

Understanding America: The Martin Luther King Myth

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More than forty years have passed since Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. King has long-since become enshrined within America's conventional wisdom as one of the preeminent leaders in the country's history. To understand America's idealization of King, a number of questions are worth exploring about this consensus, now that several years have passed. Is the consensus voluntarily undertaken by the American public? Is the myth based on an accurate depiction of the man and his actions? And what does the existence of the King myth and its powerful hold on American life tell us about American society and the workings of democracy?

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Today's Image of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Peggy Noonan, the superbly talented speech writer for President Ronald Reagan, wrote a column a few years ago for *The Wall Street Journal* about "the seven unifying myths" that bind Americans together. She feels they should be taught to the children of all new immigrants. In this, she uses "myth" in its favorable connotation, not as a word of disparagement. One of the seven gives an enthusiastic picture of "the civil rights struggle." She describes that struggle as "a massive peaceful resistance to a tradition that was a sin... – and all because America had a conscience to which an appeal could be made."²

King's image is a major part of the myth to which she refers. There

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² Peggy Noonan, "What New Americans Need to Know," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 1990.

is no greater personification of the civil rights struggle as seen today than King. M. Stanton Evans is no doubt accurate in saying that during the years since King's death in 1968 he has been elevated to "secular sainthood." Seeking something of a sainthood for him beyond even the "secular," American Catholic bishops in January 2000 asked the Vatican to name King (though a Baptist) a "martyr for the Christian faith."

Everywhere there are streets, boulevards and highways named after him; his picture hangs on the walls of countless classrooms and university offices across the United States; and since Congress declared the holiday in 1983, Americans have celebrated "Martin Luther King Day" on January 15 to commemorate his birthday, even as the traditional holidays marking the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln have been compressed into one considerably lesser observance. *Time* magazine named King the "Person of the Year" in 1963, five years before he was killed. In 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. President Jimmy Carter presented him posthumously the Presidential Medal of Freedom on July 4, 1977. Each year, King's birthday is ubiquitously noted with banquets and speakers, documentaries, marches and parades, and memorial services.

Components of the Myth

Today's image of Martin Luther King, Jr., consists of several discrete ideas:

That King was a man of superb qualities: high-minded, given to love and nonviolence, eloquently expressing dreams of equality and justice.

That his actions as the principal leader of the civil rights movement involved a whirlwind of activity that used "nonviolent direct action" and "massive civil disobedience" as levers to move American society.

That until acted upon by the civil rights movement, and to a considerable degree even today, the American people and their institutions were unresponsive, racist and fundamentally unjust.

That massive civil disobedience is a legitimate and sometimes necessary part of democratic process.

That, accordingly, King stood at the forefront of a progressive movement that has led America toward its truest ideals. The citation for the Presidential Medal of Freedom says that King "was the conscience of his generation. A southerner, a black man, he gazed on the great wall of segregation and saw that the power of love could bring it down."³

Questions About the Myth

The idealizations that a people live and die by – prominent among what we call the "myths" of a given culture – are almost indispensable as cements to give a people a sense of cohesion, meaning and direction. As simplifications and large symbols of reality, they are to be expected in every society. So it is not the existence of a myth that is to be questioned, but whether a given myth simplifies by capturing the essence of its subject-matter rather than falsifying it, and whether it occupies a constructive rather than destructive role.

With these questions in mind, we see that there are considerable problems about the image that today's United States holds of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement. To examine those problems, we must move beyond what is today insisted upon as "politically correct" about them. If a discussion confines itself to what is encapsulated within an official liturgy, it can hardly be a serious critique.

We will divide this discussion into two parts. The first will deal with the specific facts of King's image; the second will explore the broader societal issues that are suggested by the myth and its hold on American society.

Problems Most Directly Involved in the Myth Itself

This first part suggests several issues:

1. Was the Myth Freely Adopted?

Is the image one that came about because of its obvious appeal to people's hearts and minds; or is it one that constitutes a mental conquest of sorts, imposed coercively on any sizable portion of the public?

³ James Melvin Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), the page immediately prior to the Table of Contents, quoting from the citation for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

These questions are important to understanding the role a myth plays, but an answer that the myth was coercively imposed does not necessarily discolor it. Many of the ideal images revered within societies are the result of victors' having imposed their view of personalities and events to the exclusion of the perspectives held by opposing but defeated elements. During the American Revolution, for example, the contrasting views of "patriots" and "loyalists" were very real; but the victory for those who favored independence has long-since elevated the revolutionary leaders to the sanctified position of "Founding Fathers," while in the United States the loyalist perspective is virtually forgotten. It is something of a shock to an American to cross the border into Canada at Niagara Falls and come upon a monument to a loyalist general.

Thus, the acceptance of an ideal image depends on time, place and circumstance. We see this also in what has been occurring with Columbus's reputation. He was for centuries honored within the United States as the "discoverer of the New World," and Columbus Day continues among the United States' holidays. But with the increasing assertion of non-European perspectives, Columbus has come under attack, and the whole idea that he "discovered" a continent that was already populated by an indigenous people has become the subject of ridicule. There is a lesson in this: that myths are not necessarily permanent. They may be displaced as other interests come to prevail.

As is true of so many other idealizations, the King myth was not freely adopted. It didn't spring spontaneously from the universal sentiments of the American people. King's idealized image was imposed on the American people by the various organs of contemporary ideology that have fashioned what in recent years has been known as "political correctness." This is a phenomenon in which 80% of the public can think a certain way, only to see the opposite put into effect by the cultural elite that actually governs the country and establishes what is acceptable opinion.

An example is that polls have shown that the overwhelming sentiment among Kansans has long favored the death penalty. For years, however, governors announced they would veto a bill installing it. When finally a governor was elected who said she would sign a bill, several legislators switched their positions from favorable to unfavorable so that

the Legislature could no longer pass it. Eventually, the death penalty was enacted, but several years have gone by and thus far no one has been executed. The whole history resembles a charade.

In 1990 the Arizona electorate voted not to have a paid state holiday for King's birthday. This brought down the wrath of Paul Tagliabue, the commissioner of the National Football League, sixty percent of whose players were black. He attempted to sway the outcome by declaring before the vote that a rejection of the holiday would cause the NFL to move the 1993 Superbowl out of Arizona, where it had been scheduled. He reiterated that position afterward.⁴ True to his threat, the 1993 Superbowl was moved to the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

The national King holiday was approved by Congress in 1983, but only after Congressman John Conyers, D-Mich., had made 16 consecutive annual attempts to have it enacted. The approval was hotly contested, and was made in an enforced informational vacuum. Shortly before the approval, the decision was announced to seal for 50 years all FBI records relating to King's activities. Senator Jesse Helms sought to have the records opened, but a federal judge ruled to keep the records sealed.⁵ The records are thought to reflect "intense FBI scrutiny because of his close association with Communist Party members, especially Stanley D. Levinson, a major figure in the Communist Party"⁶ They are also thought to contain considerable detail about King's sexual misconduct.

