smith and Zepp, 123.

[72] King, "Youth and Social Action," in King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 37.

hatred but also free from abnormality of persons resulting from economic injustice and exploitation."[73] He was convinced that human rights had evolved, as Karel Vasak's model would later propose, from political rights (*liberté*) to social/economic (*égalité*) and fraternal (*fraternité*) rights.[74] He argued that it was the responsibility of the government and duty of all rational people to protect the conditions and provide the resources for people to pursue their dreams. King believed "that the modern state, with whatever form of political authority, is essentially a welfare state." He thought that the government "derive(d) its legitimacy from its ability to provide the social and economic security that allows its citizens to pursue their ideas of the good and achieve happiness."[75] "The rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness mean that all individuals everywhere should have 'three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.'"[76] King's solution was a democratic socialist solution that called for the government to supply the means for a strong structure of social security that had less involvement from the federal bureaucracy and more input at the local level. King hoped to "'Hollow [the federal bureaucracy] out' and reduce it to an administrative shell controlled by the deliberative decisions made by local communities." He wanted citizens to provide "oversight, and direct control" over the resources provided by the government.[77] In the Beloved Community, King wanted

[73] Smith and Zepp, 122.

[74] *Human Rights in the World Community: Issues and Actions*, eds. Richard Pierre Claude and Burns H. Weston, 3rd edition, 2006, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 21.

[75] Jose-Antonio M. Orosco, "Martin Luther King, Jr's Conception of Freedom and Radical Democracy," in *Journal of Social Philosophy* (Vol 32 No 3 Fall 2001, 366-401), 397.

[76] Smith and Zepp, 127.

[77] Orosco, 398.

people to be free, "from unwarranted interference" from the federal bureaucracy but also expected people to accept their responsibility to work together with others "to make principles of justice part of their everyday lives."[78]

King's Kind of Democracy

Democracy was the system of government that would maintain order and ensure equality among the citizens in the Beloved Community.[79] I believe that over time King develops a type of democracy that protected the inalienable rights of Locke; ensured the participatory democracy of Athens; and brought a transcendent foundation to the socialist qualities of Rousseau. For over two thousand years Greek and Western philosophers have contemplated the role of freedom in the body politic. Plato tells us that Socrates believed that the guardians of the state were "to dedicate themselves wholly to the maintenance of freedom in the State, making this their craft, and engaging in no work which does not bear to this end."[80] However, Socrates also argued that freedom, especially the freedom offered in a democracy, led to license for the fragile constitutions of most individuals and eventually ruined the state.[81] The purpose of the state—a state led by "philosopher kings"—was to protect free citizens from a profusion of personal freedom. The seventeenth century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes defined freedom as a state in which a person "finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or

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[78] Ibid., 399.

[79] Brightman believed that the social nature of personalism brought "a deeper foundation for democratic social philosophy." He further proposed that "If the universe is a society of interacting persons, all partly determined and partly free, then democracy is an attempt to live politically 'in tune with the Infinite.'" Brightman, 117.

[80] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Public Domain Books, 1996) Kindle Edition, Location 5590.

81 Ibid., Location 9390f

inclination to do."[82] Hobbes argued that because everyone desires freedom, human freedom leads to social conflict that must be mediated by a sovereign that must restrict individual freedom for the common good.[83] John Locke, an eighteenth century political philosopher, argued that freedom was the natural right of individuals to "order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending on the will of any other man."[84] Locke recognized that although people had an innate equal access to freedom, some may attempt to violate that natural freedom. When freedom was violated, Locke argued a state of war was instituted to protect inalienable rights. To avoid war and to protect natural freedom, humanity instituted the state.[85] A good state protected the life, liberty, and property of its citizens. Another eighteenth century political philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, opposed Locke's argument, asserting that private property and institutions like the state and the church did not enhance humanity but instead violated natural human freedom. Rousseau famously said, "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains."[86] Rousseau urged people to use their own sensibilities to determine who they were and to decide what was right. He hoped that people would not possess property but only use that which was necessary to live—he wanted people to return to the state of the "noble savage." He called for people to break free from their institutional

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82 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan: Or, The Matter, Forme & Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 100.

83 Ibid., 102

84 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Livonia, MI: Lonang Institute, 2011) Kindle Edition, Location 1852 Locke's call for people to "order their actions…within the bounds of the law of nature" is similar to King's call for persons to order their actions according to the law of *agape*.

