Chapter seven

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR (1929–1968): APOSTLE FOR NON-VIOLENCE

Assassinated in 1968, April 4, Memphis
Jo born - 1929, Atlanta

Early on I decided that if I was going to shoot craps on anyone's philosophy, I was putting my money on Martin Luther King, Jr. From the start I had respect for Martin. He reminded me of Jackie Robinson. These were the first cats to break down barriers made of iron and steel. Both guys took punishment for a whole race of people. I figured that if I was going to pick up my cross and follow someone, it could only be a cat like King. Yet I couldn't see me doing any marching. First, I wouldn't have known when to duck when they started throwing broken beer bottles at my head. And secondly, I'd just defeat Martin's purpose. My temperament just wouldn't stand certain treatment. I can take abuse. But if you touch me . . . man, that's another story. I hit back.

(Ray Charles and David Ritz, *Brother Ray: Ray Charles' own story*)[1]

It was not that King was a bad man, except in the sense that all men of overweening ambition are bad. It was simply that he was an inopportune man . . . his primary service to the black struggle in America was an attempt to substitute righteousness for effectiveness.

(Frank Hercules, *American Society and Black Revolution*)[2]

A NEW DEAL FOR BLACKS? CIVIL RIGHTS AND NEGRO PROTEST, 1932–1954

For most black Americans, the collapse of the United States economy after 1929 simply aggravated an already desperate situation. An Urban League report of 1933 indicates that over 17 per cent of the entire Negro

population was on relief. Conditions were equally bad in the North and South, but in the Southern states, private charity organizations often refused to aid blacks. In the Southern farm belts, black tenant farmers and share-croppers went increasingly into debt. Those organizations traditionally concerned with black welfare – the NAACP and the National Urban League – were unable to cope with the conditions produced by the Depression. But the election of the Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, with his promise of a 'New Deal', raised black hopes, and marked a turning point in American race relations. (Yet even the Depression had not shaken the traditional Republican loyalties of blacks. In the 1932 presidential election, Negroes in Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia and other major cities voted for Herbert Hoover.) By 1934, the Negro vote began switching to the Democrats; in 1936, according to one estimate, 84.7 per cent of blacks favoured Roosevelt's re-election. Although New Deal reform policies were not free of racial discrimination (and no major piece of civil rights legislation was adopted during Roosevelt's four terms of office), blacks shared in the relief measures instituted by the administration. Despite or perhaps because of Roosevelt's uncertain commitment to blacks (FDR displayed a keen awareness of Southern sensibilities on race issues because of his dependence on Southern votes in Congress for the passage of New Deal legislation), the New Deal radicalized the strategies of the NAACP and Urban League as they attempted to bring pressure on the government to make the new policies and programmes more responsive to black needs. In 1933, following an NAACP initiative, various race advancement organizations established the Joint Committee on National Recovery to fight discriminatory practices in federal relief agencies. (One black writer commented bitterly that NRA – the National Recovery Administration – stood for 'Negroes Ruined Again'.) The emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) saw an attempt by the American Federation of Labour, under the leadership of John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, to organize black skilled and unskilled workers into industrial unions, with the establishment of a Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination and a Political Action Committee. The NAACP, in response, reversed its critical stance towards organized labour, and worked to build an alliance with the CIO. In the election of 1940, Negro voters overwhelmingly supported Roosevelt for a third term.

The NAACP, in a *Crisis* editorial of November 1940, conceded that Roosevelt, despite Southern white opposition, had 'managed to include Negro citizens in practically every phase of his administrative programme', and allowed that 'no matter how far behind the ideal he may be, he is far ahead of any other Democratic president, and of recent Republican ones'. But it condemned Roosevelt's failure to support a federal anti-lynching bill, and the persistence of racial discrimination in civilian life and in the armed services.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