The enactment of the national holiday closed debate by institutionalizing the myth, which thereafter has had the imprimatur of official sanction. By now, King's life and the civil rights movement are honored as though there is no other respectable view. This constitutes, at least for the present, the total victory of one segment of the population over another. That other view is now eclipsed in a way reminiscent of the "non-persons" who were air-brushed out of official photographs in the Soviet Union.

⁴ See M. Stanton Evans, "NFL's Tagliabue: More Liberal Arrogance," *Human Events*, November 24, 1990, p. 8.

⁵ Wichita Eagle-Beacon supplement on Martin Luther King, Jr., January 18, 1986, p. 4D.

⁶ *Middle American News*, August 2003, p. 3.

Even after the King holiday has been given official sanction, coercive pressures have been brought in an effort to force people to observe it. Prior to the holiday in 1994, it was reported that "members of the Wichita branch of the NAACP plan to boycott businesses that fail to recognize the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday." Bess Dreams, chair of the committee organizing the boycott, said that "if businesses can't close on Monday, the national holiday, they should at least do something to recognize the legendary civil rights leader."⁷ The underlying premise is that it is impermissible to look on the holiday less than favorably or even to be indifferent to it.

As we noted about the coercive origins of many myths, it is true that the King myth is not unique in having been institutionalized. A great many images are in effect transformed into a part of a people's secular religion by being made the subject of monuments, parades, prestigious museums, school essay contests, and the like. This serves the prevailing consensus well, but those who seek to analyze events intellectually will need to realize that the deck has been stacked in favor of a particular perception.

The coercive imposition and then institutionalization of a myth should also be understood as one of the society's exceptions to the process of on-going democracy. Not all subjects are left for discussion within what John Stuart Mill valued as an "open marketplace of ideas." To that extent, modern "democracy" has not come as far from the pre-modern "closed" social systems as is generally believed.

2. *Is the King Myth Based on the Essential Truth*

About the Man and his Actions?

Where King's image truly runs aground is with respect to its accuracy. It does not capture the essence of its subject, but rather distorts it almost beyond recognition.

The image is of a man of sterling qualities. It has, however, become clearer over time that King was profoundly dishonest both in his personal life and his eloquence. In response to this, it is argued, just as it

⁷ Wichita Eagle, January 13, 1994, report "Businesses not honoring King holiday face boycott."

was for William Clinton during his presidency, that “his personal misbehavior is far outweighed by his monumental achievements in the public arena.”⁸ But this requires a certain view of King’s public role, one that gives him full credit as an apostle of “nonviolence” and that chooses to overlook the moral support he gave to Communist revolutions throughout the world.

People from varied points of view acknowledge that King’s public role is itself open to question. These include some black commentators. In a retrospective on King in 1996, black columnist Mark McCormick asked “Have we watered down Martin Luther King?” He quotes a black pastor as saying that “portrayals of King as a one-dimensional pacifist simply do not wash... His message was a bit more challenging, it was a bit more piercing.” The column comments that “the fact that people seem to embrace only a portion of King’s message may say a lot about some of our deepest feelings. ‘Maybe we don’t love him as much as we say we do,’ Montgomery [the pastor] said. ‘Maybe we are hypocrites... If we embrace the man and reject his message, there has to be an element of hypocrisy there.’”

These particular objections may be said to come “from the left.” There are, however, reasons to question King’s public role from other perspectives as well. The Abe Lincoln Foundation, for example, ran an advertisement expressing J. A. Parker’s opposition to the King holiday: “I’m a black American and I oppose the Martin Luther King holiday... because of King’s dishonesty... because of King’s immorality... because of King’s attacks on our capitalist free enterprise system... [and] because of King’s attacks on America. Martin Luther King once called the United States ‘the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.’ He even compared the United States to Nazi Germany... Even liberal columnist Ellen Goodman acknowledges: ‘King was *no* stick figure, appropriate for holiday framing, *no* object for the school lessons we offer up to our holiday heroes.’”

⁸ See the column by Bud Norman in the *Wichita Eagle-Beacon* supplement about King, January 18, 1986, p. 2D.

King's Plagiarism

In the academic and journalistic communities, plagiarism is condemned as a serious form of dishonesty. Professors caught doing it wind up resigning quietly from the faculty amid whispered ignominy. The problem is that it is a form of stealing: the appropriation of someone else's intellectual work without attribution.

King's rampant plagiarism has received widespread comment, but is for ideological and political reasons relegated to what astronomers call a "black hole." Its role offers a good example of the compartmentalizing that allows two contradictory things to co-exist without the one disturbing the other. This is, of course, a form of public hypocrisy. To the extent they allow themselves to be conscious of the plagiarism, those who value the King myth (and they are overwhelmingly powerful in opinion-making circles in the United States today) consider this a justifiable hypocrisy that serves a good end.

The most extensive example of King's plagiarism is almost certainly his doctoral dissertation at Boston University in 1955. The Theodore Pappas article in the January 1991 issue of *Chronicles*, and the book Pappas edited in 1994, *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Plagiarism Story*, compare long passages in King's dissertation with a 1952 dissertation at the same institution by Jack Stewart Boozer.⁹ The copying was word-for-word, not just of incidental sentences but of passage after passage. King even incorporated typographical errors and mistakes in footnoting.

Pappas sets out many passages in Boozer's and King's dissertations, showing they are identical. We won't repeat that here, but some illustration will give a feel for it:

From page 265 of Boozer's 1952 dissertation: "Correlation means correspondence of data in the sense of a correspondence between religious systems and that which is symbolized by them. It is upon the assumption of this correspondence that all utterances about God's nature are made. This correspondence is actual in the *logos*-nature of God and the *logos*-nature of man." [Italics in the original.]

⁹ Theodore Pappas, ed., *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Plagiarism Story* (Rockford, IL: Rockford Institute, 1994).

From page 21 of King's 1955 dissertation: "Correlation means correspondence of data in the sense of a correspondence between religious symbols and that which is symbolized by them. It is upon the assumption of this correspondence that all utterances about God's nature are made. This correspondence is actual in the *logos* nature of God and the *logos* nature of man." [The only difference is in King's dropping of the hyphen in the reference to "the *logos*-nature of man."]

