

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Struggle Against Racism

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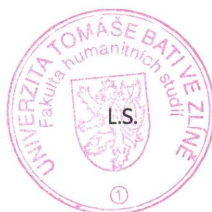
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá bojem Martina Luthera Kinga mladšího proti rasismu a rasové segregaci. V úvodu je rozebrán jeho původ, včetně pojednání o vývoji a stavu rasismu ve Spojených státech. Další část popisuje filozofii nenásilného boje doktora Kinga a zároveň dokumentuje původ této jedinečné filozofie. Závěrečná část se věnuje implementaci jeho filozofie v praxi od roku 1955 až do roku 1968. Práce prokazuje, že nebyť Martina Luthera Kinga mladšího a jeho myšlenky nenásilného boje, následky rasové nespravedlnosti ve Spojených státech by byly mnohonásobně horší.

Klíčová slova: Martin Luther King, Jr., rasismus, rasová segregace, nenásilí, Afroameričané, Hnutí za lidská práva

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis deals with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s struggle against racism and racial segregation. The thesis first provides King, Jr.'s background as well as a background of the history and status of racism in the United States. It then describes the philosophy of non-violent struggle of Doctor King and documents the origins of his unique philosophy. Finally, it describes how King, Jr. implemented his philosophy between 1955 and 1968. It proves that were it not for him and his idea of non-violent struggle, racial injustice in the United States might have continued unabated.

Keywords: Martin Luther King, Jr., racism, racial segregation, non-violence, African-Americans, Civil Rights Movement

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“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”¹

Martin Luther King, Jr.

¹ Brainy Quote, "Martin Luther King, Jr. 's Quotes," BrainyQuote.com, http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/martin_luther_king_jr_2.html (accessed May 2, 2010).

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INTRODUCTION

Some consider Martin Luther King, Jr. as a machinator, utilitarian, and even a plagiarist, while others criticize him for being an adulterer, too religious, or too peace-loving. The most militant simply tried to identify him with Uncle Tom. However, for almost all black Americans and many white Americans, his name is associated with huge changes in the civil rights and liberties of black Americans in the 1950s and 1960s, and beyond. Moreover, many racial minorities besides blacks are thankful for the changes to which King, Jr. contributed. Until his philosophy and vision are understood, all of his merits remain an enigma. What is clear, however, is that, were it not for him and his non-violent struggle against racism, racial injustice in the United States might have continued unabated.

1 GROWING UP

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s roots stretch back to the very deep south. All his life his heart was tied closely to this American region, this terrific battlefield of civil rights.

1.1 Roots

James Albert King, the grandfather of Martin Luther King, Jr. was of Irish-African ancestry. Neither Irish nor Africans were allowed to live peacefully and without restraint in the United States at that time, so King had to struggle against poverty and humiliation. After marrying Delia Linsey, the future mother of Martin Luther King, Sr., they settled down in Stockbridge, Georgia, where King became a sharecropper. Although he worked hard to support his wife and their nine children, suffering was a part of life. The first reason was mainly the fact that the land they were farming was extremely infertile - literally badlands - due to long-lasting tobacco growing that robbed the soil of its nutrients. And, already having problems with fertility, what lowered their profits even more were Southern discriminatory practices sanctioned by Jim Crow laws, or "the systematic practice of discriminating against and segregating black people". As a sharecropper, King had to pay all the costs, but the profits he made, he had to share with the plantation owner. James King was not a religious man, so it was definitely not him who influenced his future grandson's attitudes. Instead it was James's son Michael, who would impart religion upon his offspring.²

1.2 Youth

Michael King, was the oldest child of James and Delia King. He grew up among sharecroppers, but in contrast to his father, he was a churchgoer and a member of the Baptist community in Stockbridge. Later he left this community and became the head of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. At this time, influenced by the German Protestant leader Martin Luther, he renamed himself Martin Luther King, after a visit to Germany. As an advocate of social justice and racial equality, he continually stressed the need for change in the situation of colored people. He should be identified as a civil rights leader due to his involvement in the civil rights movement in Georgia. His influence stretched throughout

² The Free Dictionary, "Jim Crow," The Free Dictionary.com, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Jim+Crow> (accessed January 13, 2010).

the African-American community leading to his appointment as the head of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). According to Coretta Scott King, father King loved all his children, but Martin, his second-born, was special to him. A close relationship with his father was an important influence on King, Jr.

Even more so than to the land, born to Baptist parents, growing up in a purely Baptist atmosphere, later becoming a pastor, he was tied closely also to his religion. Since his early youth, Martin Luther King, Jr. enjoyed listening to good preachers. At that time he was not old enough to understand them. “He swore to his mother that he would find his own big words.” As soon as his mother taught him how to read, he started to browse dictionaries and study, and later he fulfilled his promise.³

Even though he faced a couple of problems concerning the color of his skin, his childhood and youth were mostly calm and peaceful. The first time he came in touch with segregation was when he was six, and his friends told him they could no longer play with him because they were white and he was colored. But his mother, as many other African-American mothers, convinced him of his equality and humaneness, “she said the words that almost every Negro hears before he can understand the injustice that makes them necessary: ‘You are as good as anyone.’” Later on, King, Jr. had to face humiliation and segregation even during seemingly ordinary activities like traveling by bus or shoe shopping.⁴

1.3 Studies and early pastor life

From the discriminatory situations that many others had to face daily, he was largely sheltered by class. The Kings were members of the middle class, which meant that the great hardship of segregation did not affect them so much. They lived in a friendly neighborhood, where academics became the focal point of his life. He was given the best possible education. In Atlanta, his parents decided to send him to B. T. Washington High School, which was the first public high school for African-Americans in the state of Georgia. This school gave him a strong educational foundation, and later, after skipping

³ Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 102.

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, introduced by Clayborne Carson (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 5.

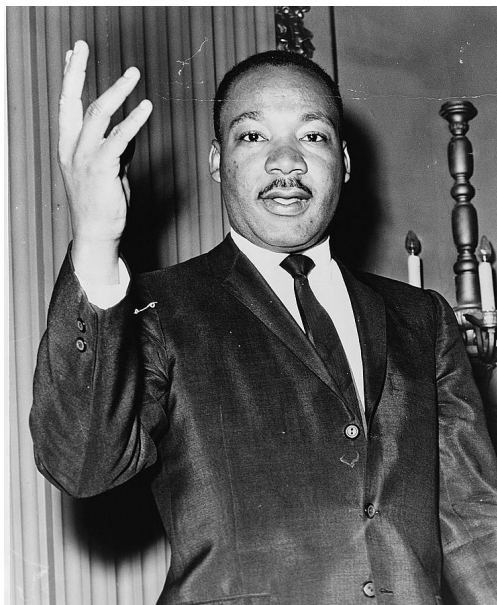
ninth and twelfth grade and without graduating officially, he entered Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, at the age of fifteen.

What MLK learned at Morehouse College, one of the foremost African-American colleges in the United States with extremely strict entrance requirements, and a great study program, influenced him for the rest of his life. He graduated at the age of nineteen with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. During his studies there, his social awareness grew, and he found that his life was much less difficult than the vast majority of his African-American contemporaries. He was not stuck in his social class. In order to understand the problem of social classes and the lives of the underprivileged, he refused the white collar job he was offered. At the age of sixteen he chose harsh manual work during which he was humiliated again and again. At seventeen, he decided to become a clergyman. He was ordained at the age of eighteen and became an assistant pastor in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He was willing to give the Ebenezer as much time and energy as possible, but it was incompatible with other work he had to do. The community around Ebenezer Baptist Church was the community into which he was born and, accordingly it was the community which he loved most. In fact, he would always remember Morehouse College and Ebenezer Baptist Church fondly and credit them for his successes.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was driven by the desire for the best education, and it gave him the strength to study hard. He read a lot, and in the process became familiar with many of the most important philosophical theories. His dream was to become a Doctor of Philosophy, hence he entered Boston University. His studies were interrupted by his marriage with Coretta Scott. After the wedding he returned to university to complete his studies. He focused on philosophy of personalism, and for his dissertation he compared the conception of God by Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman. In 1954, during his studies, he joined the Baptist community on Dexter Avenue in Montgomery, Alabama, and he became a pastor there. He said to himself: "I'll go back where they need me." Indeed, he was only twenty-five years old at that time, but his strong personality and the wisdom of his words attracted many churchgoers. In the course of his work at Dexter Avenue, he made extremely important relationships, namely with Ralph Abernathy, pastor of the Baptist Church at West Hunter Street, Atlanta. They became the closest friends and the

closest co-workers in the civil rights movement from day one of the struggle concerning Montgomery buses.⁵

Martin Luther King, Jr. was remarkably mature for his age. He was eminently thankful for all the help he was offered. He was also extremely solicitous, and that was the reason why, in the first weeks and months of his activity at Dexter Avenue, he was exceedingly busy. Working on his dissertation, he also spent much time preparing his sermons, and he had to see to the needs of the churchgoers and participate in community meetings. Moreover, he devised a set of new programs, and he advised the establishment of several new committees for the improvement of living conditions on Dexter Avenue, for example a committee for the advancement of talented young African-American artists. He also insisted on the reorganization of the community's financial management, which later brought increased profits for the church. In addition to this, he tried to involve also poor churchgoers to overturn the lofty reputation of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. It was also at that time that he began to express his opinions on racial injustice publicly. Eventually, he obtained his doctorate in systematic philosophy in spring 1955.



