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TOWARDS “THE WORLD HOUSE”: DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.’S GLOBAL
VISION OF PEACE AND JUSTICE, 1956-1968

by

BRYAN TERRY

Under the Direction of Ian Fletcher, PhD

ABSTRACT

In his last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about the “world house.” This thesis explores the development of King’s ideas about the relationship between the struggle for civil and human rights in the U.S. and global contests like decolonization in Africa and Asia and the war in Vietnam, which ultimately brought him to the notion of a world house and to forthright opposition to U.S. militarism and neocolonialism. This thesis looks at King’s changing understanding and shift of focus of the role of the U.S. government in the nation and the world as he articulated a final global vision of a “world house” of peace, human rights, and economic justice. King’s shifts raises important questions about the place of the U.S. in the world and its trajectory of global hegemony.

INDEX WORDS: World house, civil rights, human rights, global framework, U.S. in the world.

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BRYAN TERRY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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VISION OF PEACE AND JUSTICE, 1956-1968

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BRYAN TERRY

Committee Chair: Ian Fletcher

Committee: Alex Cummings

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2014

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Linda, whose steady support and encouragement was given abundantly with much grace and love.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In his 1967 book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about “the world house.”¹ He counterposed this world house, an inheritance shared by the world’s peoples, to the racism, poverty, and war that divided and degraded them. My thesis explores the development of King’s ideas about the relationship between the struggle for civil and human rights in the U.S. and global contests like decolonization in Africa and Asia and the war in Vietnam, which ultimately brought him to the notion of a world house and to forthright opposition to U.S. militarism and neocolonialism.

I open with the years from 1956 to 1960, when King made connections between civil rights and decolonization and even traveled to Ghana and India. I go on to the years from 1961 to 1965, when the upswing of the civil rights movement and the use of nonviolent direct action produced violent white resistance in the South. King developed an alliance with the federal government during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, which offered some protection for civil rights workers and led to the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965. Finally, I close with the years from 1966 to 1968, when the disappointments of the War on Poverty, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the pressure of young black power and new left activists, and the demands of his own conscience radicalized King. Once again, he made profound connections between the forces of change in the U.S. and around the world. He broadened his agenda from civil rights to peace, human rights, and economic justice. He broke with the Johnson administration and prepared to confront the government with mass nonviolent

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967; Boston: Beacon Press, 2010).

civil disobedience in the spring of 1968. He was killed before the Poor People's Campaign came to Washington, but not before he refined his ideas in a series of talks and writings in 1967. I argue that these ideas are summed up in his notion of a "world house" that could – and must – overcome division and violence and include all peoples and nations.

There is a growing body of scholarship on the nexus of African Americans, the U.S., and the world in the age of decolonization and civil rights. In *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, Penny Von Eschen explores the complex relationship between African Americans and the anticolonial cause in the waning days of European empires. African Americans participated in the mobilization of black people across the African world against empire and for self-government, democracy, and independence in colonial countries. As the Cold War took hold, some also contested U.S. support for American as well as European empire in Africa and Asia and defended their own limited rights of citizenship.² In *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, Brenda Gayle Plummer examines "Afro-American foreign policy perspectives and their connections to social and political changes by governmental and non-governmental agencies" from the Italian invasion of Ethiopia to the "wind of change" in Africa a quarter-century later.³ African Americans took seriously the projection of American power around the world and its effects at

² Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

³ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 5-6.

home as well as abroad. King is a good example, as suggested by his response to the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba in 1961:

For some reason, we [the United States] just don't understand the meaning of the revolution taking place in the world. There is a revolt all over the world against colonialism, reactionary dictatorship, and systems of exploitation. ... I am afraid that we will be relegated to a second-class power in the world with no real moral voice to speak to the conscience of humanity ... I am as concerned about international affairs as I am about the civil rights struggle in the United States.⁴

Like many other peace and human rights advocates, King understood that there was feedback between U.S. foreign and domestic policy and that African Americans had a responsibility and an opportunity to intervene in debates about the exercise of American power.

King's words about Cuba remind us that decolonization was not the only feature of the world situation in the 1950s and 1960s. Cuba was a former Spanish colony, of course. However, following the Spanish-American War of 1898, it became a nominally independent republic in the U.S. sphere of influence in the Americas and, following the 1959 revolution, a developing socialist society allied to the Soviet Union. In addition to the decline of European empires and the challenge of independence movements in the colonial world, the rise of the U.S. as a superpower and the pursuit of the Cold War with the Soviet Union affected African Americans. In *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Mary Dudziak uses the records of the United States Information Agency to understand the interplay between efforts to enhance America's image abroad and the U.S. government's engagement with

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 305.

the civil rights movement.⁵ American racism mattered in foreign perceptions of the U.S. In *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, Thomas Borstelmann also seeks to “trace the ways that the U.S. government responded to demands for an end to racial discrimination domestically and internationally.”⁶ It was not always the case that U.S. Cold War diplomacy promoted civil rights over established interests that supported or accommodated racial inequality, segregation, discrimination, and disfranchisement in the South.

Brenda Gayle Plummer’s latest book, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974*, continues her examination of the relationship between African Americans and U.S. foreign policy. As historians Mary Dudziak and Thomas Borstelmann also indicate, Plummer points out that national leaders in the Cold War “unlinked the association between civil rights and radicalism and attached civil rights to liberalism.”⁷ In the 1960s, black power revived radicalism but also divided activists, something the government was able to exploit in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives.. She concludes that the search for power is ongoing among African Americans and thus appeals to Foucault’s “history of the present” in telling her story.⁸ Her argument makes the case of King even more interesting and important, for he began with a moral and global vision and, despite his alliance with the federal government

⁵ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

during the upswing of the civil rights movement in the South and the passage of federal civil rights legislation, he become more, not less, radical in the last years of his life.

While there are as well many biographies and studies of King, few historians discuss his notion of a “world house” and his engagement with global developments. Thomas F. Jackson’s *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* is an important, though partial, exception. He puts special emphasis on a long-running concern for economic justice for black and white poor people in King’s broadening of civil rights into human rights. Although he rightly understands that King considered his domestic struggle to be a part of a worldwide human rights movement, Jackson places him in an American context.⁹ “King reminds us,” Jackson asserts, “that the national government has been the most consistent guarantor of equal rights in American history.”¹⁰ Thus he sees King’s efforts as addressed to national issues and goals. In a chapter entitled “The World House,” Jackson discusses King’s antiwar dissent and his criticisms of U.S. economic imperialism. Unfortunately, however, his quotation of King on “America as a world house of international peoples” reinforces a specifically national understanding of King’s ideas and struggles.¹¹

My thesis builds on the foundation provided by this scholarship, but as my brief discussion of Jackson suggests, there is plenty of scope for new work. Using published primary sources, mostly the sermons, speeches, essays, and books of Dr. King between 1956 and 1968, I reconstruct his views of the world situation and the connections he makes between this situation,

⁹ Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 326.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 368.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

on the one hand, and the U.S. black freedom struggle and the actions and policies of the U.S. government, on the other hand. I show that King's vision was global as well as moral. The global dimension was pronounced in the early years of his leadership, became less so while he worked closely with presidents and federal officials to overcome white resistance in the South, and then became pronounced once again in the last years of his now radicalized leadership against racism, poverty, and war in the world as well as the U.S.

My thesis does not and cannot answer all questions concerning the making of Dr. King's global vision of peace and justice in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of these questions I look forward to pondering in future research. Perhaps the most important question I do not answer here, but the posing of which has helpfully stimulated the pages that follow, is King's attitude towards the U.S. in the world. He came of age after the U.S. victory in the Second World War and died before the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. Given his very different assessments of the U.S. at various points in the 1950s and 1960s as contributing to or obstructing the human rights revolution sweeping the world, did he believe in an American mission in the world? How did he distinguish between the people and government of the U.S., and how did he strike the balance between change coming to the U.S. from within and from without? In spite of the Cold War and the Third World, did he assume that the U.S. was and would remain the hegemon of the "world house" for the foreseeable future? Did he think American hegemony could play a positive role, or did his vision of a world house imply a global system organized as a community of peoples and states without a dominant power? I hope my thesis will help set the stage for addressing at least some of these questions in future research.

2 CHAPTER TWO: “A NEW WORLD ORDER”: THE EMERGENCE OF DR. KING’S GLOBAL FRAMING OF THE U.S. BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE, 1956-1960

On January 27, 1956, the *Montgomery Advertiser* published an appeal “To the Citizens of Montgomery.” It carried the names of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and four other African American ministers. It was their effort to clear the air a claim the moral high ground for the Montgomery African American community, after fifty-three days of a city-wide boycott of the segregated bus system. The third point of the appeal identified the common religious belief of Montgomery’s black and white residents:

THE CHRISTIAN WAY: We live in a Christian community in which brotherhood and neighborliness should prevail among all people. We can only rely upon these principles to guide those in authority and other people of influence to see that the Christian way is the only way of reaching a satisfactory solution to the problem.¹²

This offer of “brotherhood” and “neighborliness” by the African American leadership in Montgomery was spurned by white supremacists. Three days later a bomb exploded on the front porch of King’s house. His wife, baby, and a friend were inside.¹³ No one was injured and King immediately arrived to disperse the angry, sympathetic crowd that had gathered. His words to the

¹² Martin Luther King, Jr. “To the Citizens of Montgomery,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3: *Birth of a New Age: December 1955-December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 108.

¹³ David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 60.

crowd that night anticipated King's mission in coming years: to frame and interpret for audiences of blacks and whites of many backgrounds the emergence of the new world order of social justice. That new world order was indeed a universal moral order of social justice which King was to interpret as evidenced by the fading global color line, demonstrated with a rising racist indifference. Dr. King's prescient witness to the emerging new world order and his own unique role in its appearing came from the words he spoke to the crowd the night of the bombing:

We want to love our enemies. I want you to love our enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them. I did not start this boycott. I was asked by you to serve as your spokesman. I want it to be known the length and breadth of this land that if I am stopped this movement will not stop. If I am stopped our work will not stop. For what we are doing is right. What we are doing is just. And God is with us.¹⁴

If the perpetrators intended to intimidate King and force black Montgomery residents to withdraw their challenge to segregation and discrimination, the bombing and other acts of harassment had the opposite effect. It only raised the profile of the young pastor and stimulated national interest in the bus boycott movement. The scholar, diplomat, and first African American Nobel Peace Prize winner, Ralph Bunche, sent a telegram to King, closing with the words "Right is on your side and all the world knows it."¹⁵ The *New York Times* soon ran its first front-page story on King and quoted him at a mass meeting on the meaning of the bus boycott: "This is not a war between the white and the Negro but a conflict between justice and injustice. This is bigger than the Negro race revolting against the white. We are seeking to improve not the Negro of

¹⁴ "'Blast Rocks Residence of Bus Boycott Leader,' by Joe Azbell," 3:115.

¹⁵ "From Ralph Bunche," 3: 134.

Montgomery but the whole of Montgomery.”¹⁶ Significantly, King boosted the morale of the boycotters in another mass meeting by pointing to the movement’s widening impact: the boycott had “reached out beyond Montgomery” and become an “international problem.”¹⁷ King’s impulse towards “brotherhood,” “neighborliness,” and his sense of the significance of the “widening impact” of confronting the injustice of Montgomery’s segregated bus line – one among the superabundant battle fronts Jim Crow offered – can be seen as a central tenant of his Christian universalism, which for King “stood at the center of the gospel and made both the theory and practice of segregation morally unjustifiable.”¹⁸ Dr. King’s Christian universalism was a key component in his inviolate conviction that the U.S. black freedom struggle had both a national and a significant global destiny of historical realization.

This chapter explores in four chronological sections the emergence of Dr. King’s global framing of the U.S. black freedom struggle in the second half of the 1950s. Dramatic global events occurred in the mid-fifties: in Asia, in 1952 the Korean War ended in a stalemated cessation of armed combat in without a formal peace treaty; in 1953 the Soviet Union’s Joseph Stalin died after a 3-decade dictatorship and the beginning of Nikita Khrushchev’s premiership; in 1954 the French suffered the end of Indochinese colonialism with their military defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam giving rise to U.S. involvement; and in 1955 the first international conference of leaders of independent Asian and African nations convened in Bandung, Indonesia in what began the Non-Alignment movement of third world countries. In Africa, in the mid-50s

¹⁶ “‘Negroes Pledge to Keep Boycott,’ by Wayne Phillips,” 3: 136.

¹⁷ “Notes on MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, by Donald T. Ferron,” 3:144.

¹⁸ King, “‘Paul’s Letter to American Christians,’ Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” 3: 418.

France's struggle to hold onto colonial Algeria faced increased insurgency amidst strident international calls for Algerian independence; in 1955 the Adoption of the Freedom Charter by the Congress of People in South Africa marked the official manifesto by the majority black South Africans against apartheid in white minority-ruled South Africa; and in 1956 Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal which evoked military action by Israel, Britain, and France, which the U.S. opposed and subsequently forced a withdrawal by the Western forces.

2.1 The Montgomery Movement

As Mary Dudziak and other scholars argue, the Cold War created an interplay between American race relations and U.S. foreign policy. For his part, although King had no direct knowledge of the concerns of policymakers in the Eisenhower administration, he was aware of from the long-running transnational connections between African Americans and peoples of color around the world. With decolonization, the perceptions of Asian and African peoples of U.S. race relations mattered greatly to Washington. Thus when "The Southern Manifesto," signed by many Southern senators and representatives, called for overturning the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, was published in March 1956, King and the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) fired off a telegram to President Dwight Eisenhower. They called on the President to intercede in the Montgomery impasse by hosting a conference at the White House. Again, the wording reminded him of the international repercussions of the Montgomery movement: "Faced with the great prestige of your office and confronted by world public opinion, the participants in such an exploratory conference ought to be able to come to a meeting of minds out of which an amicable settlement could then spring."¹⁹ According to King, global, if not national, opinion was on the side of justice.

¹⁹ King, "To Dwight D. Eisenhower," 3: 177.