The *Chronicles* article is preceded in the same issue by a letter from Jon Westling, at that time president *ad interim* of Boston University, in which Westling turns a blind eye to the whole thing. Westling's letter asserts that "not a single reader has ever found any nonattributed or misattributed quotations, misleading paraphrases, or thoughts borrowed without due scholarly reference in any of its 343 pages."

This was contradicted, of course, by a simple reading of the two dissertations, and also by the later findings of a panel of scholars appointed by Boston University to look into the matter.¹⁰ The panel held that "there is no question but that Dr. King plagiarized in the dissertation by appropriating material from sources not explicitly credited in notes, or mistakenly credited, or credited generally and at some distance in the text from a close paraphrase or verbatim quotation."

Not surprisingly in the climate of the day, the panel did the politically wise thing, recommending against a revocation of King's doctoral degree. The news report cited their reason as being that a revocation "wouldn't affect 'academic or scholarly practice,'" whatever that means. It is to be noted that the panel's findings, though meaningful as academic admissions, minimized the plagiarism by managing to avoid reporting King's copying of long passages, including even the mistakes.

King is perhaps best remembered for his peroration concluding his Lincoln Memorial speech on August 28, 1963. It is considered one of the classics of American oratory. That peroration, however, bears an uncanny resemblance to the peroration concluding the speech of a black Republican, Archibald Carey, Jr., then a member of the Chicago City

¹⁰ Associated Press report, "Panel at Boston U. finds King plagiarized, but says doctorate shouldn't be revoked," *Arizona Daily Star*, October 11, 1991.

Council, to the 1952 Republican National Convention eleven years before King's speech.

King's oration ends with the following:

"This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning – 'my country, 'tis of thee; sweet land of liberty; of thee I sing; land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring' – and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

"So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

"Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

"Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

"Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

"But not only that.

"Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

"Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

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

"And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual,

"Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

Compare this with the ending of Carey's 1952 speech:

"We, Negro-Americans, sing with all other Americans: 'My country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee, I sing. Land where my fathers died, Land of the pilgrims' pride. From every mountain-side Let freedom ring.'

"That is exactly what we mean, from every mountain side, let freedom ring. Not only from the Green Mountains of Vermont and the White Mountains of New Hampshire; not only from the Catskills of New York; but from the Ozarks in Arkansas, from the Stone

Mountain in Georgia, from the Great Smokies of Tennessee, and from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia – not only for the minorities of the United States, but for the persecuted of Europe, for the rejected of Asia, for the disenfranchised of South Africa, and for the disinherited of all the earth. May the Republican Party, under God, from every mountain side, Let Freedom Ring!”¹¹

King's Adultery

Ralph David Abernathy was for many years a close associate of King's. So we have reason to think him a credible source when in his 1989 autobiography *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* he revealed, with some evident reluctance, King's voracious extramarital sexual appetite.¹² It is interesting, in this connection, that Taylor Branch, in his book *America in the King Years, 1954-1963*, tells of both King's and Abernathy's extramarital sexual behavior: “King confided to a colleague that he not only had known of Abernathy's extramarital liaisons in Montgomery but had joined in some of them himself.”¹³

Columnist Walter Scott has written that King “was a charismatic personality who attracted women of all races to his hotel rooms.”¹⁴

In 1995, the Associated Press reported that “the first black to serve in Kentucky's Senate confirmed Wednesday that she was with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., the night before his assassination. Georgia Powers writes of a year-long relationship with King in her new autobiography, *I Shared the Dream...* The Rev. Ralph Abernathy, King's lieutenant in the civil rights movement, created a furor five years ago when he suggested in his memoirs that King cheated on his wife.” The news report tells of Abernathy's prior corroboration of Sen. Powers' revelation: “Abernathy, who died in 1990, also wrote of a liaison King

¹¹ At the request of the author of the present article, the Republican National Committee by cover letter dated July 28, 1994, provided him a copy of Carey's address, the conclusion of which is quoted here.

¹² Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 470-475.

¹³ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 239

¹⁴ Walter Scott's "Personality Parade," *Parade Magazine*, February 22, 1987.

had the night before his death with 'a black woman... a member of the Kentucky Legislature.'¹⁵

A news report one day later said "Former Kentucky state Sen. Georgia Powers is lying about having an affair with Martin Luther King, Jr., one close associate of King's said Thursday. 'I hope God will forgive her,' said the Rev. Hosea Williams.¹⁶

There was a time in the American past when serial adultery would have been thought extremely serious: as a flagrant breach of sexual morality, as a betrayal of spouse and family, and as cheating. In today's moral climate, we will allow those features to pass without comment, leaving it to each reader to judge according to the reader's own standards. What is worth adding to the discussion is a reflection about what King's adultery tells us about his psychology. One of the salient features of the elite that has long prevailed in American life is that so many individuals within it see themselves as separate from, and above, the main body of the population and its norms, even while they present themselves to the public as "men (or women) of the people." Such a quality is salient in the lives, say, of John F. Kennedy and William Clinton.¹⁷ Here, we see it with King, who presented himself to the world as a pastor and "man of God," and then on perhaps the same day lived in a way that spurned the values that entailed. This suggests arrogance, elitism, duplicity and a profound devaluation of the very people who invested their emotions in him. Is it possible that the consciousness such leaders have had of their almost instantaneous shift in roles does not suggest a certain bemused contempt for those who have adored them?

King's Role as a Leader

The image of Martin Luther King, Jr., as a man of love and peace tells the American people nothing about his deep alienation against

¹⁵ Wichita Eagle, "Ex-legislator tells of affair with Martin Luther King, Jr.," January 26, 1995.

¹⁶ Wichita Eagle, January 27, 1995.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the behavior of John F. Kennedy and William Clinton, see Dwight D. Murphey, "Presidents Kennedy and Clinton: Case Studies in Society's Condonation of 'Twilight' Behavior," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Summer 1997, pp. 185-197.

American life, his close ties with the radical Left that was so active in the United States in the 1960s, and his support for Communist “wars of national liberation” throughout the world. In a speech a few months before his death, King declared “these are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting... We in the West must support these revolutions.” He spoke of Americans’ “morbid fear of Communism,” and went on to say that “the fact is that capitalism was built on the exploitation and suffering of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor – both black and white... We must recognize that the problems of neither racial nor economic injustice can be solved without a radical redistribution of political and economic power.”¹⁸

After King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he turned his attention successively to new areas. He led a voter registration drive in Alabama and then broadened his efforts beyond the black civil rights struggle by championing the claims of the poor in Chicago and, finally, throwing himself into the anti-war movement opposing the American war effort in Vietnam.