On the event of American involvement in the Second World War, Negro protest organizations were united in demanding full and equal participation in the armed forces, and an end to discrimination in the defence industries – which offered new employment opportunities for blacks. While some sections of the Negro press came to adopt a more conservative and conciliatory tone on racial issues, arguing that the national crisis demanded that civil rights agitation should be suspended or muted for the duration of the war, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatened a mass march on Washington, DC, in 1941, to lobby for equal opportunities in employment and racial integration in the armed forces. The March on Washington Movement, an all-black protest, based its strategy on Gandhi's example of non-violent protest in India, appealed directly to the Negro working class, and anticipated the post-war forms and objectives of the civil rights movement. In his 'Call to the March', Randolph declared:

> Negroes can build a mammoth machine of mass action with a terrific and tremendous driving and striking power that can shatter and crush the evil fortress of race prejudice and hate. ... However, we sternly counsel against violence and ill-considered and intemperate action and the abuse of power. ... We summon you to mass action that is orderly and lawful, but aggressive and militant, for justice, equality and freedom. ... Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser ... and Frederick Douglass fought, bled and died for the emancipation of American slaves and the preservation of American democracy. Abraham Lincoln, in times of the grave emergency of the Civil War, issued the Proclamation of Emancipation for the freedom of Negro slaves and the preservation of American democracy ... we call upon President Roosevelt, a great humanitarian and idealist, to follow in the footsteps of his noble and illustrious predecessor and take the second decisive step in this world and national emergency and free American Negro citizens of the stigma, humiliation and insult of discrimination and Jim Crowism in Government departments and national defence.[3]

In the event, the March on Washington did not take place; Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 in June 1941. It stipulated that 'there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defence industries or Government because of race, creed, or national origin ... it is the duty of employers and labour organizations to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defence industries without discrimination because of race, creed or national origin'. Although a clause to this effect was inserted in all war contracts, defence jobs only opened slowly for blacks, and the Executive Order did not pronounce on segregation and discrimination in the armed forces.

CORE

Gandhi's philosophy and techniques were also reflected in the formation of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942. Founded by James Farmer, a Louisiana Negro, and members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a Quaker pacifist social-action organization, CORE was chiefly responsible for pioneering the use of non-violent protest as a civil rights strategy. Its 'Statement of Purpose' declared:

> CORE has one purpose – to eliminate racial discrimination.
> CORE has one method – inter-racial, non-violent direct action.
> CORE asks its members to commit themselves to work as an integrated, disciplined group:
> by renouncing overt violence in opposing racial discrimination and using the method of non-violent direct action;
> which refuses to cooperate with racial injustice;
> which seeks to change existing practices by using such techniques as negotiation, mediation, demonstration, and picketing;
> which develops a spirit of understanding rather than antagonism.[4]

In 1943 CORE engaged in its first 'sit-in', when Farmer and an interracial group of members employed the tactic against a Chicago restaurant which had refused to serve blacks; CORE was to remain active in the direct-action protests of the 1950s and 1960s, concentrating its efforts on voter-registration drives in the South. (In 1964, two CORE staff members, James Chaney and Michael Schwerner, along with Andrew Goodman, were abducted and murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi.)

In the post-war period, heightened expectations on the part of black Americans, the growing significance of the black vote, and the continuing mass migration of Negroes out of the South, combined to produce some improvements in the condition of Afro-Americans. Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, created the President's committee on Civil Rights in 1946, and urged a variety of civil rights measures on a Congress controlled by Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans. In response to the wartime complaints of black troops who had faced discriminatory and segregationist practices, Truman issued Executive Order 9981, in 1948, which called for 'equality of opportunity for all persons in the armed forces, without regard to race, colour, or national origin'. Although sections of the military were slow to implement the policy, by the time of the Korean War there was a substantial measure of racial integration in the armed forces.