To commemorate the second anniversary of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Episcopal diocese of New York State invited King to deliver the sermon at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City on May 17, 1956. Twelve thousand people attended the event.²⁰ In his sermon, entitled “The Death of Evil upon the Seashore,” he compared the slaying of the Egyptians in pursuit of the emigrating Hebrews in the biblical narrative to the death of evil. Alluding to European colonial rule of Africa and Asia, King likened the biblical story to “the great struggle of the Twentieth Century between the exploited masses seeking freedom and the colonial powers’ domination.” In closing, King proclaimed his global vision of justice:

God has a great plan for this world. His purpose is to achieve a world where all men will live together as brothers, and where every man recognizes the dignity and worth of all human personality. He is seeking at every moment of His existence to lift men from the bondage of some Egypt, carrying them through the wilderness of discipline, and finally to the promised land of personal and social integration.²¹

King employed this hermeneutic throughout his career: applying a biblical narrative and its moral meaning to the interpretation of contemporary issues, such as racial injustice in the U.S. Many Americans were attuned to such a hermeneutic in the 1950s. King’s oratorical skill in positioning African Americans in the role of the God-favored but persecuted people challenged the wider public to reconsider whether racial segregation, discrimination, and deprivation was

²⁰ King, epigraph to “‘The Death of Evil upon the Seashore,’ Sermon Delivered at the Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving, Cathedral of St. John the Divine,” 3: 256.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

compatible with Christian morality. This ability was, in a strict sense, King's unique contribution as a religious leader in U.S. society. According to Richard Lischer, he was unmatched by any preacher in the twentieth century and by "no politician since Lincoln."²²

At the August 1956 convocation in Chicago, Dr. King delivered an address for the fiftieth anniversary of the Alpha Phi Alpha, an African-American student fraternity of which he was a member. He was honored for "Christian leadership in the cause of first class citizenship for all mankind." Speaking on the topic "The Birth of a New Age," King gave one of his clearest early expositions of the momentous time in which he and his listeners lived and his thinking about what he termed "a new world order."

He called the twentieth century an exciting age filled with excitement and hope in which "a new world order is being born" and they stood "between the dying old and the emerging new." King made historical and biological allusion to the anticolonial movements in Asia, Africa, and Egypt, and the racial tensions in America as "necessary pains" accompanying the birth of the "new world being born and an old world passing away ... Through our scientific means we have made of the world a neighborhood and now the challenge confronts us through our moral and spiritual means to make it a brotherhood." Internationally, King stated that he and his audience had lived with and seen evidences of the passing of the old order of colonialism and imperialism of the European powers, where in former colonies "1.3 billion people of 1.6 billion colored people in the world today" were free and had their own government, economic systems and educational systems. But the old order was seen passing away on the national scale as well, said King, in the form of segregation and discrimination.

²² Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

African-Americans must be prepared to live in the new world, advised King. That preparation would require that African-Americans rise above their individual concerns; they must use moral and spiritual means to live together with whites as in a brotherhood; new opportunities will come that did not come in the old world; and they must go into the new world without bitterness toward those who brought the evils of segregation and discrimination. But, cautioned King, in this transition from the old to the new “we will have to rise up in protest ... [w]e will have to boycott at times ... but the end is reconciliation ... and the creation of the beloved community.” King reminded his fraternity brothers that the forces of darkness would not permanently conquer the forces of light, and “this is the thing we must live by.”²³ King’s vision did not omit the possibilities of future nonviolent direct actions, but the complications of the cold war geostrategic and ideological competition were obfuscated somewhat in his vision of the new world order. Allusions to “a world neighborhood” created by technological means and the need to make it a brotherhood had direct connections to what he would later conceive as “the world house.” From this speech, one might anticipate that King’s vision of “the world house” included the moral and spiritual work of confronting injustice with the confidence that in the end of struggle, “the world house” would be a reconciled humanity: the international beloved community.

King’s use of the phrase, “new world order,” was not further clarified by other speeches or writings. Perhaps a hint of its roots can be found in his Christian convictions of a basic New Testament biblical doctrine which he applied in a sermon for the need for social salvation: the

²³ King, “‘The Birth of a New Age,’ Address Delivered on 11 August 1956 at the Fiftieth Anniversary of Alpha Phi Alpha in Buffalo,” 3: 339-346.

new life in Christ. For example, in the sermon entitled “The Answer to a Perplexing Question” King addressed the persistent but failed efforts by humankind to remove evil from the earth. He based the sermon on the story in Matthew 17 that centered Jesus’ disciples’ inability to heal an epileptic boy brought to them and their question of their Master: Why could we not cast [the demon] out? In making the analogy, King philosophized that “the problem that has always hampered man has been his inability to conquer evil by his own power.” After sermonizing that neither God nor man could purify the world alone, King proclaimed that both man and God working in a unity of purpose through God’s gift of love and man’s obedience and receptivity could together “transform the old into the new and drive out the deadly cancer of sin.” Racial justice, said King, “a genuine possibility in our nation and the world, will come neither by our frail and often misguided efforts nor by God imposing his will on wayward men, but when enough people open their lives to God and allow him to pour his triumphant, divine energy in to their souls.” King ended the sermon on the challenge of eradicating social evil by saying that “God promised to cooperate with us when we seek to cast evil from our lives and become true children of his divine will.” He quoted the apostle Paul: “If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.”²⁴ Undoubtedly, King’s conception of and struggle for the new world order was shored by his religious convictions projected into challenging and threatening national and global contexts.

In November 1956, amid the Suez crisis and the Hungarian rebellion, King preached a sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church on the relevance of the nonviolent method in the international struggle between American democracy and Soviet communism. The sermon was

²⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., “The answer to a perplexing question,” in *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 127-136.

entitled “Loving Your Enemies.” In framing the importance of the message, King reminded his audience that Jesus “was very serious when he gave this command... He realized that it was painfully hard, pressingly hard.” But, “we have the Christian and moral responsibility to seek to discover the meaning of these words, and to discover how we can live out this command, and why we should live by this command.” King explained that Christians could not accept communism because “in communism the ends justify the means,” whereas in Christianity “the end is pre-existent in the means.” Communism was based on “an ethical relativism and a metaphysical materialism that no Christian can accept.” Yet, said King, though “democracy is the greatest form of government to my mind that man has ever conceived... the weakness is we have never practiced it.” So it was in Asia and Africa, where decolonization was “at bottom a revolt against the imperialism and colonialism perpetuated by Western civilization all these many years. The success of communism in the world today is due to the failure of democracy to live up to the noble ideals and principles inherent in the system.”²⁵ King’s critique of the failures of both communism and democracy would become his ready rejoinder when he was charged with being a communist or when the pursuit of the Cold War was given priority over his demand for civil rights and social justice. At this stage in the development of his global vision, the U.S. system of “democracy” was neither flawed nor biased in any fundamental way. The problem lay in the discrepancy between right principle and evil practice.

²⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., “‘Loving Your Enemies,’ Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., vol. 4: Symbol of the Movement: January 1957- December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California, 2000), 315-324.

On December 21, 1956, the Supreme Court order prohibiting segregation on city buses arrived in Montgomery. It was a happy conclusion for King and the thousands of African Americans who had struggled for equal treatment. With deference to the white bus riders and the white driver, King and other boycotters boarded one of the earliest buses the next day to ride in a forward seat to experience the freedom of an integrated society, though aware that its borders of integration ended at the doors of the bus. The Supreme Court ruling was a clear manifestation that the new world order of social justice was beginning to supplant the old order of Jim Crow in Montgomery, Alabama and the South.

At the center of King's interpretation of this new world order was the method by which the struggle for it could be waged and new social relations actualized. This method was first described simply as behaving in a Christian manner toward whites, but it came to be understood as nonviolent resistance. Two of King's mentors, the experienced civil rights activist Bayard Rustin and the Morehouse College president Benjamin Mays, had traveled to India and personally met Gandhi. Although King was aware of Gandhi, they were instrumental in calling his attention to the historical roots of Gandhian nonviolent direct action. In late November 1956, King found a few days to reflect and, probably at the suggestion of Rustin, wrote an essay on "Nonviolence and Racial Justice."²⁶ He sent it to the *Christian Century*, a weekly liberal religious magazine, and the editor Harold Fey decided to publish it as the main article in an issue devoted to race relations.²⁷

In the article, King described two factors in the racial crisis in America – the reactionary resistance of Southern whites to integration and the "revolutionary change" in African

²⁶King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 4: 118n2.

²⁷ King, epigraph of "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 4: 118.

Americans' conception of their "own nature and destiny." He also addressed "the peace that was no peace" – a peaceful coexistence between blacks and whites that depended on African-American subservience. King argued that the tension "we are witnessing in race relations today can be explained in part by this revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of himself and his determination to struggle and sacrifice until the walls of segregation have been finally crushed by the battering rams of justice."²⁸ He connected the African-American struggle for racial equality in the U.S. to the "same profound longing for freedom that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world." He rhetorically asked, "How is the struggle against the forces of injustice to be waged?" He answered "by physical violence and corroding hatred that creates new and more complicated social problems" or by nonviolent resistance. Then he gave five points that defined the nonviolent method. First, the method is "not for cowards"; it is "nonaggressive physically but dynamically aggressive spiritually." Second, it "does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness." Third, "the attack is directed against forces of evil rather than against persons who are caught in those forces. It is evil we are seeking to defeat, not the persons victimized by evil." Fourth, "it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love." And finally, King the interpreter wrote, "the method of nonviolence is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice." The nonviolent resister "knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship. This belief that God is on the side of truth and justice comes down to us from the long tradition of our Christian faith." King concluded with this plea: "May all who suffer oppression in this world

²⁸Ibid., 119.

reject the self-defeating method of retaliatory violence and choose the method that seeks to redeem.”²⁹ King had attempted to make clear to all audiences how the new world order would be made manifest by nonviolently opposing the old order of hate. In clarifying nonviolent direct action as a method, King’s article was significant for its avoidance of an entanglement on theological or social-political grounds or other ideological objections.

2.2 Ghana and the African Independence Struggle

The Kings’ trip to Ghana on March 3, 1957 to celebrate that nation’s independence from Britain afforded him an opportunity to do abroad what had thus far been denied him in the U.S. He finally gained access to the Eisenhower administration by meeting Vice President Richard Nixon at an official reception in Accra. But arguably it was more significant for the chance it gave Dr. King to witness a momentous act of self-determination by people of color in an African world still dominated by colonial rule and white supremacy.

The ceremonies and the raising of the new Ghanaian flag after midnight electrified the crowd and King. An African American radio personality from Texas, Etta Moten Barrett, interviewed Dr. King in the hours after midnight on March 6 about the “worldwide implications and repercussions” of Ghana’s independence.³⁰ Once again, King emphasized the new age and order it signaled:

[Barrett:] Reverend King, tell me, what are your feelings – were they mixed, or was there definite, emotional something – when you knew that you were coming to Ghana? Or did they occur when you got here?

²⁹ Ibid., 118-122.

³⁰ King, epigraph of “Interview by Etta Moten Barnett,” 4: 145.

[King:] Thinking of the fact that a new nation was being born symbolized something of the fact that a new order is coming into being and an old order is passing away. So that I was deeply concerned about it. And I wanted to be involved in it, and be a part of it, and notice the birth of this new nation with my own eyes.

[Barrett:] Reverend King, do you feel, have any feeling about the far reaching influence of this particular occasion in the history of mankind? In the history of peoples of color all over the world? How far do you think this will reach? How much do you think it will influence the affairs of men that we're interested in?

[King:] I think this event, the birth of this new nation, will give impetus to oppressed peoples all over the world. I think it will have worldwide implications and repercussions – not only for Asia and Africa, but also for America, and I think this freedom – the freedom in the birth of a new nations – will influence the situation there. This will become a sort of symbol for oppressed people all over the world.

[Barrett:] Yes, that is so very, very true. And when you stop to contemplate this, doesn't it give you more hope for the situation in which you find yourself there in, well ourselves, in America?

[King:] Yes it does. It certainly does. It renews my conviction in the ultimate triumph of justice. And it seems to me that this is fit testimony to the fact that eventually the forces of justice triumph in the universe, and somehow the universe itself is on the side of freedom and justice. So that this gives new hope to me in the struggle for freedom as I confront it.³¹

³¹Ibid., 145-148.

King underlined the connection between Ghana and the black freedom struggle in the U.S. by later recounting two scenes that held particular symbolic meaning for him. The first was the appearance of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and the other ministers of state walking on the ceremonial platform before midnight on March 5, 1957 donning their prison caps and coats. Nkrumah and his colleagues had been imprisoned by the British for their pro-independence activism. King spoke about this scene in a sermon, “The Birth of a New Nation,” at his Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. King interpreted Nkrumah in his prison clothes as conveying a truth about the freedom struggle: “freedom never comes on a silver platter. It’s never easy. ... It comes through hard labor and it comes through toil. It comes through hours of despair and disappointment.”³² The second scene occurred when Prime Minister Nkrumah danced with Britain’s official representative, the Duchess of Kent. King later proclaimed: “Isn’t this something? Here is the once-serf, the once-slave, now dancing with the lord on an equal plane.” It confirmed for King that the aftermath of nonviolent resistance was not bitterness, but “the creation of the beloved community ... redemption ... reconciliation.”³³

In relating the Ghanaian trip to his congregation and applying it to Montgomery, King rendered his interpretation: “The bus protest is just the beginning. ... [I]f you stop now, we will be in the dungeons of segregation and discrimination for another hundred years.” Ghana, concluded King, “tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice.” The “old flag coming down and the new flag coming up” conveyed the changing order: “An old order of colonialism, of segregation, of discrimination is passing away now, and a new order of justice

³² King, “‘The Birth of a New Nation,’ Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” 4: 163.

³³ *Ibid.*, 162.

and freedom and goodwill is being born.”³⁴ Though he had made similar points about an epochal transition before traveling to Ghana, Dr. King’s Ghanaian experience reinforced his determination and secured his hope that his interpretation of the emerging world order, including its American realization, was justified. The successful results of the method of nonviolence resistance elsewhere confirmed his expectations for the future. He was convinced more than ever that the unseen forces of the universe, for justice and against segregation with God Himself behind them would bring about the new world order of social justice.