Probably nothing better illustrates the temper of that time and King’s role in it than the New Politics Convention in 1967. Over the Labor Day weekend, Chicago’s Palmer House was the site of one of the most incredible scenes in American political history. Revolutionaries of several types came together – with King delivering the keynote oration. Bongo drums accompanied a chant of “Kill Whitey... Kill Whitey... Kill Whitey” outside the Chicago Coliseum as King addressed the opening night rally on Thursday, August 31. It was then that King spoke the lines quoted above.

Some commentators have sought to diminish King’s role, despite his having been the keynoter. They say, as James Ridgeway did in the *New Republic*, that the speech “was a bore to the delegates.”¹⁹ But the *New York Times*’s story the day following the speech reported that “Dr. King was warmly applauded by the 3,500 people in the steaming Chicago Coliseum.” Gary Allen’s first-hand report says “the audience broke into

¹⁸ Quoted in Gary Allen, “New Politics,” *American Opinion*, November, 1967, p. 10.

¹⁹ James Ridgeway, “Freak-Out in Chicago: The National Conference of New Politics,” *The New Republic*, September 16, 1967, pp. 9-12, 10.

a hurricane of applause” when King made the statements quoted above.

It was an audience unlike any other in American history. Andrew Kopkind in the *New Statesman* reported that “the Trotskyists were there, the Maoists, the Independent Socialists, the New Left, the community organizers, the academics, the peaceniks, the pacifists, the rich fellow-travellers, the angry liberals.”²⁰ A black caucus, which despite its small numbers towered over the entire convention, met “continuously in secrecy,” *The Nation* reported, “with shaven-headed bodyguards at the doors.” The *New York Times* spoke of “fiercely mustached students in dungarees, straight-haired sandaled girls in microskirts and Negroes in African attire....”²¹

This was the convention at which Ronald Lockman, a member of the Communist W.E.B. DuBois Club, made a sensation when he stood in his infantry uniform and declared his intention to violate his orders to go to Vietnam. After wild cheering, the delegates “gave Lockman a standing ovation,” Ridgeway tells us, “chanting over and over ‘Hell no, we won’t go.’”

After days of separate deliberation, the black caucus emerged with its demand that the convention approve without amendment a 13-point resolution, which the delegates then did, by a 3-1 margin. The *New York Times* reported in its magazine feature on September 24 that the supporters of these 13 points “took their lead” from a certain Septima Clark, “an elderly lady associated with (Martin Luther King’s) Southern Christian Leadership Conference.” The points started with the preamble that “We, as black people, believe that the United States system that is committed to the practice of genocide, social degradation, the denial of political and cultural self-determination of Black people, cannot reform itself; there must be revolutionary change.” It went on to “demand that this conference: ...give *total and unquestionable support to all national people’s liberation wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America, particularly Vietnam, Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, and Venezuela.*” [I have added the emphasis.]

²⁰ Andrew Kopkind in *New Statesman*, September 8, 1967, p. 278.

²¹ New York Times, September 1, 1967, p. 15.

It should be noted that despite Ms. Clark's leading role, the King forces didn't fully control the convention; there was a move on to create a third-party presidential ticket with King as the nominee for president and Dr. Spock for vice-president; but, according to the *Times* feature, this was abandoned when black militants who thought King "accommodationist" made it clear they wouldn't support King. The manifesto ran into some trouble with the King forces over its condemnation of "the imperialistic Zionist war," even though the points were quick to add that the condemnation "does not imply anti-Semitism." *The Nation* reported that "Rev. Martin Luther King himself sent a secret last-minute appeal through his aide, Jose Williams... to significantly modify the statement."²² It is noteworthy that the rest of the points, including the support for Communist insurgencies around the world quoted in italics above, did not seem to King to require modification; and the debate for them, as we have seen, was led by one of his people.

The convention was significant, too, for welcoming the first public outing of the Communist Party in several years. After World War II, a split had occurred in American left-liberalism over whether to include Communists in their activities. The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) was formed explicitly to repudiate such collaboration. This involved a principle of great importance, since the post-World War II history of the Third World – such as, for example, in Nicaragua – would have been vastly clarified if democratic socialists everywhere had refused to work with Communists. So it was a watershed when the American Left abandoned this position with the New Politics Convention. Although King claimed that "to my knowledge there are no Communists in the National Conference for a New Politics," the Communist Party, U.S.A., sent an official delegation of seven "observers." *The New York Times* spoke of "the sudden open appearance of the Communists... as one after another got the microphone."²³

Students of comparative ideology have often commented on the similarities of the Far Left and fascism. Parallels in style and substance

²² Richard Blumenthal, "New Politics at Chicago," *The Nation*, September 25, 1967, pp. 273-276.

²³ New York Times Magazine, September 24, 1967, pp. 124-127.

were everywhere in evidence during the New Politics Convention. James Forman (referred to about equally in the literature as “Foreman”) of SNCC, flanked by bodyguards, included in his speech a cry of “One Africa, One People!” This is eerily reminiscent of Hitler’s “Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer!” When a delegate cried out “That’s dictatorship” after Forman instructed the delegates to stand up if they favored his call for a boycott of General Motors and then immediately announced it had carried, Forman yelled back “Yes, and I’m the dictator.” (After some delegates walked out, he said he had just been joking.)

Richard Blumenthal in *The Nation* reported that Carlos Russell was chosen as leader by the black caucus without a vote, through what Blumenthal referred to as “African consensus.” This is not unlike the *fuhrerprinzip* that was a common feature of the German Youth Movement before and after World War I and that was incorporated into Nazi ideology. The theory was that powerful personalities would naturally rise to the top and would embody within themselves the sense of the group. This was the basis for the Nazis’ claim to have been more truly democratic than the parliamentary systems.

When Floyd McKissick of CORE came to speak, a starkly military scene occurred. Two hundred Black Nationalists “marched in solemn ranks,” according to Gary Allen. Then as McKissick spoke he was “flanked by two of his lieutenants, both reportedly armed at all times.”

But these things had to do with the style of fascism. Its substance appeared in the intimidation imposed by the Black Caucus and the conformity of virtually all others. The votes in the convention had originally been allocated according to the number of activists back home a delegate represented. This had led to 28,498 votes going to white radicals, some 5,000 to blacks. But the Black Caucus demanded that it be given 28,498 votes, too, to make it equal to all the rest of the convention, and an equal number of seats on all committees. The convention, eager to show its “solidarity,” agreed to this by a 2-1 margin. The members of the Black Caucus segregated themselves, sitting in a special section marked off with a red sash. As each resolution came up for a vote, “a lad in the front row of the black Caucus,” the *New York Times* reported, “raised the large pink card that represented 28,498 votes.”