In the presidential election of 1948, Truman's espousal of civil rights measures and reforms provoked Southerners to leave the Democratic Party and form the 'Dixiecrat' Party, which carried four Southern states for its candidate, Strom Thurmond. With the aid of the mass of black votes in the electorally important states of the North, Truman beat his

opponent Thomas Dewey, but continued to face a recalcitrant Congress on civil rights issues. But a series of Supreme Court decisions of the 1950s, striking down discrimination and segregation, buoyed black optimism for peaceful racial progress. In this period also, the NAACP continued to work for the rights of due process of law, equal protection of the laws, and the voting rights set forth in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. At the state and local levels from the early 1950s, there were distinct signs of increased militancy among black leaders. As a younger generation of black activists began to challenge racial discrimination and segregation in the South, they faced not only the opposition of whites, but also of black 'conservatives' – the older-established leadership class which had practised the politics of restraint and caution in their dealings with the white power structure. In 1957, CORE, in cooperation with FOR, staged a 'Journey of Reconciliation' – what came to be called a 'Freedom Ride' – in the states of the Upper South, to test compliance with a Supreme Court ruling of the previous year which had declared segregation in interstate transportation unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court's most notable civil rights decision was, however, its 1954 ruling that 'in the field of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.' *Brown* v. *Board of Education* marked the triumphant conclusion of the NAACP's long campaign against educational segregation, and overturned the *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* decision of 1896. The *Brown* decision was immediately recognized – by its supporters and opponents – as a landmark step in American race relations. Blacks were encouraged to press their protests against all forms of racial proscription to a successful conclusion.

Southern whites, in particular, resolved not to comply with the Supreme Court's 1955 request for implementation of its 1954 ruling 'with all deliberate speed'. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, although forced to nationalize the state militia and to send United States army units to Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, when Governor Orville Faubus refused to allow black students to enter Little Rock High School, did not otherwise provide executive leadership on the civil rights front. His disinterest, and the inaction of Congress, certainly encouraged Southern whites to defy the 1954 Supreme Court ruling. Segregationist governors, white citizens' councils, and vigilante mobs expressed the South's determination to resist even the minimal implications of the Court's decision. For their part, however, Southern blacks engaged in a wide range of direct-action protests – boycotts of stores and restaurants which practised racial discrimination, and a series of bus boycotts across the South, protesting against continuing 'separate but unequal' policies applied to blacks in local transport systems. This renewed black militancy was to be most notably demonstrated in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955–56.

concept of 'collective evil' (but rejected Niebuhr's break with pacifism), and rejected Marxism as atheistic and materialistic, although he welcomed its social concerns, and noted that 'Communism grew as a protest against the hardships of the underprivileged'.[8]

After a distinguished career at Crozer, King entered the doctoral programme at Boston University, in 1951. Here he met and married Coretta Scott, from Alabama, then a student at the New England Conservatory of Music. Before completing his Ph.D. thesis on the opposing theological views of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman, King was offered and accepted a pastorship at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. In addition to his intellectual abilities and credentials, King brought to his first appointment a love for the South, a supportive wife and a social philosophy based on a belief in Christian activism and Gandhian non-violent resistance to evil. As pastor and then as leader of the MIA, he came to display considerable powers as an orator and public performer, qualities which were to distinguish his career as the prophet and practitioner of civil disobedience in the cause of civil rights.

As chairman of the MIA, which included twenty black ministers in its membership, King united and inspired the boycott movement. The MIA's proposed seating arrangements for the Montgomery buses did not at first challenge the 'separate but equal' doctrine, and might easily have been adapted to existing segregation ordinances. King himself was aware that the demands of the boycott did not meet the NAACP's minimum standard for racial integration, but hoped that the original demands could be negotiated with the city fathers. When Montgomery blacks followed the call not to ride on the city's buses, the MIA created and maintained a car pool, which gave more affluent Negroes an opportunity to participate in the boycott. When Montgomery whites put pressure on the insurance companies to cancel insurance on the MIA car pool, the organizers turned to Lloyd's of London for coverage. An attempt to divide the black community into its traditional factions failed, and the mayor and city fathers resorted to other tactics. King was arrested for an alleged speeding offence, and jailed (for the first time in his life).

