

4-10-68  
NY POST

## Buckley on King: In Cold Blood

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A morose skepticism voiced here yesterday about the depth and duration of the national moral cleansing allegedly stirred by the murder of Martin Luther King was coincidentally confirmed on the same day by the cool sermon of William F. Buckley. No one could detect any sign that Mr. Buckley had been overcome.

As one familiar with Buckley's gift for twisting the terms of debate, I begin with disclaimers. Nothing written here suggests that he derived any sadistic joy from the sudden death of an adversary. I am sure he would have preferred to see Dr. King safely retired to a campus with his wife and children.

Beyond that, Buckley's text might have been titled: "Why the Assassination of Dr. King Is Nothing to Disturb Our Sleep" or, perhaps more crudely, "He Brought It on Himself." His exercise may help to explain why, a fortnight from now, too much of white America will have absolved itself of any complicity in the crime of Memphis.

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"The theory to which most of us subscribe is that there is no vice so hideous as to justify private murder", Buckley wrote. Yet, he quickly reminded us, few would have mourned if Adolph Eichmann had been slain in ambush, "the only people genuinely annoyed by Jack Ruby's assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald were those who maintained a fastidious interest in the survival of Oswald for the sake of the record," and no mass tributes followed the killing of George Lincoln Rockwell.

Buckley did not argue that King's sins can be likened to Eichmann, Oswald or Rockwell; his faults were only those of "a terribly mistaken judgment." But in fact the insinuation of analogy is a capricious distortion on many levels. Eichmann was not lynched by relations of his victims in Israel; despite the emotions of the populace, he received many long days in court and criticism of some aspects of the proceedings does not nullify the attempted adherence to judicial principle. Many Americans were angered and dismayed by the murder of Oswald—not because they had a stake in "the record" but because they simply do not believe in mob law. Rockwell was not the target of reprisal from those against whom he preached hate but from one of his disgruntled associates, a fact omitted from Buckley's recital.

These are, of course, the diversionary forays in which Buckley delights. He does not neatly equate King with Rockwell; he merely drops the thought that those who failed to weep for the fallen Nazi as they did for King have revealed a moral double-standard. In this respect, one might say, Buckley momentarily embraced King's gospel of supreme love and charity for the lowliest soul. But not for long.

"An aspect of nonviolence," Buckley declared, "is subjugation to the law. The last public speech of Martin Luther King described his intentions of violating the law in Memphis where an injunction had been handed down against the resumption of a march which had resulted in the death of one human being and the wounding of 50 others . . ."

Now comes the triumphant thrust. While "Dr. King's flouting of the law does not justify the flouting by others of the law," there is "a terrifying thought that, most likely, the cretin who leveled his rifle on the head of Martin Luther King may have absorbed the talk, so freely available, about the supremacy of the individual conscience, such talk as Martin Luther King, God rest his troubled soul [the Rev. Buckley speaking], had so widely and so indiscriminately made."

Attorney Buckley rests; the defendant still unknown "most

likely" had been incited by the gospel and example of Dr. King. Let all conscience be at ease, and no sense of injustice seize us.

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**Thus are reason and decency alike simultaneously affronted.**

What brought Martin Luther King to his journey's end in Memphis was a strike of garbage workers seeking the elementary right of union recognition. Most of them were poorly-paid Negroes to whom King's voice brought a glimpse of dignity. In any realm of responsibility, does the true guilt for the violence that grew out of this strike rest with King or with those insensate civic officials who relentlessly resisted unionism?

King never preached that "an aspect of nonviolence is subjugation to the law." In the Gandhi tradition, he proclaimed that there are moments when nonviolent civil disobedience—accompanied by a readiness to accept its consequences—is the only weapon that could redress grievances too long endured. The Memphis street battles were not part of his program, and he was shaken by them. But on how many other occasions had he successfully executed such efforts despite beatings and imprisonment? To say now that he planted the seeds of his own destruction is an ignorable insolence; to deny his grace and valor is a moral blindness or depravity.

It is the last resort of those unwilling to recognize that the "failure" of Dr. King was essentially the failure of a sick, sleepwalking society—from the mayor of Memphis to the Buckleys of the nation and all the smug stuffed shirts who do not give a damn about the garbage workers of the world as long as they empty the pails and faithfully remove the refuse from the streets.