For the rest of 1957, King traveled and spoke around the country as well as wrote. He encouraged African Americans in their new sense of dignity but warned that the hard work of ending segregation was not finished. They had to move forward as a race so as to integrate more fully in U.S. society. He urged the movement to adhere to nonviolence and to highlight the harm that segregation inflicted on both the oppressor and the oppressed. Civil rights workers could bring the good news that a new order was overcoming the old order.

Increasingly in the late 1950s, King introduced the international perspective in discussions of the U.S. civil rights movement. A good example was his speech to the American Jewish Congress biennial convention in Miami Beach on May 14, 1958, arranged by one of King’s main advisors, Stanley Levison. It was an opportune occasion to win the support of an influential section of liberal opinion for his efforts. At the end of his address, King gave the following interpretation of the right kind of liberalism: “Today we are finding, too often, a quasi liberalism which is committed to the principle of looking sympathetically at all sides. It is a liberalism so objectively analytical that it fails to become subjectively committed. It is a liberalism which has developed a high blood pressure of words and an anemia of deeds.” Then

³⁴ Ibid., 155-167.

King issued the call: “You can, with your community organization experience, assist in the development of platforms from which white moderates, liberals, and others may speak and act toward effective ends.” King then brought in an international comparison to underline the pressing need for reform in the U.S.: “The shape of the world today does not permit us the luxury of an aenemic [*sic*] democracy. . . . The so-called backward nations of India, the jungle fringed islands of Indonesia, in Burma and in nations of Africa, there is a freer franchise than in the southland of the United States. In Mississippi, a Negro college professor is turned away from the poles [*sic*], a minister is shot and killed for attempting to vote, but in India, an illiterate, penniless peasant is provided with a special ballot so his vote may be fairly recorded.”³⁵ Nehru’s India and Sukarno’s Indonesia were leading countries in what would become the non-aligned movement of the third world. The contrast between these countries, on the one hand, and Eisenhower’s U.S., on the other, was deeply embarrassing. Poor countries were more democratic than the world’s richest and most powerful country.

Civil rights leaders like King knew that racial injustice in the U.S. was an issue for American diplomats trying to sway world public opinion in a pro-American direction. Such was the case in a prepared statement read to President Eisenhower in a White House meeting on June 23, 1958 by King, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, A. Phillip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Lester Granger of the National Urban League. Their statement did not criticize U.S. foreign policy: “It is no secret that the foreign relations program of our nation has been hampered and damaged by the discriminatory treatment accorded citizens within the United States, solely on the basis of their race and color. In our world-wide struggle to strengthen the

³⁵King, “Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress, 4: 406-410.

free world against the spread of totalitarianism, we are sabotaged by the totalitarian practices forced upon millions of our Negro citizens.”³⁶ If anything, it implied that the U.S. would be a more effective player on the world stage if its domestic house was in order

King’s first book, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* was published in 1958. It recounted the struggle to desegregate public transit in Montgomery from King’s perspective. The final chapter, “Where do we go from here?,” set forth the tasks of those seeking racial equality in the face of increased resistance from white segregationists. King did not address the global context of racial justice in his telling of the Montgomery story. King’s oscillation between the global and the local can be understood by his efforts to increase the effectiveness of his leadership in the U.S. civil rights struggle while also seeking to leverage connections to successful international decolonialist movements. While King articulated a vested interest in the global framing of the U.S. civil rights movement, his personal relationships and indebtedness to leaders of international racial justice movements also played into his global-local balancing.

2.3 Pilgrimage to India

On September 20, 1958, while autographing books in a store in Harlem, King was stabbed by an African American woman later diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic.³⁷ Convalescing after this near death experience, King thought the time was right to finally make a trip to India. He had received encouragement from co-workers who had met with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru during his trip to the U.S. in 1957 and to whom he had expressed interest in meeting King. Harris Wofford, a white liberal who had traveled with his wife to India,

³⁶King et al., “A Statement to the President of the United States,” 4: 427.

³⁷ King, “From Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” 4: 498n.

had also promoted the idea to King and promised to assist in raising the necessary funds.³⁸ The Gandhi National Memorial Fund and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) agreed to co-sponsor the trip. King received a personal letter from Nehru in January 1959, thanking King for a copy of his book and extending an invitation to meet with him if he came to India.³⁹

On the eve of his departure to India, King addressed the thirty-sixth annual dinner of the War Resisters League, a pacifist organization, in New York City on February 2, 1959. Although King repeated many of the points he had made in the previous two years, he was more outspoken before this left-wing audience.⁴⁰ King exhorted them to hold fast to their principles: “We are in a period when men who understand the dimensions of our tragic state must be heard. We must stand and accept the consequences of our convictions.” In identifying himself with the audience, King stated: “This great struggle is in the interest of all Americans and I shall not be turned from it.” But King acknowledged the extraordinary situation facing them, a nuclear arms race and war danger that threatened to destroy the world and erase peace and freedom: “What will be the ultimate value of having established social justice in a context where all people, Negro and White, are merely free to face destruction by strontium 90 or atomic war.” He went on to break with the binary logic of friend and foe, victory and defeat, that drove the Cold War: “If we are to find a new method to avoid such terrible possibilities, it will be based on love not hate; it will be

³⁸ Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1980), 116.

³⁹Jawaharlal Nehru, “From Jawaharlal Nehru,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 5: *Threshold of a New Decade: January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 107.

⁴⁰King, “Address at the Thirty-sixth Annual Dinner of the War Resisters League,” 5: 120-125.

based on reconciliation and not retaliation; it will be based on forgiveness and not on revenge.” He championed the method of Gandhian nonviolence: “not non-resistance to evil; but non-violent resistance to evil.”⁴¹ There was a suggestion in King’s words that evil was not the Soviet adversary but war itself, an evil in which both the U.S. and the Soviet Union were complicit.

King explained a nuance of the nonviolent method when one accepted its premise: “we who believe in non-violence often have an unwarranted optimism concerning man and lean unconsciously toward self-righteousness.” “I have often felt that we who advocate non-violence would have a greater appeal if we did not claim to be free from the moral dilemmas that the nonpacifist confronts.”⁴² King reasoned that nonviolent resistance resolved the moral dilemma for the pacifist and the nonpacifist. King criticized a pacifist complacency or quietism that excused the pacifist’s responsibility to confront injustice. This statement by King makes it somewhat apparent that he had already given much thought to assuming a personal responsibility for courageous pacifism which demanded the confrontation of injustice. Later inspired by Gandhi’s example, in India King would make a personal commitment to a simpler life characterized by nonviolence which included and demanded that true pacifism not withdraw from injustice, but rather, as Gandhi had done, to directly confront it nonviolently.

After explaining five points of the technique of the nonviolent method, King referred to the colored peoples’ global movement for freedom: “It may even be possible for the colored peoples through adherence to nonviolence, so to challenge the nations of the world that they will seriously seek an alternative to war and destruction.” ... “The colored peoples may be God’s appeal to this age – an age drifting rapidly to its doom. The eternal appeal takes the form of a

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

warning: ‘All who take the sword will perish by the sword.’”⁴³ King was acquainted with third world leaders: he had met Ghana’s Nkrumah and would be meeting Nehru on his trip to India. Because he was very much aware of the currency of Asian and African anticolonialist movements for their political leveraging of the global preeminence of U.S. civil rights, King did not accept the cold war framing of relations between the U.S. and the third world – much like the non-alignment sentiments of Bandung’s third world leaders. His focus on the nuclear threat of annihilation – the peaceful, normalization of the national relations in the global framework – allowed King to subjugate cold war framing in order to center the preeminence of the connections of U.S. racial justice to global anticolonial movements. Knowing the importance of the alignment of third world nations to the U.S. foreign policy planners, King like other civil rights leaders advocated the unique role of the world’s peoples of color who could offer a moral counterpoint to the U.S., the cold war and its global framing.

Traveling to India with Dr. King was his wife Coretta Scott King and L.D. Reddick, a professor at Alabama State University in Montgomery. Swami Vishwananda of the Gandhi Fund and James E. Bristol of the AFSC managed the month-long trip, which was funded by the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the AFSC, the MIA, and a generous gift from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.⁴⁴ King explained the purpose of his trip in a press conference upon his arrival in

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴James E. Bristol and Swami Vishwananda, *With the Kings in India: A Souvenir of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Visit to India, February – March 1959* (New Delhi: Department of Information and Public Relations of the Gandhi Memorial Trust, 1959), 4.

Bombay: “To other countries I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim.”⁴⁵ In pilgrimage, King “had come, he said, to learn about the philosophy of nonviolence.”⁴⁶ Although King’s meeting with Nehru was not documented, notes by Reddick in preparation for the meeting indicate that King intended to address nonviolence in the contemporary world, the status of Gandhianism in independent India, the tenuous appeal of democracy in third world countries, and ways to strengthen the bonds between the Indian people and African Americans.⁴⁷

The available sources do not reveal the full significance of the India trip to King. He enjoyed many opportunities to meet the followers and see the places associated with Gandhi and his legacy of nonviolent resistance.⁴⁸ The extreme poverty of India’s population, which he attributed to British colonialism and imperialism, was “appalling to King,”⁴⁹ He was taken aback when Indians referred to him as an “untouchable.”⁵⁰ Untouchability was the condition of outcastes in the Hindu caste system. Gandhi approach to untouchability was controversial, not least among the Dalits themselves, and it persisted in India despite laws against it. King soon

⁴⁵“Account by Lawrence Dunbar Reddick of Press Conference in New Delhi on 10 February 1959,” 5: 126.

⁴⁶ Bristol and Vishwananda, *With the Kings in India*, 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁸ King, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” 5: 233.

⁴⁹ Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Puffin Books, 1969), 159-160.

⁵⁰Martin Luther King, Jr., “The American Dream,” in *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 90.

understood that, in referring to him as an untouchable, Indians were making a connection between the oppressed conditions of Dalits and African Americans and identifying him as a person who stood with the oppressed. He was very interested to learn from Nehru that the Indian government made for jobs, housing, and education for Dalits a budget and policy priority. Nehru explained that this was a way of “atoning for centuries of injustices we have inflicted upon these people.”⁵¹ Finally, King gained a sudden flash of insight during an early morning walk with the revered Gandhian, Vinoba Bhave, an activist who was continuing to apply Gandhi’s principles in poor communities in India. Taylor Branch suggests that King was struggling with the question whether India should take the lead in international disarmament. This promised “to extend the spirit of the Montgomery bus boycott as far as religion and politics would allow.”⁵² At King’s final press conference, journalists harshly rejected King’s proposal for India to consider state pacifism. Although the connections between his Indian experiences and his future actions remain unclear, one can find traces of the impact of the trip in his later struggles for social justice in the U.S., from the idea of government programs to expand economic opportunity and social services for African Americans and poor people to initiatives for the establishment of world peace. After his return to Montgomery, King preached a Palm Sunday sermon on the life of Gandhi, who, King said, “more than anybody else in the modern world, caught the spirit of Jesus Christ and

⁵¹Martin Luther King, Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence,” in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 133.

⁵² Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 253.

lived it more completely in his life.”⁵³ Thus King continued to make connections between the local and the global, often by translating the different into the familiar, in this case the Hindu Gandhi into the Christian Gandhi.

2.4 Between Greensboro and Sharpeville

On March 21, 1960, in the black township of Sharpeville, South Africa, white police killed more than sixty peaceful black protestors who had been demonstrating against a new law requiring blacks to carry identification.⁵⁴ Such action was an affront to King and other African Americans in their transnational and transracial identification with other peoples of color seeking freedom and racial equality. Within days, Claude Barrett, head of the Associated Negro Press (ANP), invited King to give him a statement for release over the ANP wire on March 28. Significantly, in condemning South African apartheid he made no attempt to downplay American racism:

This tragic massacre by police troops in South Africa should arouse the conscience of the whole world. This tragic occurrence in South Africa should also serve as a warning signal to the United States where peaceful demonstrations are also being conducted by student groups. As long as segregation continues to exist; as long as gestapo-like tactics are used by officials of Southern communities; and as long as [there are] governors and United States senators arrogantly defy the law of the land, the United States is faced with a potential reign of terror more barbaric than anything we see in South Africa.⁵⁵

⁵³ King, “Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi, Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church,” 5: 146.

⁵⁴ King, epigraph of “To Claude Barnett,” 5: 399.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 399-401.