Martin Luther King, Jr.⁶

⁵ Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 102.

⁶ Dick DeMarsico. "Martin Luther King, Jr." 1964. Library of Congress. Washington, DC.

2 RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Racism has long been a fixture in the United States of America. Beginning with first contact, the Europeans made a habit of taking what did not belong to them. As they requisitioned property in the name of God and civilization, the colonists started to have a false feeling of superiority over others, who, unfortunately started to have a false feeling of inferiority. Racism in North America was not used against African-Americans only, but was applied to all non-white minorities. Several groups, among them Native Americans, African-Americans, Asians, Jews, and even Irish, were often considered enemies by white society. As a result, the members of minority groups had to often face oppression, discrimination, and stratification. White colonists issued their own laws which the minorities had no chance to understand and colonists had no need and effort to explain. Behind the mask of common public interest, these people, the minorities, experienced difficult lives.

2.1 Situation of Native Americans

“Originally, relations between the Native Americans and the first European settlers were friendly. Unfortunately, this changed as more and more immigrants arrived and land became an issue.” Native Americans had no idea of ownership, and settlers took advantage of this fact. Thanks to racism and white supremacy, almost all Native Americans forfeited their homes, their yield, their families, and themselves. Were it not for the settlers, Native Americans would not have had to face an endless series of conflicts and problems like devastating wars, epidemic 'white' diseases, slaughter, or forced relocation. The Trail of Tears in the 1830s was the biggest forced relocation the Natives had to undergo. Several thousands of Native Americans, mainly Cherokees, were day-to-day pressed to give themselves up, leave their hunting grounds, and start a journey to Indian territory west of the Mississippi River. A great deal of atrocities was committed on Native American women and children. They were raped, ridiculed, enslaved, and flayed.⁷

The white man's hunger for land and wealth caused also the deaths of many hundreds thousands of Native Americans as whites pushed further and further west. Were it not for

⁷ Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena, "Native Americans – Forced Removal," <http://ndla.no/en/node/6200/menu212> (accessed January 30, 2010).

the settlers, Native Americans would not have had to live on reservations, or undergo cultural changes like the loss of identity, values associated with the white desire to “kill the Indian, and save the man.”⁸

Up to the present day, many members of the minority of Native Americans has suffered dearly. Approximately half of them live on federal reservations, maintaining their traditions, values and culture, but the same half also encounter difficulties, such as poverty, unemployment, high sickness rates, or even drug abuse including alcoholism. Certainly attempts were made to help the Native Americans, but “national policy on this matter wavers somewhere between integration of Native Americans and isolation on reservations. The U.S. still wishes to govern Native American peoples and treat them as subject to U.S. law.”⁹

Not only Native Americans, but many other minorities suffered from this European lust for the space and power hidden behind a mask of Manifest Destiny, a belief that the United States was ordained to stretch across North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. White settlers, constantly coming to the States, established their right to push minorities to the margins of society. On the other hand, they wanted minorities to become a labor force, and so they made them work, but often denying them their basic human rights in the process.

2.2 Asians

Of the many minorities entering the United States, the status of Asians is worth mentioning. Even more than the Native Americans, Asians had to face oppression and racial discrimination and had to fight for their rights. Their loss of rights came in the 1850s with the judicial decision known as *People v. Hall*. Chinese Americans lost the right to testify against white Americans, extending the validity of a law that previously applied to African-Americans. In the 1860s, the first transcontinental railroad was built, mostly with Asian labor. These Asians were poorly paid, despite having left their families in search of work. Working conditions were poor and often unsafe, and many of them died as a result.

⁸ History Matters, "Capt. Richard H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans," The US Survey Course on the Web, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/> (accessed January 31, 2010).

⁹ Nasjonal Digital Læringsarena, "Native Americans – Current Situation," <http://ndla.no/en/node/6203/menu212> (accessed January 31, 2010).

Discrimination already existed, but the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 made discrimination legal. Asians were banned from entering the States until 1943. For decades, Chinese and other Asians had to undergo humiliating and violent race riots organized against them. Over and above, during the Second World War came another phenomenon. Many Japanese living in America were sent to special camps – internment camps – so as not to endanger America through espionage. Although some negative sentiments and conflicts appear, contemporary attitudes towards Asians can be seen as rather positive. Asians are appreciated mostly for their honesty, family values, and high level of education.

2.3 Anti-European sentiments

Whites also demonstrated biases against Europeans. Anti-European, especially anti-Irish attitudes appeared first in the nineteenth century. Although the Irish are now white, they were not considered white back then, and they had to face the same problems as their colored companions. Similar problems occurred with Jewish immigrants who left Eastern Europe for America in the nineteenth century. In the 1920s, Jews were oppressed, attacked and even tortured by members of Ku Klux Klan (KKK), but also by ordinary citizens. In 1924 the Immigration Act was introduced, which limited the number of immigrants allowed to enter the U.S. This was accomplished through a national origins quota providing immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in the States. Later, especially during and after the Second World War, there appeared also anti-German and anti-Italian racial prejudices because of the fascist background of these states during the war. The contemporary situation concerning the relationship between Americans and Europeans trying to enter the States can be, to a large extent, regarded as quite peaceful. American lawmakers passed a series of laws dealing with immigration, and although discrimination and racism against Europeans still lasts in some places, the overall situation can be regarded as stable.¹⁰

2.4 African-Americans

African-Americans were the one who had to face the worst situation of all the nationalities and ethnic minorities entering the United States. In many cases, native

¹⁰U.S. Department of State, "The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/id/87718.htm> (accessed February 6, 2010).

Africans were shipped to the States where they were exploited, discriminated, ridiculed, attacked, and not occasionally also killed. Colonists were frequently accused of destroying native African families, traditions, and spirit, forcing these people to work and not giving them basic civil rights. This was not totally accurate. Of course, even slaves had some rights in some states. They were, for instance, guaranteed due process. Some contemporary scholars argue that African-Americans lost their rights in 1675, following Bacon's rebellion in Virginia.¹¹

The idea of making slaves out of colored African inhabitants came after the failure of indentured servitude ending in the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century. Indentured servants were white Europeans from very poor backgrounds who wanted to move to America but could not afford to do so. They signed a special contract with a person in the colonies who would pay for their journey in exchange for the white immigrant's services up to ten years. The main problem with this method was that many European immigrants died from diseases to which they were not immune before they were able to pay off the cost of the travel. Also, many of the servants escaped and, because they were white, were difficult to find. It appears from this that the main reason Africans became slaves was that they were easy to identify. Another reason why African-Americans were considered more acceptable was the process of seasoning. Africans were first sent to the Caribbean to get accustomed to the new climate and diseases and only then, was a stronger and more resistant labor force sent to the States. African-Americans, or slaves, were used mainly in agriculture in the production of tobacco and cotton but were also used as domestic servants. Their labor was extremely cheap and they became a threat to white laborers.

On 1 January 1863, the Government of the United States released the Emancipation Proclamation proposed by President Abraham Lincoln. This regulation gave potential freedom to all slaves in the Confederacy. Slavery was officially outlawed by the Thirteenth Amendment, effective from 6 December 1865. Accordingly, slaves in the South were freed, but slaves in the North stayed grandfathered in. Nonetheless, America remained racist, a fact later exhibited by the existence of Jim Crow laws, or laws that in many

¹¹ Joseph G. Dawson, "Myne Own Ground," *Library Journal* 105 (September 1980): 1731.

Southern states lead to 'separate but equal' facilities. Among others, Booker T. Washington, civil rights leader, speaker and author of half African descent, played an extremely important role in the evolution of rights of African-Americans. After the Civil War, the situation of African-Americans improved a bit with the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment. These amendments gave them voting rights and legal equality, but, on the other hand, a lot of atrocities were committed against them. The establishment of the KKK during U.S. Reconstruction, a hate group that used violence and intimidation, contributed to a tense situation between whites and African-Americans. The beginning of the twentieth century, when MLK's father and father-in-law were born, was a period full of oppression. Segregation existed in employment, in business, at schools, and in ordinary everyday life. It was absolutely inaccessible for an African-American to have benefits not enjoyed by whites. If the rule of 'white first, colored last, if ever' was disturbed, it was a perfect reason to use violence, either by means of race riots and white mob attacks, or through intimidation and lynching. For the defense and support of the civil rights of African-Americans, the NAACP was established in 1909. One of the founders of this influential organization was W. E. B. Du Bois, civil rights activist, propagator, and author. He worked for an improvement of the situation of African-Americans and was also a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. W. E. B. Du Bois as well as Booker T. Washington would have an amazing influence upon the philosophy of MLK.

