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SO MUCH HISTORY, SO MUCH FUTURE:
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND THE SECOND COMING OF AMERICA¹

We have hung our heads and cried
for all those like Lee who died,
Died for you and died for me,
died for the cause of equality.
We've been 'buked and we've been scorned,
We've been talked about, sure as you're born
But we'll never turn back, no,
we'll never turn back,
Until we've all bee freed and
we have equality.

Bertha Gober²

1978/79

This is a portion (the major portion) of a larger paper. Thus it begins with page 12.

It is good to be in this place [The University of Mississippi], to talk about Martin Luther King here; for it is from this angle of vision that we can see that there was, is, indeed a freedom movement, a movement towards inner and outer freedom in the lives of millions of men and women, and Martin King was both child of that movement and its greatest symbolic representative, its internationally-recognized spokesman, its leader, but in a very special sense of that word, and it was only for a limited time that he served that role before sharp challenges rose to his leadership.

In other words, King and Mississippi and the larger movement they represent remind us of the words that C.L.R. James, that great revolutionary scholar, constantly paraphrases from Karl Marx: Men and women do make history, but only so much history

as they are able to make. Within the context, it is clear that we shall understand the role Martin King played in the movement only as we understand that he was at once created by the movement and a creator of some of its major thrusts. He made much history, but in doing so he was aided, limited and defined by the struggle that was mounting all around him, making him.¹²

This dialectic, the dynamic, ecstatic, often agonized interplay between Martin and the movement may be illustrated in many ways, at many points, but this morning we shall choose five developments to illustrate briefly the relationship between the man and the movement and to comment on its nature and its strengths and weaknesses. Those reference points are Montgomery, Alabama in 1955-56; Albany, Georgia in 1961-62; Birmingham, Alabama and Washington, D.C. in 1963; Mississippi and Chicago in 1966 and the fateful, desperate road from Riverside Church, New York on April 4, 1967 to Memphis Tennessee on April 4, 1968.

Let us begin at Montgomery, where black folks took the U.S. Supreme Court more seriously than the court took itself, firmly grasped the Brown decision, intuitively recognized its many broader implications and began immediately to press it far beyond the limited arena of the segregated school systems. Even before he arrived in Montgomery as the new pastor of the prestigious black middle-class-dominated Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Martin King had entered the dialectic. He was a child of one

of those comfortable Atlanta Black Bourgeoisie, church-dominating families; but nothing could insulate him against the reality of his people's existence in the south, in America. Nothing could blind him to the fact that ever since World War II a new phase of our freedom struggle was being mounted against rugged, often savage opposition, and he knew that what we were doing, largely through the courts, at first, and through early, dangerous attempts at voter registration, was somehow tied to the anti-colonial struggles being waged across the world.¹³

Then, just a bit more than a year after he had been in Montgomery, not long after he had completed his doctoral dissertation for Boston University, while thoughts of a relatively easy life as part-pastor and part-academic danced in his head, a strong, gentle woman named Rosa Parks refused to do the usual, agonized black dance on a segregated Montgomery bus. As a result, she was arrested, and a new time was opened in the struggle. But it was not out of synchronization with the past. Indeed, Rosa Parks had been an NAACP officer, as was E.D. Nixon, the Pullman Car union official and local leader who bailed her out. Rosa Parks had not been the first to act in such a way on the Montgomery bus, but Ms. Parks had a wide and highly respected reputation in the black community. Moreover, the news about and the indignation over what had happened spread quickly because a group of black women in the city had set up a telephone tree to help in their earlier voter registration campaign work. And now they put that system to work in this new cause. So the new time was building on the efforts and the people of the time before,

and King was initially pressed into the role by a small group of genuine local leaders who had proven themselves in the past, and in a real sense he was later anointed by the larger masses of the Montgomery black people to be the public representative of their struggle. Even then no one fully realized that the new time had really begun to come, that it was possible now to make more history than they had ever made before in Montgomery, Alabama.¹⁴

At the urging of Nixon and others, King agreed to become president of the Montgomery Improvement Association. What did that mean? What was his role? Initially it was to be a spokesman, to articulate the hopes and aspirations of his people in ways, in words that they were not able to formulate. But his role was also to help re-shape and reformulate these goals in the light of his own special, developing vision.

Before examining that particular vision and role, it will probably be helpful to remind ourselves that at the outset of the Montgomery struggle the black folk of the city established their boycott of the segregated buses for very simple goals. They did not initially demand an end to bus segregation. Indeed, as late as April, 1956, four months after the beginning of the boycott, King was articulating three objectives which assured continued segregation. The three goals were:

1. More courteous treatment of black passengers.
2. Seating on a first-come, first-served basis, but with blacks continuing the current practice of filling up from the rear of the bus forward, while whites filled in from the front towards the back.
3. Hiring of black bus drivers on predominantly black lines.¹⁵

That was all. That was all they asked at first, and they did not march, sit-in or fill up the jails--they just refused to ride the buses. That was all. That was all. It seems so simple now, but it was a great step then, and it was the local context in which King began.

In the weekly mass meetings which developed as a series of increasingly politicized, religious revival sessions King set out to put forward his evolving philosophy of Christian non-violence.¹⁶ At first, it was defined primarily as a refusal to react violently to the violence of whites, as a willingness to return love for hatred, and a conviction that their action was not only constitutional but within the will of God--therefore also within the onward, righteous flow of history. So, at the first mass meeting on December 5, 1955, in his exhortation to the fearful, courageous, wondering, determined people, King said,

We are not wrong in what we are doing. If we are wrong, the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. If we are wrong, the Constitution of the United States is wrong. If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong. If we are wrong, Jesus of Nazareth was merely a Utopian dreamer who never came down to earth.

Then he closed with one of his typically rousing and inspiring perorations:

When the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, 'There lived a race of people, a black people, fleecy locks and black complexion, but a people who had the marvelous courage to stand up for their rights and thereby they injected a new meaning into the being of history and of civilization.' And we are going to do that.¹⁷

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From that auspicious beginning, one of King's major roles was interpreter, inspirer, the prophet who saw the significance, the larger meaning of what was happening in the immediate Movement. He learned that role, grew into it, made important errors in it, but it was his. As he developed this sense of vocation, King tried constantly to interpret the black struggle as one which was ultimately of benefit to the entire society. He insisted that as blacks fought for their own human rights they were indeed working for the common good, for the good of their white neighbors and fellow citizens, for the building of the good society in America. In addition, King urged his people to believe that their struggle was also part of the world-wide movement of non-white men and women breaking the bonds of colonial oppression, creating a new world order.

So the young pastor, moving into his 27th year, had found a black community ready to take certain initial risks on behalf of a limited vision of its rights and a new determination to establish its dignity. Beginning where they were, he took the people's courage and lifted it to the highest possible level, called upon them to see themselves as far more than black men and women of Montgomery Alabama, striving for decent treatment on a bus. Instead he pressed them forward, urging them to claim their roles as actors in a great cosmic drama, one in which they were at once in unity with the best teachings of American democracy and with the winds of universal social change-- and at the same time walking faithfully within the unchanging will of God.

It was a heady mix, but when the going got hard, when the bombs began to explode, when the white employers threatened to fire women and men who needed the work so badly, such a leader/teacher and his teachings were critical factors in helping an essentially Christian people to remain faithful to their own best visions. Meanwhile, at the same time King was deeply inspired by their courage and determination, by their willingness to take great risks for freedom. In playing this role, King, of course, was totally within a great black tradition himself, following the pathway of the giants who had taught him, the preacher-educator-political leaders who had affected his life, men like Benjamin Mays, Mordecai Johnson, Howard Thurman and Vernon Johns.¹⁶

Moreover, King brought to the people his own clearly developing courage in the face of harsh danger--and this was critical to the creating and legitimizing of his role. For instance, early in the struggle his house was bombed, nearly destroying his family, but he neither retreated nor encouraged retaliation by an angry black populace. He was faced repeatedly with threats on his life, threats that the history of Montgomery, Alabama made very easy to believe, and yet he overcame the very natural fear that welled up within him, fear for himself and for the life of his young family. On one of many such occasions in Montgomery, King insisted on using the "white" side of the segregated railroad ticket office. The first time he did it a police officer insisted that King "use the entrance for niggers." Martin refused, then after an exchange in which

Martin King kept his cool--one of his great gifts--the officer said "All right, King, I'm going to let you through this time, but if you ever dare to use this door again, I...will kill you with my own hands." Martin picked up his bag and said "Sir, I am sorry you feel this way about me, and I bear you no ill will, but every time I leave Montgomery by train, I shall be compelled by conscience to use this door...."¹⁹

Knowing the grapevine of the black community as we do, it was obvious that word of such encounters, embellished many times in the telling, ran like fire through their lives. Inspired by the courage of his people, King repeatedly set his own example of courage, and they in turn were enabled to hold out for week after difficult week, for 381 days of boycott. So, by the time the boycott had successfully ended in December, 1956, by the time blacks were free to sit wherever they chose on the city buses, the possibility of an entire community of black men and women in the South taking large risks on the basis of conscience, justice and a belief in the will of God, had begun to be established. Those men and women and children of Montgomery, with their leader-spokesman had made it possible for others to go beyond them and make even more history, create an even greater future.

