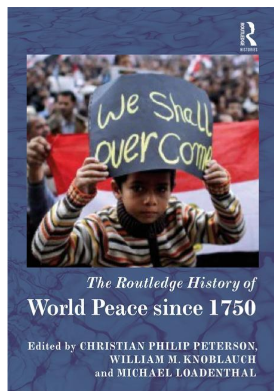
This article was downloaded by: *10.2.97.136*
On: 27 Sep 2023
Access details: *subscription number*
Publisher: *CRC Press*
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge History of World Peace Since 1750

Christian Philip Peterson, William M. Knoblauch, Michael Loadenthal

One Man's Peace

Publication details
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315157344-8
Kevin E. Grimm
Published online on: 04 Sep 2018

How to cite :- Kevin E. Grimm. 04 Sep 2018, *One Man's Peace from:* The Routledge History of World Peace Since 1750 CRC Press
Accessed on: 27 Sep 2023
https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315157344-8

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

7

ONE MAN'S PEACE

Influences on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s non-violent philosophy

Kevin E. Grimm

Martin Luther King, Jr. led the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the mid-1950s to desegregate city buses, helmed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), was present for Ghana's independence in March 1957, traveled to India in 1959, and was arrested multiple times during sit-ins and marches in the early 1960s. Perhaps most famously, King delivered his "I Have a Dream Speech" in 1963, led the marches in Birmingham (1963) and Selma (1965) that drew national attention to the cause of black civil rights, and helped produce the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act before his assassination in April 1968. Yet what compelled King to do these things? Why did he adopt the specific non-violent strategies he advocated? King's brave and influential actions have received much scholarly attention, so much so that we seldom see him as a deep thinker, one who incorporated numerous philosophies into both his worldview and his actions. The acts he pursued for the sake of equality were non-violent, of course, and King's non-violence is one of the key reasons most Americans include him in the canon of important historical figures. But why did he choose non-violence? What did King think he was pursuing, ultimately, with his strategies? Which thinkers and ideas most fed into his goals and actions?

This chapter explores the numerous political, religious, intellectual, and philosophical concepts that comprised King's non-violent approach to civic action. In examining the influences on King's non-violent philosophy, this chapter will show how Christian beliefs and Gandhian conceptions of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* played the most prominent roles in shaping King's view of non-violence and his vision of a future of broadly defined human equality. Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel's dialectical thinking, American Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience, and the Christian-derived theory of personalism also played significant roles.

The centrality of non-violence to King's thoughts and actions reflected his concern with creating a better future for all people. African Americans were not to respond with force, property destruction, or any other action that would only poison relations between races. Embracing both Christian and Gandhian concepts, King believed in the love of others and extending that love even to one's enemies. While he challenged the racial and social structures of mid-twentieth century American society, he never ignored the potential effects of social changes on future race relations. In other words, King fought not solely for black freedom,

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

but for black–white cooperation; he sought not only justice, but racial peace. By emphasizing, and often interrelating, beliefs in racial justice, social harmony, and a beneficent future for all people, he pursued his conception of a Beloved Community in ways that would, he hoped, usher in an era of interpersonal and social peace, one that valued the dignity of all persons.

King's life

Martin Luther King, Jr. was originally born with the first name Michael in 1929; he obtained his famous moniker only after his father, who led Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, returned from a voyage abroad five years later.[1] Growing up the son of a preacher, perhaps it was no surprise that King, Jr. would follow a similar path, especially in an American South defined by Jim Crow laws and sanctioned segregation, a place where opportunities for blacks were largely limited to the church, the legal profession, and running small businesses. King's formal education included an undergraduate degree at Morehouse College, a divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from Boston University. According to Taylor Branch, King originally envisioned a career as a university professor, but in the spring of 1954 he accepted a position at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, just one year after marrying Coretta Scott in June 1953.[2] He was thus still relatively new to the city and state where he would become famous when, just a year and a half later, Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her bus seat, sparking the mass protest phase of the civil rights movement.[3] Often misremembered as a feeble old woman, Parks was actually a trained and able National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) activist and was ready to take a stand for civil rights that fateful day on a bus in Montgomery.