On March 26, King and twenty other African-American civil rights leaders put their names in a telegram to President Eisenhower again appealing for a strong statement of support for African Americans' struggle for constitutional rights. The telegram included a "warning" that it might be necessary to appeal to the United Nations. There had been previous initiatives to bring the human rights struggle of African Americans before the U.N. in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in the early days of the Cold War and the Red Scare.⁵⁶ The brief telegram ended with that "warning" made clear: "South Africans cannot hope for help from a government committed to 'apartheid'; nor can we hope for help from local and state governments committed to 'white supremacy.' Africans are turning to the UN for moral support and encouragement; must we?"⁵⁷

In the May 1960, King published an article, "The Burning Truth in the South," in *The Progressive*. It focused on the student sit-in movement that had begun in Greensboro, North Carolina in February and had spread throughout the South. King interpreted the movement as a result of causes and precedents from World War II, including veterans' expectations for a "broader democracy" that did not "assume reality," and the 1954 Supreme Court decision promising further improvement in educational opportunities. Young people had been "steeled by both deeds and inspiration to step into responsible action." King explained that the determination of African Americans "to win freedom from all forms of oppression springs from the same deep longing that motivates oppressed peoples all over the world." In explaining the focus on voting rights, he claimed that ordinary African Americans knew "that in primitive jungle villages in India still illiterate peasants are casting a free ballot for their state and federal legislators. In one

⁵⁶ Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ King et al., "To Dwight D. Eisenhower," 5: 400-401.

after another of the new African states black men form the government, write the laws, and administer the affairs of state. But in state after state in the United States the Negro is ruled and governed without a fragment of participation in civic life. The contrast is the burning truth which has molded a deep determination to end this intolerable condition.”⁵⁸

This contrast extended to the inconsequential performances of American democracy, “the conferences,” the “hollow legislative enactments or empty electoral campaign oratory,” the legal “red tape [that] had been drawn out into litigation and evasive schemes.” And “token integration,” wrote King, had become a “new form of discrimination covered up with certain niceties.” African Americans were frustrated, knowing what was underway in the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia. It was inevitable that a more direct approach would be taken. The sit-ins, he wrote, “represent more than a demand for service; they represent a demand for respect.”⁵⁹

King heralded the student sit-ins and their significance: “[A] generation of young people has come out of decades of shadows to face naked state power,” and has “experienced the majestic dignity of a direct struggle for its own liberation.” The students are “an integral part of the history which is reshaping the world, replacing a dying order with modern democracy.” Just as King interpreted the “burning truth” for African Americans and their allies in the cause of racial equality, he also interpreted the burning truth for the white segregationist. They “now face some hard alternatives.” Continued resistance to desegregation would yield violence and “a step backward for the whole of society.” Interpreting the social conflict in a larger perspective, King wrote: “A revolution is occurring in both the social order and the human mind.” Referring to the

⁵⁸ King, “The Burning Truth in the South,” 5: 447-451.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

American Revolution, King made the comparison: “The Negro students, their parents, and their allies are acting today in that imperishable tradition.”⁶⁰

2.5 Conclusion

King brought an international perspective to bear on African American resistance to segregation, discrimination, and disfranchisement, asserting that it was part of the larger global freedom movement of people of color. At the meeting of the North Carolina state conference of the NAACP on September 25, 1960, King spoke on “The Negro and the American Dream.” He likened America to a dream yet unfulfilled, a dream “where men of all races, colors, and creeds will live together as brothers.” The Preamble of the Declaration of Independence “was a dream ... a profound, eloquent and unequivocal expression of the dignity and worth of all human personality.” The time was now to realize the dream: “The shape of the world today does not permit Americans the luxury of exploiting the Negro and other minority groups.” This internal domination of people of color undercut the external mission of the U.S.: “America is at its lowest ebb in international prestige; and most of this loss of prestige is due to our failure to grapple with the problem of racial injustice.” King referred to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s proposal to remove the U.N. headquarters from New York because “representatives of young African and Asian states [were] being subjected to racial discrimination in the United States.” He was careful, however, to argue that “the primary reason for bringing an end to racial discrimination ... must

⁶⁰ Ibid.

not be the Communist challenge... nor to appeal to Asian and African peoples.” The primary reason, he said, “is that it is morally wrong.”⁶¹

In the years during and after the Montgomery movement, King made connections between events and movements in the U.S. and around the world. In particular, he linked the civil rights movement of African Americans with the independence struggles of people in Africa and Asia. He avoided the anticommunist whirlpool of the Cold War, which had drowned radical black leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson, by seeking the high moral ground. Christian morality, Gandhian nonviolence, and the American dream provided ways of distinguishing between the democratic principles and racist practices of U.S. society and politics. In coming years, pursuing the quest for justice and grappling with the place of the U.S. in the world, King would move first towards the U.S. state as an ally in the struggle for freedom and then away from it as an enemy in the struggle for peace.

3 CHAPTER THREE “THE POTENTIALS OF FEDERAL POWER”: DR. KING’S NATIONAL REFRAMING OF THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1961 – 1965

If the new age and new world of freedom and justice was to be realized, the success of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56 and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) sit-ins of 1960 indicated to Dr. King that nonviolent direct action was key. This method was the moral means to combat the immorality of segregation. The idea of “means and ends” was foundational to both King’s theory and praxis of social change, and his practical theology of

⁶¹ King, “The Negro and the American Dream,” Excerpt from Address at the Annual Freedom Mass Meeting of the North Carolina State Conference of Branches of the NAACP,” 5: 508-511.

how God acts in history.⁶² His faith that social change *could* happen and *would* happen was centered in the historical event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, whom to King was, by faith, theologically God's Son and, by faith, politically the supreme example of a moral political change agent.⁶³ For King, these religious convictions informed his relationship to the state. Michael Long's research on King's relationship to the state concludes that King believed that "the state was good when its policies helped to establish integration, economic justice, and a just social order." Likewise, King saw that the state could be "evil if it implemented policies that established or condoned racism, classism, and militarism."⁶⁴ Long's study is supportive of what this chapter argues: King's relationship to the state was characterized by a contextual shifting. King shifted in his relationship to the state depending on how to best achieve civil and economic rights long-denied to deprived African Americans.⁶⁵ The context for

⁶² Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Case Against Tokenism," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986), 109.

⁶³ Martin Luther King, Jr., "King, Martin Luther, Jr., East Berlin: Sermon Held at St. Mary's Church," *The Civil Rights Struggle, African-Americans, GIs, and Germany*. A website of collaboration by the German Historical Institute, Heidelberg Center for American Studies, and Vassar College, http://www.aacvr-germany.org/GenSys/DVD/publishing/XML-Files/XML/S_10003_LS.xml (accessed 11/05/14).

⁶⁴ Michael G. Long, *Against Us, But For Us: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the State* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 211-12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 212.

King in the period 1961 – 1965 was the southern communities where the brutalities of segregation were hidden from national and international scrutiny and where crimes under white supremacists were not prosecuted and civil rights laws were not enforced by the federal government. In order to confront by nonviolent action these southern structures of injustice, King stepped away from a global perspective to form alliances with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. In two successive administrations, King found presidents who responded to the challenge of the civil rights movement by supporting passage of historic civil and voting rights legislation to end legal segregation.

Of course, there were events between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s that sustained King's interest in global as well as national issues. For example, the Algerian Revolution ultimately compelled France's President De Gaulle to give independence to Algeria. Closer to home, there were crises in places like Cuba (1959) and Panama (1964) where people opposed the U.S. presence or intervention. A full-orbed nuclear war between Russia and the U.S. was narrowly avoided during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Other global events underlined the instabilities around the world. The U.S. stepped up its involvement in Vietnam in the early 1960s. Independence leaders like Lumumba in the Congo in 1961 and Sukarno in Indonesia in 1965 were overthrown with U.S. complicity. Violence was not confined to the peripheries. The young American president John Kennedy was assassinated in 1963.

In this complex and perilous world, which King aspired to change, the defenders of the Jim Crow system in the U.S. South represented the immediate threat to racial equality and social justice. African Americans from North Carolina to Mississippi were subjected to brutal violence against their persons as well as chronic denial of their rights. Nonviolent mass demonstrations offered a way to confront this southern structure of injustice. This chapter will explore how King

pursued a strategic choice to concentrate his efforts on changing the Deep South and to forge an alliance with the federal government to achieve this goal.

3.1 Seeking an Alliance with the Kennedys, 1961-62

The inauguration in 1961 of John F. Kennedy as the new Democratic president of the United States, the presidential election being one of the closest in U.S. history,⁶⁶ was a crucial development in the gathering forces for change in the early 1960s. Republican President Eisenhower had deployed federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 to enforce the 1954 Supreme Court decision on public school desegregation and had signed the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which established the U.S. Civil Rights Commission to investigate voting rights, public education, and housing and to make recommendations to Congress. However, Eisenhower's conservative approach was mostly concerned with maintaining order. In early 1961, Dr. King believed that the federal government's involvement in the enforcement of civil rights could be changed from a relatively passive to an active approach.

Just weeks after Kennedy's inauguration, *The Nation* published the first of five annual reviews by King in the weekly liberal magazine. Each review surveyed the progress of civil rights and what actions the federal government had taken the preceding year. The February 4, 1961 article was entitled "Equality Now: The President Has the Power." As King described it, "The purpose of this review is to emphasize that a recognition of the potentials of federal power is a primary necessity if the fight for full racial equality is to be won." Framing the urgent need for strong and bold leadership from the new administration and to publicize his expectations of

⁶⁶Zachary Karabell and Jonathan Rosenberg, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Quest for Justice: The Civil Rights Tapes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 28.

what needed to happen immediately, King wrote what a mini-manifesto calling for President Kennedy to issue an executive order eliminating, with one stroke of the pen, segregation in American society.

“Equality for Negroes,” wrote King, was an “accepted and firm conviction”⁶⁷ at the federal level but thus far had been “ineffective,” and since African Americans were not benefitting from their collected taxes, the federal government had become the “highest investor in segregation.”⁶⁸ After a thorough examination of all its programs and agencies, the federal government should develop “a rigorous program to wipe out all discrimination,” he asserted. King called for the President to sign what would amount to a second Emancipation Proclamation and to create a new cabinet level office, the Secretary of Integration. Perhaps recalling the Indian government’s measures to mitigate the centuries-long mistreatment of Dalits, King urged that the U.S. government had “a moral obligation to solve the problem.”⁶⁹

Kennedy was faced, however, with a challenging political balancing act. Harris Wofford, Kennedy’s first civil rights liaison in the White House, had prepared a pre-inaugural memo that the president accepted as his administration’s strategy: “minimum civil rights legislation, maximum executive action.”⁷⁰ The goal was to avoid alienating pro-segregation Southern Democrats in the House and Senate, whom Kennedy needed for his broad legislative plans, while

⁶⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Equality Now: The President Has the Power,” *The Nation*, February 4, 1961, 91-95.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys & Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980), 133.

applying “the full power of the Federal Government” to bear on the racial problem “with intelligence and consistency” in order to break the “racial bottleneck in our national life.”⁷¹ The question remained whether maximum action could achieve at least as much as minimum legislation, especially if grassroots black protest and white resistance advanced more expansive, and conflicting, claims on the state.

The Freedom Rides of 1961 mounted an early challenge to the Kennedy administration’s strategy of civil rights gradualism. This new form of nonviolent direct action was sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)⁷² and the purpose was to test the December, 1960 Supreme Court ruling in *Boynton v. Virginia* that prohibited segregated public facilities used by interstate bus travelers.⁷³ King and the SCLC publicly supported CORE’s and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) initiative. On May 20, after freedom riders had been beaten in Anniston and Birmingham, Alabama, another integrated group of freedom riders were brutalized by a white mob in Montgomery. King, an anathema to Montgomery’s white defenders of the status quo, attracted his own maelstrom when he arrived at Ralph Abernathy’s First Baptist Church in Montgomery. As the mob grew that night to three thousand shouting, brick tossing, angry reactionaries, King retreated to the church basement to telephone Attorney General Robert Kennedy in Washington. After the mob racial violence in Birmingham, Kennedy and his staff had spent the week mobilizing hundreds of federal marshals. As King pleaded for

⁷¹ Ibid., 137.

⁷² Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 174.

⁷³ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Touchstone, 1988), 390.

help on the phone, Kennedy told King that the federal marshals should be arriving at that moment. In doubt, King left Kennedy waiting on the phone while he went upstairs to check. Indeed, the federal marshals were just then arriving. After a long night, the last of the mob were finally dispersed just before sunrise.⁷⁴ The Attorney General had made good on his promise, made earlier that month at the University of Georgia Law School, that “if the orders of the court are circumvented, the Department of Justice will act. We will not stand by or be aloof. We will move.”⁷⁵ This was the second intervention in the space of a week by the Kennedy Justice Department, suggesting that an alliance with the federal government against the pro-segregation local and state authorities in the South had potential for the civil rights movement.

Federal government intervention during 1961 and 1962 involved a range of actions, depending on the nature of confrontations, the applicability and violation of federal laws, and the capacity and willingness of local law enforcement to respond to violence. If King and the SCLC were planning a demonstration that might be threatened by violence, they could liaise with the Justice Department. Robert Kennedy and his civil rights assistants, Burke Marshall, John Seigenthaler, Byron White, Nicholas Katzenbach, and other staffers⁷⁶, were often in the thick of the action when conditions and criteria permitted. However, when federal law was not impugned, federal intervention was withheld.

⁷⁴ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 420-33, 460.

⁷⁵ Robert F. Kennedy, “University of Georgia Law School 1961.” Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights, <http://rfkcenter.org/university-of-georgia-law-school-1961?lang=en> (accessed October 29, 2014).

⁷⁶ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 428-439.

Such was the case in Albany, Georgia in December 1961, where racial tensions had intensified as black demonstrators demanded interracial dialogue, desegregation of public facilities, and an end to police brutality.⁷⁷ When a local African American doctor pleaded for King's involvement, he agreed to address the demonstrators at a mass meeting. Hundreds of African Americans had been arrested and farmed out to surrounding jails without bond. With a stirring response by the energized crowd to his message, Dr. King committed to march with the demonstrators the next day.⁷⁸ King was arrested, but in a matter of days he and Abernathy were released. The local sheriff had the cunning to recognize that relatively mild treatment of the demonstrators would neutralize the clamor for federal intervention. When King called for intervention from the Justice Department, he was denied because there was no violence and no breaking of federal law.⁷⁹ Robert Kennedy's Justice Department evaluated that there was too little to gain and too much to risk in the balance of civil rights claims and segregationists' political power.

Even though the Albany movement would stretch into the summer of 1962, the expectations of King and the local movement for definitive gains of racial equality failed to materialize. The lack of federal intervention and the resulting absence of pressure from above to complement pressure from below meant that the civil rights challenge failed to produce change from the local white elite. A simplistic cause and effect analysis of reactionary violence to nonviolent direct action in the Jim Crow South might have led some activists or observers to conclude that provoking such violent reaction would insure federal intervention. However, under

⁷⁷ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 176.