This continued even though some blacks who favored explicitly violent action left the convention eventually to hold their own conference (from which whites were excluded) at a South Side church. The *New York Times* tells us that when this happened “representatives of [Martin Luther King’s] Southern Christian Leadership Conference took over” the original convention. The ensuing direction by SCLC caused no repudiation of the overall scene, nor any renunciation of the bitterly anti-American and pro-revolutionary resolutions enacted earlier.

King’s “Nonviolent Direct Action”

Martin Luther King, Jr., was in principle committed to the philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi, famous for his use of “nonviolent civil disobedience” to hasten the British departure from India. The concept of “nonviolence” is important to our present discussion because it lies at the heart of King’s idealized image as it is honored in the United States today.

There is much in King’s utterances that gives articulate support to nonviolent protest, both on philosophical grounds and for pragmatic reasons. In an article written by King that was published after his death, he said “We are not going to tolerate violence. And we are making it very clear that the demonstrators who are not prepared to be nonviolent should not participate in this.” His organization held workshops on nonviolence, and used those who attended as marshals to oversee the demonstrations.²⁴ In his final presidential address to SCLC, King said “I’m concerned about justice. I’m concerned about brotherhood. I’m concerned about truth. And when one is concerned about these, he can never advocate violence.”²⁵

Nevertheless, King’s words and actions offer reason to question the nature of his nonviolence. It is worth remembering that his keynote address to the New Politics Convention called for support for the “wars of national liberation,” most of them under Communist leadership and sponsored by either the Soviet Union or Communist China or both, around the world. This was far removed from a rhetoric of nonviolence,

²⁴ Washington, *Testament of Hope*, p. 68.

²⁵ Washington, *Testament of Hope*, p. 249.

unless we are to suppose that he was unaware that people were being killed in such wars or that Communist powers had already butchered many millions of people. Thus, his rhetoric (and his moral concern) was by no means consistent.

Even if King's utterances had been consistent, there is reason to question how much an activist is to be credited for "nonviolence" when he conducts mass marches and boycotts, as well as speaks a language of bitter recrimination, in the midst of burning cities and militants who *are* calling for violence. Lionel Lokos speaks to this in his book *House Divided: The Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King* when he says, "King never hurled a Molotov cocktail, but he never stopped faulting society for those who did. King never looted a store, but he never stopped defending those who felt that poverty gave them a license to steal. King never hid on a roof with a rifle and sniped at the police, but he never stopped picturing the police department as a sort of home-grown Gestapo."²⁶ "We must ask ourselves," Lokos said, "if the doctrine and dogma of Martin Luther King's campaigns unwittingly created a fertile breeding ground in which the urban riots could flourish."²⁷ When he uses the word "unwittingly," Lokos is being charitable; the incendiary context was so clear that the causal nexus between "nonviolent massive disobedience" and the burning of cities was inescapable. That King understood the context is clear from his statement in April 1968 that "we also know, as official Washington may not, that the flash point of Negro rage is close at hand."²⁸

Nor is that all. It isn't simply that King knew the incendiary context. Lokos cites the comments by Dr. Jerome D. Frank, professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University: "Leaders of nonviolent movements constantly remind their opponents that if their demands are

²⁶ Lionel Lokos, *House Divided: The Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1968), p. 459. I have had occasion to reread much of Lokos' book in preparing this article in 2003, and highly recommend it both for its exhaustive research and for its balance and thoughtful reflection. It is a serious piece of scholarship, ranking among the better writings on the subject.

²⁷ Lokos, *House Divided*, p. 73.

²⁸ Washington, *Testament of Hope*, p. 65.

not met, they may not be able to keep their followers in check. Is the threat of violence an integral part of the success of nonviolence?"²⁹

Frank's point is sensible. It is illustrated in a totally different context by an incident in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Israelis objected to a letter by King Hussein of Jordan to Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in which the king said that Netanyahu's actions toward the Palestinians were conducive to "inevitable violent resistance." It was observed that "the king thought he was issuing a warning to protect the fragile peace, but Israelis heard a threat. Their ally Hussein had joined the Arab drumbeat of predicting violence, a repetition they said justifies and even encourages violent acts."³⁰

In early 1968, Dr. King told an audience that "we seek to say to the nation in our campaign that if you don't straighten up, then you're writing your obituary."³¹ When King turned to economic issues, he made a demand for virtually total economic and social reconstruction, which he is certain to have known would involve, at the very least, a long political process: universally guaranteed jobs or a guaranteed annual wage. After making this improbable demand, he wrote that "if it fails, nonviolence will be discredited, and the country may be plunged into holocaust...." He added: "If nonviolent protest fails this summer [of 1968], I will continue to preach it [nonviolence] and teach it... But I'm frank enough to admit that if our nonviolent campaign doesn't generate some progress, people are just going to engage in more violent activity, and the discussion of guerrilla warfare will be more extensive."³²

From this, we see that the idealized image of King as an apostle of "love" and "nonviolence" is a sanitized version of King's actual position. This makes the myth comfortable for the public's consumption, but hides the reality, which is very different.

Thought must also be given to the very concept of "civil disobedience." Civil disobedience as a doctrine validates lawlessness, and thus

²⁹ Lokos, *House Divided*, p. 85.

³⁰ Wichita Eagle, February 16, 1997, article on "Mideast."

³¹ Rocky Mountain News, March 21, 1993, p. 108.

³² Washington, *Testament of Hope*, pp. 65, 69.

runs contrary to a free society's adherence to the Rule of Law. Lokos comments that "his concept of civil disobedience was exquisitely embroidered with 'love' and 'good will,' but stripped to its essentials it was the concept that every man could be his own judge and jury and legislator... It was the concept that a minority had the right to flout the law... to force its will upon the majority."³³ *Vital Speeches* carried an address in 1967 by retired Supreme Court Justice Charles E. Whittaker that argued persuasively that the Rule of Law constitutes, in fact, an essential bulwark in the defense of minorities themselves. Whittaker said:

Minority groups, in preaching and practicing defiance of the law, are in fact, advocating erosion and destruction of the only structure that can assure to them, or permanently maintain for them, due process of law, and the equal protection of the laws, and that can thus protect them from discriminations and abuses by minorities.³⁴

It seems hard to imagine that black leaders could forget that lynching, which they abhorred, had itself been a departure from organized legal institutions by frontier-like communities that thought it justifiable to take the law into their own hands. Once there is a departure from law, even for reasons those doing it consider valid, the direction that extralegal action takes can vary greatly from one circumstance to the next.