The roots of the American Civil Rights Movement stretch to the turn of the twentieth century. First, it served as a movement helping all the oppressed people. Later, it focused on the situation of African-Americans. As time passed, it became more influential, culminating in the era of Martin Luther King, Jr., approximately from the mid-1950s till the end of the 1960s. Members and those who sympathized with this movement tried to get rid of racism and give all the downtrodden people back their rights, liberties, and their dignity.

Beside the supporters of nonviolence such as King, Jr., there appeared also more radical figures connected with the Black Power Movement and Black Panther Party, for example Bobby Seale or Malcolm X. These people celebrated blackness and black heritage and identity, and many of them were prepared to use any necessary means, including violence, to stop the injustice.

As it was mentioned earlier, racism did not touch his childhood and adulthood much, but what Martin Luther King, Jr. did for his underprivileged brothers and sisters was astounding. According to him, the cause of American racial injustice was the white man's fear of the African-American's progress. What he was trying to do all his life was to give the lost dignity and courage back to those who needed it. He tried to persuade the white man that "all men are created equal."¹²

The current status of anti-colored sentiments can not be measured with the status some fifty or sixty years before. There is quite a big improvement in the situation of African-Americans. Segregation is basically over and, in many cases colored inhabitants get along much better than their white fellow citizens. Many people see also the election of Barack Obama to the presidency as a step towards the equality. On the other hand, several relicts of the old era still remain, for example in Mississippi, where several school districts became racially segregated by a federal judges decision. Indeed, this is what America is like. Contemporary racism has its origin in the barbarous practices implemented from the beginnings of colonization.

¹² Indiana University School of Law, "The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies," <http://www.law.indiana.edu/uslawdocs/declaration.html> (accessed February 13, 2010).

3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE STRUGGLE

African-American extremist leader and Justice Minister of the Black Panther Party, a revolutionary left-wing organization aiming for the self-defense of African-Americans, Rap Brown, once stated: "Violence is just so American as an apple-pie."¹³

The exceptional philosophy of King, Jr., a great leader of the Civil Rights Movement, has been described as a triumph of non-violence and sense of camaraderie. He connected theology and politics and believed in the supernal dominance of moral law. Devoted to the doctrine of Christ, he saw non-violence as the only applicable way to change the status of African-Americans. Even he himself wondered if the boycott method he championed was in agreement with Christian belief or not. However, he was not interested only in the situation of minorities in America. He tried also to draw attention to the status of white Americans. Segregation, in his mind, was an evil for both groups. By liberating African-Americans, he wanted to free the whites of their wrong attitudes and feelings of superiority.

He warned people against their fears. Racist organizations like the KKK or even white police officers used fear as a weapon. In Montgomery, Alabama, at the beginning of his struggle for civil rights, Martin Luther King, Jr. preached how to overcome white anxieties and fear by confrontation, courage, and love. He advocated calm and peaceful protest, no cross burning, no mob killing, no lynching, but law and order.

Furthermore, he disapproved of weapons. In the spirit of "he who lives by the sword dies by the sword," he himself got rid of his weapon and urged members of the Movement to follow him. He recognized that violence is effective only when rebels command a majority or at least an extensive minority. African-Americans had neither majority, nor extensive minority. This was another reason why he chose to implement a counter strategy of non-violence. In fact, the Civil Rights Movement was a militant organization. Its militancy was camouflaged in non-violence, the most powerful and accessible weapon the movement had at its disposal.¹⁴

The first radical test of his Christian fundamentals and his theory of non-violence came with the night bombing of his house in Montgomery in January 1956. Even in such an extreme and dangerous situation when his closest family members could die, he kept a

¹³ Jan Pilát, *Svět doktora Kinga [The World of Doctor King]*, (Prague: Práce, 1983), own translation, 7.

¹⁴ Matthew 26:52, "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword," Famous Quotes Webpage, http://www.famousquotes.com/show.php?_id=1053739 (accessed February 23, 2010).

level head and rejected violent revenge. When talking about this horrible incident in front of his friends, churchgoers, and his followers, he stayed calm and repeated the idea of non-violence – “Violence has to be confronted by non-violence.”¹⁵

MLK saw a close relationship between the African struggle for independence and the African-American struggle for equality in the United States. He felt a great sense of camaraderie with the Africans and he was very proud of his heritage. After his visit to Ghana in Africa in 1957, he used the Ghana struggle as a symbol of the hopes and wishes of all oppressed African-Americans in the States.

Not only African-Americans believed in Martin Luther King, Jr. He became a symbol of unity and a bond between disparate groups. All his followers respected him as their leader, their voice, their idol. His respect for humanity connected him also with poor people, whom with he associated himself entirely. Not being interested in wealth and possession, he was willing to accept an obligation of poverty. Once, he said: “People have to understand that the value of a person can not be measured according to their bank account or size of their car. It is measured by their self-sacrifice.” In January 1966, when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) moved to Chicago, Illinois, to lay the foundations of a local movement, Reverend King, Jr. decided not to stay at a hotel. Instead, he rented a flat in one of Chicago’s slums in order to share the life pattern forced by the system upon the ghetto people. Also later, when he ran the Poor People’s Campaign, instead of staying in a Holiday Inn hotel, he stayed at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, which, as some might say, cost him his life.¹⁶

3.1 Influences

In forming his philosophy, Martin Luther King, Jr. drew from the philosophies of several men – his father Martin Luther King, Sr., Henry David Thoreau, a philosopher and author, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, spiritual leader of India, historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, an educator, orator and author, and Marcus Garvey, the black nationalist author and orator.

¹⁵ Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 132.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

3.1.1 Martin Luther King, Sr.

Martin Luther King, Sr. acted as both a great authority and support to his son during his son's lifetime. Father King himself never adapted to the system in which colored Americans had to live. His unfailing opinion of injustices happening to 'unsuitable non-white citizens' immensely influenced his son's conscience.

One of the first real influences came with King, Jr.'s decision to enter the ministry. Not that the father forced his son to become a preacher, but he himself was so amazed by his father's mission that he decided to follow him. Were it not for the father, the son would probably not have become a Baptist preacher.

People loved him as they loved his son. Latterly, when the Civil Rights Movement was well under way, much work had to be carried on the shoulders of Martin Luther King, Jr. He worked on writing speeches and organizing marches and demonstrations, while his father, on the other hand, helped his son's followers, and gave them stoutness and provided assistance.

MLK was also influenced strongly by his mother, Alberta Williams King, and her peaceful strength, temper, tendency towards perfection, and high moral principles. On the one hand he was very thoughtful, wistful, and receptive to his parents' feelings, but on the other hand he remained independent.

3.1.2 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Coretta Scott King once stated that people frequently thought that her husband inherited the idea of non-violence from his parents and grandparents. On one hand, they influenced him to care for his fellow man, but there was another reason why he chose the pathway of peace and non-violence. The major influence came from the thought of the spiritual leader of India of the day, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. This 'great soul', as he was often called became a "familiar icon of anti-colonial resistance and of movements for social justice throughout the world."¹⁷

With the life and work of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. became familiar very early, already during his studies at Morehouse College. He became fond of Gandhi's strategy of 'satyagraha', which advocated the use of non-violence or civil disobedience to achieve

¹⁷ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, edited by Paul Lauter (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 408.

specific changes. “It excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and, therefore, not competent to punish. It presupposes self-discipline, self-control, self-purification, and recognized social status in the person offering.” The principle Gandhi defended was so simple that even children could understand it. Unlike passive resistance advocated by many others, satyagraha is not designed as a weapon of the weak. It is, de facto, vice-versa. Indeed, the use of violence does not come into question at all. Adherents of passive resistance, on the other hand, are not afraid to use any means necessary, including violence, to gain their point. Gandhi advocated that proper satyagrahi, or the person that professes the satyagraha doctrine and obeys it, “will always try to overcome evil by good, anger by love, untruth by truth, and himsa (violence) by ahimsa (nonviolence).” Gandhi saw also the connection between the body and mind. He alleged that adherence to non-violence cannot be done without proper physical training because of the connectivity between body and mind. Moreover, intensive campaigning is an essential part of mobilizing public opinion, and it is prudent public opinion that is the most powerful weapon of satyagrahi.¹⁸

MLK as well as Gandhi used specific types of protests. As far as Gandhi is concerned, he frequently used the method of fasting. King, Jr., on the other hand, used sit-in demonstrations and mass marches. According to the model of his guru, he knew that public opposition takes effect only if there is a certain level of strength and action behind it. Both Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. also knew that one of the most important things in their struggle is to teach their followers to fight without weapons. But they both also knew that whoever was dependent on using weapon their whole life would find it difficult to dispose of it.