85 Ibid., Location 2763

86 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Social Contract, Confessions, Emile, and Other Essays*, (Alvin, TX: Halcyon Press, 2009), Kindle Edition, Location 30.

masters and rebuild society in such a way that the general will was master over the individual will. He called for the establishment of a direct democracy with the hope that the masses would counter the inequitable influence of the privileged aristocracy and their controlling institutions.

King addressed the negatives of American society and its institutions in the 1960's in a similar manner to Rousseau's critique of eighteenth century French society. King argued that in the American context, religious, financial and political institutions were both the principal culprits in creating affronts to his idea of freedom and the best tools Americans could use to attain his idea of freedom. King, most likely, would have approved of Rousseau's ideal form of government with the caveat that the general will must be consistent with God's moral law. King was for the primacy of the general will over the selfish tendencies of the individual will as each individual's well-being depended on the well-being of all others. Each person must be willing to deny selfish ambition for the common good and be willing to face repercussions should selfish ambition threaten the common good. King called for the people to have more direct involvement in the application of appropriated funds to improve the conditions of their communities. Free people in the Beloved Community of King's dream did not have to contend with other people within a competitive economic system to gain access to substantive freedom. In the Beloved Community, the state was an active partner working with the people to fulfill the basic needs of humanity. The purpose of government was not to protect every individual's right to life, liberty, and happiness but to act justly and protect the rights of collective individuals and ensure the common good.

King was, to a certain extent, preparing the way for the basic principles of the Sen's capabilities approach. The ability to participate in society promoted "a sense of responsibility" for society in the lives of citizens. Participation in society required economic stability for the adults and families in the Community; thus the socialist call for active governmental involvement in the major economic sectors were promoted over the selfish motivations that enabled *laissez faire* capitalism and created alienated citizens. King argued, "When culture is degraded and vulgarity enthroned, when the social system does not build security but induces peril, inexorably the individual is impelled to pull away from a soulless society."[87] Participation in society also required an integrated society in which people of all minority groups had the opportunity "to affect or alter the social and economic circumstances that have significant impact on one's social and economic circumstances that have a significant impact on one's life choices through some kind of democratic control of community life."[88] Every citizen deserved an opportunity to hold a position in the political realm in which they had the "responsibility and authority…to control, modify, and perhaps improve their own circumstances through such public cooperation."[89]

The African Americans whom King represented "insist[ed] upon the mass application of jobs, housing, education, and social mobility:" they expected "a full life for the whole people."[90] The government's promises had proven worthless, and calls for

[87] King, "Youth and Social Action," 44.

[88] Jose-Antonio M. Orosco, "Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Conception of Freedom and Radical Democracy," in *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 32 Issue 3 (386-401), 389.

[89] Ibid., 396.

[90] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, Location-1906.

change at the speed of "all due diligence" were rarely taken seriously by the racist establishment. Promises neither filled empty stomachs nor paid monthly bills. Following the Birmingham Campaign, King wrote that African Americans were "not struggling for some abstract, vague rights, but for concrete and prompt improvement in [their] way of [lives]" so that they not only participate in an open society, but also "be absorbed into our economic system in such a manner that they can afford to exercise their rights."[91] Since African Americans were mostly forced out of the American "economic system" following reconstruction, the government needed to firmly place them within that system. African Americans not only deserved preferential treatment, freedom required it because the sociopolitical history of America had denied instrumental freedoms to most African Americans for over two hundred years and hindered the access to substantive freedoms for three hundred years. The conditions of unfreedom had to be bulldozed and replaced with the conditions of freedom. His call for preferential treatment was challenged by both ardent resistors and sympathetic moderates. King noted that even "some of our friends" argue that an opportunity at equality was all anyone could ask for from the federal and state governments. He countered their argument by comparing the African American to a runner who is only allowed to enter a race three hundred years after the rest of the runners had started. Such a runner "would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner."[92] The nasty oppression that forced the status of second-class citizenship upon African Americans had successfully denied them opportunities to participate in the social, religious, educational, political, and economic

[91] Ibid., Location-2160.