⁷⁸ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 546-547.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 625.

the pressures of rapidly changing conditions in the theatre of direct action which included the anticipation of the eruption of violent reaction from any number of unknown random sources – local law enforcement personnel or white supremacist citizens – activists may have developed a certain “streets-smart’ simplicity in their on-the-run analysis. Such a simplistic analysis would have concluded that for nonviolent direct action to be effective, violent reaction was required that brought national press coverage and federal intervention. Albany’s white law enforcement had carefully withheld the reactionary violence that typically was allowed to be freely meted out to blacks who were foolish enough, so white supremacists reasoned, to challenge the sacrosanct southern way of life. This was the main lesson learned from Albany by King and SCLC staff. As King later wrote in the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” yet a year away, “[n]onviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such a creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”⁸⁰ The political costs of federal intervention carried a high price tag in both the Deep South and Washington, D.C. Still, the Albany locals harbored suspicions that Kennedy’s men “kept King on the telephone for two solid days, when their leader could have turned failure into victory.”⁸¹

Dr. King’s second annual review of civil rights and federal action appeared in *The Nation* of March 3, 1962. The article’s title, “Fumbling on the New Frontier,” summarized King’s assessment of the President’s and the federal government’s performance in the preceding year. In

⁸⁰ James A. Colaiaco, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action,” *Phylon* 47, 1 (1986): 21.

⁸¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “It’s a Difficult Thing to Teach a President,” *Look*, November 17, 1964, 61, 64.

moving away from the use of executive orders and toward a legislative program “[t]he year passed and the President fumbled.”⁸² Dr. King did affirm Kennedy’s issuance of a major executive order, EO 10925, which set a precedent for more robust affirmative action policies a few years later.⁸³ But, wrote King in emphasizing the lead role that the federal government needed to fulfill, “to date no Administration has grasped the problem in this total sense and committed the varieties of weaponry required for constructive action on so broad a scale.” Reiterating the crucial role of the federal government in the struggle for racial equality, King wrote that “[t]he Negro in 1962 – almost one hundred years after slavery’s demise – justifiably looks to government for comprehensive, vital programs which will change the totality of his life.” And to the President’s key role as the leader of the Federal Government, he wryly concluded: “The President has proposed a ten-year plan to put a man on the moon. We do not yet have a plan to put a Negro in the State Legislature of Alabama.”⁸⁴ King called for more aggressive efforts by the President in marshaling the power at his disposal as the federal government’s chief executive.

The potential of the federal government to support the civil rights struggle was partially realized in Oxford, Mississippi in the fall of 1962, when resistance mounted to the efforts of James Meredith, an African American Air Force veteran, to register as a student at the University

⁸² Martin Luther King, Jr., “Report on Civil Rights: Fumbling on the New Frontier,” *The Nation*, March 3, 1962, 190-193.

⁸³ Judson MacLaury, “President Kennedy’s E.O. 10925: Seedbed of Affirmative Action.” Society for History in the Federal Government, <http://shfg.org/shfg/?s=executive+order+10925> (accessed October 30, 2014).

⁸⁴ King, “Fumbling on the New Frontier,” 190-193.

of Mississippi. White mob violence against this lone African American seeking educational opportunity proved an effective catalyst for federal intervention. The Oxford, Mississippi segregationists had not yet understood what the Albany, Georgia segregationists had learned: the federal government would not move when nonviolent Jim Crow counter-demonstrators met nonviolent anti-Jim Crow demonstrators. The suddenness and seriousness of the Oxford riots so alarmed the White House that President Kennedy himself took to the phone to repeatedly call the Mississippi Governor about state efforts to suppress the violence.⁸⁵ With Justice Department agents on the ground in Oxford and Jackson, the violence was eventually quelled.⁸⁶ James Meredith was finally able to enroll at the university under the protection of federal troops. The Oxford riots deepened Kennedy's commitment to civil rights, increasing the likelihood that the federal government would intervene on a wider front than the extreme but narrow circumstances of white rioting.

A distinguishing aspect of King's framing of the potentialities of the federal government for civil rights and the extreme challenge of the dethronement of southern segregation was his insistence of acknowledging the moral foundation for social change. This insistence was a manifestation of his religious convictions of how God worked in history – most clearly, he claimed, as modeled in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus – and was a testament to his regard for the high moral purpose involved in the confrontation with the structures of injustice by African American communities' individual and corporate sacrificial submission to possible reactionary violence to nonviolent mass demonstrations. This insistent emphasis was noticeable in his March 30, 1963 *Nation* article in reviewing the previous year's civil rights progress.

⁸⁵ Karabell and Rosenberg, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Quest for Justice*, 27-84.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Writing that the Administration had backed away from the Senate fight to amend the cloture, or filibuster rule – “the greatest obstacle to the passage of civil-rights legislation” – King acknowledged other imperatives of the federal government. National security concerns amidst the Cuban missile crisis had “drained [civil rights progress] of its moral imperative.” “The Administration is at a historic crossroad ... It has at stake its moral commitment, and with it its political fortunes ... Throughout our history, the moral decision has always been the correct decision.”⁸⁷ After a meeting in New York City in October 1962 with Premier Ben Bella of newly independent Algeria, King issued a statement that focused on the “international implications” of racial inequality in the U.S. He reported that Bella had emphasized the connections between colonialism and American segregation and gone on to warn that the U.S. risked its moral and political standing in the world if it did not put an end to racial discrimination. In reference to how U.S. foreign policymakers were framing the Cold War, King said the reason to embrace racial equality in America was not to meet the Communist challenge or to appeal to Asian and African peoples, but because it was the right thing to do.⁸⁸ Thus King used this international opportunity to put pressure on the Kennedy administration to support urgent and sweeping federal civil rights legislation.

⁸⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Bold Design for a New South,” *The Nation*, March 30, 1963, 259 – 262.

⁸⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., “My Talk with Ben Bella: Statement by Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *Amsterdam News*,” in “*In a Single Garment of Destiny: A Global Vision of Justice*,” ed. Lewis V. Baldwin (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 78-79.

3.2 From Birmingham to Freedom Summer, 1963-64

Just as King was enticed to get involved in the Albany movement, in early 1963 Fred Shuttlesworth of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights based in Birmingham pled with King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to become involved in their ongoing struggle. The Birmingham movement would evoke a rapid mobilization by the Justice Department and the involvement of President Kennedy during the outbreaks of violence from the marches of the “Children’s Crusade.” King was arrested during the series of marches and penned the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” his reasoned response to eight white clergymen who in a newspaper ad had called for the cessation of marches by Birmingham’s African Americans and for moderation by both sides of the racial conflict. Marshall Burke, Robert Kennedy’s main Justice Department assistant in charge on the ground in Birmingham, was instrumental in the negotiations between the white business leaders on the Senior Citizens Council and King.⁸⁹ Both the Administration and the movement tried to anticipate each other’s next moves throughout the changing situation in Birmingham. When Wyatt Walker, the SCLC executive director moved the campaign to phase two, which focused on voting rights, SCLC staff member Andrew Young confessed to reporters that “this is the only way we can get the Justice Department in on this.”⁹⁰ Additionally, both Kennedys were continually appraised of the events unfolding in Birmingham and were engaged in orchestrating next moves with government officials and King. They were monitoring the unfolding situation very closely and were prepared to act so that violence did not get out of hand and force the administration, due to a backlash outside the south, to commit to anything that would jeopardize its legislative program in Congress. The Birmingham movement

⁸⁹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 253-254.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 245.

showed that even though the Kennedy administration had not issued a “Second Emancipation Proclamation” per King’s year-long appeal, President Kennedy was ready to mobilize the resources of the federal government to quell eruptions of violence.

In another challenge to the old order in early June 1963, President Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard to enforce the admission of two African American students to the University of Alabama. In response to racial violence in Tuscaloosa, Kennedy delivered on national telecast a “Report to the American People on Civil Rights.” The President began the national address by stating: “We are confronted primarily with a moral issue.” And, “We face ... a moral crisis as a country and as a people.”⁹¹ Kennedy for the first time acknowledged publicly what King had preached. Kennedy gave a list of initiatives that he was sending to the Congress – a list that agreed in substance with Dr. King’s demands for a comprehensive federal program to undermine and defeat legal segregation and disfranchisement. Kennedy said he would ask the Congress to enact legislation that would integrate all facilities open to the public, to authorize the federal government to participate more fully to end segregation in public education, and to provide greater protection for the right to vote.⁹² King’s efforts to forge an alliance with the Kennedy administration were beginning to bear fruit.

⁹¹ John F. Kennedy, “Excerpt from a Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Columbia Point, Boston, MA, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/LH8F_0Mzv0e6Ro1yEm74Ng.aspx# (accessed November 6, 2014).

⁹² Ibid.

King's delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28 to a crowd of a quarter of a million people and on a live, national telecast. In the speech, he reiterated in his indubitable, rhetorical style the same issues of equality that Kennedy made in his televised civil rights address. As the final speaker the day of the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," King's short and highly spirited speech addressed the major demands around desegregation, fair housing, and voting rights which he and other civil rights leaders sought immediately in the "urgency of now." Despite the fact that it was used for its pliable cold war value in the endorsement of America as the global defender of freedom, King's speech was directed to the administration, the Congress, and white and African American citizens. To the executive and legislative branches of the government, King said they were there to dramatize the shameful condition that continued to exist one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation. The government had defaulted on its promises of full citizenship rights to African Americans. They had also come to remind America that the time was now to grant those rights: that there would not be "rest or tranquility" until they had those rights. To blacks of the black freedom movement, King said that they needed to exercise dignified discipline in their awakened militancy and to not allow that militancy to degenerate into racial violence. To whites and blacks – particularly the black nationalists - he said whites had realized that their destiny and freedom was tied to that of blacks and that the injustices of segregation and discrimination must be fought by a biracial movement: blacks could not do it alone. To African Americans of all political orientations and to the administration, the Congress, and white citizens, King encouraged the one oppressed group and warned the others that they would not stop until the barriers of segregation and discrimination to full equal rights were removed and they had full access to citizenship rights. To those who had confronted nonviolently the existing order of racial discrimination and police

brutality by “creative suffering,” King encouraged them to return to their homes where the existing situation would be changed. King’s dream of racial justice envisioned full integration throughout American life. He encouraged black and white Americans, despite their differences, to agree on freedom for all citizens. In this short but powerful speech, King had illuminated the stake that the whole country, from the administration and the Congress to ordinary citizens, had in the expansion of American freedom.⁹³

The March 9, 1964 edition of *The Nation* contained King’s fourth annual review of the previous year’s actions of the federal government. The assassination of President Kennedy the previous November had brought Lyndon Johnson to the Presidency and King had already met with Johnson along with three other civil rights leaders in January.⁹⁴ That meeting centered on Johnson’s program to combat poverty. In the article, “Hammer of Civil Rights,” King wrote that the “hammer” was “episodic social protest.”⁹⁵ What he did not discuss, but which was implicitly understood by both defenders of and challengers to the status quo, was that a relationship existed between episodic social protest and the action of the federal government under Kennedy and now Johnson. It was a useful alliance for both sides. Contentious politics in the recalcitrant South provided the excuse for progressive policies at the national level, which allowed local activists and communities to make gains against an otherwise entrenched white-majority system.

⁹³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that changed the World*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 102-106.

⁹⁴ “LBJ Meets With Negro Leaders; All Five Worry About Poverty,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, January 20, 1964, 29, <http://exproxy.gsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.exproxy.gsu.edu/docview/494021855?accountid=11226> (accessed November 6, 2014).

⁹⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Hammer of Civil Rights,” *The Nation*, March 9, 1964, 230-234.

Returning to a global vision, King wrote that the African American freedom movement was part of the “world upheaval” of “multifaceted struggles for human rights.” It was against that global background, wrote King, that “the civil rights issue confronts the 88th Congress and the Presidential campaign of 1964.” Focusing on the Senate where Kennedy’s civil rights bill had by then moved from its passage in the House, King warned that “There are men . . . who now plan to perpetuate the injustices Bull Connor so ignobly defended.” Bull Connor of Birmingham epitomized the violent nature of the authorities, not just the white supremacist groups. But as an encouragement to the moderates in the Senate, King advised, “What one group of men dedicated to a dying cause can do, another group, if they are as deeply committed to justice, should be able to do.” King appealed to the Senate and the President to not allow this opportunity to pass. While nonviolent direct action had been marshaled by the “extraordinary courage” of African Americans, wrote King, “The massive power of the federal government, applied with imagination, can make [the] problem [of racial segregation] yield.” King reasserted to the new occupant of the White House the ongoing need for a bold and pro-active chief executive of the federal government: “The necessity for a new approach to the Executive power is not a matter of choice.”⁹⁶

Fortunately for the civil rights movement, President Lyndon Johnson had arrived in his new role after already having placed his support for civil rights on the record. Days after President Kennedy’s state funeral, Johnson made a nationally televised address to a specially called joint session of Congress.⁹⁷ The new President advised:

⁹⁶ Ibid., 234.

⁹⁷ Karabell and Rosenberg, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Quest for Justice*, 198.

No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long. We have talked long in this country about equal rights. We have talked for one hundred years or more. It is time now to write the next chapter, and to write it in the books of law. I urge you, as I did in 1957 and again in 1960, to enact a civil rights law so that we can move forward to eliminate from this nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color.⁹⁸

In the following months after this address, Johnson used his political skills and knowledge of the workings of the Congress to work strenuously behind the scenes for the passage of Kennedy's civil rights bill. Without his efforts, it is doubtful that the bill would have reached the full vote of the Senate in basically the same form as the House version. On June 19, 1964, the Senate passed the bill and on July 2, the House approved the Senate version of the bill. Johnson signed the bill into law that same evening with King and other civil rights leaders in attendance at the signing ceremony. Though sanguine about its passage, King and his co-workers knew from history and memory that laws had been passed with much fanfare in the past but had proved ineffective in bringing down Jim Crow. They adopted a pragmatic view of the possible effects of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As King had said on more than one occasion: "Laws may not make a man love me, but they will keep him from lynching me."⁹⁹ In the meantime, the SCLC continued to plan and coordinate nonviolent challenges to southern structures of racial and social injustice.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 213.