3.1.3 W. E. B. Du Bois

Another extremely important person in the sphere of civil rights and a person who influenced the disposition of Martin Luther King, Jr. was American civil rights leader, educator, author, scholar, and Pan-Africanist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.

In his 1890 *Address to the Nations of the World* he stressed the need for solidarity between all people of the African origin. He saw a fixed color barrier standing between

¹⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, edited by Paul Lauter (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 407, 414; *Ibid.*, 415

white and colored people. He knew that if African-Americans would not start with their campaigns and agitations, they would gain no opportunities and benefits. One of his main ideas was to destroy the myth of African-American inferiority. He was the one who “more than anyone else disposed the lies about African-Americans in the most important and the most productive period of their history.” He argued that through co-existence, humans influence each other. As a result, if African-Americans were given opportunities and knowledge, everyone would benefit.¹⁹

In 1909 he was one of the founders and latter main figures of the NAACP which was formed mainly as a protest against the legal prosecution of lynching, acts of intimidation and oppression, and race riots which were quite popular at that time.

He also advocated Pan-Africanism, or the philosophy to join all the Africans and people of African descent into one global African fellowship. W. E. B. Du Bois organized a number of Pan-African congresses in the 1920s, but practical results were few.

By the 1920s Du Bois was speculating on the importance of the assimilation of African-Americans and whites. Approximately ten years later, he left the NAACP’s integrative endeavors and promoted an African-American wave of nationalism. Much like he became an idol for MLK, he became an idol for the Black Nationalists, who were advocates of black unity and independence.

3.1.4 Booker T. Washington

Half white, half African-American, born into slavery, Booker Taliaferro Washington became a skillful and liberal leader, author, and orator. He was successful in the creation of inter-racial relationships and co-operation, and he counted among his followers not only African-Americans, but also whites.

Unlike Du Bois, Washington believed education was an obligation. Therefore, he focused much of his attention on improving the educational situation for African-Americans. He raised funds and gained moral support through cooperation with whites, especially white philanthropists. He believed that higher education is the right of everyone,

¹⁹ Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 277.

and he himself contributed to education through the authorship of several books that are still widely read.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Booker T. Washington was criticized for his cooperation with whites by several NAACP leaders, namely W. E. B. Du Bois. As well as Du Bois, Washington advocated the principle of patience. He strongly believed in assimilation. He supposed that racism could be overcome through the mutual cooperation of people of different races and backgrounds. MLK adopted this point of view.

Although not all African-American citizens agreed with his philosophy, Washington's life work contributed to a better understanding of the American legal system and, basically, also to the establishment of the Civil Rights Movement some decades later.

3.1.5 Henry David Thoreau

Darwinist author, philosopher, transcendentalist, environmentalist, abolitionist, and anarchist Henry David Thoreau was another person who influenced Martin Luther King, Jr. His whole philosophy was based on one simple argument, a right to resist non-violently the civil government and its unjust demeanor.

One of his great works, *Civil Disobedience*, was written as a reaction to his objection to tax paying. In fact, he believed that the best government is one which does not govern at all. MLK agreed with Thoreau's opinion that evil should not be dissembled, and repeated often that a person who accepts it without any objections in fact agrees with it. The civil disobedience defended by Thoreau could not be conducted by every single person but only by a selected few. Furthermore, it presumed the person could act free from fear of the penalties that could come. His philosophy influenced Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. From Thoreau, King, Jr. took the idea of non-violent resistance. In fact, he was "fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system." On the other hand, Gandhi during his work in South Africa picked up several ideas concerning the coexistence of man and nature, transcendentalism, and environmentalism.²⁰

²⁰ The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "King Encyclopedia – Nonviolent Resistance," http://MLK-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://MLK-kpp01.stanford.edu/Kingweb/about_King/encyclopedia/nonviolent.resist.html (accessed March 2, 2010).

3.1.6 Marcus Garvey

Sometimes called a religious prophet, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr. was a Jamaica-born author, orator, Black Nationalist, and Pan-Africanist. There was a big controversy between Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois considered Garvey a dangerous person because of his opinions that undermined Du Bois' endeavors towards the rights of African-Americans. Garvey, as well as Booker T. Washington believed in the need for the assimilation of African-Americans into American society. He knew that uniting them is the best and only possible way to bring them to success and improve the conditions in which they lived. Marcus Garvey was the founding father of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) in 1914. The purpose of this organization was to bring together all the people of African descent and ensure them with freedom in economic, social, and political matters.

Martin Luther King, Jr. appreciated Marcus Garvey for being one of the first real African-American leaders. He was the first person taking advantage of the number of people and establishing a mass movement. UNIA-ACL had several million members, and he was able to give them all a sense of belonging and decorum.

4 PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION

The modern Civil Rights Movement began after the Second World War, when several citizens were appointed by President Harry S. Truman to a civil rights committee. Public awareness started to increase. Long before this, in 1896, a decision of the U.S. Supreme Court made racial segregation constitutional under the doctrine of 'separate but equal'. This doctrine became the rule of the land for almost sixty years, until reversed in 1954.

4.1 Montgomery Bus Boycott

Martin Luther King, Jr. became involved in the Baptist community of Montgomery, Alabama. "The church was comparatively small there, with a membership of around three hundred people, but it occupied a central place in the community. Many influential and respected citizens – professional people with substantial incomes – were among its members." Shortly after that he came to understand the dramatic situation taking place there.²¹

In December 1955, a few weeks after the birth of his first child, Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white person because, as she said, she was tired. This dressmaker was fined ten dollars and did not stay in jail because E. D. Nixon, a civil rights leader and one of the promoters of Montgomery Bus Boycott, posted bail for her. Rosa Parks may not have been the first person to refuse giving up her bus seat to a white citizen, but she certainly became famous for her actions.

King, Jr. soon established several committees and associations promoting the reduction of segregation. He adhered to his commitment to fight against inequality. He himself hesitated over whether boycotting is Christian. But, he remembered Thoreau's thought that if a person accepts evil without protest, s/he co-operates with it. Furthermore the aim of the entire boycott was not to ruin the bus company, but to bring in a bit of justice. The movement called for the civility of bus drivers, colored bus drivers for predominantly colored lines, and the rule of 'first come first served'.

The boycott began on 5 December 1955, with the simple rule, that colored inhabitants should not use buses. Several thousands of leaflets announcing the plans were published

²¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, introduced by Clayborne Carson (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 3.

and distributed. The white press actually helped the organizers by criticizing the boycott, and in the process provided free publicity for it. Only a few African-Americans rode the buses that day. People used bicycles, taxis, mules, and their own feet. Some of them walked up to twelve miles repeating “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you.”²²

The boycott survived threats, discouragement, King, Jr.’s arrest, and even cold and rainy weather. Actually these setbacks united the African-American community even more. Even white women unconsciously helped the boycotting side by transporting their African-American maids to be sure they would come to work.

With the success of the boycott, African-Americans began to feel that something new was happening in the United States, something that had never been seen there before, something that had been seen in India led by Gandhi – a non-violent struggle – no cross-burning, no lynching, no assassinations, no coercion, but persuasion, law, and order. They also felt the global potential of the boycott. It became a part of the world revolution of humanity. MLK himself affirmed that God chose Montgomery as an example of the triumph of liberty over submission and injustice.

Some of the leading figures of the Movement were charged with breaking local laws. As a result, King, Jr. was fined and obliged to post bail. Not long after that, on 6 May 1956, the court heard arguments concerning the constitutionality of bus segregation, and several months later, the court found segregation on buses to be unconstitutional. White lawyers appealed the decision all the way to the Supreme Court which, on 13 November, confirmed the previous court’s rulings. This decision was an historical milestone in the struggle for civil rights. It meant the end of a tiring and long-lasting boycott.

Even though bus segregation was unconstitutional, the practical implementation of equality in public transportation faced resistance from whites. But Martin Luther King, Jr. still preached the ideas of non-violence and civility to his followers.

The bus boycott was canceled on 20 December 1956, right after the official court decision. The next day, the African-Americans triumphantly boarded the buses, but this

²² Webster’s Bible Translation, "Matthew 5:44," Biblos.com webpage, <http://websterbible.com/matthew/5.htm>, (accessed March 13, 2010).

time the desegregated ones. King, Jr. warned the African-American citizens of Montgomery not to repay evil and violence with evil and violence, but with love. In the end, the power of non-violence was stronger than the racist opposition validating King, Jr.'s approach. It was an immense success for the movement that nobody died during the protests in Montgomery. It showed the other cities, and basically, the whole South, what can be achieved by combined force and non-violence.