[92] Ibid., Location-2137.

arenas of life in the United States. King's movement sought the equal opportunities that African Americans had for so long been denied and realized that this equal opportunity necessitated "practical, realistic aid" to aid them in the struggle to obtain it.[93] Alexis de Tocqueville provided support for King's argument in *Democracy in America*, where he argued that equal rights could not exist in a nation where there was not real equal opportunity.[94] A government program was necessary to provide this equal opportunity to those fighting for equal rights.

In the Beloved Community all people would have equal opportunity, as it was "a manifestation of God's intention that everyone should have the physical and spiritual necessities of life."[95] Here King once again revealed his socialist tendencies.[96] His goal for the Beloved Community was that it would "alleviat(e) economic inequity and…achieve economic justice."[97] To accomplish this end, the civil rights movement would "reveal the inner core of despotism" in the American economic system and inspire Americans to take part in a "struggle for liberation." He was in awe of the technological advances of the modern world and openly questioned how similar advances could not be made in the advancement of social justice.[98] The challenge was for the United States to demonstrate that it could "abolish not only the evils of racism but the scourge of poverty

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[93] Ibid., Location-2160.

[94] See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 479-482.

[95] Smith and Zepp, 123.

[96] "That King was influenced by Karl Marx is beyond doubt." Smith and Zepp, 124.

[97] Smith and Zepp, 125.

[98] "Through our scientific genius we have made of the world a neighborhood. Now through our moral and spiritual genius we must make of it a brotherhood." Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," in Carson, *Symbol of the Movement*, 78.

of whites as well as of Negroes, and the horrors of war that transcend national borders and involve mankind."[99] Therefore, he called for "a massive program by the government of special, compensatory measures which could be regarded as a settlement in accordance with the accepted practice of common law."[100] This "broad based and gigantic Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged" would be modeled after the GI Bill of Rights and would provide benefits for those who had been denied access to the American promise of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[101]

The Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged had to be more than a law; it had to be "a massive, new national program."[102] It would require the government to provide "the answer to full employment" and create legislation that would "outlaw…grotesque legal mores" that favored the wealthy and ignored the disadvantaged.[103] He noted:

> The dispossessed of this nation—the poor, both white and Negro—live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice…against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty.[104]

He called for "an emergency program to provide employment for everyone in need of a job, or if a work program is impracticable, a guaranteed annual income at levels that sustain life in decent circumstances."[105]

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[99] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Love in Action" in King, *Strength to Love* 238.

[100] King, *Why*, Location-2185.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence and Social Change," in King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 61.

[103] King, *Why*, Locations-2207 and 2230.

[104] King, "Nonviolence and Social Change," 59f.

[105] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Impasse in Race Relations," in King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 14.

This call for employment and a livable income came out of King's deep seated personalism. He argued that the denial of employment or an income to an individual was tantamount to psychological murder. He said, "You are in substance saying to that man that he has no right to exist. You are in a real way depriving him of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, denying in his case the very creed of his society."[106] The Beloved Community was life-giving and life-sustaining.

The Unfreedom of Vietnam

King's moral idealism confined the conduct of his civil rights campaigns. He made every effort to abide by federal statutes and reasonable injunctions made by the courts, and he was committed to a non-violent resistance that did not harm people or fracture social structures. The lack of fundamental structural change following his civil rights efforts from 1955 to 1966 frustrated King and challenged his moral idealism. He did not want to give in to the pessimism of Reinhold Niebuhr that had tempted him when he was a graduate student in Boston.[107] His pessimism increased as non-violent resistance apparently was not making significant inroads against the structures of institutional segregation and economic disparity that blocked the pathway to the Beloved Community. America's soul seemed farther away from redemption in 1967 than it had in 1955. The atrocities of the Vietnam War, the specter of more violence in the Civil Rights

[106] King, "Nonviolence and Social Change," 57.

[107] "The Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr qualified King's initial optimism about the possibility of actualizing it within history and changed King's attitude about the kinds of tactics necessary to move toward it." Smith and Zepp, 119.