II

By this time, King had become nationally and internationally known, not yet on the scale of the mid-sixties, but clearly he was the coming new spokesman for the movements towards freedom

in the Black south at least. And yet, once the Montgomery bus boycott had ended, King was without the base of direct mass action which he needed for the fullest, continuing development of his own role. Of course, action was taking place all over the south, largely focussed on the issue of token desegregation of the schools. Very often it was hard, explosive, sensational action, with young black children and their families taking fantastic risks, symbolically culminating in the experience of Little Rock, Arkansas in the fall of 1957, where federal troops were called in to desegregate a high school. Though he was not personally involved in many of these activities, King was still the leading interpreter of their meaning, and by the time of Little Rock's agony it had been suggested to King that he try to develop a major regional action organization based on the rising black momentum and on the tremendous power of the black religious leaders of the south. So in 1958, Ella Baker, one of the key architects of the idea, a former NAACP field worker in the region--and one of the greatest heroes of our struggle--returned south to become the first executive secretary of what was to become known as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, based in Atlanta. Though he was still in Montgomery at the time, King naturally became its first president.²⁶

But the establishment of an organization of black, mostly Baptist, ministers did not create a movement. The giving of 200 speeches a year by King did not create a movement. Besides, as whites continued their resistance to change, both in the courts

and through the uses of fierce, extra-legal means of intimidation and violence, King's philosophy of non-violence in the cause of a largely undefined integrated society was being seriously challenged. In the north the deepest, broadest questions seemed to be coming from the revived forces of black nationalism, most clearly seen in the growing Nation of Islam and in its increasingly popular national representative, Malcolm X. In the south, the message of non-violent resistance was challenged by the action of Robert Williams and his armed self-defense group in Monroe, North Carolina in 1959.²¹

Nevertheless, in spite of, because of all these things, beyond all these specific developments, a movement was mounting in its own sporadic, unpredictable ways, as mass movements always do, as they always will. And King recognized both the presence and the potential power of the movement. In November, 1959, the leader of Montgomery's movement resigned his pastorate in that city and turned toward his organizational and family base in Atlanta. Before he left the city and the people who had played so critical a role in the creation of the rising southern movement, King held a press conference in which he made clear both his own sense of the critical moment of history and his determination to find, to shape, a new, even more decisive and active role for himself. On the last day of November, 1959, Martin King announced his decision to move to Atlanta by February 1, 1960. Then he said,

The time has come for a bold, broad advance of the Southern campaign for equality...a full scale assault will be made upon discrimination and segregation in all forms. We must train our youth and adult leaders in the techniques of social change through nonviolent resistance. We must employ new methods of struggle involving the masses of the people.²²

Clearly, King was speaking to himself, to the moving black community and to the white and non-white world all around. Then, only two months after the announcement, on the very day of the planned move, almost as if by orchestrated agreement, an explosive response to King's vision came from the very "youth" he had hoped to train. They were not waiting for that training, and when the student sit-in movement erupted, beginning on February ~~11~~¹, 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, it drove immediately towards the center of King's life, transforming it in ways that he had likely not quite anticipated. That was, of course, appropriate. For these neatly dressed, amazingly disciplined black young men and women, who, with a few white allies, began the new phase of the movement, were not only the products of the on-going school desegregation struggles of the south, they were really the children of Martin Luther King. In spite of many mixed feelings about him, they saw him as hero and model. But as is so often the case in such situations, they also went beyond him, creating what he could not create on his own, establishing the basis for the south-wide movement of massive, direct non-violent confrontation with the segregated public facilities of the section which King had just announced. They were, of course, also the first generation of blacks to grow up in a world where the power and legitimacy of the white west was being challenged across the globe. ✓

By the time they held their organizing conference at Shaw University in April 1960--under the urging of Ella Baker and with some financial support from SCLC--the student movement had reached into dozens of cities and enlisted the active engagement of thousands of young people and their older supporters. Indeed, through the power of mass media they had already cast their image and their reality across the earth. Not long after the Raleigh, North Carolina organizing conference they had decided to call themselves the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, better known, sometimes lovingly known as SNCC--"SNICK." Picking up much of the non-violent rhetoric of King and SCLC, SNCC literally became the shock troops of the massive movement for direct non-violent confrontation with the white keepers of southern law, order and power. And for many of them it was, at first, much more than rhetoric. They truly believed that through the power of their organized, disciplined, confrontative, non-violent struggle, they were to be the builders of "the beloved community" in America, the harbingers of the new society Martin King had so continually evoked. Black and white together, they believed and they struggled, taking into their own flesh and spirit many of the hardest blows of white hatred and fear.²³

In 1961, this rapidly spreading movement was given dramatic and explosive emphasis with the coming of the Freedom Rides, originally organized by the Congress for Racial Equality. The meeting of these two elements, Freedom Riders and sit-in students--sometimes involving the same persons--their mutual, harrowing, radicalizing experiences at the hands of southern

white mobs and in southern jails, provided the vanguard force that was needed to break open and given new shape to the struggle which had been developing since Montgomery. Added to these human elements was the startling power of the mass media--especially television--to help create (as well as destroy) a sense of mass movement. Surely by 1961, the new time had really come. These young people pouring out into the streets and into the jails of hundreds of southern towns and cities, these high school and college students being beaten on national television, these youths shaking a nation, drawing the attention of a world to their demand for rights, dignity, justice and human recognition, these were the children of Martin King, of Rosa Parks, of all the singing, praying mothers and fathers of Montgomery.²⁴

III

But because we often create more history than we realize, because we often give birth to children that we do not understand and cannot control, it was not until the development of the Albany Movement that Martin King was really able to catch up with the newest, rapid, explosive expansion of his people's struggle. What happened in this southwest Georgia community from the fall of 1961 through the summer of 1962 was critical to the development of his role in the movement. Having moved from Montgomery to Atlanta in 1959, having developed no similar non-violent mass action base in Atlanta, but sensing the new moment of history and its needs, King now became a kind of roving leader, responding to calls from the local movements

which were springing up in hundreds of communities all over the south. In Albany, the black community had had some earlier sporadic, largely unsuccessful experiences of attempting to negotiate with their all-white city administration for change. But there was not concrete, responsive action until the fall of 1961 when, as part of their voter registration campaign--a story in itself--SNCC sent two of its young field secretaries, Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon into this tough and dangerous community. They became the "outside agitators" who quickly developed themselves into inside organizers, and their courageous defiance of the city's white leadership and the arrest of a mini-freedom rider expedition at the train station helped to stimulate the local black community to form the Albany Movement. Soon, Albany went beyond the sit-in stage and became the first deep southern community to engage in the kind of focussed mass civil disobedience, through marches, prayer vigils as well as sit-ins, that Martin King had seen coming and had hoped to stimulate through SCLC. When in December, 1961, the Albany Movement invited King to come and help them, new patterns in his role began to be clear.²⁵

One of his major functions was admittedly to help inspire the local populace to greater efforts, for by now King had begun to be idolized by large sections of the black community, a development fraught with great pitfalls, of course, both for the idol and his idolizers. Nevertheless, King was their national leader, the acknowledged symbol of their struggle. And he was a great exhorter in every sense of the word. In

addition, his presence was now considered a guarantee of national and even international media attention. Moreover, because Martin had begun since Montgomery to establish certain ambivalent contacts and significant influence with "liberal" white forces, especially in the religious, educational and labor union communities, he began to be seen as the one person who could mobilize the "people of good will"--as he called them-- from across the nation to come to help in the struggle of local southern communities. Even more important in the minds of some persons was the fact that King seemed to have access to the Kennedy White House and its great potential power. Of course, it also came to be understood that Martin would lead marches and go to jail, and that his own organization, SCLC, with its rapidly growing staff, would provide experienced aid to those who might be new in the ways of non-violent struggle. Albany actually was the first real testing ground for the developing role of King, the visiting leader/symbol, and SCLC, the black church-based organization in the new phase of the southern movement.

In many ways, as one might have expected, the first experiment was an ambivalent one. In Albany, King was able to test out with the local Movement leaders what was essentially a new strategy, one forced upon them by the powerful thrust of the freedom movement. Rather than focussing on a single issue, such as bus desegregation, they decided to make multiple demands for changes toward racial and economic justice in their city.

The internal force of the people's rush towards justice, their sense that the new time was indeed upon them, their growing understanding of the wider significance of their movement and the stubborn recalcitrance and evasiveness of the white leadership--all these pushed the black freedom fighters out of the churches, out of the train and bus stations, out of the dime stores, out into the streets.

In this motion, King was a crucial element, constantly in dynamic interaction with the force of its thrust. Through his words, his actions and the very fact of his presence, Martin served as a great inspiration to the movement of the local black community, especially in the early weeks of their activity. Hundred of persons for the first time in southern freedom movement history did volunteer for acts of direct action, civil disobedience right out on the streets--which meant certain jailing in some of the most notorious and dangerous jails of Georgia. Out from the church mass meetings they marched, singing We shall overcome, Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round and This little light of mine. They went to jail, singing, "I'm gonna let it shine." They sang and prayed in jail, "Paul and Silas locked in jail had nobody to go their bail, keep your eye on the prize, hold on." In the dirty jails where the memories of blood from older times were still present, they were threatened for singing and praying, and they kept on singing and praying, "Oh, Kelly; Oh, Pritchett; Oh, Kelly; Open them jails." They were beaten and kicked for singing and praying, and they kept on singing and praying, scores and hundreds, young and old. "Over my head I see freedom in the

air. There must be a God somewhere." Indeed out of the Albany jails came one of the most dynamic cultural forces of the southern movement, the SNCC Freedom Singers, carrying the songs of the movement across the nation and over the world, songs which were bought at a great price. Woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Freedom.

In these transformed, transforming jails, many other important developments were also taking place. Not only were some men, women and children being tested, honed and readied for the years of struggle ahead, but the invidious class distinctions which had plagued Albany and so many other similar black communities, were momentarily forgotten as people from every level of life and experience were jammed into cells. One woman, Norma Anderson, the wife of the osteopath who led the movement, told me that she had never known an experience of communion in a church which equalled the deep unity that she felt one night as she and eight other tired, thirsty, frightened, but courageous women in a cell built for two persons, passed around an old canning jar of water, sharing so much more than the luke-warm liquid that they drank. Moreover, scores of white and black sympathizers and comrades from the North were drawn to the struggle, and some were arrested and briefly jailed, thus sharing pieces of the deepest joys and agonies of the experience (providing, too, both cocktail-hour stories and life-changing momentum for years to come). All the while, at least for a while, the mass media certainly came on the scene, according to plan. So much that was new to the larger southern movement and to King's role became sharply focussed in Albany. Here on the banks of

the Flint River, Martin King was again being shaped and developed by the movement of a creative, courageous black community. He was making history, but only so much history as he was able to make in the context of his people's thrust towards justice.

But there were major problems as well. The Albany Movement had not really jelled as an organization before they called on King. Thus, there were both understandable confusions in its goals and in his role. On the one hand, their sense of the need for non-violent struggle was constantly being strained by the rush of their own motion and the violence they were meeting. On the other hand there was a temptation to see King, to encourage him to see himself, as a savior--too often a peripetetic savior, one who had to leave town at various points to keep speaking and fund-raising engagements elsewhere. This created real difficulties, especially for a leader who was not essentially a day-to-day strategist in the first place. In addition, there were understandable hard feelings among the SNCC forces--who were often, brilliant, brave and sometimes foolhardy strategists. These young people were often resentful when, after their initial, lonely and hazardous weeks of local organizing, Martin King now arrived on the scene, trailing a coterie of supporters and a crowd of media persons behind him, and the hard, dangerous spade-work of these young freedom soldiers tended largely to be forgotten in the aura of Martin Luther King. Moreover, King's leadership style, which was also SCLC's style, derived largely from the semi-autocratic world of the black Baptist church, and it simply grated against the spirits of the young people from SNCC.