Underlying Issues Suggested by the King Myth

It remains for us to discuss certain underlying issues that don't pertain directly to King or his actions, but that anyone who is reflecting on the myth will want to consider.

1. *Did the American people adopt the most constructive approach on racial matters when direct-action activism and legislation were adopted as the means for social change?* Nothing is more settled in the consciousness of the American public today than that the civil rights movement in effect pressured the United States into doing the right thing, changing the society from one that had been inexcusably structured around white racism and inequality toward blacks. The movement's direct-action

³³ Lokos, *House Divided*, p. 460.

³⁴ The quotation from Whittaker appears in Lokos, *House Divided*, p. 88; the speech appeared in *Vital Speeches*, March 15, 1967, p. 327.

campaigns and the major acts of legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are honored as decisive turning-points in American history.

And yet, sixty years after the beginnings of this shift, there is still a deep sense of victimization on the part of blacks. American society remains accused of racism (as we see in the demand for reparations and in the recurrent charges of "racial profiling," of continuing discrimination, etc.); there is a high level of black-on-white crime; and the cultural divide between blacks and whites, although in some ways closed, is still quite wide. Forty years after King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial, his son said "people of color are still being denied a fair share of employment and educational opportunities in our society."³⁵ Black columnist Carl Rowan speaks on "a larger American society in which racism permeates everything."³⁶ The time has come to ask a question that is every bit as heretical as the child's observation that "the emperor has no clothes": "What," we are prompted to ask, "went wrong"?

The prevailing consensus will be loath to admit it, but there was arguably a better way. That more gradualistic alternative was brushed aside primarily for two reasons: because there was a desire for more rapid change than it offered; and because a rapid jump to "full equality" seemed most to comport with acknowledged American ideals of equality before the law and respect for all persons.

The two great paradigms for the amelioration of racial relations in the United States were put forward a century ago by Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Washington called upon his fellow blacks, recently risen from slavery, to advance their position by cultivating themselves through hard work and earned respect. DuBois saw this as a form of surrender to social injustice, and demanded immediate equality in all areas of American life.

To those who perceive the theory of a free society entirely in model-building terms, asking themselves what the principles of such a society ought to be, DuBois was correct – everyone is entitled, without delay and at all times, to an entire measure of rights. The alternative to this is

³⁵ Wichita Eagle, August 24, 2003, report "A dream remembered."

³⁶ Wichita Eagle, November 30, 1999, column by Carl Rowan.

to see those principles in their historical context, recognizing the terrible exceptions that history has sometimes imposed. Thomas Paine had thought that Americans were in a position "to make the world all over again." But slavery, an existing institution with historical roots going back thousands of years and one that was ingrained in the culture and economy of a major section of the country, was a "bone in the American throat." Its existence did not mean that the United States was not, in its overall embrasure of the philosophy of John Locke and the Enlightenment, an extremely meaningful departure from the ways of the past. In his Farewell Address in 1837, Andrew Jackson argued that the American experiment was so valuable that it should not be brought to smash over the issue of slavery. He urged that the contending voices be lowered. When he argued in this fashion, he was not arguing from an ideal model, but from the priorities imposed by history, placing the aspirations raised by those ideals in the context of existing facts. This historically-minded perception of what a free society requires at a given point in time is something that is almost incomprehensible to those whose ideological rigidity causes them to think rationalistically without regard to context.

Those who in the post-World War II era argued for gradualism in the improvement of race relations understood that coercion, through "mass civil disobedience" and legislation, is anathema to a free society. They had the wisdom to see that the slow growth of fraternity through mutual respect is far preferable, and much more likely to be permanently successful. The condition of blacks in America had been improving rapidly over what had been, in historical terms, a very short period of time. The civil rights movement was a classic case of a "revolution of rising expectations." In all such revolutions, activists step in to claim credit for improvements that have actually been brought about by much less noticeable subterranean forces.

If the continuing emphasis had been on good will and on building the foundations for mutual respect and affection, that improvement would almost certainly have continued and perhaps even accelerated. It would have depended in the main on everyone's behavior and long-term cultural compatibility. If blacks and whites proved culturally very different from one another, this would have resulted in a mutually-

acknowledged separation; if not, “integration” socially and economically would have been the most natural evolution. This, in turn, would have led through an amicable process to the removal of disabilities. Whatever would evolve would lack a deep sense of alienation and victimization, and it would respect the sovereignty of individuals over their own associations.

This is the path the “civil rights movement” consciously rejected. In doing so, its leaders were profoundly influenced by the alienation the American artistic-literary culture – the “intelligentsia” – had long felt toward the mainstream of American society. Perhaps the central motivating feature of the “Left” since it arose in Europe beginning in about 1820 has been a deep animus against people in virtually all walks of life – business, agricultural, professional – in the predominant society. DuBois absorbed this alienation, with fateful consequences for the United States in the post-World War II era. American racial relations continue to suffer from it.

2. *Are there differences between blacks and whites, considered as a whole, that should be taken into account in determining the justice of their relationship?* There may be another reason the alienation-based movement to force equality was bound to be non-productive. It may have been demanding far more than facts about the respective races would justify, and complaining about “disproportionalities” that have not been the result of racism at all. If the premise is incorrect that the races are “the same” in all their qualities, disparities in outcome in many fields of life would not be surprising.

The discussion of potential differences between the races has been treated as a complete taboo, reflecting again the semi-totalitarian nature of contemporary public discourse. When a sportscaster or a coach has mentioned any difference at all between the abilities of white and black athletes, the media have pointed with alarm as though the very idea were a scandal. No apology need be made here for ignoring this taboo, which is so totally a negation of free inquiry.

A good example of what is at issue came up in Wichita, Kansas, during the summer of 2003. Complaints were made that a higher percentage of black students were suspended by the Wichita public school district than of white students. “African-American students made

up less than 24 percent of the Wichita district's enrollment last school year and accounted for nearly 46 percent of the suspensions, according to the Kansas Department of Education," the *Wichita Eagle* said. The report went on to quote a black student as saying, "It all boils down to, racism still exists today." The paper apparently considers this true, since it dutifully set out columns tabulating the respective percentages.³⁷ A 17-year-old high school student may be forgiven for not seeing the conceptual flaw in the statistical comparison, but an adult who accepts the comparison at face value is almost certainly engaging in a sophistry for ideological or other reasons. The comparison, as is obvious, should not be between the percentage of suspensions and the percentage of black students in the schools. Rather, it should be between the percentage of suspensions and the percentage of black students *who are misbehaving* in the schools. If *that* comparison were made, the rate of suspensions may be just right, too high, or too low. We aren't told anything about that by the sort of comparison that fails to take behavior into account.