Movement, and his own frustrating experience in Chicago began to push him toward more radical means to bring about his desired ends.[108]

One notices King heading in the direction of radicalism when he began to openly denounce the Vietnam War (the *American War* from the perspective of the Vietnamese) and American foreign policy. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott he committed himself to the pacifist cause and non-violent resistance. Prior to Montgomery and even in the several years following the boycott King justified war as a "negative good" that "prevent[ed] the spread and growth of an evil force."[109] Edgar Brightman agreed: "If war can possibly be justified, this can be done only by showing that respect for personality can be defended and increased by its means—and in no other way."[110] However, the influence of Bayard Rustin and the vividness of the Vietnam War led to a change in his position as he watched the devastating power of the weapons of modern warfare on television and saw the pictures of dead children in magazines. King's personalism convinced him of the value of every person; Gandhi helped him apply this conviction to life. King was convinced that God was a reality, that God was personality, that God imbedded personality in all persons, and that personality unified humanity. Gandhi taught that those who acted violently denied the reality of God and the unity of

[108] Smith and Zepp make the observation that, "King had obviously abandoned the strategy of liberalism and adopted the strategy of radicalism, "the open mobilization of the people against the prevailing system." Smith and Zepp, 137.

[109] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Love in Action" in King, *Strength to Love*, 44. Burrow notes, "Only slowly did King come to the realization that if one truly believes persons are sacred and that life is worth living, war, even the so-called just war or limited war is not an option…By 1959 King made it clear that he was finished with the whole sordid business of war, wherever it occurred in the world." Burrow, 212.

[110] Brightman, 152.

humanity.[111] There was no justification for this kind of human tragedy. Virtue and equality required reasonable people to stand against this kind of threat against humanity because all people were "linked in the great chain of humanity."[112] The Vietnam War was a vulgar affront to the ideals of the Beloved Community. The war was an enemy to human personality in that thousands of people were being slaughtered and maimed in an ideological conflict. In the Beloved Community people lived together as daughters and sons of God who did not allow war to exist in a world where every casualty was a sibling and where the quality of life of one influenced the quality of life of all others. It was absurd to King that the war machine continued to thrive in a world with so many technological advances and among people whose corporate morality argued against war. The war was also an affront to freedom in that the Americans were denying the Vietnamese people the opportunity to define who they wanted to be as a nation by continuing the imperialist occupation the Vietnamese loathed. He said, "Wisdom born of experience should tell us that war is obsolete."[113] Winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 reinforced King's commitment to pacifism and energized his work for the cause of peace around the world. Violence was the denial of King's convictions; therefore, he pushed peaceful mediation as modern alternative to war.

The Vietnam War further constrained freedom by using human, economic and technological resources to murder and maim instead of using those same resources to create jobs, to care for the sick and wounded, to build homes and infrastructure, and to

[111] "Violence is the negation of the great spiritual force, which can only be cultivated and wielded by those who will entirely eschew evil." Gandhi, 34.

[112] King, "Birth of a New Age," 343.

[113] King, "Love in Action," 44.

eliminate poverty. King looked at the social and economic landscape of the United States and saw war "not only as a moral outrage, but also as an enemy of the poor" that needed to be attacked.[114] He could not sit back and allow the nation to "spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift" because the continuation of this program would lead the nation into "spiritual doom."[115] His dream was "that one day war will come to an end, that men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, that nations will no longer rise up against nations, neither will they study war anymore."[116]

In January of 1968 he was ready to demonstrate his new radicalism through "nonviolent sabotage" as he called for "mass civil disobedience to effect revolutionary changes in the social system."[117] Non-violent resistance, which was effective against blatant racism, had to evolve if it was going to transform America's more furtively racist character: it had to accept the use of "power, coercion, conflict, and confrontation."[118] SNCC and its progeny in the "Black Power" movement had called for and implemented this kind of radical methodology against King's will for several years. King was not interested in instituting racial or class wars, he was, beginning in 1967, however, willing to use radical methods to clear the road of injustices for the coming of the Beloved Community.[119]

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[114] King, "Conscience and the Vietnam War," 22.

[115] Ibid., 33.

[116] King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," 80.

[117] Smith and Zepp, 136f.

[118] Smith and Zepp, 137f.