King's soaring rhetorical abilities launched him to the front of the fight for bus desegregation in Montgomery from late 1955 into 1956. After achieving victory there, he helped create the SCLC, which would become a key organization in the campaign for racial equality. While the years 1957 to 1960 seemed to be a period of consolidation and preparation for future efforts, in that time King also witnessed the rest of the nation coming to terms with the court-ordered school desegregation of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case, which famously overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine established in the 1896 case Plessy v. Ferguson. From the closing of schools in Virginia to avoid integration to Governor Orval Faubus's use of the Arkansas national guard for the same purpose in Little Rock, the South showed itself largely unwilling to move toward a future of racial equality. Beginning then with the student-led sit-in movement in early 1960 and a new campaign in Albany, Georgia the following year, African Americans, often with King at the helm, began to conduct mass, grassroots, non-violent protests for civil rights. The height of the movement, and the years of King's most famous actions, speeches, and leadership acumen, occurred between 1963 and 1965 with the campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, the March on Washington, and the campaign in Selma, Alabama. These events pressured the nation to pass the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, which became law in 1964 and 1965 respectively.

After these victories many African American activists, including King, turned to issues so far left untouched, including the plight of urban poverty and its effects on the black population. From a failed 1966 campaign in Chicago to addressing northern segregation in housing and education—where discrimination was not codified in law as in the South, but was certainly

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

practiced and upheld as a cultural norm—to his increasing criticism of the American war in Vietnam, King seemed to take a radical term and his rhetoric became more stark than in his earlier career. Consider this passage from his final book, published posthumously:

> We may now be in only the initial period of an era of change as far-reaching in its consequences as the American Revolution. The developed industrial nations of the world cannot remain secure islands of prosperity in a seething sea of poverty. The storm is rising against the privileged minority of the earth, from which there is no shelter in isolation and armament. The storm will not abate until a just distribution of the fruits of the earth enables man everywhere to live in dignity and human decency. The American Negro of 1967, like Crispus Attucks, may be the vanguard in the prolonged struggle that may change the shape of the world, as billions deprived shake and transform the earth in their quest for life, freedom, and justice.[4]

His global outlook, his implicit critique of capitalism, and later his description of the Vietnam War as a "demoniacal destructive suction tube" indicated a radicalization of some of his beliefs near the end of his life.[5] In fact, he was yet again working for the cause of combating black poverty by helping out a strike by black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee when James Earl Ray assassinated him on April 4, 1968. King never ceased striving for racial equality in all areas of American society. After the federal government struck down formal legal inequality, he spent his few remaining years attacking informal racial inequalities ingrained in American economic and cultural norms.

International influences

Undeniably, King's approach to non-violent action was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian activist who strove for decolonization and was assassinated in early 1948. King never met Gandhi, but his ideas had a profound effect on the young preacher. As Keith Miller relates, King encountered Gandhi's precepts not only through writings, but also through several African Americans who visited India in the 1930s and 1940s and returned imbued with the concepts of non-violence.[6] These men included key Howard University figures such as Howard Thurman, Mordecai Johnson, Benjamin Mays, William Stuart Nelson, and Harris Wofford, all of whom King heard lecture or corresponded with regarding Gandhian non-violent ideas.[7] Yet King was the one who most fully applied Gandhi's methods to the American civil rights movement. As Miller notes, "In 1959, a decade after Gandhi's death, King retraced the footsteps of Thurman, Johnson, and Mays by travelling to India to visit with Gandhi's followers and learn about nonviolence."[8] It was King who most famously channeled Gandhian conceptions of non-violence within the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

King embraced Gandhi's belief in non-violent protest, one rooted in the concept of *satyagraha*, which meant "truth-force" and implied that one should try to achieve progress through non-violence.[9] It was an idea that often appeared alongside *ahimsa*, a more specific proscription against hurting others.[10] While these concepts seemed to imply a restraint from action, note Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp, "Gandhi seems to have drawn an analogy between *ahimsa* and the Christian conception of *agape* [an intentional, unconditional love of others]" in such a way as to turn the idea of *ahimsa* into an action that implied active love of, and treating well, one's enemies.[11]

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

At Crozer Theological Seminary King first encountered Gandhi at a lecture by Mordecai Johnson. Hanes Walton believes that