Basically, King "raised the sights of a local movement to encompass large moral issues and shaped the black struggle for freedom into a human rights movement with international dimensions." His first book called *Stride Toward Freedom* was out in September 1958. In it he discussed the history of the Montgomery boycott and the protest movement created there.²³

4.2 From Montgomery to Africa and Washington, D. C.

Soon after the triumph in Montgomery, Martin Luther King, Jr. recognized that the potential energy among African-Americans should be harnessed and the whole South integrated. To achieve these goals, the SCLC was established on 10 January 1957, and Reverend King, Jr. was appointed its first president.

In March, the prime minister of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah invited King, Jr. to join the Independence Day jubilee there. Since MLK considered the situation in Africa very similar to that in the United States, he accepted this invitation. Ghanaians struggled for independence from Europe. During his visit to Ghana, King, Jr. learned from Nkrumah that even the most complicated conflicts can be solved in peace.

17 May 1957 was an important day in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Thirty-seven thousand people, including three thousand whites, gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. to hear a persuasive speech by MLK on the occasion of the Pilgrimage of Freedom. He addressed his speech to President Eisenhower and the Congress, expressing the need for voting rights. The law was adopted several years later, in 1965.

²³ Michael Honey, "Becoming King," *Journal of American History* 96 (December 2009): 919 – 920.

4.3 Atlanta happenings

Tired of traveling back and forth from Montgomery to Atlanta led to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s decision to leave Alabama and move to Georgia. After all, Atlanta offered better possibilities for personal development as well as for the growth of SCLC.

In 1960, a new type of protest action appeared. Sit-in demonstrations were aimed at eliminating segregation from restaurants and snack bars. For several weeks, colored, as well as white students organized these demonstrations in university towns all across the South. Furthermore, the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) was established on 15 April 1960.

Several accusations came during these months, but all of them were just imputations. Certain people tried to trample on King, Jr.'s reputation and taint everything he had accomplished. In some cases, accusers themselves withdrew the accusations for fear of hurting their own reputation. The worst attack on MLK's reputation came soon after his arrival to Atlanta. A jury in Montgomery accused him of falsifying his income-tax return. However, a Southern jury of twelve whites found him innocent. This was a triumph of justice. Yet, soon after that King, Jr. had to face another accusation, because he drove a white woman in his car. This time he was found guilty and sentenced to six months of hard labor in a state correction facility in Reidsville, Georgia. This is another proof of how absurd the regulations were. At that time, Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy was a candidate for the presidency of the States. He called to Coretta Scott King, expressed his interest in her husband and offered his help. Soon after this phone call, MLK was liberated and J. F. Kennedy was elected president by a small margin. It is left to wonder if Kennedy's intervention helped him or hurt him in the election.

While sit-in demonstrations continued, another new type of protest action appeared in 1961: freedom rides. Desegregation of interstate buses, as well as desegregation of their terminals in the South was the main purpose of these rides. Groups of African-Americans, but also young white people counteracted the regulations of segregated transport. Martin Luther King, Jr. became chairman of the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee (FRCC). These rides continued throughout the summer, and time after time he urged the idea of non-violence. Then he went to Albany, Georgia, for another SCLC campaign. Albany was the heart of the deep-rooted white racist region, where the federal government was the only ally the movement had. However, by the means of combined effort and non-violent

resistance, injury was avoided. Experience gained in Albany helped the movement when it turned its focus to Birmingham.

4.4 Birmingham

Birmingham, Alabama, a wealthy city with a white majority, was another battlefield of civil rights. Civil and business leaders, as well as most of the citizens, disliked even the idea of integration. The purpose of all the actions in Birmingham, which in the end lasted for more than two months, was to end the city's discriminatory economic policies.

Organizers, whose members besides Reverend King, Jr. were Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, and others, started to operate in January 1963. They knew that the campaign in Birmingham would probably be the most difficult, but they also knew that success would help to destroy segregation. MLK inculcated Birmingham's African-Americans with the concept that 'black is beautiful', for he knew that emotional and psychological maintenance was the strongest weapon a colored person could possess.

At that time already, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the rest of the Civil Rights Movement knew that even though president J. F. Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy were in favor of civil rights, they did not plan to draft a civil rights bill. This made them work even harder.

The Birmingham demonstrations started on 3 April 1963 with a number of sit-ins followed by less successful boycotts of segregated facilities. The purpose of these sit-ins was to provoke arrest, so that the prison would be overcrowded. One week after the commencement of the Birmingham campaign, on 12 April 1963, Doctor King, Jr. and a number of other leaders induced their arrest by breaking the law against mass public demonstrations. King, Jr. commented that the "purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation." He spent eight days in the Birmingham prison, during which time he wrote his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, addressed to eight white Alabaman clergymen who accused him of being a swindler trying to find popularity.²⁴

²⁴ The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle Online, http://MLK-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_letter_from_birmingham_jail_1963/. (accessed March 15, 2010).

In this letter written on newspaper margins and shreds of toilet paper, he vindicated his presence and intervention in Birmingham affairs:

I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. It is unfortunate, that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom.²⁵

Birmingham was generally a duel between segregation and equality, but it was also a duel between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Theophilus Eugene Connor, or 'Bull' Connor. Bull Connor was the chief of police of the city of Birmingham during the Civil Rights era. He was a thorn in the flesh of every person fighting against segregation. He used high-pressure water jets against demonstrators, as well as police dogs, even against children. Bull Connor's reputation suffered while the reputation of MLK improved. On 2 May 1963, 959 young people were arrested as a result of the protest march. The next day, while singing 'We Shall Overcome', another crowd of young people led by Reverend King, Jr. went to the streets. But this time the first weakness in the structure of Birmingham racism showed itself. When the crowd stepped forward, the white officers with their water jets withdrew. All the followers of Doctor King, Jr. stood by the code of non-violence. The moral pressure the white police officers had to face combined with the strength of African-Americans, disarmed them. It was a triumph of peace and collective power.

On 10 May 1963, six days after President J. F. Kennedy sent Burke Marshall to handle the situation in Birmingham, the deal was warranted. This act, Martin Luther King, Jr. considered as a real driving force behind the Birmingham actions. The Movement's original requirements of nullification of the segregation from stores, improvement of the wage conditions, nullification of all the accusations, or implementation of regular meetings of the Chamber of Commerce and the city representatives with members of African-American minority were accepted almost completely. Generally, public places were opened to African-Americans bar none.

²⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1990), 290, 301.

As in Montgomery, the deal between white business leaders and the African-American minority in Birmingham was followed by an explosion of violence. Several bombs exploded near the houses and offices of colored leaders. Consequently, thousands of angry African-Americans went to the streets. Violent mayhem was about to break out, but the power of non-violent action was stronger and the same furious people who were ready to start fighting started to hand over their weapons validating the spirit of non-violence.

In relation to politics, another great achievement came after the happenings in Birmingham. Responding to Cold War pressures, President J. F. Kennedy decided to draft a civil rights law, which was passed by the Congress in 1964.

Birmingham became a great example of solving the situation of whites and colored, of inter-racial relations. MLK stated: “Birmingham was a colossus of segregation. Victory of the place will light up the whole South and will cause breaches in the house of discrimination.” His prediction came true. Not counting the era of Civil War and Reconstruction, African-Americans were never so determined to change their living conditions.²⁶

Though there was an endeavor to uplift African-Americans, a number of serious obstructions always appeared. But Birmingham was the start of a new chapter of inter-racial relations. Generally, discrimination started to disappear, but more importantly the confidence of African-Americans started to raise not just in the South but nationwide.

Later, when planning one of his most famous and most successful marches, Martin Luther King, Jr. started to write his third book called *Why We Can't Wait*, an “attempt to defend the potency of nonviolent direct action by showing how it had succeeded in Birmingham and other Southern cities.”²⁷

4.5 March on Washington

In June 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. went on a lecture tour. Tens of thousands attended his speeches and participated in his marches.

²⁶ Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 218.

²⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1990), 518.

A March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was planned for 28 August 1963, for two purposes. The first purpose was to give the African-Americans an opportunity to demonstrate non-violently and in an organized fashion. The second purpose was to place pressure on Congress to approve a bill of civil rights.

Although there were not as many participants as organizers had hoped, King, Jr. still made his speech in front of an estimated quarter of a million people in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C.

As the so-called 'moral leader of the nation', King, Jr., delivered his now famous "I have a dream" speech, in which he stated:

We have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds'. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning.²⁸

Throughout the speech, he encouraged people to think and take heart. He then ended the speech with the words of an old African-American spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" As good as the speech was, the greatest success of the March on Washington was that although white and colored, poor and rich, from all corners of the States were together at one place, no violence occurred. Moreover, almost one third of the crowd was white. One of the biggest contributions was that a lot of whites, not connected to or caring for African-American requirements, got to know what the Civil Rights Movement was all about.²⁹

The assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, on 22 November 1963 was a shock for all Americans. This tragedy had huge consequences, especially on the Civil Rights Movement. Kennedy's death somehow activated the conscience of the nation, and people felt that the bill concerning civil rights should be passed in his honor, which it ultimately was on 2 July 1964.

²⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I have a dream," Martin Luther King Online, <http://www.MLKonline.net/dream.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

²⁹ Ibid.

Also in 1964, MLK won the Nobel Peace Prize. He accepted the prize on behalf of the Movement, but, he was a bit solicitous: “I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle; to a movement which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize.” He swore he would struggle for peace and brotherhood as long as he would be able to. He also had become reconciled to the fact that he might be killed. Regardless of this, the Kings sent their children to white school, not to gain publicity, but to be an example for the rest of African-American families. There was a huge need to let the nation see that integration can be achieved peacefully.³⁰

4.6 Selma

On 2 January 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr. engaged the issue of voting rights. He chose Selma, Alabama, as the next target of demonstrations. Selma was under the jurisdiction of a sheriff who was “an avid, shrewd segregationist”. Rather than fueling the movement by perpetrating race violence before the television cameras, the sheriff “admonished his deputies to enforce Alabama’s segregationist voter registration laws with the least amount of brutality.”³¹

Doctor King, Jr. said that

...the goal of the demonstrations in Selma, as elsewhere, is to dramatize the existence of injustice and to bring about the presence of justice by methods of nonviolence. Long years of experience indicate to us that Negroes can achieve this goal when four things occur: 1. Nonviolent demonstrators go into the streets to exercise their situational rights. 2. Racists resist by unleashing violence against them. 3. Americans of conscience in the name of decency demand federal intervention and legislation. 4. The administration, under mass pressure, initiates measure of immediate intervention and remedial legislation.³²

³⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," Martin Luther King Online, <http://www.MLKonline.net/acceptance.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

³¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1990), 126.

³² *Ibid.*, 127.

4.6.1 Violent vs. non-violent action in the struggle against racism

At the beginning of February 1965, another person dealing with civil rights appeared in Selma – Malcolm X. Both, Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as Malcolm Little, later renamed Malcolm X, were fighting for the same thing – they wanted to destroy the deep-rooted evil able to destroy the lives of the masses – racism. Although they had the same aim, the means they used were root and branch different. Major aspects of their counter philosophies in the struggle against racism and racial injustices in the 20th century U.S. were rooted in their backgrounds, denominations, and visions. As Malcolm X himself pointed out, he did not come to Selma to harm MLK but to help him, showing whites the other option of the African-American civil rights struggle, giving them the chance to choose and hear of Martin Luther King, Jr.

First, both leaders came from different backgrounds. Martin Luther King, Jr., as mentioned earlier, grew up in a comfortable middle-class family, and he was a beloved child. Even if he faced some problems of racial segregation, he was enabled to study in prestigious schools. He had almost everything that an African-American boy could have had in such times. On the other hand, Malcolm Little's youth was difficult. Malcolm believed his father was murdered by a mob called the Black Legion, although the police report said it was an accident. His mother was placed into a sanatorium for the mentally ill following her nervous breakdown and he himself spent some time in a penitentiary, because of repeated stealing when trying to help his mother with raising the other children. The local court later removed Malcolm from his mother to a white couple, able to better control him. If MLK had everything, Malcolm Little had barely anything. It was during such formative years that they started to form their visions of how to deal with the racism. Martin, having more or less a content youth did not want to harm anyone. He was given an opportunity, and he took an advantage of it. Whereas Malcolm, who suffered a childhood of neglect, embraced the idea of revenge – an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.

The next thing that distinguished these two men and their philosophies was their denomination. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born into a purely Baptist family. His father was a reverend, and Martin was predetermined to follow the same path. All the time he was taught: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you." But, this was not the case for Malcolm Little. Although he was born to a Baptist father and he honored these values for a certain time, in his twenties he converted to Islam. This new religion, which defended

racial segregation and excused violence, gave him another angle on things and influenced his specific philosophy later.³³

The historical figures and their visions that inspired these great leaders were also important influence. As mentioned earlier, Reverend King, Jr. constructed his philosophy on several basic authorities, among them: his father Martin Luther King, Sr. with his religion values and respect for his fellow man; Henry David Thoreau with the idea of civil disobedience; Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his idea of passive resistance. Over the years MLK developed and cemented his strategy of nonviolent direct action, He was determined to use all possible peaceable and warrantable resources to fight for his program. On the other hand, Malcolm X based his philosophy on two important figures. The first was Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Jr. with his theory of repatriation. The other important figure in Malcolm's life was Elijah Muhammad, the head of the Nation of Islam, who espoused the theories of self-defense and full independence of African-Americans, both economically and politically. Little's philosophy was founded on the idea of complete separation of African-Americans from whites, even in their own detached land, a state which would act as a provisional home until returning back to Africa. But the most distinguishing principle of Little's struggle remains the strategy of making use of violence. In fact, he encouraged African-Americans to use any necessary means of self-defense. The relation between King, Jr. and Malcolm X can be, essentially, compared to the one of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi on one hand was fully attached to non-violence; Nehru on the other hand accepted violence as an effective means of revolution.

By all means, one of the things the two men shared was the attitude toward the seriousness of the fight. Both were of the conviction that a man should be prepared to lay down his life for the right thing. Actually, Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." The outlook of Malcolm Little was fairly the same: "The price of freedom is death. If you're not ready to die for it, put the word 'freedom' out of your vocabulary." MLK also agreed with some points of Malcolm X's program, for example with the recapturing of the old African-American pride, culture, and the idea of 'black is beautiful', as well as with non-violent Black Power

³³ Webster's Bible Translation, "Matthew 5:44," Biblos.com webpage. <http://websterbible.com/matthew/5.htm> (accessed November 24, 2009).

ideas of having a share in economy, job feasibilities, and free competition, fairly having a share in society.³⁴

Both, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X represented two different sides of the same coin, two opposing views on one major problem – racism. Their purpose was to right the wrongs of the racial segregation. Although they used different weapons, they both fought for the same thing, they both were willing to die for they dream, and they both died for it. They both were murdered, Malcolm X at a Harlem public meeting, Doctor King, Jr. at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

One wonders what would have happened if the masses had listened more to Malcolm X than to Martin Luther King, Jr.? What would have happen if the idea of non-violent direct action had not been given greater weights? Probably, the line of bloody battlefields would be much longer.

The first march, forty-five miles long from Selma to Montgomery, was planned for 7 March 1965. More than five hundred African-Americans gathered and started on their route. However, this march did not last long; the whole day came to be known as 'Bloody Sunday'. "During a demonstration, the sheriff had directed his men in tear gassing and beating the marchers to the ground." As a result, sixteen participants in the march had to be hospitalized, and another fifty were injured. Not even this discouraged Martin Luther King, Jr. and the rest of the Movement. He still repeated and insisted on reciprocating against evil and violence with love and non-violence. Constantly he imparted this message to his followers, even when they were beaten, because according to him, violence was no solution.³⁵

Although MLK feared he might die in Selma, he called for another march two days later. The court, however, intervened, granting a temporary injunction against a march. A Federal district court judge "issued a restraining order, preventing the march from taking place until he could hold additional hearings later in the week." Doctor King, Jr. respected the courts, but he knew that canceling the march would appear like he had given up. In response he himself said: "It is better to die on the road than to commit a slaughter on own

³⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Quotes," Martin Luther King Online, <http://www.MLKonline.net/quotes.html> (accessed November 24, 2009); Little, Malcolm, "Quotes," Malcolm X Online, <http://www.malcolmxonline.com/malcolm-x-quotes.html> (accessed November 24, 2009).

³⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, foreworded by Coretta Scott King, introduced by Vincenc Harding (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 1.

conscience.” Headed by MLK and Ralph Abernathy, the demonstration set forth to Selma with about 1,500 participants, out of which more than half were whites. MLK was concerned about the small number of march participants and because of the growing danger of a violent face-off, he decided to call off the march. He was criticized for this later, but he knew that big changes cannot be achieved without necessary support. Like Gandhi, he considered masses and violence incompatible. That was why he decided to wait until the maximum force gathered.³⁶

The third march was planned for 21 March, and this time nearly five thousand participants, both African-American and white showed up, and they were under the protection of the United States government, which had taken command of Alabama police and soldiers. The ban on demonstrating was also lifted which, by itself, meant a great success.

After a demanding, fifty-four mile march, the procession reached the imaginary gates of Montgomery. Many celebrities also came to support the marching crowd, among them Harry Belafonte, Sammy Davis, Leonard Bernstein, and Nina Simons.

25 March 1965 represented the most important day of all the Selma demonstrations. Hundreds of thousands of people from all states, races, religions, and social classes assembled in Montgomery. King, Jr. said, “This is the greatest day for the Negro in the history of America.” Unfortunately, this day did not end without violence. A white female Viola Liuzz was shot for supporting the movement, and she became a martyr for free voting rights for African-Americans.³⁷

Partly as a result of what happened in Selma, a Voting Rights Act outlawing discriminatory voting practices was passed on 6 August 1965 and became one of the cornerstones in the struggle for the protection of the rights of African-Americans.