3.3 Selma and the Voting Rights Act, 1965

King's final article in *The Nation* series on civil rights progress and the federal government was entitled "Let Justice Roll Down." It appeared on March 15, 1965, immediately after "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama. When demonstrators led by leaders of the SCLC and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) set off on what was to be a 54-mile march along Highway 80 from Selma to Montgomery, a phalanx of Alabama state troopers, local police, and auxiliary county sheriff deputies, some on mounts, attacked without provocation the unarmed and peaceful crowd with tear gas and billy clubs. The televised images of the scene incensed many people, from the President and Congressional leaders of both parties to ordinary people, white as well as black.¹⁰⁰

Writing before the events in Selma, King judged that, "[t]aken together, the two years [1963 & 1964] marked a historic turning point for the civil rights movement," but the walls of segregation "remained erect and reinforced" since "the basic institutions of government, commerce, industry and social patterns in the South all rest upon the embedded institution of segregation." He asserted that nonviolent direct action would still be needed as "the federal government reacts to events more quickly when a situation of conflict cries out for its intervention,"¹⁰¹ and that demonstrations were necessary in some communities to achieve gains. Notably in Selma, Alabama, according to King, "voting rights, employment opportunities, improved interracial communication and paved streets in the Negro neighborhoods" were still lacking. In Selma, out of 15,000 eligible black voters, less than 350 were registered.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 400.

¹⁰¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Let Justice Roll Down," *The Nation*, March 15, 1965, 269-274.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

In a critique of President Johnson's preference for seeking consensus on further civil rights legislation, King wrote that his predecessors, Kennedy, Roosevelt, and Lincoln, had not achieved a "historically great program" by waiting on consensus. Rather, "[t]he overwhelming national consensus followed their acts, it did not precede them." King promoted bold leadership by the President and the executive branch rather than waiting on Congressional consensus. In the South, wrote King, "the Negro ... requires in the first place the opportunity to exercise elementary rights and to be shielded from terror and oppression by reliable, alert government protection. He should not have to stake his life, his home or his security merely to enjoy the right to vote."¹⁰³

Selma made King's assessment in *The Nation* prophetic. The garish truth was that when the brutality of racism was exposed by unprovoked violence against unarmed, nonviolent demonstrators, federal government intervention could be counted on. Bloody Sunday's provocation against defenseless African Americans by Selma defenders of the status quo provoked federal government officials and the electorate to a new awareness of the need for change. Indeed, it helped forge a consensus among the nation's lawmakers that would lead to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Though the relationship between King and President Lyndon Johnson and his administration was similar to the relationship King had had with President Kennedy and his administration, there were some advantages to Johnson as President. Johnson was older than Kennedy and a more seasoned politician; he was more skilled and more effective in the workings

¹⁰³ Ibid.

of the legislative process;¹⁰⁴ he brought to the executive position more familiarity with civil rights than had Kennedy, though Johnson had not worked closely with any of the civil rights movement's leaders;¹⁰⁵ and Johnson was already committed to the goal of achieving legislation for African American equality.¹⁰⁶ With his commitment to racial equality, his political skills, and his willingness as the Chief Executive, Johnson deftly orchestrated within the limitations of the executive branch the legislative process toward new Congressional voting rights legislation. The highlight of the process was Johnson's special message to Congress on Monday, March 15 in the wake of Bloody Sunday. The content of his speech included the following:

Rarely are we met with a challenge, not to our growth or abundance, our welfare or our security, but rather to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved Nation. The issue of equal right for American Negroes is such an issue. ... There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans – not as Democrats or Republicans – we are met here as Americans to solve that problem. ... Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. ... To those who seek to avoid action by their

¹⁰⁴ Russell D. Renka, "Comparing Presidents Kennedy and Johnson as Legislative Leaders," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 15, no. 4 (1985): 806-825.

¹⁰⁵ Karabell and Rosenberg, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Quest for Justice: The Civil Rights Tapes*, 203.

¹⁰⁶ Doris Kearns, "Lyndon Johnson's Political Personality," *Political Science Quarterly* 91, no. 3 (1976): 385-409.

National Government in their own communities; who want to and who seek to maintain purely local control over elections, the answer is simple: Open your polling places to all your people. Allow men and women to register and vote whatever the color of their skin. Extend the rights of citizenship to every citizen of this land. There is no constitutional issue here. The command of the Constitution is plain. There is no moral issue. It is wrong – deadly wrong – to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country. There is no issue of States rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights. ... But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life. Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome.¹⁰⁷

While watching the speech on television, King was so moved he cried openly when Johnson uttered, “We shall overcome.”¹⁰⁸

3.4 The Return of the Global, 1962-65

Dr. King often made the connection between social justice in the United States and social justice in other nations, even if the need to bring federal power to bear on local struggles in the

¹⁰⁷ Lyndon Baines Johnson, “President Johnson’s Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise,” March 15, 1965, LBJ Library, <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/speeches-films/president-johnsons-special-message-to-the-congress-the-american-promise/> (accessed November 9, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 408.

South required him to frame the issues in national rather than global terms. For example, he participated in the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa (ANLCA), a committee of leading African American civil rights organizations founded in 1962 to support freedom in Africa and influence U.S. foreign policy.¹⁰⁹ In a statement at the time King acknowledged the shifting relationship between the national and the global in African American consciousness: “The Negro recognizes more than ever now, that he lives in a world community. There was a time when the intensity of our problems excluded our awareness that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” The connecting link between Africa and the U.S. was colonialism and economic imperialism’s links to racism and segregation, which he identified as produced by “the very same set of complex politico-economic forces ... Their common end is economic exploitation, political domination and the debasing of human personality ... There seems always the choice between political expediency and that which is morally compelling or the choice between advantageous economic aid and military alliances versus the establishment of racial justice.” For a more extensive examination between the American South and black Africa, King said that one needed to examine the role of the U.S. government.¹¹⁰ Winning men and nations to the free world would not be won militarily but had to a “moral offensive for freedom and justice.”¹¹¹ King’s critique can be considered as a pacifist reading of U.S. militarism. Or, it can

¹⁰⁹ George M. Houser, “Meeting Africa’s Challenge: The Story of the American Committee on Africa,” *A Journal of Opinion*, 6, No. 2/3, Africanist Studies 1955-1975 (Summer - Autumn, 1976): pp. 16-26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1166441> (accessed November 1, 2014).

¹¹⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 224.

¹¹¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Statement of Dr. Martin Luther King, President Southern Christian Leadership Conference at the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa, November 24,

be considered as the critique of a human rights leader who had political and public standing in both America and internationally. King's global framing was usually prompted by either a trip overseas or by meeting with a foreign visitor. King's recognition of American power in both national and global contexts led him to identify the U.S. government as the nexus for finding increased clarity in tracking the linkages between the systemic oppressions in the South and in Africa.

The case of South Africa was both compelling and constraining. While the parallels between segregation and apartheid were clear, the U.S. government as well as U.S. banks and businesses were deeply involved in the country. Two weeks after the founding of ANLCA, King issued a joint statement with Chief Albert Luthuli, the head of the anti-apartheid African National Congress. It denounced the acts of repression and violence committed by the South African government since 1957, and set forth two courses for the country, either the continuation of these policies, which would lead to a race war, or the alternative, the "only solution which represents sanity," which was "the transition to a society based upon equality for all without regard to colour." Finally, the statement asked people of goodwill to take action against apartheid by participating in demonstrations, urging their governments to support economic sanctions, calling on the U.N. to adopt a resolution to isolate South Africa, individual and corporate boycotting of South Africa's products, and stopping all trade and investment in South Africa.¹¹²

1962, Arden House, Harriman, New York," The King Center, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlks-address-about-south-africa#> (accessed November 8, 2014).

¹¹² Albert Luthuli, "Appeal for action against Apartheid: Statement issued jointly by Chief Albert Luthuli and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., 10 December, 1962," African National Congress,

King had the unique opportunity of preaching at the *Marienkirche* (St. Mary's Church) in East Berlin on September 13, 1964. He was present in the divided city on the invitation of Mayor Willy Brandt to open West Berlin's annual cultural festival. The 1964 festival was designed to honor the memory of President John Kennedy, who had famously visited West Berlin in June 1963. King paid tribute to Kennedy and preached a sermon to 20,000 people at the Waldbuhne amphitheater in the morning. On the same day an East Berliner, Michael Meyer, had been wounded by East German guards as he attempted a crossing to the western sector of the city. King insisted on being taken to the Kreuzberg neighborhood where the shooting occurred. This visit was not on his travel schedule, but King had met Heinrich Gruber, Provost of St. Mary's, in the U.S. and remained in communication with him. King wanted to cross the border to go to St. Mary's and, amazingly, his wish was granted at Checkpoint Charlie even though U.S. officials, fearing such a possibility and concerned what King might say to an East German audience, had revoked his passport earlier that day. American soldiers let King leave West Berlin on his own recognizance and their East German counterparts opened their side of the crossing to East Berlin. At St. Mary's, King appeared before an overflowing crowd that had gathered by word of mouth in just a few hours and delivered the same sermon he had given that morning in West Berlin. Hasty arrangements were made for him to appear at nearby Sophia Church for a second sermon later that night. King's remarks were not politically controversial. He spoke about the "common humanity" that binds people together 'regardless of the barriers of race, creed, ideology, or

South Africa's National Liberation Movement, <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4650>

(accessed November 10, 2014).

nationality.”¹¹³ King was able to make transnational connections on themes of faith, struggle, and suffering for civil and political rights that resonated with an East German audience living under an oppressive government.. During King’s address, many of the East Germans wept openly. In these unique circumstances, he easily shifted from a national to a global focus.

In December 1964, Dr. King received the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, an honor that spotlighted not only him but the whole U.S. civil rights movement on the world stage. In his acceptance speech in Oslo, King gave tribute to the nonviolent approach as a “powerful moral force” in confronting injustice and to the many nonviolent protesters who made it such an effective means in the struggle for racial and social justice. In framing the issues in both national and global terms, he gave the struggle universal significance. In a national framework, he declared “an abiding faith” in American democracy and refused to believe that racism could not be overcome by brotherhood. In a global framework, he rejected the notion that systemic structures of injustice could not be transformed or that nations could only solve their conflicts by violent means. In this dual perspective, he affirmed the moral basis of human society and the

¹¹³ King, “King, Martin Luther, Jr., East Berlin: Sermon Held at St. Mary’s Church,” *The Civil Rights Struggle, African-Americans, GIs, and Germany*; “Remembering Martin Luther King’s visit to Berlin,” website of Deutsche Welle, Germany’s international broadcaster, Bonn, Germany, <http://www.dw.de/remembering-martin-luther-kings-visit-to-berlin/a-17907455> (accessed November 30, 2014); Triebita Chestnut, “...There is no East, no West...: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visits Cold War Berlin,” *A City Divided: Life and Death in the Shadow of the Wall* held at the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC on October 16, 2013, <http://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/cold-war/berlin-wall-1962-1987/publication.pdf> (accessed on December 9, 2014).

moral choices available to all people. He expressed a religiously grounded hope in the power of truth and love, the prospects for overcoming of war through “bowing at the altars of God,” and the vision of each and every person gaining access to adequate food, benefiting from educational and cultural uplift, and enjoying respect and dignity. King made reference to only one individual by name in his speech. Significantly, given his consistent support for the antiapartheid cause in South Africa, the person he named was Chief Albert Luthuli, winner of the 1960 Nobel Prize and President of the African National Congress.¹¹⁴

Throughout his civil rights career, King made explicit links between the freedom movements in the U.S. and the Afro-Asian world. He often referred to the interrelatedness of peoples across political, cultural, and geographical borders by speaking of “a single garment of destiny.”¹¹⁵ He considered the struggle for the new order of social justice in the U.S. as an integral part of the worldwide emergence of this new order. Moreover, King believed that the U.S. government was morally bound to act for justice in its foreign as well as domestic policies. While King was committed to a transnational struggle for human rights, of which the civil and voting rights legislation of 1964-65 was a piece, the U.S. government did not share this understanding. The significance of this divergence would soon confront King.

3.5 Conclusion

Dr. King connected the freedom of all men and women to the recognition that all shared a common destiny and to the moral example of crucifixion and resurrection, which promised the

¹¹⁴ King, “Nobel Prize: Acceptance Speech,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 224-226.

¹¹⁵ King, “The Greatest Hope for World Peace:” Statements by Martin Luther King, Jr.; Prepared for *Redbook Magazine*, in “*In A Single Garment of Destiny*”: *A Global Vision of Justice*, 149.

ultimate realization of reconciliation and brotherhood. His work from 1961 to 1965 was focused on overthrowing Jim Crow and moving towards a new order of justice in the U.S., which required developing a strategic alliance with the U.S. government. Going forward, his work for racial and social justice would broaden in many ways. As he told listeners at a South Africa Benefit event in New York City on December 10, 1965, “We are in an era in which the issue of human rights is the central question confronting all nations.”¹¹⁶ But this widened outlook would raise disturbing questions about the nature of the United States and its role in the world.

4 CHAPTER FOUR: “A WORLDWIDE FREEDOM REVOLUTION”: DR. KING’S RE-ENVISIONING OF GLOBAL PEACE AND JUSTICE, 1966-1968

In January 1966, Dr. King, his wife Coretta Scott King, and their young children moved into a dilapidated third-floor apartment in the Lawndale section of Chicago. Responding to the Watts rebellion in Los Angeles in August 1965 and the rise of “black power” among activists in the freedom movement, he was determined to show that the SCLC could successfully use nonviolent direct action outside the South for economic as well as racial justice. The experience of living in the slums and opposing Chicago’s Mayor Richard Daley’s political machine began to clarify for King how the structures of racial exclusion and economic deprivation worked together in a systemic way to limit the freedom and opportunities of African Americans. “The Chicago problem is simply a matter of economic exploitation,” he claimed. “Every condition exists simply because someone profits by its existence.” Such conditions could be changed, he believed, if the government took action. Indeed, President Johnson’s war on poverty in pursuit

¹¹⁶ King, “Let My People Go: South Africa Benefit Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.; Hunter College,” in *“In A Single Garment of Destiny”: A Global Vision of Justice*, 39.

of a Great Society of equality and prosperity seemed to promise sweeping change. However, according to King, “the Federal Government has yet to initiate a creative attempt to deal with the problems of metropolitan life and the results of the past three centuries of slavery and segregation on Negroes.”¹¹⁷ This lack of action radicalized King, who understood that the state had the power to address systemic problems but could not understand why it refrained from doing so.¹¹⁸

The answer lay in the Vietnam War. King had criticized the war and called for negotiations with the National Liberation Front as early as August 1965, but negative reactions from other civil rights leaders, his own SCLC staff, the press, and the Johnson administration led him to exercise restraint in expressing his dissent.¹¹⁹ Throughout 1966, however, he continued to note the war’s impact on government funding of anti-poverty programs. Increasingly, his advocacy for racial and economic justice collided with escalating U.S. military involvement in Vietnam and elsewhere in what had become known as the Third World of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. The alliance he had made with the federal government during the height of the civil rights movement against legal segregation, discrimination, and disfranchisement in the South came to an end. In its place, King sought to build a grassroots

¹¹⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “My Dream: Fighting The Ghetto,” *New Journal and Guide*, February 26, 1966.