For they were clearly working out their own forms of sometimes anarchistic-appearing participatory democracy.²⁶

Unfortunately, as time went on, more than style and attention were at stake, for attention was tied to fund-raising, and competition over fund-raising began to sour what should have been healthy, necessary debates over the essential goals and strategies of the movement. Those debates did take place, but from the outset, just as later on Mississippi's Highway 51 in 1966, they were too often mixed with too many other elements of personality, media attention and finances. Then, too, what must also be said about Albany and King's role is that he was not really able to enlist the federal government as an ally. Indeed, it was a federal court which later struck a harsh blow against the Albany Movement, its organization and its leaders, opening their eyes to certain crucial realities regarding the federal government's essential ambivalence--at best--towards the struggle for black freedom. Nevertheless, two final words must be spoken about Albany: First it is to King's credit that he recognized many of the problems which were built into his own new role and tried to deal with some of them, but the role of a roving leader in the midst of a mass movement spread over such a massive area, often under the glare of television cameras, was fraught with deep and intrinsic difficulties. These were especially dangerous when added to the tendency to sycophancy and adulation which was building in some of the people around him, and the tendency to psychic murder which was built into the media of mass television. Secondly, in spite of the mistakes of King,

SCLC, SNCC, the NAACP, CORE and the Albany Movement itself, Albany and its black and white people were changed and have been changed in profound, significant ways. There is no way that the black community will ever be pushed back to 1961; there is no way that white Albany will ever be the same again. But the question blacks now ask, as we must all ask, as Martin asked, is, where do we go from here?²⁷

IV

In 1963, for King and SCLC, the geographic answer to that question was Birmingham, Alabama. But as we all knew, Birmingham, like Mississippi, was much more than a physical place. It had a bloody reputation, it was a frightening name. It was pronounced by some as "Bombingham" because of the violence whites had consistently brought against any black movements towards justice and equal rights there. And every black person in this country likely knew someone who had been run out of, beaten or killed in Birmingham, Alabama. But the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth had not been run out, though he had been beaten more than once and almost killed, at one point with national television cameras running. It was largely at Shuttlesworth's insistence that King and SCLC came to Birmingham in the spring of 1963.

Because the story of Birmingham is somewhat better known than Albany's I will not go into as great detail, but the developments in that city in April and May, 1963 are most important for our sense of the developing role of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the exploding mass freedom movement of his people. Shuttlesworth's organization, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights,

had been active longer than the Albany Movement, so King had a somewhat sounder base. In addition, attempting to learn from the Albany experience, SCLC spent several months sporadically exploring and analyzing the Birmingham situation before they moved in to initiate mass demonstrations.²⁸

When the demonstrations began on April 3, it was clear that King's new role which had been sharply marked in Albany would see some important re-shaping and refining in Birmingham. With the Birmingham black leadership, he decided again to put forward a broad array of demands; so not only the desegregation of all public facilities, but the hiring of black policemen and the employment of blacks in all parts of the public and private sectors were now new, key items on the agenda.

But by the time that King himself began to lead demonstrations-- a week after they began--he was faced with the reality that there was a very volatile situation at hand, the most difficult he had ever faced. Birmingham was "bigger and badder" than either Albany or Montgomery and whites were not the only bad dudes in that town. So certain powerful contradictions began to surface. On the one hand, the "Commandments" handed out to demonstrators began with "1. Meditate daily on the teachings and life of Jesus" and included such additional admonitions as "walk and talk in the manner of love for God is love...Refrain from violence of fist, tongue or heart." But at the same time, Jim Bevel and other staff members were confiscating a good number of knives and other weapons from some of the brothers who had come prepared for other ways of walking and talking. Obviously, then, the tensions were

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there, felt more sharply, drawn more clearly than ever before. In many ways the black community of Birmingham in 1963 was a long way from the praying and singing folks of Montgomery in 1955. Still the leaders moved from a religious base. On Good Friday, when King and Abernathy led their first march, Martin quoted from Jesus "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth...let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid..." Ralph said "You may call it city jail, but I call it Calvary...where he leads I'll follow." And Rev. Lindsey, one of the many courageous local leaders, perhaps caught the dilemma of the situation best of all, when just before marching out to meet Bull Connor's police and dogs and high-powered fire hoses, he said "We are going to set this city on fire with the Holy Ghost."²⁹

The internal tensions were real, for there were many young people and older ones as well who were indeed on fire, caught up in all the anger and defiance which were building in the 60's in the black community, north and south, as we met white resistance, defiance and violence everywhere. These were young men and women who now had heard the powerful voice and seen the piercing eyes of Malcolm X on their television screens, and they had to understand how they might at once be faithful to his calls for black pride, resistance, defiance and even retaliation, while at the same time heeding the call of their traditional, respected leaders, above all, Martin Luther King, who spoke the language of the deep places of the black southern experience. So the young people went out into the streets with even more explosive poten-

tial than Albany had known. They taunted the police, they broke out of the marching lines when faced with barricades of police and firemen; they did their own speedy end runs downtown; they poured into the department stores and spread out, sitting on the floors, singing freedom songs until the police caught up with them, threw them into vans and took them away, trailing behind them the sound of their songs "I ain't afraid of your jails 'cause I want my freedom. I want my freedom now."

These young people of Birmingham and others like them had a powerful affect on Martin King, on the shaping of his role, on the history he was making. He saw the great forces of energy and power, black power, stored up within them, and he knew where it could lead. He realized that now they were at least potentially the children of Malcolm X as well, and he was not unmoved by that recognition. He saw them take on the dogs and the firehoses with courageous anger, and he knew that anger was not easily controlled.¹⁰

Now his rationale for non-violence began to expand to account for such young men and women in Birmingham and everywhere, began to account for Malcolm and the Nation of Islam and other, even more radical and revolutionary voices abroad in the land. Now it was not simply a weapon of love. As he explained it to an increasingly perplexed white world, non-violence was also a defense against black retaliatory violence. More explicitly than ever before, King was forced to face the stormy potential of the Black young people around him, and what they meant for his own sense of the future. When forcibly given a time to rest and think

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in Birmingham jail, these children, spawned out of his own body, were clearly on his mind as he wrote his famous letter. Speaking of the American blacks he said,

Consciously and unconsciously, (the Negro) has been swept in by what the Germans call the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa, and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. Recognizing this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand public demonstrations. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march some times; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history.

From that point onward, King increasingly found himself caught between the rising rage, nationalistic fervor and questioning of non-violence in the black community, and the fear of the white community that would seek to hold down all of those black energies, to break them up, at worst destroy them. So while Birmingham represented the largest number of blacks ever engaged in massive direct civil disobedient action up to then, and while the agreement worked out with the city was considered a victory of sorts, King's role was clearly undergoing transition again. Forces were now at work which had long been kept in check; new people had been born, older ones--like Malcolm Little--had been reborn, and their presence demanded gradual changes in King's vision of the movement and of himself. Indeed, the night after the formal agreement was announced in Birmingham, bombings of the black motel where Martin had stayed and of his brother's home goaded an enraged group of

blacks into a burning, car-smashing, police-battling response. In a sense, this was the first of the period's urban rebellions.¹²

Meanwhile, the television screens had carried pictures of Bull Connor's hounds and heavily-armed police across the country and throughout the world. Black men and women everywhere never forgot the snarling dog charging at the young boy demonstrator, never forgot the black woman on the ground with a white policeman's knee on her neck. They watched through tears of outrage and pride as teen-aged girls held hands and stood fast in the face of pounding streams from high-powered fire hoses. Thus the very victories of Birmingham had unleashed new forces of anger, commitment and temporary unity, as well as many doubts about non-violence across the black nation. At the same time, all through that spring and summer the streets and roads were simply streaked with the tears and blood of demonstrators in some 800 communities throughout the south, challenging the old ways, the old times, calling for a new America to be born.¹³

V

In a sense, Montgomery was a long, long time ago. Seen from the late spring of 1963 the bus boycott was now a time of quiet, gentle protest, compared to the massive action sweeping across the south, challenging the old regime, eliciting some of its most brutal responses. This new massive direction-action pressed King more fully into another role--that of chief Movement emissary to the White House. John Kennedy, who had

said in January, 1963 that Civil Rights action was not among his highest priorities was forced to change his priorities by the whirlwind of the black movement. So White House conferences with King and others, by phone and in person, became almost de rigueur. But some persons soon learned--King later than some, earlier than others--that conferences with presidents may do more to divert the force of a movement than to fuel and inspire it, especially if that is one of the intentions of the president. So, while Kennedy began to face the issue of the rights of black people more fully than ever before, instead of using his vast executive powers to make the first move, he threw the weight on Congress, calling for Civil Rights legislation. He then asked King and other Civil Rights leaders to help create the climate to bring about the passage of this legislation (including much that blacks in the south had already seized with their own courageous lives). Essentially, that meant trying to cool out the rising force of the southern movement. As a result, King became, partly unwarily, a tool for defusing a powerful current in a critical struggle for the future of the movement.¹⁴

This is what I mean: for more than two years before Birmingham, Martin and others had talked about the development of a trained, disciplined non-violent army which would become the spearhead for a national movement of powerful, disruptive non-violent civil disobedience, from coast to coast. Some persons took the idea more seriously than others; among them were James Bevel and Diane Nash Bevel, C.T. Vivian, James Lawson, Rosemarie

Harding and me. This group, and others with them, believed that 1963 was the logical year for the development of such a cadre, clearly a potentially revolutionary force for a uniquely American revolution. At the 1963 SCLC convention, Wyatt T. Walker, King's executive director, declared, "The question is... whether we want to continue local guerilla battles, against discrimination and segregation or go to all out war," He went on, seeming to suggest an answer to his own query, all the while continuing to expand the question, the possibility:

...has the moment come in the...nonviolent revolution when we are forced...on some appointed day...literally to immobilize the nation until she acts on our pleas for justice and morality...is the day far off that major transportation centers would be deluged with mass acts of civil disobedience; airports, train stations, bus terminals, the traffic of large cities, interstate commerce, would be halted by the bodies of witnesses nonviolently insisting on 'Freedom Now.' I suppose a nationwide work stoppage might attract enough attention to persuade someone to do something to get this monkey of segregation and discrimination off our backs, once, now and forever. Will it take one or all of these?³⁵