³⁶ All Experts, "Selma to Montgomery Marches: Encyclopedia," All Experts webpage online, http://en.allexperts.com/e/s/se/selma_to_montgomery_marches.htm (accessed March 10, 2010); Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 241.

³⁷ Coretta Scott King, *Můj život s Martinem Lutherem Kingem*, translated by Jaroslav Šonka (Prague: Vyšehrad, 1976), originally published as *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin, 1994), own translation, 247.

4.7 Vietnam intervention

Martin Luther King, Jr. considered peace and freedom as indivisible, and he was fully aware of the fact that the money spent on the Vietnam War could instead have been spent for the struggle for freedom within the United States. He started expressing this opinion publicly in 1967, and he encountered a lot of criticism from others, both African-Americans and whites. Many of his colleagues from the Civil Rights Movement considered his intervention as a threat to the struggle for equality and human rights.

Despite of all the criticism, he delivered his first speech openly criticizing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War on 4 April 1967 in New York City's Riverside Church at a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned. He stressed there that peace and freedom are interrelated, that the war was bad for the poor. He himself said

...the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching the Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools.³⁸

He also proposed stopping the bombing in North and South Vietnam, the need of an armistice, and the removal of all foreign troops from Vietnam. Likewise, he criticized his own government for being “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today” and for being property-oriented. King, Jr. was conscious of the fact that it would take a long time to resolve this situation, but he was prepared take action to do so, to convince people to take the initiative to change American society and make it more people oriented.³⁹

Though, he fully expected to face the consequences of his actions, he never anticipated such disunion within the Movement. Nevertheless, he took part in several peace

³⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1990), 233.

³⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," Martin Luther King Online, <http://www.MLKonline.net/vietnam.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

mobilizations and demonstrations. Again, he repeated constantly that the war in Vietnam is wrong. In a speech, delivered on 4 April 1967, in New York City, he also criticized the proceedings of the federal government and the fact that people have to understand the cohesion between the above mentioned peace and freedom, that America is seen and will be seen as a land of violence as well as militarism, instead of being seen as a revolutionary and democratic land. He tried to make the people understand that U.S. intervention in Vietnam was wrong from the very beginning. He also stressed the need of understanding that the conflict in Vietnam is of a moral character and the fact that always there is a choice:

If we will make the right choice, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. If we will but make the right choice, we will be able to speed up the day, all over America and all over the world, when justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.⁴⁰

Martin Luther King, Jr. helped to change the sentiment of the American people. Public opinion started to advocate peace and disapprove of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The American military involvement in the war in Vietnam ended by the Case-Church Amendment, following the Congress decision on August 15 1973.

Again, as a respond to the current situation, in 1967, MLK wrote his fourth, and probably the toughest, book called *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*. In this book he identified the black power with many of his own objectives and he called for “recognition of the importance of many strategies, and lamented the rise of logistical imperialists.”⁴¹

4.8 Poor People’s Campaign

Since the beginning of 1968 Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed doubts about his longevity. He was aware that he had made many enemies, both for his civil rights activities and his anti-war stance. What he repeated often was the necessity that all of his followers

⁴⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," Martin Luther King Online, <http://www.MLKonline.net/vietnam.html> (accessed October 1, 2009).

⁴¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1990), 555.

must not mourn his death, but continue in his work. He did not want to die, but he was reconciled to it. As mentioned, he held the view that a man not willing to die was not worthy to live.

All the while, poverty persisted. King, Jr. started to ruminate about a campaign that could unite all the poor people, regardless of the color of their skin. This campaign was soon called the Poor People's Campaign and its purpose was to organize another march on Washington to plead the cause of poverty. The main aim was the introduction of an 'Economic Bill of Rights'. The Poor People's Campaign asked "for the federal government to prioritize helping the poor with an antipoverty package that included housing and a guaranteed annual income for all Americans."⁴²

This campaign should have been something special, because it was the first proper action in the hands of the Movement that went beyond race. Aims of this demonstration were obvious: economic assurance, good education, and proper housing for each American. Although King, Jr.'s new campaign met with several setbacks in New York City, he was fully determined to continue with the Poor People's Campaign in Memphis, Tennessee. Once in Memphis however, he was criticized for staying in a hotel that was too luxurious. He acknowledged this critique by moving to the Lorraine Motel, which had African-American owners and staff.

On 3 April 1968 he delivered his final and probably the most apocalyptic sermon at the Mason Temple in Memphis, the headquarters of the Church of God in Christ which was the largest Pentecostal denomination for African-Americans in the States. In contrast to all his preceding speeches which were aimed at the future, this speech seemed to focus on the past.

In his speech he expressed thanks to his longtime friend Ralph Abernathy, he discussed history mentioning Egypt, the Roman Empire, and Abraham Lincoln. He stressed that the struggle for equal rights must not stop in Memphis. He thanked God for allowing him to be with his people, and he reminded people of his past efforts to make his American dream come true. His speech, made in front of two thousands of his followers, closed with:

⁴² Poor People's Campaign, "History of Poor People's campaign," Poor People's Campaign webpage, <http://poorpeoplescampaignppc.org/HISTORY.html> (accessed March 29, 2010).

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.⁴³

The next day, this advocate of justice, peace, honesty, and brotherhood met his fate. He was martyred. In his commemoration, many schools, offices, and companies were closed; several important sport events were postponed, as well as many television and broadcasting programs. The funeral was planned for 9 April 1968 and it could not take place anywhere else than in King, Jr.'s Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, one of his loves, the place where he was baptized and where he found his deep faith that accompanied him all his life. The last farewell was held at Morehouse College where he grew into a man and found his path. People all over the United States expressed their regards and sympathy. Manifestations of love and brotherhood on the one hand shared the stage with riots.

On 9 April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. led his last march, paradoxically one of the biggest in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. One hundred and fifty thousand of followers of all ages, religions, genders, and skin colors, accompanied him to his final resting place, the grave marker of which was inscribed with the words of a famous African-American spiritual: "Free at last, free at last, I thank God I'm free at last."⁴⁴

"There was a deep and mighty response of sympathy in Atlanta – church bells pealed all over the town during the march. And white churches opened their doors to house and feed visitors. With violence all over the nation, Atlanta was spared. On Easter Sunday there were prayers of gratitude in many churches."⁴⁵

⁴³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1990), 286.

⁴⁴ Negro Spirituals webpage, "Free at Last," Negro Spirituals online, http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/free_at_last_from.htm (accessed March 30, 2010).

⁴⁵ Bill Emerson, "From the Editor," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 1968, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=27&hid=112&sid=a2fc5ebe-113a-4cf1-89b9-f6a44cf20768%40sessionmgr114&bdata=Jmxhbm9Y3Mmc210ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#db=a9h&AN=17081662> (accessed May 3, 2010).

Although James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King, Jr., he failed to silence him. Instead MLK's death amplified his message worldwide. In less than a week, his message was heard by more people than in twelve years of his sermons. Martin Luther King, Jr. laid down his life in the name of all the oppressed of this world, from poor workers in Memphis, to powerless workers in Birmingham, to downtrodden peasants in Vietnam. His name became a symbol of hope and courage.

Regrettably, however the Poor People's Campaign ended as an unfulfilled dream. The march on Washington was finished in the honor of Martin Luther King, Jr., but without his presence, the campaign's effectiveness decreased and the campaign was closed on 19 June 1968.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps a machinator, perhaps a plagiarist, perhaps too religious and too peace-loving, but for sure Martin Luther King, Jr. was a great civil rights leader and a person whose character contributed to huge changes of sentiment towards African-Americans and whose actions led to huge changes concerning rights of African-Americans in the United States during the previous century.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. showed the world that violence is not a solution and that problems can be solved in a peaceful way. Were it not for him and his ground-breaking idea of non-violent struggle, racial injustice in the United States might have continued unabated.

His talents and potential, in the hands of a violent leader, could have been weapons of mass destruction. Fortunately, Martin Luther King, Jr. fought for the right goals.

“I’d like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I’d like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.”⁴⁶

Martin Luther King, Jr.

⁴⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct," Harvard Kennedy School webpage, http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/mganz/Archive%20Readings/MLK_Drum_Major.pdf (accessed May 4, 2010).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MLK	Martin Luther King, Jr.
NAACP	National Association for Advancement of Colored People
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee
UNIA-ACL	Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League

APPENDICES

P I “I have a dream” – Address at March on Washington (28 August 1963)

P II “I see the Promised Land” – Address at Mason Temple (3 April 1968)

APPENDIX P I: “I HAVE A DREAM”

I Have a Dream - Address at March on Washington (28 August 1963)

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. [Applause]

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of the Negro. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

APPENDIX P II: "I SEE THE PROMISED LAND"

I See the Promised Land - Address at Mason Temple (3 April 1968)

Thank you very kindly, my friends. As I listened to Ralph Abernathy in his eloquent and generous introduction and then thought about myself, I wondered who he was talking about. It's always good to have your closest friend and associate say something good about you. And Ralph is the best friend that I have in the world.