> it was in reading the work of Gandhi that he lost his skepticism of the power of love and began to appreciate its usefulness and potency in the area of social reform . . . The Gandhian technique of love and nonviolence gave him a potent instrument for social and collective transformation which blacks could be taught to use in their struggle against oppression and injustice.[12]

Indeed, advocating non-violence and love of others in the face of injustices in the American South became central to the push for civil rights. Historians expose, however, two key differences between some of Gandhi and King's non-violent strategies. First, John Ansbro asserts that King hesitated to call for any occupying of property, even as peaceful as Gandhi wanted such actions to be. Second, King opposed any resignations from positions in governments or organizations as a method of protest. These choices, according to Ansbro, were made because "King's goal was the transformation of the structures of the existing system so that all citizens could experience integration within the system."[13]

After Gandhi, another international influence on King came from Kwame Nkrumah's efforts to guide Ghana peacefully to independence from Great Britain during the 1950s. By 1950 Nkrumah had led his Convention People's Party in strikes and protests; starting in 1951, he became head of the Ghanaian government as the colony moved toward freedom. Although Nkrumah began clamping down on internal dissent in the early 1960s—to such an extent that the military overthrew him in 1966—during the 1950s he became a global symbol of sub-Saharan Africa's emergence onto the world stage. King even attended the independence ceremonies in Accra, Ghana in March 1957. After he returned, he delivered a sermon on the new nation at his home church, Dexter Avenue Baptist in Montgomery, entitled, "The Birth of a New Nation." In it, he declared, "And oh, it was a beautiful experience to see some of the leading persons on the scene of civil rights in America on hand to say, 'Greetings to you,' as this new nation was born."[14] King was most inspired when Nkrumah and his allies spoke during the final hour of British control, waiting for midnight to strike, adorned in their prison outfits as a reminder of how they had suffered for the cause of Ghanaian freedom.[15]

Ghana's struggle led King to consider how the experience of Africans could help African Americans struggling for their rights. Invoking Gandhi alongside Nkrumah, he claimed, "It says to us first, that the oppressor never voluntarily gives freedom to the oppressed. You have to work for it."[16] He also argued that Ghana showed how non-violent means could achieve freedom.[17] In summation, King believed, "Finally, Ghana tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice."[18] Clearly, Nkrumah and Ghana showed King that through non-violent agitation for freedom, in the end, right would win. After Ghana's independence, King increasingly saw connections between the African American struggle and problems around the globe. In *The Trumpet of Conscience* (1967), he described poverty as a problem "international in scope" and wondered, "Can a nonviolent, direct-action movement find application on the international level, to confront economic and political problems?"[19] Citing problems in Latin America, southern Africa, and elsewhere, King asserted,

> In a world facing the revolt of ragged and hungry masses of God's children; in a world torn between the tensions of East and West, white and colored, individualists

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

> and collectivists; in a world whose cultural and spiritual power lags so far behind her technological capabilities that we live each day on the verge of nuclear co-annihilation; in this world, nonviolence is no longer an option for intellectual analysis, it is an imperative for action.[20]

Such language suggests that had King lived, he may have turned his non-violent civil disobedience movement international.

Christianity

While Gandhi's ideas were important to King, as Ira Zepp concludes, "Gandhi's adherence to *Satyagraha*, *Ahimsa*, and his loyalty to Truth reinforced King's own understanding of King's teaching on nonviolence and *agape* [an intentional, unconditional love of others]. The latter was the essential content of his Christian nonviolence."[21] Although Gandhi provided the non-violent method, it is no surprise, given that King earned a divinity degree and was a Baptist minister, that Christianity was foremost in his considerations about African American rights and the black position in American society. Still, in what specific ways did Christian ideas affect King's vision of the world?