During the Birmingham demonstrations the group pressing for the development of such a non-violent army proposed that its first action be aimed at Washington, D.C. to shut down the activities of the city until adequate Civil Rights legislation of many kinds was passed. Without going into the details of the transformation, it is enough to say that King allowed himself to be convinced by other more moderate black and white leaders of the Civil Rights coalition that such a move would be exceedingly unwise. They were convinced and were probably

right that it would lose friends and anger many "neutrals," in the white community. It would certainly lose the president's supposed support for Civil Rights legislation specifically and racial justice generally. So, instead of a disciplined, non-violent force--largely from the southern testing grounds--descending on Washington for an extended campaign of disruptive, civil disobedience, the summer of 1963 produced the one-day, unthreatening March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. As a result, King passed up an opportunity possibly to transform his role in the struggle, to transform the struggle itself, losing perhaps more than we can ever know. And it was not until the fiery, bloody summers of 1964-1967 had passed that he was eventually forced by the movement of his people and the larger forces of history back to the idea of an organized, national non-violent revolutionary force. By then it would be too late--at least for that time.³⁶

Now, it should be noted that in spite of what the March on Washington was not, it definitely was another advance in King's public recognition as a spokesperson for the Black freedom movement, and together with Birmingham it was probably the major single factor in his justly deserved nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. At the same time, within the movement, the level of diversity and disagreement over goals, strategy, tactics, allies and spirit had increased so much that there was no way in which any one man could any longer represent that spread of ideas and directions. So the public-directed role of spokes-

person was increasingly at war with the actual role King played within the movement, for the movement itself was increasingly unsure of its direction and many voices needed to be heard and tested. Meanwhile, the mainline Civil Rights leaders gave their major energies to work on the passage of the Civil Rights Bill and SNCC and CORE, especially, prepared for the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964.³⁷

All the while, King was under many pressures, making more than 500 speeches a year in 1963-64, travelling over 300,000 miles in that year, constantly voicing to his close friends his need for time, time, time to reflect on where we were as a people and a movement and where he was as a man, a leader and a symbol. The deaths and sufferings in Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Church and then later in Mississippi, and the explosions which began in the northern cities in the summer of 1964 added their pressures. He had to deal increasingly with the clashing forces of white resistance and rising black militance. Regardless of what he said publicly, King had likely heard the many voices of Malcolm from the black cities of the north, understood and felt much of their relentless logic in his very sensitive soul, and so by the end of 1964 he told Playboy magazine's interviewer that he, himself, was "militantly non-violent" now. Accordingly, he began to try to speak more forcefully on behalf of the urban black community and all the nation's poor, calling for an alliance between blacks and poor whites to "exert massive pressure on the government to get jobs for all." Together, he said, "they could form a grand alliance." This was the end of 1964. King was

being transformed, gradually attempting to transform himself at once into a spokesperson for the explosive urban black north and for all the poor people of the society. The movement was clearly enlarging itself, becoming more complex in his mind, and in America. He in turn was attempting to open and enlarge his own vision of himself to accompany that internal and external development, making as much history as he could, seeking new visions of the future to be created.³⁸

The Nobel Peace Prize added another pressure and heightened another element of his vision. Almost from the outset, an opponent of the American war against Vietnam, he had begun speaking out more clearly, more publicly about the need for negotiation. With the Nobel Prize, King clearly saw himself newly commissioned as a spokesperson for world peace and justice for the oppressed--especially the people of Vietnam--and he increasingly took that stand, much to the dismay of some members of his own family, his organization, some of his fellow Civil Rights leaders and the President of the United States--to say nothing of J. Edgar Hoover and his minions. Still King went forward, sometimes hesitantly, but moving forward, recognizing that there was again a new time coming, perhaps already present, for the movement, for the nation, for himself, perhaps a more dangerous time than any before.³⁹

So, when the Selma March came in 1965, it was really anticlimactic. In a sense, it was the last of the traditional southern movement spectaculars. It was marked by a serious

mistake in judgment and what was likely a temporary failure of nerve by King at Pettus Bridge, but that is not our point now. It was the last of its kind, the triumphal entry into Montgomery with hosts of liberal friends and supporters locking arms--with the young people yelling out:

"Oh Wallace, you never can jail us all, Oh Wallace segregation's bound to fall."

They were right (as blacks in struggle have been right about so much of the reality of American life), and a new time in the movement had already begun. 40

VI

Fittingly enough that new moment was symbolized right here in your tough, old, bad, violent, beautiful, new, overcoming home state of Mississippi, right on Highway 51 on the Meredith March. The issues which had been simmering, roiling the waters of the Movement for a long time--sometimes pressed audaciously to the surface in the recent speeches of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.; the issues of power, the issues of racial pride, solidarity and nationalism which had poured out anew in the north after the assassination of Malcolm X--El Hajj Malik El Shabazz; the issues of Black control over the organizations of our struggle; the issues of the role of whites in the struggle; the issue of the need for black "liberation" as opposed to "integration" raised to a new level by the introduction of Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth into the reading experience of many of the SNCC members; the concomitant rising discussion of black "revolution" as opposed to finding a place in the American status quo; the

issue of the relationship between the black middle class and the masses of poor blacks, south and north; the issues of the need for the development of black leadership; the issue of sexual relations between white women and black men--all of these exciting, frightening, dangerously explosive matters and many more leaped out in a compressed code from the lips of Willie Ricks of SNCC and they found their national identity in Stokely Carmichael, 24 year old veteran of the freedom rides, of the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, Alabama, of Greenwood, Mississippi. (Always remember that Stokely at his best was no dilettante. But like the rest of us, he was not always at his best.) Black Power! Black Power! Black Power had officially begun its time: June, 1966, on the road from Memphis to Jackson, cities of our music and our martyrs.⁴¹

Now, Martin King had been, in more ways than they ever dreamed, the best friend that white folks ever had. He was smart enough to know that and sensitive enough soon to realize that the cry for Black Power had touched deep nerves in the black and white communities. White allies had been crucial to King's vision of the Movement, and some of his earliest responses to Black Power as a slogan reflected his fears about the loss of many such allies. Nevertheless, such fears did not mesmerize him (nor did they press him to join with Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and other mainstream black leaders in public condemnations of Black Power in such places as large New York Times advertisements). For King had already been changing, struggling to understand all the new movements streaking through our lives. Because he truly

felt the pulse and the heart beat of his people and was trying by then also to deal with the cold, cold heart of white power, Chicago style, Martin King knew that he had to deal with Black Power, knew that it would deal with him. He had already shifted from the strategy of non-violence as a way to white consciences and was describing it much more as a militant, disruptive strategy and as an alternative to the urban rebellions. So during the heated public and private debates in the course of the Meredith March, King was likely much more responsive to the fervent arguments of Carmichael, Floyd McKissick and their comrades than any of the participants immediately recognized.⁴² Then, when the SCLC convention met down in Jackson later in the summer of 1966, it was clear that Martin had been listening and was trying to be on time when in his annual report he said

The continuing struggle for civil rights now shifts into a new phase: a struggle for power.

Indeed, he attempted to equate his hero, Ghandi's description of non-violence as "an experiment with truth" with his own new sense that militant, radical non-violence could also be "an experiment with power." That was one of his great roles, trying to stay on time, trying to be on time, trying to understand what was happening with and to his people, with and to the oppressed of this nation and the world and then trying to move on time.⁴³

It was no easy task. Indeed, at many points in the fall and winter of 1966-67, after another summer of urban rebellions, as the fierce debate over Black Power raged, as he recognized the essential failure of his heroic/quixotic foray into Chicago,

as the war in Vietnam continued to expand, as white anger mounted and black criticism of his positions grew more strident, King seemed at times like a great, courageous, but deeply perplexed captain, trying desperately to control a ship that was being rocked by mutinies from within and raging storms from without.

Yet, the truth of that perilous time was even more difficult. For by then there was no longer any one entity--even symbolically speaking--which could be called the Black Freedom Movement and which Martin could really lead. Indeed, the very internal power of the movement which he had done so much to create and focus, which had shaped and molded him, had now broken out in many new directions, reviving, inspiring a plethora of older black--and white--traditions. Now, for instance, a militant, sometimes militaristic nationalism was sweeping the northern cities, at once a revival of earlier black American movements, and at the same time linking itself to the liberation struggles of non-white men and women across the globe. Talk of "urban rebellions" had now replaced the idea of "riots," and there was active, serious discussion in various quarters concerning the coming "black revolution," concerning the struggle for "black liberation" in America.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, in spite of presidential declarations of a "war on poverty," and hastily organized, often ill-conceived "anti-poverty" programs, it was clear to King and many other black people that this was not really the quintessential American response to black needs and demands. Rather, it seemed more likely that the federal troops and their armored equipment

sweeping through the black communities, the helicopters with their floodlights, the national military alerts, and the intelligence agencies' infiltration of black organizations were at least as descriptive of the federal government's real responses towards black aspirations as any other programs coming out of Washington.

It was impossible for King--or any other single individual--to understand, much less command all the tendencies now set loose in the black communities of the land. (Of course, he knew that he was being falsely identified as an "Uncle Tom" by many northern black rhetoricians of revolution who had never once risked their lives as King had done so many times in the cause of his people's freedom.) At the same time, Martin was trying to understand where the real, critical centers of power lay in American society, trying to understand how he could tackle the powerful forces which supported war, racism, poverty and the internal subversion of the freedom movement's many parts.

VII

No easy task. Still King seemed convinced that he would be unfaithful to the history he had already made with others, untrue to his forebears and his children in the struggle for justice, unless he followed what appeared to be the logic of the movement. For him, that logic, that history, that sense of integrity pressed him towards a more radical challenge than he had ever mounted before, one which would leave him more naked to his enemies than ever before. Very little that he had learned in

all the dangerous campaigns of the south had prepared him for the task of striking towards the heart of America's real political, economic and social structures of oppression, exploitation and greed. Not even the bitter Chicago experience had been lived with long enough to help him build the kind of analysis, organization and strategy which were needed. Yet, moving as much as anything else on the power of his deep sense of compassion and courage, he determined to go in that direction, tried to fashion a two-pronged attack on the center of America's foreign and domestic policies of repression, co-optation and de-humanization. He had concluded that there could be no black freedom, no true freedom for anyone without such a challenge being raised, and he knew that he could no longer assume that the federal government would even be a reluctant ally. No, that government and its policies was now the prime target.⁴⁵

First, King decided to try to respond fully to the unspeakable agony, the terrible crime of Vietnam, defying all his critics and many of his friends, from the White House to members of his own organization and his own family. On April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City, the struggling leader-searcher addressed a major meeting sponsored by Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. Near the beginning of his vibrant presentation, King admitted that he had not spoken clearly and early enough, but vowed that he would never make that mistake again. Justifying the connection he saw among the struggles for equal rights and economic justice in America and the demand for an end to American military involvement in Vietnam, King

placed them all within the context of his commission as a minister of Jesus Christ and a Nobel Peace Prize awardee. Unflinchingly, he identified America as the essential aggressor in the war and called his nation "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world."