¹¹⁸ Adam Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?” *History Workshop* 15 (Spring 1983): 120 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288462> (accessed March 20, 2014).

¹¹⁹ Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 311.

alliance of poor people, communities of color, and people of conscience committed to nonviolent direct action and to re-envision a global alliance along the same lines. The culmination of this work was the Poor Peoples Campaign of 1968.

This chapter explores the crucial year of 1967, when King elaborated his ideas in a series of talks and writings. He did not simply denounce the different forms of violence, structural as well as direct, he witnessed to the global space devoid of violence. Recalling his notion of a world “neighborhood” from a decade earlier, he described a peaceful and just “world house” that offered an alternative to war, poverty, and oppression.

4.1 To the Riverside

In January 1967, as King waited to catch a flight to Jamaica, where he planned to complete the manuscript of what would become his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, he thumbed through *Ramparts* magazine. His eyes fell on photographs of Vietnamese children who had been badly burned by napalm. The images of these children and their wailing mothers crystallized Dr. King’s growing sense of outrage about the war in Vietnam. In that instant, he resolved to fully oppose the U.S. war effort.¹²⁰

King’s first opportunity to speak out was at the Nation Institute in Los Angeles in February. King’s address was entitled “The Casualties of the War in Vietnam.” The victims of the war could be found far away from Vietnam. The casualties in the U.S. included the Great Society’s anti-poverty programs;¹²¹ the government’s loss of humility and resort to hubris in its

¹²⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 543.

¹²¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Casualties of the War in Vietnam,” in *“In a Single Garment of Destiny”*: A Global Vision of Justice (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 153.

actions;¹²² and the principle of dissent, a hallmark of American democracy.¹²³ The casualties around the world included the Charter of the United Nations, violated by the U.S.'s aggressive war;¹²⁴ the principle of national self-determination, once heralded by an American president;¹²⁵ and, in a divided world still governed by the danger of nuclear war, "the prospects of mankind's survival."¹²⁶ King reiterated his call for "a supreme effort to generate the readiness, indeed the eagerness, to enter into the new world which is now possible,"¹²⁷ and for "a company of creative dissenters" to "organize as effectively as the war hawks."¹²⁸

At King's request, the antiwar group Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam hosted his most important and moving antiwar speech at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967. Entitled "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," the speech was far more than a jeremiad. He wanted to "make a passionate plea to my beloved nation,"¹²⁹ to speak directly to "the far deeper malady within the American spirit" that if ignored would "take us beyond Vietnam" to concerns about U.S. intervention in other nations,¹³⁰ and "to move past

¹²² Ibid., 155.

¹²³ Ibid., 156.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 151.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 151-52.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 157.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 159.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 161.

¹²⁹ King, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," in *"In a Single Garment of Destiny,"* 165.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 176.

indecision to action” in finding “new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice throughout the developing world.”¹³¹

His overall analysis of what he called the U.S.’s neocolonial actions in Vietnam and other nations made a deep impact, as public reaction in following days made clear. He gave seven reasons why he had brought Vietnam into his moral vision. Some sprang from his Christian convictions: the commitment reflected in SCLC’s motto “to save the soul of America”;¹³² his commitment “to the ministry of Jesus Christ”;¹³³ and his calling that he “shared with all men ... the calling to be a son of the living God.”¹³⁴ His other compelling reasons were to “see the war as an enemy of the poor”;¹³⁵ the war’s “cruel manipulation of the poor”;¹³⁶ the conflict of speaking against violence in the nation’s ghettos while remaining silent in opposing the violence in Vietnam;¹³⁷ and his award of the Nobel Prize, which laid “an additional burden of responsibility” on him to “work harder than he had ever worked before for the brotherhood of man” and its “calling beyond national allegiances.”¹³⁸

¹³¹ Ibid., 180.

¹³² Ibid., 167.

¹³³ Ibid., 168.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 168.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 166.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 167.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 168.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

King recalled the previous three summers of riots in the nation's ghettos and excoriated the U.S. government as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today."¹³⁹ That violence, he claimed, caused the Vietnamese people to "languish under our bombs and consider us – not their fellow Vietnamese – the real enemy." U.S. violence herded the people "off the land of their fathers into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met." It "poisoned their water"; killed a million acres of their crops, bulldozed their areas in preparation to "destroy their precious trees"; caused the people to "wander into towns" and saw "thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals ... degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food ... and selling their sisters to our soldiers, soliciting for their mothers."¹⁴⁰ King coupled his litany of U.S. violence in Vietnam with "a pattern of suppression" in other countries in the world house. That pattern of suppression "justified the presence of U.S. military 'advisors' in Venezuela ... maintained social stability for U.S. investment accounts for the counter-revolutionary action of American forces in Guatemala" and explained "why American helicopters are being used against guerillas in Colombia and why American napalm and green beret forces have already been active against rebels in Peru."

These inflictions of violence on the rest of the world, according to King, threatened terrible consequences for the U.S. "America's soul" would be "totally poisoned" by Vietnam;¹⁴¹ it would "approach spiritual death" by devoting "more money on military defense spending than on programs of social uplift";¹⁴² and the U.S. state, which King had once seen as an

¹³⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 170-71.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 168.

¹⁴² Ibid., 178.

indispensable ally in the struggle for civil rights for African Americans, would “possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.”¹⁴³

4.2 Where Do We Go From Here?

In June 1967, Dr. King published *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, his final and perhaps greatest book. In the first five chapters, King assessed the present status and future goals of the civil rights struggle in a U.S. framework. He addressed the stalled progress of civil rights, and examined Black Power as a cry of disappointment that could not win in a violent confrontation with white power. King explored the genesis of racism and the white backlash, the dilemma that faced African Americans in their attaining political power, and what the civil rights movement needed to achieve in order to realize economic and political power in American society. His assessment represented his mature thinking about the reality of African Americans’ lack of power, what would be required to achieve effective economic and political power and make real social change, the national costs required for full civil rights to be achieved, and the groups of allies in the struggle.

The book’s final chapter was entitled “The World House.” This evocative image and the argument he made about it captured King’s return to a global frame for peace and justice. King simply described the “world house” as the space in which “black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu” were unduly separated but had to learn to live with each other because they could never again live apart. In their struggle to at last “be at home,” African Americans could not ignore this larger world house. The “world house” demanded that “we transform this worldwide neighborhood into a worldwide

¹⁴³ Ibid., 180.

brotherhood.”¹⁴⁴ “Our hope ... lies in our ability to reestablish the moral ends of our lives in personal character and social justice.”¹⁴⁵ Using words that he had also uttered in his Riverside speech to convey a sense of urgency as well as possibility, King wrote, “We need to make a supreme effort to generate the readiness, indeed the eagerness, to enter into the new world which is now possible.”¹⁴⁶

This new world was not distant, but palpable. King had glimpsed it in the hubbub of the mobilization for voting rights in 1965:

After the march to Montgomery, there was a delay at the airport and several thousand demonstrators waited more than five hours, crowding together on the seats, the floors and the stairways of the terminal building. As I stood with them and saw white and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis, labor organizers, lawyers, doctors, housemaids and shopworkers brimming with vitality and enjoying a rare comradeship, I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment of luminous and genuine brotherhood.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967; Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 181.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

This brotherhood was large and diverse, not small and intimate like the beloved community of civil rights workers who had launched the movement by giving up everything and by being willing to give up even their lives for the cause.

To appreciate the alternative offered by the “world house,” King examined both the inside and the outside of America’s house. “Why are there forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence?” Why, he asked, “has our nation placed itself in the position of being God’s military agent on earth, and intervened recklessly in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic” and “substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order?” There was a need for the “radical reordering of national priorities”;¹⁴⁸ the “radical restructuring of [the nation’s] architecture” that formed the basis of American society;¹⁴⁹ and a “revolution of [American] values” that would “accompany the scientific and freedom movements engulfing the earth.”¹⁵⁰

To resist the prevailing violence, the human rights movement needed “creative dissenters” to challenge “all the existing values of American society” and to call it “to a higher destiny ... a new plateau of compassion ... a more noble expression of humanness.” In words that evoked the climax of decolonization in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he described peace and justice activists as a “colony of dissenters” who needed to give their “ultimate allegiance to the empire of justice,” and to “challenge the nation to deal with its larger dilemma.”¹⁵¹ The task, according to King, “is to organize our strength into compelling power so that government cannot elude our

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 196.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 142.

demands.”¹⁵² As to a generalized tactic about racism, he wrote that “nonviolent direct action will continue to be a significant source of power until it[] is made irrelevant by the presence of justice.”¹⁵³ King envisioned a broad alliance of social and political forces, including organized labor;¹⁵⁴ poor people, such as the unemployed and welfare recipients;¹⁵⁵ African Americans, Puerto Ricans, labor, the churches, and the liberal middle classes. This multi-layered alliance offered “the keys to political power.”¹⁵⁶ All of these groups “in the future must become intensive political activists.”¹⁵⁷

The “world house” was global in scale and scope. It was made possible by “a worldwide freedom revolution,” a transformative force that went beyond the process of decolonization witnessed by King in the late 1950s. Likewise, the movements of people of color, poor people, and their allies in U.S. society were not simply parallel to, but converging with, movements in other parts of the world. “[W]hat is happening in the United States ... is a significant part of a world development.”¹⁵⁸ The African American, along with his “black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers in Asia, South America and the Caribbean,” is moving “with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice.”¹⁵⁹ The obstacles to the construction

¹⁵² Ibid., 145.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 147.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 149.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 150.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 160.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 162.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 180.

of the “world house” of social justice were “racism and its perennial ally – economic exploitation”;¹⁶⁰ “poverty on an international scale”;¹⁶¹ and “war and human destruction.”¹⁶² Apartheid South Africa, long a matter of concern to Dr. King, provided “the classic example of organized and institutionalized racism.” This systematic domination was not simply the result of some inward project of South African whites to insure their privileged position. Rather, it was “virtually made possible by the economic policies of the United States and Great Britain.”¹⁶³ Yet, he went on, there has been “little or no attempt to deal with the economic aspects of racist exploitation. We have been notoriously silent about the more than \$700 million of American capital which props up the system of apartheid, not to mention the billions of dollars in trade and the military alliances which are maintained under the pretext of fighting Communism in Africa.”¹⁶⁴ The “more sophisticated form of racism,” wrote Dr. King, was neocolonialism. It was little different in Latin America, where the continent and its peoples were “held by U.S. corporations.”¹⁶⁵ Thus the war on poverty in the U.S. was part of a struggle around the world, and the rich nations had to use their wealth to help the poor nations. According to King, the Western nations “must see [the war against poverty] as a moral obligation to provide capital and technical assistance,” he said. In the religious tradition widely shared in the U.S. that held that “all men are made in the image of God,” he insisted that that “all life is interrelated” and that “we

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 183.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁶² Ibid., 192.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 183.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 184.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 185.

are our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother."¹⁶⁶ He confided that when he saw the U.S. "intervening in ... a civil war" and unwilling to "create the atmosphere" for peace negotiations by halting the bombing of North Vietnam and offering to talk with the guerrillas in South Vietnam, he "trembled for our world."¹⁶⁷

King prescribed a revolution of values for the U.S., a shift from a "'thing'-oriented" to a "'person'-oriented society."¹⁶⁸ In going beyond traditional capitalism and Communism to a "socially conscious democracy," it was necessary to "question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies" concerning the making of profits at the expense of working people.¹⁶⁹ This move could not be limited to internal U.S. policies. King asserted that those seeking social justice had to recognize that making profits without regard to human welfare in the countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America was "not just"; that U.S. support for oligarchies that dominated the land and people of Latin America was "not just"; that Western arrogance, which assumed that the West was the teacher and the rest of the world was the pupil and that the former had nothing to learn from the latter, was "not just"; and that the current world order, with its easy resort to war to settle differences was "not just."¹⁷⁰ The loyalties of those struggling for racial and social justice on a global scale had to be "ecumenical rather than sectional." Given the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 192-93.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 196.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 197-98.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 198-99.

interdependency of the world, “every nation must develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.”¹⁷¹

In elaborating his opposition to U.S. actions and policies not only in Vietnam but also in other parts of the world, King made some extraordinary assertions. American values as reflected in the U.S. government were producing chaos not community in the “world house.” It was incumbent on a colony of dissenters to begin to change the deteriorating world situation. To counter racism, economic exploitation, and the use of military force to settle disagreements, nothing short of a nonviolent revolution was necessary to rebalance the world order.

4.3 To the Crossroads

In November 1967, King spoke at the National Leadership Assembly for Peace in Chicago.¹⁷² The union members who had gathered from many parts of the country were an important constituency of his new alliance of dissenters. According to King, they represented “the troubled conscience of the working people” that could not be stilled.¹⁷³ In an argument that took into account the psychological as well as material elements of politics and policy, he suggested that “the government was emotionally committed to the war and emotionally hostile to the needs of the poor” and that “the government will resist committing adequate resources for domestic reform because these are reserves indispensable for a military adventure.”¹⁷⁴ As a result of this unbending stance, the U.S. had alienated itself from the world community as well as

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 201.

¹⁷² Martin Luther King, Jr., “Domestic Impact of the War in Vietnam,” in *All Labor Has Dignity*, ed. Michael K. Honey (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 137.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 141.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 144.