King's study of the early twentieth century social gospel proponent Walter Rauschenbusch reveals that he thought beyond formal legal and political rights early in his life. In his posthumous autobiography, King claimed,

> It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch [at Crozer] that any religion that professes concern for the souls of men and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.[22]

The famed Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr also shaped King's worldview early on.[23] Niebuhr believed evil would always exist in the world due to the fallen condition of human nature. Such evil also had to be combated. Essentially, as Taylor Branch notes, "There was no evidence, said Niebuhr, that human beings became less selfish or less predatory as they became better educated. War, cruelty, and injustice survived because people were by nature sinful."[24]

King was attracted to Niebuhr's robust theology because the latter "combined an evangelical liberal's passion for the Sermon on the Mount with a skeptic's insistence on the cussedness of human nature."[25] James Patterson contends that King liked the theologian's worldview because "Niebuhr understood the profoundly sinful nature of mankind without lapsing into despair or abandoning the struggle for social change. Niebuhr's Christian realism provided King with a base on which he rested growing faith in tactics of non-violence."[26] In his initially controversial 1932 *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr believed Gandhian non-violent activities were useful and, as Taylor Branch puts it, "might apply to the cause of the American Negro. If Gandhi's methods were somehow adapted to American conditions and then employed in a difficult, protracted campaign, they could make headway toward justice even against the selfish forces of the immoral society."[27] Niebuhr's Christian realism reassured King that he was viewing the core essence of human nature correctly and could, in the end, bring about social change through non-violent means.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

In general, King took from Christianity teachings on the love of others, even one's enemies, and a belief that all humans were valuable and deserved full equality based on being made in the image of God. More specifically, his desire for a "Beloved Community" is one of the deeper ways Christianity wove through his thought. Kenneth Smith and Ira Zepp especially lay out this final goal of King's, calling it "the organizing principle of all of King's thought and activity" and claiming that "the crux of his faith was a vision of a completely integrated society, a community of love and justice. In his mind, such a community would be the ideal corporate expression of the Christian faith."[28] Essentially, the Beloved Community was "a transformed and regenerated human society" that went beyond just racial integration to a "vision of the future includ[ing] a society which would be free not only from the malformation of persons resulting from racial hatred but also free from the abnormality of persons resulting from economic injustice and exploitation."[29] In the end, "King envisaged a new social order wherein all kinds of people and groups would live together as brothers and share equally the abundance of God's creation."[30] All other tactics were to serve this end vision of human society that King obtained from his Christian faith.

Nineteenth-century influences

Another key influence on King's conduct was the early nineteenth century German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel. Historians point out that King often talked in dualisms similar to Hegel's concept of dialectical thinking—in which one idea, the thesis, confronts another idea, the antithesis, to produce a new idea, the synthesis—a process Hegel believed drove human progress. According to Ira G. Zepp, "Although King could never become an Hegelian in substance, Hegelian methodology pervades his thinking and writing. The net result of his study of Hegel was that King thought dialectically (in terms of wholes) and he appreciated broad sweeps of history."[31] Additionally, "King repeatedly refused to see the racial conflict simply in terms of white and black, but in a much larger perspective of justice and injustice."[32] Zepp finds further influence of Hegelian concepts on King when the civil rights leader spoke of different periods of America's past race relations that were leading to a better future.[33] In his own 1963 work, *Strength to Love*, King noted of Hegel, "His contention that 'truth is the whole' led me to a philosophical method of rational coherence. His analysis of the dialectical process helped me to see that growth comes through struggle."[34] John Ansbro likewise notes that in a 1956 speech, King invoked this Hegelian idea of "growth through struggle" when wrapping together all the global movements for equality across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States.[35] In sum, "Inspired by Hegel, King claimed that life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in productive harmony."[36]

Another nineteenth century figure who impacted King was Henry David Thoreau, the American Transcendentalist author of the book *Walden* and the famous essay "Civil Disobedience." Privileging the spiritual over the material, an early environmentalist, and an advocate of peacefully following one's conscience instead of unjust laws, Thoreau has since influenced many to question their world and to seek a more meaningful existence. Ansbro notes that in college King read Thoreau's concept of civil disobedience, specifically "noncooperation with an evil system," and that during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, he invoked "Thoreau's principle of noncooperation" repeatedly.[37] Indeed, in 1962, King wrote in *The Massachusetts Review* that he was initially fascinated with Thoreau's ideas "of refusing to cooperate with an evil system" and claimed, "Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride to Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

in Montgomery, Alabama, it is an outgrowth of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice."[38] By the time King was helping to coordinate the 1968 Poor People's Campaign in Washington D.C., he "began to advocate . . . the use of mass civil disobedience to effect revolutionary (i.e., structural) changes within the social system."[39] While Thoreau's civil disobedience was individualistic, King's increasingly became more mass-based. Still, Thoreau's influence was clear.