Attempting to give voice to the many millions of the voiceless of the world whose "movement" towards freedom he now felt he was representing, Martin called to the American nation, to President Lyndon Johnson, to men and women everywhere and said,

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.⁴⁶

The black struggle for freedom had served to inspire and inspire the rapidly mounting American anti-war movement. Now King was urgently placing himself into the center of this force which he had helped to create, calling for conscientious objection, even draft resistance, following the earlier examples of such SNCC leaders as Bob Moses, Jim Forman and Stokely Carmichael, as well as James and Diane Revel of his own staff. But King was still ahead of most of SCLC, its board and its staff, and some persons within his organization were seriously opposed to so forceful a move into the anti-Vietnam war arena. Indeed, this was one of Martin's major difficulties through much of the post-1965 period: the vision that he was trying to fashion, the

history he was trying to make, was often beyond the capacities the aspirations, the politics and the imagination of most of the men and women who made up SCLC, his only real organizational base.⁴⁷

At the same time, of course, as head of the organization, he had to accept at least some of the blame for its political backwardness. Still, King drove forward, was driven forward by all the explosive forces around him, by all the history he had helped to make, and soon he turned from Riverside Church to forge the second prong of his militant challenge to white American power. In the summer of 1967, after two of the decade's most deadly urban uprisings--in Newark and Detroit--had stunned the nation, after a national Black Power Convention had done much to stamp that variously-defined slogan in the minds of black folks everywhere, King announced his plans for a major attack on America's internal structures of inequality and injustice.

On August 16, 1967, the New York Times carried a story from SCLC's tenth annual convention in Atlanta, a story which began, "The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said today that he planned to 'dislocate' Northern cities with massive but nonviolent demonstrations of civil disobedience before Congress adjourns its current session." According to the reporter, Martin had said, "That he had decided on the step to provide an alternative to rioting and to gain large federal spending for impoverished Negroes."

It was a version of the non-violent army again, now surfacing at a far more volatile, confused and dangerous moment in the nation's history and in King's own career. There was much unclarity

and disagreement within the ranks of SCLC and among the many-faceted freedom movement organizations, but by the end of 1967, King and his staff had again decided to focus this potentially revolutionary challenge in Washington, D.C., fully aware of the ugly, angry and unreceptive mood at work in the White House and elsewhere.⁴⁰

At his radical best, King was determined to press the logic of his position, the movement of his people's history. Having attacked the nation's anti-liberationist overseas actions, he now intended to move on the heart of the government, demanding a response to the suffering of its own semi-colonized peoples. (Nor was King paving a way of welcome for his move by saying late in 1967: "I am not sad that black Americans are rebelling; this was not only inevitable but eminently desirable. Without this magnificent ferment among Negroes, the old evasions and procrastinations would have continued indefinitely." He was not paving a way, but he was indicating his own way, his own movement in the vortex of "this magnificent ferment.")⁴¹

Martin was trying to be on time, trying to be faithful, trying to go forward, to create whatever openings towards the future that he could. Jamming his life against the advice of many of his black and white movement supporters, defying the angry warnings of Lyndon Johnson, King searched for his new role, for the new role of his people. In an America which seemed at times on the edge of armed racial warfare, an America increasingly torn over the Vietnam war, an America unresponsive to the deepest

needs of its own people, especially its poor--in the midst of this history King was desperately searching for the connections with his past, for the openings to his and our future.

By December, 1967, Martin had at least temporarily taken his new, powerful and dangerous position. In a series of broadcasts for Canadian Public Radio, he said, "Negroes...must not only formulate a program; they must fashion new tactics which do not count on government goodwill." Instead he said the new tactics must be those which are forceful enough, "to compel unwilling authorities to yield to the mandates of justice." But here at the end, at the beginning, at the end, in his last major published document, King was not talking about Blacks alone: the Movement had grown; there was no way to "overcome" without taking on much more than we had ever taken on before. Thus he said,

The dispossessed of this nation--the poor, both white and Negro--live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty.⁵⁰

Martin King was talking about a non-violent revolution in America, to transform the entire society on behalf of its poorest people, for the sake of us all. Martin King was moving towards an experiment with truth and power, and he was calling for 3,000 persons to join him for three months of intensive training to begin that revolution at the seat of America's political

power, Washington, D.C. Martin King was shaping a new role for himself, leader of a non-violent revolutionary army/movement, one which he also saw connecting with the oppressed peoples of other nations.

For some time he had been talking about the need for "a revolution of values" within America which would deal with the needs of our own exploited and dehumanized peoples and place us at the side of all men and women struggling for justice and liberation throughout the world. Now, at the end, at the beginning, the words were clearer, sharper, harsher, no longer the vague "revolution of values." Martin King, who had begun twelve years before as the spokesman for a people who wanted to be treated with dignity on a segregated city bus, was now calling for non-violent revolution against all the "structures" of injustice in America. He had declared non-violent war against all the political, economic and social structures which denied dignity, hope and the opportunities for the fullest self-development to all the black, white, red and brown brothers and sisters of those early pilgrims towards freedom in Montgomery. Although the seed for such a development was present in every fundamental black challenge to the racist powers of the society, surely no one in Montgomery--including Martin Luther King, Jr.--ever imagined that a dozen years later the history they and others had made, the future which their opponents had fought to deny, would now lead King to call for non-violent revolution in America.⁵¹

Harding/53

In 1967, no one, including King, really knew what such a revolution would mean, how it would really be organized and mounted, what its concrete, programmatic goals might be; but he was determined to move forward. At Riverside Church, precisely one year before his assassination, Martin had proclaimed the fullness of time, declaring,

Now let us begin. Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter--but beautiful--struggle for a new world....The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.³²

For him, the non-violent army of revolution was his own choice, his own contribution to the world-wide struggle of the oppressed. Here, again, almost no one on his staff was ready for this, ready to move directly against the ruthless, brutal power of white America's most deeply vested military, political, economic and racial self-interests. Unclear, often afraid, everyone, including Martin, tended to drag their feet through the winter of 1967-68, the winter of preparation. All the while, they were taking harsh criticisms on every hand, palpably sensing the dangers of this new, more radical direction mounting all around them, dangers from within and without.

Perhaps Martin King had seen and felt more than he was able to accomplish. Perhaps he could not ever be ready for this new role. Perhaps in the violent climate of America, it was impossible to be ready for such a campaign of revolutionary, non-violent civil disobedience without an organization that was fully prepared for all the dangers, all the opportunities and all the long, hard, preparatory work. SCLC was not that organization. Never-

theless, ready or not, King appeared to be trying to get ready--
facing toward Washington, D.C.⁵³

But first there were garbage collectors to help in Memphis, and there were powerful forces at every level of American society who were determined that Martin Luther King would never be ready for the kind of revolution he had now announced. As a result, Martin never made it to Washington, never found out if he was ready or not.

VIII

When the word of his death was flashed to the black communities of America, they sent up their requiem screams of anguish and rage. When they heard that the King was dead they lighted great fires everywhere, especially in Washington. Were these simply continuations of the long, hot summers, the burning of the dream? Were they no more than angry, flaming protestations? Were they funeral pyres for the King, for the hope, for the dream? Or were they, possibly, just possibly, torches, torches of continuing hope, searching for a way to the future, a way to that future that Martin King did not have a chance to make?⁵⁴

If they were flaming searchlights, then after the fires, after the screams, the search seemed to be dramatically intensified. All the tendencies towards inner and outer rebellion, towards black questioning of America's very nature, towards the search for black identity, all the outrage and the passion were poured into a thousand projects, conferences, caucuses,

organizations, in countless strident demands upon existing institutions. (And all the attempts at official subversion were also intensified, of course.) Black students, Black welfare mothers, Black preachers, Black lawyers, Black policemen, Black congressmen, Black psychologists, Black priests and nuns, Black elected officials--all these and many more were driven toward each other, at least temporarily, seeking to touch, to hold and to organize and make demands as never before. For a while, a powerful thrust of solidarity seemed to pull together many who had been fragmented, seemed to energize others who had been apathetic.⁵⁵

At the same time, over the years immediately following King's death, many other diverse persons and groups had taken up the torches, searching for their own new way. The revived force of the Black movement helped stimulate new groupings and revitalize older ones in the women's movement, among Native Americans, Chicanos, Latinos and white ethnics. The various splintered Marxist movements in America gained new courage and new converts. The homosexuals formed a "liberation" movement. The prisoners across the country (mostly black, of course) fought for rights long denied them, fought and died, with Attica, 1971, as the symbol of all these struggles for new levels of freedom, justice and dignity behind prison bars. Meanwhile, the anti-war movement grew in force and breadth; draft-resistance became almost respectable; then after terrible final crimes of destruction, American forces were finally pushed and

pulled out of Vietnam, ending at an embassy wall, with one last mad, American-like scramble of each man and woman for themselves, seeking to escape the judgment of history. Later, across the globe in South Africa, the children of Soweto, inspired by the children of Malcolm and Martin, raised their fists in defiance and hope, were beaten and shot down, but will rise again, with the judgment of history.^{5 6}

Martin King was part of it all. He had helped to create this history, in his life and in his death. Indeed, it is likely fair to say that this man who grew from a spokesperson for his people's search for simple dignity in a medium-sized southern city to become a giant symbol of the search for justice across the globe--this man, with all of his weaknesses, all of his flaws, all of his blindspots and all of his creative, courageous greatness, made all the history he could make. Perhaps of even more importance to us here and now, we are able to see that he helped force open the way to the possibility of a new vision, a second coming of America, an America in which justice, compassion and humanity prevail.

Now, largely as a result of the movement King represented, as a result of the significant developments since his death, the old America has been cracked, wedged open, cannot be the same again. Now, the forces which were absent from the first official beginning of America, in the days following July 4, 1776--the blacks, the women, the Native Americans, the Chicanos, the students, and many more--all who were then pressed aside are now present, are all more aware of themselves, of ourselves, than

ever before. King helped create the possibility that all of us might break beyond our own individual and group interests and catch a vision of a new America, create a vision of a new common good in a new future which will serve us all. He saw that our needs were economic and spiritual, political and moral, social and personal, and as the end, the beginning approached, he was groping his way towards a new integration--one which had very little to do with the legalities of Brown v. The Board of Education.