I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world.

As you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of general and panoramic view of the whole human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?"-- I would take my mental flight by Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there. I would move on by Greece, and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes assembled around the Parthenon as they discussed the great and eternal issues of reality.

But I wouldn't stop there. I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire. And I would see developments around there, through various emperors and leaders. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and esthetic life of man. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even go by the way that the man for whom I'm named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther as he tacked his ninety-five theses on the door at the church in Wittenberg.

But I wouldn't stop there. I would come on up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating president by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion that he had to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry that we have nothing to fear but fear itself.

But I wouldn't stop there. Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth century, I will be happy." Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The

nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding--something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee--the cry is always the same--"We want to be free."

And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we're going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence.

That is where we are today. And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period, to see what is unfolding. And I'm happy that he's allowed me to be in Memphis.

I can remember, I can remember when Negroes were just going around as Ralph has said, so often, scratching where they didn't itch, and laughing when they were not tickled. But that day is all over. We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world.

And that's all this whole thing is about. We aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. And that we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we've got to stay together. We've got to stay together and maintain unity. You know, whenever Pharaoh wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt, he had a favorite, favorite formula for doing it. What was that? He kept the slaves fighting among themselves. But whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh's court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.

Secondly, let us keep the issues where they are. The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers. Now, we've got to keep attention on that. That's always the problem with a little violence. You know what happened the other day, and the press dealt only with the window-breaking. I read the articles. They very seldom got around to mentioning the fact that one thousand, three hundred sanitation workers were on strike, and that Memphis is not being fair to them, and that Mayor Loeb is in dire need of a doctor. They didn't get around to that.

Now we're going to march again, and we've got to march again, in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be. And force everybody to see that there are thirteen hundred of God's children here suffering, sometimes going hungry, going through dark and dreary nights wondering how this thing is going to come out. That's the issue. And we've got to say to the nation: we know it's coming out. For when people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory.

We aren't going to let any mace stop us. We are masters in our nonviolent movement in disarming police forces; they don't know what to do. I've seen them so often. I remember in Birmingham, Alabama, when we were in that majestic struggle there we would move out of the 16th Street Baptist Church day after day; by the hundreds we would move out. And Bull Connor would tell them to send the dogs forth and they did come; but we just went before the dogs singing, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round." Bull Connor next would say, "Turn the fire hoses on." And as I said to you the other night, Bull Connor didn't know history. He knew a kind of physics that somehow didn't relate to the transphysics that we knew about. And that was the fact that there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out. And we went before the fire hoses; we had known water. If we were Baptist or some other denomination, we had been immersed. If we were Methodist, and some others, we had been sprinkled, but we knew water.

That couldn't stop us. And we just went on before the dogs and we would look at them; and we'd go on before the water hoses and we would look at it, and we'd just go on singing. "Over my head I see freedom in the air." And then we would be thrown in the paddy wagons, and sometimes we were stacked in there like sardines in a can. And they would throw us in, and old Bull would say, "Take them off," and they did; and we would just go in the paddy wagon singing, "We Shall Overcome." And every now and then we'd get in the jail, and we'd see the jailers looking through the windows being moved by our prayers,

and being moved by our words and our songs. And there was a power there which Bull Connor couldn't adjust to; and so we ended up transforming Bull into a steer, and we won our struggle in Birmingham.

Now we've got to go on to Memphis just like that. I call upon you to be with us Monday. Now about injunctions: We have an injunction and we're going into court tomorrow morning to fight this illegal, unconstitutional injunction. All we say to America is, "Be true to what you said on paper." If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn't committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of the press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on. We need all of you. And you know what's beautiful to me, is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel. It's a marvelous picture. Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and say, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somehow, the preacher must say with Jesus, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."

And I want to commend the preachers, under the leadership of these noble men: James Lawson, one who has been in this struggle for many years; he's been to jail for struggling; but he's still going on, fighting for the rights of his people. Rev. Ralph Jackson, Billy Kiles; I could just go right on down the list, but time will not permit. But I want to thank them all. And I want you to thank them, because so often, preachers aren't concerned about anything but themselves. And I'm always happy to see a relevant ministry.

It's alright to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here. It's alright to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's alright to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. Now, we are poor people, individually, we are poor

when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively, that means all of us together, collectively we are richer than all the nation in the world, with the exception of nine. Did you ever think about that? After you leave the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and I could name the others, the Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States, and more than the national budget of Canada. Did you know that? That's power right there, if we know how to pool it.

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles, we don't need any Molotov cocktails, we just need to go around to these stores, and to these massive industries in our country, and say, "God sent us by here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda--fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you."

And so, as a result of this, we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy--what is the other bread?--Wonder Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain. We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are choosing them because they can begin the process of saying, they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men who are on strike. And then they can move on downtown and tell Mayor Loeb to do what is right.

But not only that, we've got to strengthen black institutions. I call upon you to take you money out of the banks downtown and deposit you money in Tri-State Bank--we want a "bank-in" movement in Memphis. So go by the savings and loan association. I'm not asking you something that we don't do ourselves at SCLC. Judge Hooks and others will tell you that we have an account here in the savings and loan association from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We're just telling you to follow what we're doing. Put your money there. You have six or seven black insurance companies in Memphis. Take out your insurance there. We want to have an "insurance-in."

Now there are some practical things we can do. We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts. I ask you to follow through here.

Now, let me say as I move to my conclusion that we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point, in Memphis. We've got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.

Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus; and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters in life. At points, he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew, and through this, throw him off base. Now that question could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air, and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho. And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn't stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be compassionate by proxy. But with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, because he had the capacity to project the "I" into the "thou," and to be concerned about his brother. Now you know, we use our imagination a great deal to try to determine why the priest and the Levite didn't stop. At times we say they were busy going to church meetings--an ecclesiastical gathering--and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn't be late for their meeting. At other times we would speculate that there was a religious law that "One who was engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony." And every now and then we begin to wonder whether maybe they were not going down to Jerusalem, or down to Jericho, rather to organize a "Jericho Road Improvement Association." That's a possibility. Maybe they felt that it was better to deal with the problem from the casual root, rather than to get bogged down with an individual effort.

But I'm going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It's possible that these men were afraid. You see, the Jericho road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road, I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as a setting

for his parable." It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1200 miles, or rather 1200 feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about 2200 feet below sea level. That's a dangerous road. In the day of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass." And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

That's the question before you tonight. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?" The question is not, "If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?" "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question.

Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

You know, several years ago, I was in New York City autographing the first book that I had written. And while sitting there autographing books, a demented black woman came up. The only question I heard from her was, "Are you Martin Luther King?"

And I was looking down writing, and I said yes. And the next minute I felt something beating on my chest. Before I knew it I had been stabbed by this demented woman. I was rushed to Harlem Hospital. It was a dark Saturday afternoon. And that blade had gone through, and the X-rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of my aorta, the main artery. And once that's punctured, you drown in your own blood--that's the end of you.

It came out in the New York Times the next morning, that if I had sneezed, I would have died. Well, about four days later, they allowed me, after the operation, after my chest had been opened, and the blade had been taken out, to move around in the wheel chair in the hospital. They allowed me to read some of the mail that came in, and from all over the

states, and the world, kind letters came in. I read a few, but one of them I will never forget. I had received one from the President and the Vice-President. I've forgotten what those telegrams said. I'd received a visit and a letter from the Governor of New York, but I've forgotten what the letter said. But there was another letter that came from a little girl, a young girl who was a student at the White Plains High School. And I looked at that letter, and I'll never forget it. It said simply, "Dear Dr. King: I am a ninth-grade student at the Whites Plains High School." She said, "While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I am a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune, and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing you to say that I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze."

And I want to say tonight, I want to say that I am happy that I didn't sneeze. Because if I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1960, when students all over the South started sitting-in at lunch counters. And I knew that as they were sitting in, they were really standing up for the best in the American dream. And taking the whole nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around in 1962, when Negroes in Albany, Georgia, decided to straighten their backs up. And whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere, because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been here in 1963, when the black people of Birmingham, Alabama, aroused the conscience of this nation, and brought into being the Civil Rights Bill. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have had a chance later that year, in August, to try to tell America about a dream that I had had. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been down in Selma, Alabama, to see the great movement there. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been in Memphis to see a community rally around those brothers and sisters who are suffering. I'm so happy that I didn't sneeze.

And they were telling me, now it doesn't matter now. It really doesn't matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us, the pilot said over the public address system, "We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night."

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say that threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.