[119]Smith and Zepp note that "King began to advocate…the use of mass civil disobedience to effect revolutionary changes within the social system." They further state that he "opted for what Reinhold

Agents of the Beloved Community may have had to accept radical means to advance the kingdom, but the methods still needed to adhere to the kingdom principles of love and justice. Victory was not in and of itself the goal of King's latter radical plans; freedom was still the goal, and freedom demanded that all people love each other as equal creations of God united by the divine personality that distinguished humanity from all other life. He was certain that "the highest good is love."[120] However, he began to believe that extreme measures were necessary to break the hold of evil systems that promoted separation (i.e. sin) and blinded the eyes of people to the innate goodness of all people. These measures were not meant to be revolutionary for revolution's sake or for the sake of punishing the oppressor—the goal was to develop a just, fair, and equitable world. Once the sinful systems were destroyed and people were redeemed by *agape* in action, then "true integration [would] be achieved by true neighbors who [were] willingly obedient to [the] unenforceable obligations" of humanity.[121] Whatever radical methods that were to be implemented had to be in harmony with the spirit of the Beloved Community.

The Last Campaign

King called his new revolutionary movement, "The Poor Peoples' Campaign." He decided to focus attention on the economic plight of the people because he was convinced that the urban riots outside of Dixie were the manifestations of the exasperation felt by the forgotten poor. In 1966 he went to Chicago to fight for equal

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Niebuhr had called 'rational coercion' or 'nonviolent coercion'…It is apparent…that Niebuhr had a greater influence upon King's thought at the point of tactics than anywhere else." Smith and Zepp, 136 and 138.

[120] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Love in Action" in King, *Strength to Love*, 144

[121] King, "On Being a Good Neighbor," 38.

opportunities for African American children forced into second class schools and to challenge the bigoted housing practices of realtors and city council representatives. He hoped to prevent the kind of rioting that had broken out in Watts and Detroit. His efforts in Chicago were frustrated by Mayor Daley's powerful political machine and his spirit was injured with the minimal advances made on behalf of Chicago's poorest residents. He needed to come up with a more substantial campaign to overwhelm the various American political machines; so he decided to stage a protest in Washington, D.C. on behalf of the poor by the poor and their advocates. He hoped that this effort would grab the nation's attention like Birmingham and Selma had a few years earlier and that people from around the country would join the poor in demanding "a new economic deal for the poor."[122]

King was astonished that the majority of Americans did not recognize the necessity of these ventures. He chastised the American public and Congress for raving about the crime in the ghettos and the destruction of urban riots while glossing over the conditions that produced these outcomes. He attempted to convince Americans that their efforts would receive a better reward if they exerted more energy preventing the creation of criminals than they did on controlling the effects of crime. Society created the conditions that created criminals, bigotry, and poverty, so it was society that needed to change. Americans needed the government to play the most significant part in bringing about these changes because it was the most powerful institution in the country and could provide the funding and coercive force required to make change a reality. King thought that Congress "could, by a single massive act of concern expressed in a multibillion-

[122] King, "Nonviolence and Social Change," 63.

dollar program to modernize and humanize Negro communities, do more to obviate violence than could be done by all the armies at its command."[123] The funding of these programs would come from a transfer of monies from the Vietnam War to this new war against poverty. The program would create jobs by allowing residents in substandard housing units to demolish the old housing and construct new housing to replace it. The program would also work to provide housing for those who did not have a home.[124] Funding would be infused into public school systems to improve the quality of education and prepare workers for a more technologically advanced work force. The campaign also called for more financial backing of social programs to support those who had been ostracized by society. The state was a necessary participant in making the Beloved Community a reality.

The Kingdom of God

The zeitgeist of the Beloved Community was rooted in the morality that God infused in all of creation. Without this investiture of transcendent and objective morality, the world would exist in a purely materialistic manner, and King's call for a virtuous community would not impact the United States and its many institutions. Without the influence of the divine personality on humanity, King could have easily espoused Nietzsche's call for the powerful to wield their power over the weaker members of humankind. It was a belief in the innate morality of creation that forced King to reject

[123] King, "Impasse in Race Relations," 17.