But in the midst of this struggle, this groping, this searching, King learned some things, and the message he left was the message he learned, the message he had been given by the earlier generations of our freedom-striving people: Freedom is a constant struggle. The message he left was that a new America cannot be created without an even more difficult, radical and dangerous struggle than we have known up to now. The message he left is that black people can no longer make any separate peace with America, that our needs are the needs of other millions of Americans, that the entire society must be challenged with the force of revolutionary change in all of its political, economic, social and psychic structures.

The message he left for those who would create a new future was that we cannot find the jobs we need, we cannot find the education we need, we cannot find the health care we need, we cannot find the physical and psychic security and development we need, we cannot find the creative male-female relationships we need, we cannot build the mutually nurturing relationship to our environment that we need, we cannot create the non-

exploitative relationship to the raw-producers of the world we need, we cannot develop the fraternity with the freedom-lovers everywhere we need--we cannot find/create these things in an America as it is presently structured, in an America that makes financial profits and personal prestige "the bottom line."

Thus, like King, we must be driven, we must press forward towards revolutionary transformation of ourselves and of our nation, for the good of all its people. The bottom line (if ever there is such a thing) must become compassion and the attention to human needs, which has no bottom, no end. The message he left, then, was that for all who would create a future which is at once worthy of our past struggles and capable of moving us far beyond those struggles we must be prepared to move forward as never before. And this time, I am sure he would urge us to know that we cannot wait for a messiah, not even a black one. No, only many groupings of serious, disciplined, organized and self-confident men, women and children can bring about the transformation that we now need.

At Riverside Church he called us: "Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter--but beautiful--struggle for a new world." Closely examined, we realize that King's Riverside statement is no different than the last testament of Frantz Fanon, especially if we substitute King's "America" for Fanon's "Europe":

Humanity is waiting for something other from us than... imitation...if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which {America} has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries...For {America},

for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts and try to set afoot a new (being).⁵⁷

Yes, that is essentially the message King left as he made all the history he could, as he opened the future for us to make, to re-make. Serve the people. Serve humanity. Let the oppressed go free. Let America be born again. A wild and visionary set of ideas, of course, but our struggle for freedom, like all struggles for freedom, has been wild and visionary from the very beginning. (Remember, once it was wild and visionary to believe that such words as these would ever be spoken at the University of Mississippi and published by its press!)

So I am not afraid to be wild and visionary, with Martin, brother, comrade and friend. And I dare, with him to believe, to hope, to risk the charge of madness and super-subjectivity. Indeed, I dare to believe that somewhere, perhaps everywhere, Martin and Chairman Mao, Martin and Malcolm, Martin and Fanon, Martin and Fannie Lou, Martin and Medgar, Martin and A.J. Muste, Martin and Tom Merton, Martin and Emma Goldman, Martin and Clarence Jordan, Martin and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Martin and Slater King, Martin and Ralph Featherstone, Martin and Ruby Doris Smith, Martin and Bertha Gober, Martin and all those folks and many more; indeed Martin and Jesus of Nazareth--all of them, I believe all of them, somewhere, perhaps everywhere, are having a grand time discovering, re-discovering themselves, each other, moving ever more deeply into that ultimate, overwhelming light of freedom out of which we all came. And I dare to believe

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that they are hoping for us, hoping that we will find again, within ourselves, that we will dredge out from all its dark and hidden places, that infinite capacity to hope and struggle which is stored up like a great light within us all.

I dare to believe that they are hoping that we will dare to believe that we can do the impossible, that we will, that we can make America a new society for all of its people. I dare to believe that they are hoping for us, believing that we can, that we shall continue overcoming--overcoming today, overcoming tomorrow, overcoming the fears, overcoming the complacency, overcoming the desire for nothing more than security and safety. I dare to believe that Martin is hoping, knowing that the power to continue overcoming is within us as it was within him, within all of them, wherever they are. And I dare to believe that Bertha is still singing her song, somewhere, everywhere, still singing our song, our special Mississippi song, our American song, our world-wide song, for us, for them, for everyone:

We've been 'buked and we've been scorned,
We've been talked about, sure as you're born.
But we'll never turn back, no,
we'll never turn back,
Until we've all been freed and
we have equality.

~~Vincent Harding
Ella Baker's House
Littleton, North Carolina~~

~~Fall, 1978~~

FOOTNOTES: Harding/Martin Luther King, Jr.

1. This work is dedicated to that courageous company of men, women and children who, with Martin King, lost and found their lives in the struggle for justice and new humanity in the United States in the 1960s. They have left a legacy and a hope for us all.

2. After having been expelled from Albany State College in 1961 for her early participation in the Albany (Georgia) Movement, Bertha Gober joined the staff of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and was a member of the original SNCC Freedom Singers. A small, frail, quiet young woman, with great courage and a magnificent voice, Bertha suffered many harsh wounds of the spirit, partly as a result of her experiences in the jails of southwest Georgia, and partly as a result of the often unbearable internal tensions of the struggle, but she continued to endure and prevail. Her creation, "We'll Never Turn Back" (which cannot possibly be appreciated apart from being heard in the context of struggle), became the theme song of the Mississippi Summer volunteers. This version of the text appears in James W. Loewen and Charles Sallis (eds.), Mississippi: Conflict and Change (New York, 1974), 262.

3. Loewen and Sallis, Mississippi, 263-265. Appropos of the question of overcoming, perhaps it would be important to note here that while this work by a team of historians, sociologists and others is generally recognized to be the best interpretation of the history of the state, in the modern spirit, it has not been adopted as a text, nor has any public voice been raised on its behalf from scholars at the state's most prestigious university.

4. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York, 1963), 167. The eventual discovery of Fanon by many of the young people of the Movement marked a critical turning point in their lives.

5. See Eric Lincoln, "The New Black Estate" in this volume, pp 3-30.

6. The references are to Malcolm X; Fannie Lou Hamer, Mississippi Civil Rights activist from 1962 until her death in 1977; Clarence Jordan, founder of Koinonia Farm, Americus, Georgia; Thomas Merton, Trappist Monk and world-reknown advocate of peace and human rights; Ruby Doris Smith-Robinson, one of the founding members of SNCC and a bedrock of its Atlanta office staff. Like King and Hamer, all of these persons are now dead.

7. Among the persons mentioned in the above paragraph, Ms. Hamer has already been identified; Lee, Evers, Schwerner, Chaney and DeMeyer were among the best known of the martyrs to freedom's struggle in Mississippi; others like Henry, Turnbow, Meredith, Blackwell, Moore, Johnson, King, Brooks and Robinson, continue to live and work for change in the state; Moses was the courageous, indomitable and truly humble leader of the SNCC forces who eventually included among their members persons like Peacock, Block, Watkins, Travis and Guyot--all native Mississippians, as well as those who came from elsewhere to join the struggle, like Diane Nash Bevel, Zellner, Forman, Cobb and Mahoney. Many of that band of heroes who still live bear deep physical and psychic scars as marks of their participation in the battles to transform this state and this nation.

7. Among the persons mentioned in the above paragraph, Ms. Hamer has already been identified; Lee, Evers, Schwerner, Chaney and Dahmer were among the best known of the martyrs to freedom's struggle in Mississippi; others like Henry, Turnbow, Meredith, Blackwell, Moore, Johnson, King, Brooks and Robinson, continue to live and work for change in the state; Moses was the courageous, indomitable and truly humble leader of the SNCC forces who eventually included among their members persons like Peacock, Block, Watkins, Travis and Guyot--all native Mississippians, as well as those who came from elsewhere to join the struggle, like Diane Nash Bevel, Zellner, Forman, Cobb and Mahoney. Many of that band of heroes who still live bear deep physical and psychic scars as marks of their participation in the battles to transform this state and this nation.

8. For accounts of the murders of George Lee, Courts and Herbert Lee, see Loewen and Sallis, 257-258. The special significance of Herbert Lee's life and death is noted in Bertha Gober's song, cited in the epigraph to this article, and is especially mentioned by Bob Moses in his oral account on The Story of Greenwood, Folkways Record, ED 5593. James Forman, one of the most powerful shapers of SNCC's ideological direction, offers more details on Herbert Lee's case in his semi-autobiographical, all-important study, The Making of Black Revolutionaries (New York, 1972), 231. Indeed, it is impossible to understand the meaning of Mississippi to the Movement or the significance of SNCC to that state's struggle without a careful reading of Forman's work, especially 215-310 and 354-457. Other important first-hand accounts of the Mississippi Freedom Movement of the 1960's may be found in Sally Belfrage, Freedom Summer (New York, 1965), Elizabeth Sutherland (ed.), Letters from Mississippi (New York, 1965), Anne Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi (New York, 1968), Joanne Grant (ed.) Black Protest, 299-301, 303-308, 329-336, 415-416, 472-475, 498-506, and Len Holt, The Summer That Didn't End (New York, 1965).

9. On the Hamer and Ponder experiences, the two women (along with June Johnson of Greenwood, who was also beaten, and who continues to work for justice in her hometown) gave me their accounts in the summer of 1963, not long after the beatings. For a published account see Howard Zinn, SNCC: The New Abolitionists (Boston, 1964), 94-95. This was the first, and is still one of the best works on the student movement, especially its earlier phases.

10. Cleveland Jordan's statement comes from The Story of Greenwood. The Rev. White's experience was related to me in an interview, October 11, 1978. The prayer from Greenwood jail is reported by James Forman, "Some Random Notes from the Leflore County Jail," Joanne Grant, Black Protest, 333-334.

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11. The reference to Tupelo is, of course, a recognition of the powerful black organization of North Mississippi, the United League, its campaign of boycotts and demonstrations in the cause of racial and economic justice, and the well-publicized response from the Ku Klux Klan, all in the course of 1977-78. For examples of newspaper reports see Jackson (Mississippi) Clarion-Ledger and Daily News, June 11, 1978; Arkansas Gazette, August 30, 1978; and Jackson (Mississippi) Advocate, August 17-23 and September 7-13, 1978. I am indebted to Colia Lafayette, one of the veterans of the Movement, and to Sandra Stell Rush for calling my attention to these accounts.

12. In his exemplary work, Black Jacobins (New York, 1963), James' specific reference was to another magnificent leader of a rather different black revolution, Toussaint L'Ouverture of Haiti. There, James' words were, "Great men make history, but only such history as it is possible for them to make."