“isolated itself from the majority of [the American] people.” It stood alone in the world “without a single significant international ally.” It had turned away “from the very people whom we profess to support, the South Vietnamese.”¹⁷⁵ This isolation of the government was matched by a convergence of many people in criticism of and opposition to the war. These forces ranged from “members of the Congress and distinguished political scientists”¹⁷⁶ to “hundreds of thousands of young people in their colleges, in the slums, in churches and synagogues.”¹⁷⁷ Their critique “questioned the trend toward excessive executive power” and their “systemic inability to influence government” that was shrouded by a “blanket of intimidation” from “ubiquitous congressional committees.”¹⁷⁸ The connections they witnessed between war abroad and repression at home demonstrated that “injustice anywhere [was] a threat to justice everywhere.”¹⁷⁹ The future of the “world house” was at stake, for a world order that accommodated injustice would reproduce and expand it.

In November and December 1967, King delivered the annual Massey Lectures in Canada. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation carried his five talks on the radio. He had been invited to speak on “anything of relevance not only to the United States but to the world at

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 145-46.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 147.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 148.

large.”¹⁸⁰ Published posthumously, King’s Massey Lectures were his last and perhaps most clearly stated view of the struggle for peace and justice in the “world house.”

In the first lecture, King discussed the impasse in race relations in the United States. Urban riots were now in the center stage of racial history. Due to a U.S. government “preoccupied with war ... and determined to husband every resource for military adventures rather than for social reconstruction,” African Americans, said King, must “fashion new tactics which do not count on government goodwill but serve, instead, to compel unwilling authorities to yield to the mandates of justice.” Hence, he continued, “nonviolent protest must now mature to a new level to correspond to heightened black impatience and stiffened white resistance. This higher level is mass civil disobedience.”¹⁸¹ This expansion of nonviolent direct action would not be directed at local elites, as it had been in the heyday of the civil rights movement against inequality in the U.S. South, but at the national leadership in Washington, D.C. While this forecast for protest presaged the SCLC’s Poor Peoples Campaign and as yet undisclosed plans for mass nonviolent civil disruption in Washington and elsewhere in the spring of 1968, King was speaking of conditions that demanded action worldwide.¹⁸² In his view, “The United States

¹⁸⁰ Coretta Scott King, “Foreword to the 1968 Edition,” in Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience: Dr. King’s Final Testament on Racism, Poverty, and War* (1968; Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), xiii.

¹⁸¹ King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 14-15.

¹⁸² “Poor Peoples Campaign: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle,” Stanford University’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_poor_peoples_campaign/ (accessed November 26, 2014).

is substantially challenged to demonstrate that it can abolish not only the evils of racism but the scourge of poverty of whites as well as of Negroes, and the horrors of war that transcend national borders and involve all mankind.”¹⁸³ This challenge was effectually global, not just national. It could not be evaded: “The developed industrial nations of the world cannot remain secure islands of prosperity in a seething sea of poverty. The storm is rising against the privileged minority of the earth, from which there is no shelter in isolation and armament. The storm will not abate until a just distribution of the fruits of the earth enables every man everywhere to live in dignity and human decency.”¹⁸⁴

While his second lecture, “Conscience and the Vietnam War,” reprised his Riverside talk on Vietnam, King’s third lecture, “Youth and Social Action,” delivered his first analysis of young people in the U.S. as a force for change. He identified three principal groups in the younger generation. The largest group was comprised of the majority of young people, who, at one and the same time, were struggling to adapt to the prevailing values of society but were also critical of the status quo. The second group was young radicals, who were in revolt against the old values and believed that society required structural changes to eliminate injustice. The third group was the hippies, who aligned with the values of peace and justice but were fleeing from rather than challenging society.¹⁸⁵ This “flight from reality,” said Dr. King, expressed “a profoundly discrediting judgment on the society they emerge from.”¹⁸⁶ All these groups furnished evidence that “this generation is in substantial ferment.” By contrast, the defenders of

¹⁸³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁸⁴ King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 18.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 39-43.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 42.

the status quo, who argued that “technological marvels” indicated social progress, only “revealed their poverty of spirit.”¹⁸⁷ As technology loomed larger, humankind became smaller. Rather than strengthening democracy, the technological revolution had helped to “eviscerate it.”¹⁸⁸ All of this, posited Dr. King, could make those participating in the movement for social change despair of the future “because it is clear now how deep and systemic are the evils it confronts.”¹⁸⁹ King did not despair, however, in part because he found hope in the possibilities represented by youth. The question was what direction would young people’s activism take: “The revolutionary spirit is already world-wide. If the anger of the peoples of the world at the injustice of things is to be channeled into a revolution of love and creativity, we must begin now to work, urgently, with all the peoples, to shape a new world.”¹⁹⁰

In his fourth lecture, “Nonviolence and Social Change,” King likened nonviolent direct action to a fire truck that speeds through red lights to get to a raging fire, even though the law normally requires that traffic must stop. The “fire is raging now for the Negroes and the poor in this society,” and what was needed was “brigades of ambulance drivers who will have to ignore the red lights of the present system until the emergency is solved.”¹⁹¹ The fire was not burning only in the U.S. “[T]ragic conditions” existed globally; “disinherited people all over the world are bleeding to death from deep social and economic wounds.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁹² Ibid.

The conventional politics of legislating and governing could not adequately address this dire situation; according to King, “it is obvious that new laws are not enough.” The contentious politics of urban riot was ineffective as well, for the government used violence as an excuse for not even “giving a hearing to their just and urgent demands.”¹⁹³ Symbolism rather than substance – a call for a day of prayer, for example – was “worse than blind, it was provocative,” railed King.¹⁹⁴ He reiterated the need for protest: the “dispossessed of this nation – the poor, both white and Negro,” of this “cruelly unjust society” must “organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which society” perpetuates poverty and inequality. It would take place in Washington, D.C., where the government had the power and wealth needed “for a real war on poverty.”¹⁹⁵

This struggle involved the poor, the dispossessed, and the exploited of the whole world. “It is clear to me that the next stage of the movement is to become international,” said King. “Poor countries are poor primarily because we have exploited them through political or economic colonialism.” Given the centrality of the U.S. in the global system, “Americans in particular [need to] help their nation repent of her modern economic imperialism.”¹⁹⁶ Reaching for a word that would express the scale and scope of both the problems and the solutions, he spoke of the need to “planetize” the movement: “It is obvious that nonviolent movements for social change must internationalize, because of the interlocking nature of the problems they all face, and because otherwise these problems will breed war, we have hardly begun to build the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 61.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 61-62.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

skills and the strategy, or even the commitment, to planetize our movement for social justice.”¹⁹⁷

Today, of course, we have come to speak routinely of globalizing processes and projects when we want to capture things of a nature that goes beyond the forms of distinct states or nations and their interrelations. Even before the peoples of the earth were able to see their planet from the window of an Apollo capsule orbiting the moon, King was trying to convey a truly global sense of what would be required to achieve peace and justice.

In the fifth and final lecture, King preached a Christmas sermon, “Peace on Earth...” in which he proclaimed that “our loyalties must become ecumenical and must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation” and called for the development of a world perspective.¹⁹⁸ If there was to be peace in the world, “men and nations must embrace the nonviolent affirmation that ends and means must cohere.”¹⁹⁹ Recounting that “every time we drop bombs in North Vietnam, President Johnson talks eloquently about peace,” King argued that peace could only be sought by peaceful means.²⁰⁰ The starting point had to be “the nonviolent affirmation of the sacredness of all human life.”²⁰¹ To realize peace requires belief “in the ultimate morality of the universe,” in the conviction that “all reality hinges on moral foundations.”²⁰²

These words summed up Martin Luther King, Jr.’s best thinking on the commitments and actions needed to bring about peace and justice in the world. We can surmise that he directed his

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 70.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 72.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 73.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 74.

²⁰² Ibid., 77.

words to both leaders and peoples, in Canada and the U.S. and around the world. However, we can also assume that, based on his reflections on his experience of moral and social change, he also understood that it would take nonviolent direct action on a massive scale to force leaders to consider rather than dismiss people's demands.

In early December, King issued a press statement on the Poor People's Campaign, scheduled to unfold in the spring of 1968. Holding the U.S. government accountable, he drew a series of contrasts between poverty and plenty, segregation and freedom, protest and repression, lack of jobs and social services and abundance of economic and financial resources, reductions in social expenditures in the U.S. and vast spending on the weapons of war used in Vietnam. While the wider responsibility lay with the larger society, King said that much of the immediate responsibility for removing injustices belonged to the federal government.²⁰³ The SCLC would go to Washington "to use any means of legitimate nonviolent protest necessary to move our nation and our government on a new course of social, economic, and political reform ... the power to initiate this reform resides in Washington." King was open and unreserved about the crucial nature of this coming confrontation: "America is at a crossroads of History ... it is critically important for us, as a nation and a society to choose a new path and move upon it with resolution and courage."²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Martin Luther King, Jr., "MLK Public Statement on the Poor People's Campaign: Monday, December 4, 1967," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, GA <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-public-statement-poor-peoples-campaign> (accessed on November 20, 2014).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

4.4 Conclusion

A few months later Martin Luther King, Jr. was dead, shot and killed by an assassin in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968, one year to the day after ending his silence on Vietnam at Riverside Church. He was there to support a strike of black sanitation workers, at the crossroads of the struggle for racial and economic justice and, more broadly, of the choice to go along with war and violence or to work for peace. In a posthumously published essay, King reiterated and extended his assessment of American society and the U.S. state. Without radical changes in social and political structure, King wrote, justice for black people could not be achieved. “Despite its virtues and attributes, America is deeply racist and its democracy is flawed both economically and socially.”²⁰⁵ The black revolution was more than “a struggle for the rights of Negroes ... it is forcing America to deal with all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism.”²⁰⁶ Placing the U.S. in the world, King claimed that “it is glaringly obvious to me that the development of a humanitarian means of dealing with some of the problems of the world – and the correlative revolution in American values that this will entail – is a much better way of protecting ourselves against the threat of violence than the military means we have chosen.” As for American leadership, King believed that the Johnson administration, “amazingly devoid of statesmanship,” was “almost totally trapped by the military-industrial complex.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Testament of Hope,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986): 314.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 323.

Nevertheless, King placed his confidence in the dissent of the people, which he likened to the “sound of distant thunder increasing in volume with the gathering storm clouds. This dissent is America’s hope.” His faith was unshaken: “Jesus of Nazareth changed the course of mankind with only the poor and the despised. Naïve and unsophisticated we may be, the poor and despised of the twentieth century will revolutionize this era ... we will fight for human justice, brotherhood, secure peace and abundance for all.”²⁰⁸ Although King did not live to see the “planetizing” of nonviolent direct action for peace, human rights, and economic justice that are so much a part of global social movements in the contemporary world, the vision he began elaborate of a “world house” in the last years of his life remains a powerful perspective on peace and justice almost fifty years later.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Over the years between 1956 and 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. worked tirelessly for the realization of a global vision of peace and justice, which he deemed was necessary if humankind were to survive the nuclear age. In the aftermath of the successful Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56, he ardently argued that the dismantling of the system of segregation, discrimination, and disfranchisement in the U.S. South was part of an emerging “new age” and “new world.” He saw the independence movements in Asia and Africa as parallel to the civil rights movement in the U.S. It was fitting that he attended the independence celebrations in Ghana in 1957 and traveled to India in 1959.

When the student sit-in movement began in the South in 1960, King was ready to champion nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, and negotiate with the federal

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 328.

government to offset the violent reaction of Southern white supremacists in and out of local and state government. Fortune was on his side, for U.S. foreign policy around the world during the Cold War with the Soviet Union depended increasingly on an attractive image of American democracy and equality. The Kennedy administration provided a degree of protection to civil rights workers subjected to white Southern violence and eventually the Johnson administration oversaw the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But this alliance between the movement and the government did not last, despite Johnson's War on Poverty programs. The escalating U.S. military involvement in Vietnam made an all-round attack on poverty and inequality unsustainable. Rising frustration among black people made itself felt in ghetto rebellions in cities all over the country.

The Vietnam War and its impact on both the Vietnamese and the Americans in the last years of his life, 1966 to 1968, led King to re-examine his ideas about racial and economic justice, the possibilities for a grassroots alliance of communities of color, poor and working people, youth, and people of conscience, and the role of the U.S. in the world. In 1967, he developed the notion of "the world house" to reflect the new historical reality that the peoples of the world now shared the global space and would have to live or die together.²⁰⁹ This broader and deeper analysis not only convinced King to become an outspoken critic of the war, most famously at Riverside Church in New York City, but also to begin making plans for a Poor People's Campaign, including mass nonviolent civil disobedience, that could profoundly challenge the federal government and change American values. His fateful journey to Memphis in 1968 was meant to be just a step on the way to Washington. To the end, he was convinced

²⁰⁹ King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 181.

that the “world house” of peace and justice was realizable, because “all reality hinged on moral foundations.”

These findings of my thesis are significant because they help us to better understand and appreciate the global dimensions of the history of the civil rights movement and “the Sixties” in the U.S. Too often King’s life and message are seen in an exclusively American frame. As I have shown, the evidence of his speeches and writing indicates otherwise. In particular, his moral interrogation of the U.S. role in the world, especially the relationship between U.S. policies and the global and systemic afflictions of racism, poverty, and war, remains extraordinary. However, just as he appraised the white segregationist as not so much the enemy as a person also in need of freedom from the evil of racism, so he appraised the United States as not so much the antagonist as a nation and a society in need of transformation from unjust structures.

Building on my thesis, a future line of research could be an exploration of a larger group of religiously-inspired advocates and activists for peace, human rights, and economic justice in the U.S and their global interlocutors from the 1950s to the 1990s. Dr. King would be one figure in this group portrait. Such an exploration could trace not only the development of dissenting ideas about the U.S. role in the world, but also follow the unfolding of social movements in the U.S. in response to the country’s changing political and economic engagements with a globalizing world. Research along these lines is likely to reveal a rich religious and political discussion “from below” about the nature of democracy, the impact of globalization, and the fate of peace, human rights, and economic justice in the most powerful country in the late twentieth-century world.

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