[124] Ibid., 15.

systems rooted in selfishness.[125] He also realized that he could not keep his head in the clouds. The Beloved Community was not taking earth to heaven, but bringing heaven to earth, and King believed that the worldly institutions created by people were the temporal means by which the realization of the Beloved Community would be achieved. Government, education, and economic institutions needed to work together for the benefit of humanity. If these institutions did not step-up on behalf of civil and human rights, America would "surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight."[126]

Governor Coleman, and probably most white Americans in the 1950's and 1960's, believed that Martin Luther King, Jr. was merely a communist sympathizer who challenged traditional American sensibilities, questioned the veracity of American exceptionalism, and stirred up trouble between the races. One wonders if King would argue with them. His Beloved Community was not American, it was multinational; it did not favor *laissez faire* economics; and it did not promote the ideal of self-sufficiency over communal responsibility. His Beloved Community expected "justice, fair play, and equality" to be the rule that governed all human interaction. He intentionally stirred up trouble among the races because the races were in trouble—they accepted a status quo that was inhumane and sapped people of the kind of fulfilled life that God intended for all people. America was like Ezekiel's valley of dry bones that needed the life-giving breath

[125] "King believed that moral laws are always relevant to every person and group everywhere in the world." They were "discoverable through reason" and were "part of the grain of the universe." Therefore, a fulfilled life depended on living in community with other "in ways that are pleasing to God." For King, "agape love…was…the supreme moral law" and failure to meet the requirements of agape's morality "would alienate persons from each other, from community, and from God." Burrow, 210.

[126] King, "Conscience and the Vietnam War," 34.

of God. These bones, once divinely animated, needed a new environment to live and thrive. The place was bound by the temporal and rooted in the eternal. This place needed a government that promoted civil liberties, protected civil rights, and provided social security. King believed that this place was the Beloved Community.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."
>
> --Declaration of Independence

This dissertation sought to answer the question, "What did Martin Luther King, Jr. envision when he spoke of freedom?" The answer offered here is King observed that freedom is the inalienable right to define who one is in a way that corresponds with who one wills and to then have the opportunity and ability to act accordingly.

I contend that King believed every person has intrinsic worth because of the innate qualities of personality endowed by her/his creator and that freedom is an aspect of God's personality that is bestowed upon every person. Freedom was more than a concept for King. Freedom was a complex reality meant to be experienced in the real life of persons. King believed that people were creatures of extreme worth endowed by their creator with a divine like personality. It is my contention that King believed every person is born free. Since all persons are free, every person has the right to a life unencumbered from fear that another person or group of persons might take her life because her melanin is dark and her lips are thick; because she worships God or does not worship God at all; or because she does not possess the capital necessary to provide for her basic needs. A person has the right to the substantive freedoms of sustenance, a livable wage, healthcare, a home, a quality education and the knowledge that society will provide those necessities when he is unable to provide them himself. A person has the right to the instrumental

freedoms to worship or not worship; to pursue his vocational dreams, to love whomever he chose to love; to participate in the political machine of his country; and the ability to access the technology necessary to fully participate within society. As a full-fledged member of the body politic, persons had the right to protest when the government or other persons violated inviolable rights. King believed that freedom was more than an ideal, people had to experience freedom in the phenomenal world.

One of the complexities of King's interpretation of freedom arises from the ability of free people to decide who they are and to act accordingly. King believed people ought to live in harmony with the eternal will of God; however, people have the God given right and ability to choose to follow the will of God (to create conditions of more freedom) or to walk away from the will of God (to create conditions of unfreedom). Freedom is an innate right established by God and yet freedom is dependent upon social and/or political conditions to be realized in the actual lives of persons. Throughout human history the inviolability of freedom has been challenged by human activity. While some people faced more challenges than others did, all people faced affronts to their freedom. King fought against violations and violators of freedom and strove to convince people to act on behalf of actualized freedom by making choices that corresponded to the transcendent laws of God.

In the Beloved Community King envisioned a society that, because the people recognized the assaults against life, strove to provide a shelter from life's storms. The foundation of that shelter rested upon the ideal that all people were bound together in the love (*agape*) of God without consideration of sex or race, religious or political affiliation, or emotional or physical condition. As the name implies, the Beloved Community was a

community—it was a group of people that shared the common goal of allowing people to experience a fulfilling life. People in the Beloved Community recognized that life was material and temporal and that, while being human required a link to the transcendent, the people had fundamental material needs that could not be found on praying knees or delayed until the coming parousia. Ensuring that all persons had access to life's necessities meant that each citizen had to possess a genuine concern for others (they must have an I-Thou relationship with their fellow citizens). It was understood that depriving persons of the essential elements of life was absurd and patently inhumane. It was further understood that personal fulfillment was frustrated when others lived in conditions of unfreedom. An abundant life required a personal commitment to the community and a commitment by the community to the person.