13. The story of King's pre-Montgomery experiences has been told in many places and in many ways. His own first, brief autobiographical statement appears in Stride Toward Freedom (New York, 1958), 1-9. There are four standard biographical works: Lawrence D. Reddick, Crusader Without Violence (New York, 1959); Lerone Bennett, What Manner of Man: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Chicago, 1964); William L. Miller, Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York, 1968); and David L. Lewis, King: A Critical Biography (New York, 1970). Largely as a result of his extensive interviews in Montgomery, Arthur Smith is especially helpful in pointing out the decisive role of the black community, particularly its women, in the development of the structure and momentum of the Boycott. See his Rhetoric of Black Revolution (Boston, 1969), 87 ff. The most complete bibliographical work on King is William H. Fisher, Free At Last: A Bibliography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Metuchen, NJ, 1977). A much briefer bibliographical list appears in The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 4 (Spring, 1977), 67-79.

14. King, Stride Toward Freedom, 10-38; Lewis, King, 46-61; Miller, 30-41; Reddick, 112-154. It is important to compare these to E.D. Nixon's contemporary account from another angle of vision, "How It All Got Started," Liberation, December 1956, and to Ms. Parks' modest oral reflections four months after her arrest: "Montgomery Bus Boycott," Joanne Grant, Black Protest, 276-280.

15. I am paraphrasing the original list of goals reproduced in Preston Valien, "The Montgomery Bus Protest As A Social Movement," Jitsuichi Matsuoka and Preston Valien (eds.), Race Relations: Problems and Theory (Chapel Hill, 1961), 116. Valien's source for the list was King's "Our Struggle," Liberation (April, 1956), 3-6.

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16. In tracing his "Pilgrimage to Non-Violence" in Stride Toward Freedom, 72-88, King went into considerable detail about his earlier readings in the work of Thoreau, Hegel, Marx and particularly Ghandi, and how they joined his Christian vision of life. However, he was surprisingly brief in his account of the help he received from Glen Smiley of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and said nothing at all--in the entire book--about the significant contribution of Bayard Rustin, who was at the time probably one of the two leading Black theoreticians and practitioners of non-violence and pacifism in the cause of radical social change. Both Smiley and Rustin spent considerable time with King during the early months of the Boycott and probably contributed more to the practical working-out of his philosophy and strategy of non-violence than King was prepared to admit. (Rustin had already begun to be Red-baited about his earlier political associations, and King, always sensitive to such matters, might not have been prepared to have the brilliant black Quaker appear to play an important role in the development of the movement.) William Miller, who worked closely with Smiley and Rustin, and who knew King, gives a fuller account of the role of the two men, saying, indeed, that Rustin "soon became King's secretary." Martin Luther King, Jr., 46-47. Some of Rustin's own contemporary understanding of the relationship may be found in his "Montgomery Diary," Liberation, (April, 1956).

17. A transcript of a tape recording of the first Bus Boycott mass meeting, December 5, 1955, quoted in A. Smith, Rhetoric of Black Revolution, 102-105.

18. Benjamin Mays was president of Morehouse when King was a student there, and set his powerful imprint on thousands of black young men. See his autobiographical Born to Rebel (New York, 1971). Mordecai Johnson was the first black president of Howard University. An eloquent speaker, socially-concerned Baptist preacher and world traveler, he provided King's first real introduction to the life and work of Ghandi. Howard Thurman, father, advisor and teacher of thousands of black and white religious seekers was Dean of the Chapel at Boston University while King was there. One of the nation's great preachers, he was a friend and counselor to King. Nor is it accidental that Thurman's best-known among many books is Jesus and the Disinherited (Nashville, 1970). Vernon Johns, the powerful preacher who preceded King at Dexter Avenue left a legacy of constant--usually unsuccessful--efforts to involve his middle-class congregation in the risky issues of freedom and justice for blacks in Montgomery. See Smith, Rhetoric, 98-99.

19. The bombing of King's house and his handling of the black community's enraged desire for retaliation are reported in Reddick, Crusader, 134-136; Miller, Martin Luther King, Jr., 45-46; D. Lewis, King, 69-70. The railroad station incident appears in Glen Smiley, "A Man Remembered," Fellowship 44 (April/May, 1978), 6.

20. Among the many available accounts of the school desegregation and other of the earlier post-1954 struggles, three may offer helpful, complementary perspectives: Lerone Bennett, Confrontation: Black and White (Chicago, 1965) provides a powerful engaged black overview; Anthony Lewis (ed.), Portrait of a Decade (New York, 1964) is a selection of New York Times' accounts from many places, while Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock (New York, 1962) gives a thoughtful, poignant, first-hand account of one situation by one of the too-soon forgotten heroes of the freedom movement. The role of Ella Baker as the elemental force behind the early developments of SCLC's structure has been too long overlooked and underplayed. See brief accounts of her role in David Lewis, King, 108, 113 and Miller, Martin Luther King, Jr., 84. She received much more adequate recognition in Zinn's SNCC and Forman's Making of Black Revolutionaries. Fortunately, work is now progressing which should bring forth a book and a documentary film on the life of this woman who has influenced so many of the participants in the black freedom struggle since the 1930's.

21. The rise of the Muslims and the role of Malcolm X are most ably discussed in C. Eric Lincoln, The Black Muslims in America (Boston, 1962) and (Alex Haley), The Autobiography of Malcolm X (New York, 1964). Robert Williams tells his story (at least its pre-1960 stages) in Negroes With Guns (New York, 1962). James Forman became deeply involved in the situation with Williams and reports from his perspective in The Making of Black Revolutionaries, 158-211.

22. New York Times, December 1, 1959, 23.

23. One of the best and earliest accounts of the first stages of the student movement is Dan Wakefield, Revolt in the South (New York, 1960). Two important documents from the Raleigh Conference are in August Meier, Elliott Rudwick and Francis L. Broderick (eds.), Black Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century (Indianapolis, 1971), 307-315. Howard Zinn's SNCC: The New Abolitionists is an invaluable report from a social historian who was one of the earliest adult advisors to the group. See also Forman, The Making of Black Revolutionaries, 215-223. Jack Newfield, A Prophetic Minority (New York, 1966) states the crucial, direct connection between the rise of SNCC in the South and the development of the New Left white student movement in the north shortly thereafter. It is important to note, too, that all of the above narrative accounts mention the fact that King and other SCLC leaders had expected to incorporate the student movement as the youth arm of the older organization and they seemed never to have forgiven Ms. Baker for encouraging the young people to stand firm in their quest for independence.

24. Among the best accounts of the Freedom Rides are James Peck, Freedom Ride (New York, 1962), James Farmer, Freedom When? (New York, 1965) and August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968 (New York, 1973).

25. Much of the following account of the Albany Movement is based on my own personal files, which I shall designate as Harding, Albany Files. The best initial published report on the early Albany Movement situation was Howard Zinn, Albany, A Special Report of the Southern Regional Council, Atlanta, Georgia, January, 1962. See also Zinn's SNCC, 123-136. The Albany section of James Forman's Making of Black Revolutionaries, 250-262 is a crucial part of the story. The Albany story is also treated in some detail by William Miller, Martin Luther King, Jr., 112-129 as well as David Lewis, King, 150-170, in his usual flippant style. King gave Albany very little sustained attention in his Why We Can't Wait (New York, 1964), 34-35. Unless otherwise cited, the Harding Files and the Zinn and Forman works form the basis for the following treatment of Albany.

26. The critique of King and SCLC in Albany which appears in Forman's Black Revolutionaries, 253-260 is critical to an understanding of the continuing and deepening rift between SNCC and SCLC on many ideological and strategic grounds, and between Forman and King (perhaps Forman and other SNCC comrades had even more difficulty with the flamboyant Wyatt T. Walker) on personal grounds.

27. Slater King, Vice-President and true political-spiritual leader of the Albany Movement, later wrote some of his own reflections on the continuing experience in "Our Main Battle in Albany," Freedomways, Summer, 1965. King, a man of intense feelings, towering integrity and deep humanity, was a member of a southwest Georgia family which was apparently unrelated to Martin's, but which was as important to the struggle in that part of the state as was the other King to the nation-wide Movement. Slater King died in an automobile accident in 1969. His wife, Marian King-Smith, who was also an activist in the Albany movement, continues to work for justice there, now as a lawyer. Rosemarie Harding and I have continued to visit Albany and our friends there since those early days. My comments on the continuing significance of the Movement are based on these observations and conversations.

28. As the best known of King's southern Movement campaigns, the Birmingham action in the spring of 1963 has elicited an extensive literature, and there will be no attempt here to do more than mention a few crucial works. King's own statement of the campaign is found in his Why We Can't Wait, a book devoted almost exclusively to that experience. Expectedly, we find an important, though brief, counterpoint to King's views in James Forman's Making of Black Revolutionaries, 311-316. In addition,

there are several significant, but too often neglected accounts in Robert Brisbane, Black Activism (Valley Forge, PA, 1974), 62-68; Debbie Louis, And We Are Not Saved (New York, 1970), 130-150; Smith, Rhetoric of Black Revolution, which provided the results of extensive interviews with Key SCLC organizers. The eloquent "Birmingham Manifesto" which signalled the start of the demonstrations appears in Staughton Lynd (ed.), Nonviolence in America (Indianapolis, 1966). I also rely heavily on my own Birmingham files, compiled during my participation in the activities of that spring and since then: Harding; Birmingham Files.

29. The information in this paragraph, including the "Commandments For the Volunteers," is based on Harding, Birmingham Files.

30. Many observers noted the powerful, militant spirit of the young people. See, for example Forman, Making of Black Revolutionaries, 313-314; A. Smith, Rhetoric, 127 ff. and D. Louis, 130 ff. Even Eugene "Bull" Connor, the notorious Commissioner of Public Safety, was so impressed with the fervor and intensity of the young people who went off to his jails singing their songs that he said, "Boy, if that's religion, I don't want any..." Anthony Lewis, Portrait of a Decade, 182.

31. Published in many forms and languages, King's eloquent "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is most readily accessible and set in its context in Why We Can't Wait, 77-100

32. The night of violent rebellion and King's response to it are reported, among other places, in A. Smith, Rhetoric, 156-160, and Anthony Lewis, Portrait, 183-186.