A final Christian philosophical strand that influenced King was the theory of personalism, an idea focused on the ultimate value of each individual human. As Rufus Burrow argues, the civil rights leader held to a "theistic personalism" which meant

> his conviction is that every person, regardless of race, gender, class, ability, age, health, or sexuality is a being of absolute worth, because every person is created and loved by a supremely personal God. Each person is infinitely valuable to God, and therefore should be treated as such.40

While King only once mentioned personalism explicitly, he studied the concept both at Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University.[41] In his writings,

> Several themes occur and recur that are clearly traceable to the influence of personalism . . . (1) the inherent worth of personality, (2) the personal God of love and reason, (3) the moral law of the cosmos, and (4) the social nature of human existence.42

Burrow's work provides the most extensive treatment of how personalism influenced King's views of human dignity and of the existence of good and justice in the universe, all stemming from a personal God. While these ideas were less overt than clear invocations of Gandhi's methods or Hegel's dialectical thinking—or even Thoreau's civil disobedience against unjust systems—they undergirded King's conviction to pursue racial equality and justice and gave him confidence that right was on his side.

Ideas rejected

In the ideological maelstrom of mid-century America, King also encountered numerous other concepts where race, protest, and the potential use of violence or non-violence intersected. Ultimately, however, he decided none of these would advance the struggle for African American rights. First, and perhaps most obvious considering the Cold War, King rejected communism. Yet it was not a knee-jerk rejection of the Soviet Union's stance, but a principled consideration of what communism offered and actually produced. King read both *The Communist Manifesto* and Marx's much weightier work, *Das Kapital*, while in graduate school; according to Ansbro,

> King . . . believed that Marx's critique of capitalism was applicable to our system to the extent that it exposed the gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty. Necessities are taken from the many in order to allow luxuries for the few, and this system has allowed some to remain apathetic to the suffering of humanity.43

Alternatively, however, King could not embrace communism because of its moral relativism, in which any action could be taken to usher in the communist future, its atheism,

and its vision of human nature that "reduced to matter and motion" humans who, to King, were also spiritual beings.[44] Ultimately, in his fourth book *Where Do We Go From Here*, King argued that under twentieth century versions of communist rule, in which the party-state had taken the place of authority Karl Marx had originally reserved for the working class,

> While the state lasts, it is an end in itself. Man is a means to that end. He has no inalienable rights. His only rights are derived from, and conferred by, the state. Under such a system the fountain of freedom runs dry. Restricted are man's liberties of press and assembly, his freedom to vote and his freedom to listen and to read.[45]

Capitalism found itself in King's crosshairs too, due to its "cutthroat competition and selfish ambitions that inspire men to be more I-centered than thou-centered."[46] Instead, King advocated "a socially conscious democracy which reconciles the truths of individualism and collectivism."[47] Because of this latter vision, King could ideologically oppose communism while simultaneously opposing the war against communist forces in Vietnam—a distinction not every critic of King made at the time. By the second half of the 1960s, with half a million American soldiers fighting a communist insurgency in South Vietnam, King criticized the war for two reasons. The first was financial; the immense cost of the war, he believed, was better spent at home. In 1967 King noted that a

> misestimate of the war budget . . . alone is more than five times the amount committed to antipoverty programs . . . *The Washington Post* has calculated that we spend $332,000 for each enemy we kill. It challenges the imagination to contemplate what lives we could transform if we were to cease killing . . . The bombs in Vietnam explode at home; they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America.[48]

King also voiced moral objections to the conflict. While he did not embrace Black Power, he evinced understanding of that group's frustrations when he wrote,

> Over the last decade they have seen America applauding nonviolence whenever the Negroes have practiced it . . . But then these same black young men and women have watched as America sends black young men to burn Vietnamese with napalm, to slaughter men, women and children; and they wonder what kind of nation it is that applauds nonviolence whenever Negroes face white people on the streets of the United States but then applauds violence and burning and death when these same Negroes are sent to the fields of Vietnam.[49]

By 1967 King was writing, speaking, and marching, in Chicago in March for instance, against the American war in Vietnam because he believed the costs in money and morality were far too high.[50]