The same can be said for the frequent reports that tell us that black drivers are given more tickets than white drivers. Again, the only valid comparison is between the percentage of blacks and whites, respectively, in the population and the percentage of blacks and whites, respectively, *who are violating the traffic laws*.

In the suspension case, it is interesting that the deputy superintendent of schools in Wichita acknowledged a racial difference in behavior, although he used multiculturalist ideology to explain it away: "He said many teachers are raised in middle-class families and sometimes don't know how to react to kids in poverty. For example, maybe a child comes from a home where yelling or even profanity is normal."³⁸ It is doubtful whether he realized the incredible significance of this admission of a difference in culture.

We have cited the misuse of statistics in the school-suspension and traffic-ticket instances. This same demagogic misuse is applied in

³⁷ Wichita Eagle, September 8, 2003.

³⁸ Wichita Eagle, September 8, 2003.

countless other areas in a superficially successful demonstration of how “racist” American society continues to be. Thus, a headline in the *Wichita Eagle* a few years ago read “Feds fire minorities more often. Wide gap shows in federal practices.” The article explained that “overall, minority men were dismissed at more than three times the rate of whites, and minority women at double the rate of whites.”³⁹ Again, the comparison was fallacious; to speak to the issue of discrimination, it should have been between racial percentages in the workforce and the percentages of workers in both races *who were performing their jobs adequately*.

One suspects that the same fallacy underlay black columnist Carl Rowan’s complaints that “in 1993, the median income of white households was \$32,960, but for black households, only \$19,533. In 1992, 46.6 percent of black children under age 18 lived in poverty, compared with 16.9 percent of white children. Black babies in America are twice as likely to die within the first year of life as white babies... 31.7 percent of black teenagers in the labor force could not find work, while only 12.9 percent of white youth faced that plight. Why? Why? Why?”⁴⁰

The conceptual demagoguery is likely to have severe effects in the context of the predictable failure of President George W. Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” educational initiative, in which schools will be subject to draconian penalties based on statistical disparities in how well their students do, regardless of who those students are. The refusal to be honest about racial differences will inevitably come down hard on teachers, administrators and school districts.

Thus far, I have pointed to the behavioral differences that need to be considered. The issue has another, perhaps even more fundamental, dimension. It is one I hesitate to say anything about other than tentatively, however, because I am not an expert in psychometrics. This is the issue of comparative intelligence. Several social scientists have had the courage to study racial differences in intelligence, despite the taboo that demonizes them for doing so and the wall of silence that surrounds

³⁹ *Wichita Eagle*, December 14, 1993.

⁴⁰ *Wichita Eagle*, January 5, 1995, column by Carl Rowan.

the subject in public discussion such as we have seen in the Wichita newspaper.

Among these have been Richard J. Herrnstein, a psychometrician from Harvard, and Charles Murray, a social philosopher from the American Enterprise Institute. Their book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* appeared in 1994. Here is what I reported about their findings in my review of the book at that time:

“That the distribution of intelligence among blacks – in a bell-shaped curve that is offset somewhat to the left of that of society at large – is not such as to make available large numbers of persons who are intellectually capable of success within the cognitive professions. There are many very intelligent blacks, but their percentage at the higher scale of intelligence doesn’t match the percentage of blacks in the population as a whole. What this means, say, is that if universities and government departments adopt a policy, as many are, of hiring almost all minorities until a certain social reconstruction is achieved, they will be competing for the same small pool of qualified individuals. This will force them to lower their standards, will cast a shadow of doubt over the achievements of all blacks, and will cause resentment among those who, though better qualified, are displaced....

“That blacks are already equally, and sometimes overly-represented, in high-level positions – and in education, occupations and wages – relative to what would be predictable if intelligence were the criterion.”⁴¹

If the Herrnstein-Murray findings are valid, they mean that the mental landscape of the civil rights movement and of the resentment against “white racism” needs to be reexamined from the ground up.

It should be pointed out that differences in levels of intelligence between two groups is not a reflection on the moral worth of the individuals within those groups. A person with a 90 I.Q. may have better character than someone with a 150 I.Q. Differences, if indeed they exist, are factually very important and have great explanatory potential; but

⁴¹ Review by Dwight D. Murphey of Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (The Free Press, 1994). The review appeared in *Conservative Review*, January/February 1995, pp. 35-38.

they are not to be confused with aspersions belittling a race as human beings. One reason for the taboo against inquiring into such differences may be the fear that the results would be used as a reason for disparagement. The American Left profoundly believes that American whites are inherently racist; and in that context it is bound to expect a racist misuse of information about racial differences in intelligence. Another reason for the taboo is almost certainly that an acknowledgment of differences would undercut virtually all the racial ideology and rhetoric of the past half-century. It would deeply undercut the myth we are discussing in this article.

3. *Does massive civil disobedience fit into the theory of how a free society is intended to work?* There is no need to comment again about the destructive effects of lawlessness. In what Karl Popper called “an open society,” with many avenues of speech available, it is to be presumed that the ordinary functioning of the society will make possible the most diverse expression of views and of grievances. There are orderly processes of speech, much as organized legal institutions preempt a role for vigilantism.

For various reasons, however, it may come to be felt that a standard system of “free speech” doesn’t work, at least not meaningfully. All sorts of people and viewpoints may feel there is an insurmountable problem of how to “get the attention” of the public and of the society’s institutions. Moreover, even if the public’s attention is gotten, there may be the problem of how to cause it to respond in the desired way. Associated with this are the assumptions, which such people certainly consider sound, that they have a right to commandeer the attention of people who would otherwise be indifferent to their cries and further that they have a right to obtain a given response.

Someone is likely to see things this way if the person perceives the society as systemically dysfunctional. In such a case, the system is not presumed to work satisfactorily. Herbert Marcuse, a member of the Frankfurt School of neo-Marxist intellectuals who have played so central a role in post-World War II ideology, and a leading philosopher of the New Left, expressed such a view in his essay on “repressive tolerance.” He argued that free speech is actually a vehicle for bourgeois manipulation of the masses, and called for the repression of all views on the right

and allowance of all those on the left.

The assumptions behind the American civil rights movement, with its primary vehicle of massive civil disobedience, have been identical to the two assumptions mentioned above. A society imbued with white racism would not listen to, and then act appropriately on, black grievances unless it was caught by the nape of the neck and shaken.