33. The connection between the powerful outbreaks in Birmingham and those which took place in black communities across the nation is noted in many accounts. See especially Louis Lomax, When the Word Is Given (New York, 1964), 73-75; A. Smith, Rhetoric, 178; D. Louis, And We Are Not Saved, 130-137; and Lerone Bennett, The Negro Mood (Chicago, 1964), 6. Bennett claimed, "The Bastille of Birmingham was a turning point in the Negro resistance movement. Sparks from the flame of Birmingham leaped from ghetto to ghetto, igniting flammable material that had been gathering for years, welding Negroes into a great black mass of livid indignation."

34. The change-about of the Kennedys and King's ambiguous involvement with them were reported in both contemporary and historical accounts. For instance Donald M. Schwartz, "What Lies Ahead in Civil Rights Fight," Chicago Sun Times, February 2, 1964; Zinn, SNCC, 206, and Smith, Rhetoric, 127 ff. Even more important in the long run were the forces which the Kennedys and their administration represented. For when the young people exploded across the city, calls came to the Birmingham businessmen not only from the Kennedys, but from Secretary of the Treasury, Douglas Dillon and Secretary of Defense, Robert

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McNamara. It is likely that such men were pressing for some kind of settlement not simply as temporary government officials, but also in their far longer-term roles as members of the powerful, American-based, multi-national, capitalist community, a community which was clearly disturbed about the possibilities of Birmingham sparking a national black insurrection. See both Smith, Rhetoric, 127 ff and Bayard Rustin, "The Great Lessons of Birmingham" Liberation 8 (June, 1963), 7-9, 31, on this critical long-range connection and concern. It is a connection which must be remembered when we consider the response to King's eventual threat of national, massive, non-violent civil disobedience, below, 49-53.

35. On the unpublicized discussions of the non-violent army, I am partially dependent on my memory and my files, including the Birmingham Files. See also Louis Lomax, The Negro Revolt (New York, 1962), 99. Walker's convention address is quoted in Lerone Bennett, Confrontation, 244.

36. Among the helpful discussions of the making and re-making of the March are Forman, Making of Black Revolutionaries, 331-337, and almost inadvertently David Lewis, King, 210-232. Smith, Rhetoric, 186-189, includes some of the story of the restraining of the original idea, and quotes fittingly from a New York Times story on the great sig of relief which arose from many quarters when the March was clearly domesticated. On August 29, 1963 Russell Baker's story noted, "Instead of the emotional hordes of angry militants that many had feared, what Washington saw was a vast army of quiet, middle-class Americans who had come in the spirit of the church outing." We may assume that Baker later discovered that in the presence of anger, militance, and deep emotions of hope and distress, church outings do not last very long.

37. On the situation of many voices and forces, James Baldwin, the novelist and essayist, had succinctly stated the issue that spring: "No man can claim to speak for the Negro people today. There is no one with whom the power structure can negotiate a deal that will bind the Negro people. There is, therefore, no possibility of a bargain." New York Times June 3, 1963.

38. Playboy Interview: Dr. Martin Luther King." Playboy, (January, 1965), 65-68, 70-74, 76-78.

39. His increasing, self-conscious sense of responsibility to speak out on Vietnam and other issues of imperialistic exploitation and domination may be seen in "An Address by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. At the Synagogue Council of America," December 5, 1965--precisely a decade after his first Montgomery mass meeting address. Harding, King Files. King's father,

a staunch Republican, found his son's increasingly radical anti-war position hard to take. Of course, the responses of the FBI and other federal agencies have become more fully known since King's death. David Lewis had begun to deal with Hoover's responses in King, 256-258. However, even King's earliest, more outspoken criticisms of the American involvement came later and were much more restrained than the position already taken by such Movement activists as Bob Moses of SNCC and Jim Bevel of SCLC. Moses was a leader of the first major anti-war demonstration in August, 1965 in Washington, D.C. James P. O'Brien, "The New Left's Early Years," Radical America 2 (May-June, 1968), 7.

40. The fact that the Selma March was anti-climactic in a larger, historical sense does not in anyway diminish the long, hard, courageous voter-registration organizing work which had gone on there since 1963, beginning with the digging-in of Bernard and Colia Lafayette of SNCC. The Selma March itself is covered in Miller, Martin Luther King, 204-221 and David Lewis, King, 264-293, with Lewis proving as usual somewhat more critical of King's role. Neither biographer brought the perspective, the personal involvement or the bitterness to the history of that experience that is present in Forman, Making of Black Revolutionaries, 316-326, 345-354, 440-442. His view is essential to any full assessment. The "Wallace" song may be found in one of its textual variations in Guy and Candie Carawan (eds.), Freedom is a Constant Struggle (New York, 1968), 168-169.

41. The overall ferment of the Black struggle in this post-Selma period is handled with skill and analytical sophistication by Robert Allen, Black Awakening in Capitalist America (New York, 1970). James Boggs' Racism and Class Struggle in America (New York, 1970) is an important collection of essays on the significance of the period's developments. Also helpful as an overview is Robert Brisbane, Black Activism. The important role of Adam Clayton Powell is likely best grasped in his autobiographical Adam by Adam (New York, 1971). Julius Lester "The Angry Children of Malcolm X," Sing Out November, 1966 (more accessible in Meier, et al, Black Protest Thought, 469-484) makes clear the power of Malcolm's death to the younger black community. See also my "The Religion of Black Power," Donald Cutler (ed.) The Religious Situation 1968 (Boston, 1968).

42. The actual experience of the Meredith March may be viewed from the perspective of some of the participants via Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (New York, 1967), King Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community (New York, 1967), 23-66; and Floyd McKissick, 3/5 of a Man (New York, 1969). One of the best contemporary, journalistic accounts is Paul Good, "The Meredith March," New South 21 (Summer, 1966), 2-16.

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It is also treated in David Lewis, King, 321-331, and Miller, Martin Luther King, Jr., 241-249. Of course, the concept of Black Power was at least as old as nineteenth century black nationalists like Martin Delany, and the term itself had been used by Richard Wright as a title for his book on the rise of blacks to power in Africa: Black Power (New York, 1954). More recently, Paul Robeson had spoken of the need for massive "Negro Power" in his Here I Stand (New York, 1957). In the north at least as early as 1965, a group of black radical activists had formed an "Organization for Black Power," directed by Jesse Gray of Harlem. "Jesse Gray" Vertical Files, Schomburg Collection, New York Public Library. It is likely, however, that Adam Clayton Powell's use of the idea and proximate use of the term was one of the most important immediate stimuli for the SNCC forces who had been developing their own ideas on the theme for more than two years earlier.

43. King's SCLC convention statement is in his "President's Annual Report...Jackson Mississippi, August 10, 1966," Harding, King Files.

44. Most of the work cited in the first part of Note 41 would be helpful here.

45. Much of this section is based on my own extended conversations with King and my preparation of memos on American involvement in Vietnam for his use, as well as conversations on the relevance on non-violence for the new period in the black struggle. See also his developing ideas on dealing with poverty in Where Do We Go From Here, 135-166. Another important perspective on King's development during this period is provided in Thomas Edward Offenburger, Transcript of a Recorded Interview, July 2, 1968, Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection (formerly Civil Rights Documentation Project), Moorland-Spigarn Research Center, Howard University.

46. King, "Beyond Vietnam" in Clyde Taylor (ed.) Vietnam and Black America (New York, 1973), 79-98. Taylor's anthology places King's crucial statement in its proper context: the larger Black opposition to America's fight against Vietnam.

47. On the criticism of King's Vietnam stand within and outside of the shattered Civil Rights establishment, see Miller Martin Luther King, Jr., 255-256; David Lewis, King, 357-367.

48. King, The Trumpet of Conscience (New York, 1968), 59-60.

49. The statement, which appeared posthumously, was the most unequivocally positive public assessment King had ever made of the rebellions: "A Testament of Hope," Playboy, (January, 1969), 175.

50. King, Trumpet of Conscience, 59-60. The italics are mine.

51. In the spring of 1967, King had used the term "revolution of values" several times in his conversations with New York Times reporter, David Halberstam and in his Beyond Vietnam speech. See Halberstam's "The Second Coming of Martin Luther King," Harpers, (August, 1967), 39-51.

52. King, "Beyond Vietnam," 97.

53. The difficulties King faced in bringing himself and his staff to work out a real plan for the campaign as well as to find a way to handle the constantly mounting criticism and self-doubt, are suggested in David Lewis, King, 368-372; 259-268. The constant temptation, to which he often seemed understandably prepared to succumb, was to blunt the radical edges of his plans, to make the campaign another, longer, civil rights-type march rather than a revolutionary action of confrontation. I was involved in many of the conversations which went on that winter, and I am not convinced that David Lewis is correct in his statement that Lyndon Johnson's decision to refrain from seeking a second full term caused King to decide--just before Memphis--that he would at least postpone the Washington campaign. See Lewis, King, 384-385. Of course, King knew that neither he nor SCLC was ready.

54. The immediate, volatile black responses to the death of King--and the federal government's massive military responses--are documented in Jerome Skolnik, The Politics of Protest (New York, 1969), especially 172-173. See also Debbie Louis, And We Are Not Saved, 343.

55. Many of the references noted above in Note 41 are useful here, especially Robert Allen, Black Awakening. See also Institute of the Black World, Black Analysis for the Seventies, 1971-1972, Atlanta, 1973. Perhaps the symbolic highpoint of this period of black solidarity--as well as the signal of its temporary nature and its structurally weak foundations--was the National Black Political Convention at Gary, Indiana in March, 1972. The "Gary Manifesto" is included in Black Analysis.

56. On the variegated social ferment of the late 1960's and early 1970's and its relationship to the black movement, see my "The Black Wedge in America: Struggle, Crisis and Hope, 1955-1975." The Black Scholar 7 (December, 1975), 28-30, 35-46; also Howard Zinn, Post-War America: 1945-1971 (Indianapolis, 1973). Two important additions to any thought about the connections between past and future struggles for revolutionary change in America and elsewhere are James and Grace Lee Boggs, Revolution and Evolution in America (New York, 1974) and Conversations in Maine: Exploring Our Nation's Future (Boston, 1978). The latter book was developed by the Boggs' in collaboration with Freddy and Lyman Paine. King's Vietnam position, especially after the April, 1967 Riverside Church statement, apparently had a powerful influence on the National Liberation Front/North Vietnamese forces there. For instance, one of their key contact persons in this country assured me that they were so encouraged by King's sense of compassion and understanding of their cause that they made special efforts to exhibit their own sense of ultimate solidarity with the black American soldiers who they captured.)

57. King, "Beyond Vietnam," 97; Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 255.