King disagreed with the Black Power movement in another way: Its embrace of the use of violence. Initially, King was sympathetic to the new Black Power movement, which was led first by Elijah Muhammad and then by Stokely Carmichael. He recognized that the slow, or nonexistent, pace of change on urban issues, especially poverty, caused frustration; according to Ansbro, he even "saw the desire of the Black Power Movement to glory in blackness and in the African heritage as a further reaction to the system of slavery . . . with its fear, awe, and obedience to the master."[51] Yet King was troubled by the racial separateness

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

implied, or even encouraged, by Black Power advocates, as well as the potential use of violence (even if usually in self-defense) they affirmed. Obviously, racial separation did not fit King's vision of racial brotherhood in a "beloved community" and, more practically as Ansbro writes, such talk might alienate white supporters of black rights, whom King saw as "genuine humanitarians and integrationists."[52]

Regarding violence in the cause of self-defense, in his 1967 work *Where Do We Go From Here*, King explained two key problems. While he admitted people could defend themselves at home, he argued that because the very "cause of a demonstration" was "to protest the evil[s]" of society, "the demonstrator agrees that it is better to suffer publicly for a short time to end the crippling evil of school segregation than to have generation after generation of children suffer in ignorance."[53] More broadly, he worried that

> it is dangerous to organize a movement around self-defense. The line of demarcation between defensive violence and aggressive violence is very thin. The minute a program of violence is enunciated, even for self-defense, the atmosphere is filled with talk of violence, and the words falling on unsophisticated ears may be interpreted as an invitation to aggression.[54]

As King recognized, a key philosophical support for the embrace of violence by Black Power proponents came from Frantz Fanon, an intellectual from Martinique who famously traveled to Algeria to aid the uprising there against French control.[55] Although Fanon died in 1961, his most famous work from that same year, *The Wretched of the Earth*, discussed the ways "violence is a psychologically healthy and tactically sound method for the oppressed."[56] Essentially, not only did violence serve a strategic purpose in a conflict—it also de-colonized the mind, purifying it of anything that would reinforce any sense of racial inferiority.

King understood why some were attracted to Fanon's ideas; yet he rejected those ideas due to the numerical majority of whites in the United States, because urban riots had accomplished no discernible gain, and because he believed

> nonviolence . . . can save the white man as well as the Negro . . . To master fear he [the white man] must also depend on the spirit the Negro generates toward him. Only through our adherence to nonviolence—which also means love in its strong and commanding sense—will the fear in the white community be mitigated."[57]

For King, only non-violence truly accounted for mankind's susceptibility to racial division by redeeming those of both races. Therefore, while he affirmed the problems outlined by Fanon and Black Power advocates, he could not embrace their solutions.

Conclusion

Martin Luther King, Jr. pursued peace in multiple ways. He sought racial equality at the formal, legal level and largely achieved that goal when Congress, due in no small part to President Lyndon Johnson's support for the measures, passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. While these laws have often been considered the pinnacle of achievement for the civil rights movement, King's further actions in Chicago, anti-war sentiment regarding Vietnam, planning for the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, and his aid to the Memphis sanitation workers' strike all showed his concern with a broadly defined

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

peace among races and nations in all areas of society and international conduct. Such a remarkable and remarkably active man benefited from innate abilities, especially rhetorical ones. Yet his extensive education and broad reading provided a number of concepts and methods that helped him formulate, plan, and justify his use of non-violent methods in the service of a peaceful, racially integrated, and harmonious future.

From Georg W. F. Hegel, King obtained a dialectical method of thinking that "growth through struggle" would move history forward. Henry David Thoreau gave him a belief in the usefulness of civil disobedience, most specifically in the form of noncooperation with an unjust social system. Personalism, stemming from Christianity, provided a focus on the dignity and worth of each individual person, regardless of race or any world-derived status. Of special importance, second only to Christianity for King, Gandhi provided the methods of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* for him to conduct his non-violent campaigns. Emphasizing, respectively, non-violence and love of others, even enemies, these beliefs helped him put his Christian concepts of love of others and pursuit of justice into action in ways that brought him and his followers respect and, eventually, legal victories.