The order necessary for the community to function properly came from a precarious relationship between the church (religious community) and the state. The church's role in the community was to practice *agape* by purposefully and actively showing genuine concern for the plight of all of God's children; by working to help people maintain healthy bonds with God and each other; and by holding the state accountable for creating and maintaining conditions of freedom. The state's role in the community was to create a system in which people had access to the substantive freedoms required to exist and to the instrumental freedoms that allowed them to experience life as a person. The state also had to possess the authority, legitimacy and will to compel people to live according to the law of *agape* (i.e., to create conditions of freedom) and the disposition to alter its course when it fails to act in accordance with the law of *agape*.

When King spoke of freedom, he envisioned a world in which the people honored the laws of God and respected the personality of every person—including their own personality—by treating every other person as they would like to be treated.

Questions for Future Consideration

The night before he was assassinated King told a Memphis crowd that he had been to the mountaintop and could see the Promised Land of freedom on the horizon. He did not have the opportunity to move any closer to seeing his dream fulfilled. After considering King's interpretation of freedom, one wonders if he only saw a mirage in the distance instead of the fulfillment of a dream—is it likely that actualized freedom will be realized by all persons in the phenomenal world? I believe King's dream has a chance if, for instance, the Human Development and Capabilities Approach (HDCA) (what I believe to be the closest interpretation of freedom in our contemporary world to King's ideal) influences the decisions made by political, economic, and religious institutions around the world. However, one of the problems with the HDCA is the intentional distance it keeps from religious underpinnings; King's vision of freedom is thoroughly religious. The HDCA is not hostile to religion, it allows for willing individuals to practice religion. Nevertheless, its lack of a religious foundation allows for the ever changing wills of people to determine what are the essential qualities of freedom and what species are worthy of having their freedoms protected.[1] King's commitment to

[1] For instance, Martha Nussbaum lists what she believes are ten "Central Capabilities" that she believes are the minimum necessities for a dignified existence. She further claims that these central capabilities "provide a reasonable basis for beginning to think more adequately about what we owe nonhuman animals." I find nothing wrong with her list of ten capabilities; the problem comes when deciding who is the arbiter of what is necessary and what happens when an individual disagrees with the arbiter's decision. Are we able to trust the evolving sensibilities of the human species? Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, Location 374f, 395.

God's eternal law provided a stable foundation for the establishment of the conditions of equality that the HDCA lacks.

I question the fulfillment of the dream as I consider the secularist bent of Western society. The emphasis on individual liberty and the closeting of religious dialogue, I believe, provide significant resistance to the advancement of King's ideal. How does one practice the love of God when the general attitude of a culture questions either the existence of God or the significance of a God that may exist? The high regard that people in the United States have for the doctrine of the separation of Church and State leads to further complexities for an attempt to realize King's dream. One question to consider is "How might religious institutions influence individuals and other institutions to act in accordance to transcendent values when the culture does not value the transcendent?" A second question to consider is "How can a pluralistic society decipher the eternal will of God?" A third question to consider is "Can the state practice *agape*?"

King held people in high regard. King believed people were fundamentally good and that the sociopolitical conditions of one's life either enhanced natural goodness or pushed one to act untowardly. King's Beloved Community depended on this idyllic view of the human condition. In the Beloved Community people willingly denied personal gratification for the benefit of the community. Was King's dream too utopian in scope? One wonders if King may have had too high a regard for people. While he acknowledges the prevalence of sin in the world, King appears to deny innate selfishness and underappreciate the power of personal ambition. One may want to consider a synthesis between the idealism of King and the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr.

King's vision of freedom has significant economic costs and restricts the accumulation of individual wealth when people lack the secure of substantive freedom. One wonders that if the investors in a capitalistic market driven economy would take risks with their personal wealth to benefit their fellow persons. One also wonders if the "American Dream" can evolve into a global dream in which one views their success as a means to help the less fortunate. Are the majority of Americans ready for a massive redistribution of wealth?

Significant questions arise from my interpretation of King's complex vision of freedom. The goal of this dissertation was not to determine the feasibility of King's vision, but to interpret King's vision. I believe I have accomplished that task. When King spoke of freedom he envisioned a world in which people had the substantive and instrumental freedom to attempt to realize their own dreams in the phenomenal world.

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