Cultural conservatives in the United States feel very much the same way today, although they are barred from “direct action” techniques by the fact that they consider any form of lawlessness contrary to their ideals. The perception is (as I have myself argued earlier in this article) that American society is governed by an elite, with the opinions of the great mass of the people counting for very little. We have seen the extent to which the American people live under a cloud of myth and ideology, despite their frequently professed abhorrence of ideology. Many ideas that would contest the conventional wisdom are suppressed altogether. One can imagine that John Stuart Mill and John Milton would be shocked that such a thing can happen within their “open marketplace of ideas.”

There *are*, then, systemic problems that can arise in a system of free speech, vitiating its effects to a great extent. The question is whether massive civil disobedience (or violence, as the next step) is a constructive solution. This question will never be resolved completely, but it is reason for those who are concerned about the well-being of a free society to see to it that the organs of inquiry and communication are, at any given point in time, in good health.

4. *What is the prevailing ideology in America, and is it consistent with what are commonly seen as “American ideals”?* The ideology of “multiculturalism” that has become dominant in the United States for perhaps the past thirty years holds to one central principle: atomization for whites, and ethnic cohesion for everyone else. Multiculturalist ideology installs a ubiquitous double standard, with one set of principles for white Americans and another for minorities.

This is much broader than simply “affirmative action” in employment and job-letting. Any form of separatism for whites, and especially white males, is forbidden, while separatism of a great many kinds flourishes for everyone else. One small example: that separate gradua-

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tion ceremonies are sometimes held for black students at a university before those students then participate in the larger all-university ceremony, at which they may wear colorful sashes proclaiming their racial pride.⁴² Another: that there is in Congress a “Black Caucus,” while a “White Caucus” would be universally condemned as despicable.

At one time, it was thought that these were temporary exceptions that would exist only until the larger society had come fully to accept blacks. But there isn’t much mention of that anymore.

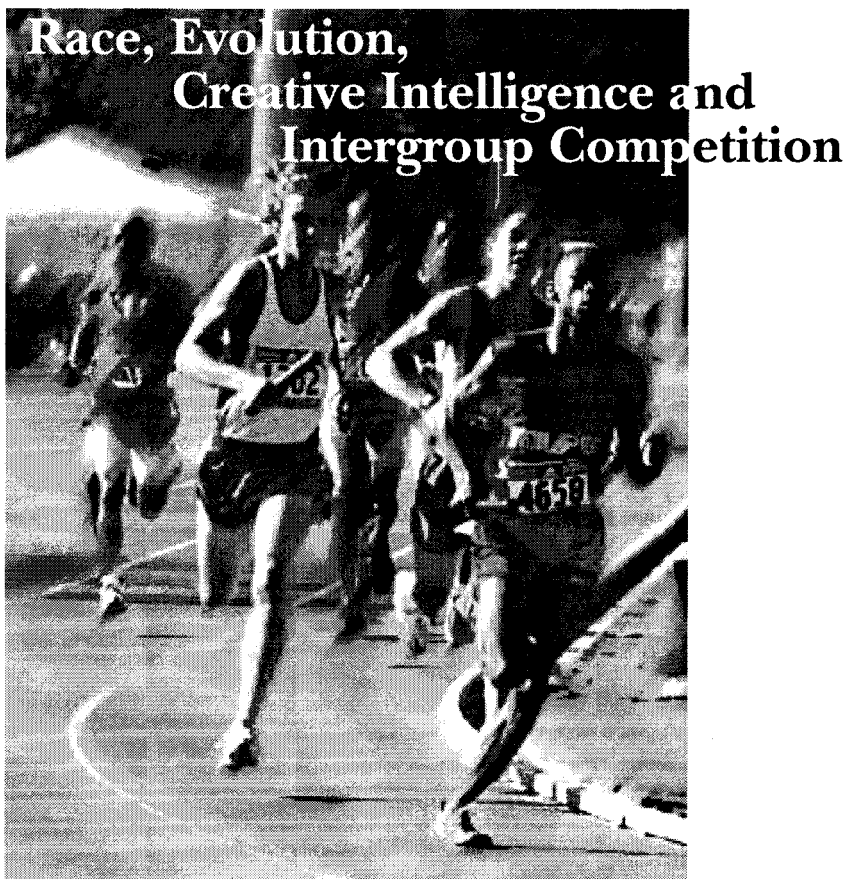
The American people have acquiesced in this duality just as they acquiesce in most of the dominant *ethos*. Their acquiescence doesn’t tell us much, except as a comment on their inertia and desire not to be discomfited in the pursuit of daily life. What we need most to understand about the duality is that it springs from the same source that the rest of the Left’s ideology has since about 1820: the long-burning, white-hot animus of the “alienated intellectual” against the mainstream “bourgeois” society. It isn’t accidental that we have had occasion to mention this before. It is fundamental to an understanding of today’s mental fixations.

When we ask whether this prevailing ideology is consistent with “what are commonly seen as American ideals,” we are asking a question that can only be answered by a decision about whether or not the alienation that has burned for so long is itself valid.

Conclusion

In this article, we have sought an understanding of America’s idealization of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement he led. This has carried us into more areas than most readers will have thought possible. A full understanding requires a grasp of facts, concepts and history that go beyond the simplified images commonly entertained.

⁴² This has been done at Wichita State University for several years.



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Feminism in the Postmodernist Age

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The author identifies feminism as a product of Modernism, which in turn she sees as having its roots in the Enlightenment. She notes that Postmodernism rejects the universalities assumed by Modernism, and concludes that in the Postmodern age feminists will accept the fact that while women around the world share certain common interests, their aspirations will necessarily vary in accordance with ethnic, cultural and regional environments.

Key Words: Feminism; Patriarchy; The Enlightenment; Modernism; Postmodernism; Universalism; Ethnic, Cultural and regional diversity.

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The task of fashioning a postmodernist feminism seems an impossible one when taken at face value. This is particularly so when one recognizes the fact that postmodernism and feminism appear to have conflicting objectives.

The postmodernist argument has issued a number of challenges: to the idea that we can continue to think, write and speak of culture as representing a continuous progress; to the idea that humanity is proceeding towards a *telos* of 'emancipation' and 'self-realization'; and to the idea that we can invoke a universal subjectivity in speaking about the human condition.² Yet these are the hallmark concepts of modernism. Postmodernism is thus a critique of modernity, and of the Enlightenment from which modernism derives. For example, it has been thought that human beings are possessed of a stable, coherent, rational self, and that rationality applied in the pursuit of science and knowledge

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² See Kate Soper 'Feminism, Humanism and Postmodernism' in *The Woman Question*, edited by Mary Evans (London: Sage Publications 1994) p.10.