Two international factors also provided King encouragement. First, he increasingly envisioned the African American struggle as part of the larger global pattern of twentieth-century opposition to white domination. Second, near the end of his life he seemed to ruminate on the idea of linking non-violent movements for justice and equality across oceans and continents, although that idea remained vague and, sadly, unfulfilled. Ultimately, most central to King's activism was the Christian environment and faith he imbued from an early age and which led him to become a Baptist minister. From Christianity, King combined preexisting ideas with new ones. He emphasized love of others and enemies, argued for a focus on improving the black community's social conditions, sought a future absent of racial conflict, and extolled his belief in a Beloved Community in which all humans received dignity and respect; these facets combined, King believed, could end racial strife. Finally, his Christian faith gave him confidence that the eventual victory of God's justice in the universe meant his visions truly could be fulfilled in history.

Notes

1 Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 43–44.

2 Ibid., 90, 101, 111.

3 Parks had, in fact, already trained with the NAACP on methods to pursue racial equality, had led the Youth Council of the NAACP in Montgomery, was the secretary of the local NAACP chapter, and was one of the few African Americans registered to vote in Alabama, having taken and passed the literacy test three times and then cleared the final hurdle of paying a hefty poll tax to gain access to the franchise. See Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 124–125; Nicholas Rathod, "Honoring Rosa Parks: Moving from Symbolism to Action," *Center for American Progress*, December 1, 2005, accessed July 5, 2017, www.americanprogress.org/issues/courts/news/2005/12/01/1743/honoring-rosa-parks-moving-from-symbolism-to-action/.

4 Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 17. Crispus Attucks was an African American killed in the Boston Massacre, when British soldiers fired on a colonial mob on March 5, 1770.

5 Ibid., 23.

6 Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press of Macmillan, 1992), 93–94.

7 Ibid., 94–95.

8 Ibid., 95.

9 Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 44–45.
10 Ibid., 46.
11 Ibid., 47.
12 Hanes Walton, Jr., *The Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971), 42–43.
13 John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 133–134.
14 Sermon, "The Birth of a New Nation," April 7, 1957 at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron, and Kieran Taylor (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 158.
15 King, "New Nation," in Carson, et al., *Papers*, 159.
16 Ibid., 161.
17 Ibid., 162.
18 Ibid., 163–164.
19 King, *Trumpet*, 62.
20 Ibid., 63–64.
21 Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *The Social Vision of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Carlson, 1989), 236.
22 Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 18.
23 Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 81–82.
24 Ibid., 82.
25 Ibid., 86.
26 James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 403.
27 Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 86.
28 Smith and Zepp, *Beloved Community*, 129–130.
29 Ibid., 130, 133.
30 Ibid., 138.
31 Zepp, *Social Vision*, 202.
32 Ibid., 203.
33 Ibid., 203–204.
34 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 101, quoted in Walton, *Political Philosophy*, 44.
35 Ansbro, *Making*, 119.
36 Ibid., 124–128, quote on 124. See also Smith and Zepp, *Beloved Community*, 123–128.
37 Ansbro, *Making*, 110–112.
38 Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Centenary Gathering for Henry David Thoreau: A Legacy of Creative Protest," *The Massachusetts Review* 4 (Autumn 1962), in Mary King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action* (Paris, France: UNESCO, 1999), 216–217.
39 Ansbro, *Making*, 112-114; Smith and Zepp, *Beloved Community*, 150–151.
40 Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 7.
41 Smith and Zepp, *Beloved Community*, 104–105.
42 Ibid., 110.
43 Ansbro, *Making*, 184.
44 Ibid., 184–185.
45 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967 (2010 reprint), 197.
46 Ibid., 197.
47 Ibid., 197.
48 Ibid., 91–92.
49 Ibid., 36.
50 Ansbro, *Making*, 253. Ansbro notes "at least ten *moral* reasons for his opposition to the war" and outlines them at length (256–265).

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8

51 Ibid., 214–219.
52 Ibid., 221.
53 King, *Where Do We Go*, 57.
54 Ibid., 57–58.
55 King/Carson, *Autobiography*, 329.
56 Ibid., 329.
57 Ibid., 330.

Downloaded By: 10.2.97.136 At: 18:41 27 Sep 2023; For: 9781315157344, chapter7, 10.4324/9781315157344-8