On 30 January 1956, King's house was bombed; on 21 February a Montgomery Grand Jury indicted 115 Negroes for breaking a 1921 anti-labour law which held that it was illegal to injure a legitimate business enterprise without 'just cause or legal excuse'. Faced with such provocations, King continued to preach a message of non-violent resistance, but it was the visit to Montgomery of the Gandhian disciple and scholar Ranganath Diwakar that convinced him that he should also set an example of personal suffering. The Montgomery boycott began to attract national support and received financial donations from various sources, including the NAACP, the United Auto Workers and donations from overseas. During this period, King developed a close

working relationship with Ralph Abernathy, Negro pastor of the First Baptist Church, and an activist preacher. Following the attack on his home, King was visited by Bayard Rustin, the respected theorist of the civil rights movement, a pacifist and member of FOR.

It was a white woman, Miss Juliette Morgan, in a letter to the *Montgomery Advertiser*, who alerted King to the parallels between the bus boycott and Gandhi's strategy in India:

> The Negroes of Montgomery seem to have taken a lesson from Gandhi – and our own Thoreau, who influenced Gandhi. Their own task is greater than Gandhi's, however, for they have greater prejudice to overcome. One feels that history is being made in Montgomery these days. . . . It is hard to imagine a soul so dead, a heart so hard, a vision so blinded and provincial as not to be moved with admiration at the quiet dignity, discipline and dedication with which the Negroes have conducted their boycott.

King remembered that Miss Morgan

> sensitive and frail, did not long survive the rejection and condemnation of the white community, but long before she died in the summer of 1957, the name of Mahatma Gandhi was well-known in Montgomery. . . . Non-violent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. . . . Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method. This philosophy was disseminated mainly through the regular mass meetings which were held in the various Negro churches of the city.[9]

Despite a Supreme Court ruling against segregation in intrastate buses in South Carolina, the Montgomery city government obtained a local court injunction ordering it to continue the practice. On 4 June 1956, a federal district court ruled that the city ordinance violated the United States Constitution, but the city appealed, and the boycott continued. However, as King and his associates were awaiting a court decision regarding the continuing operation of the car pool, news came of the United States Supreme Court decision declaring Alabama's state and local laws upholding segregation on the buses to be unconstitutional. King and the MIA now worked to prepare the black community for the arrival of the desegregation order, and urged blacks to behave courteously when they went back on the buses. Negroes were instructed to 'read, study and memorize' a listing of 'Integrated Bus Suggestions' which included the following:

> Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete non-violence as you enter the bus.
> Be quiet but friendly; proud, but not arrogant; joyous, but not boisterous.
> If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck, do not strike back, but evidence love and goodwill at all times.[10]

Montgomery's buses were desegregated, but there was further violence against blacks, and Negro churches in the city were firebombed. But for King, the boycott was the decisive point in his career, and one which 'did more to clarify my thinking on the question of non-violence than all the books which I have read'. While the boycott was still in progress, he declared:

> ... our non-violent protest in Montgomery is important because it is demonstrating to the Negro, North and South, that many of the stereotypes he has held about himself and other Negroes are not valid. Montgomery has broken the spell and is ushering in concrete manifestations of the thinking and action of the new Negro. ... We now know that the Southern Negro has become of age, politically and morally. Montgomery has demonstrated that we will not run from the struggle, and will support the battle for equality. ... This is a protest – a *nonviolent* protest against injustice. We are depending on moral and spiritual forces. To put it another way, this is a movement of passive resistance, and the great instrument is the instrument of love ... no matter what sacrifices we have to make, we will not let anybody drag us down so low as to hate them.[11]

King's great contribution to the Montgomery boycott was his oratory and his passionately expressed belief in the power of moral suasion to effect social change. In his first (hastily prepared) speech as leader of the boycott, his concern was to 'make a speech that would be militant enough to keep my people aroused to positive action and yet moderate enough to keep this fervour within controllable and Christian bounds'. He advised his black audience that despite the mistreatment and abuse they had already suffered, they must not become embittered. King quoted Booker T. Washington directly and to good effect: 'Let no man pull you so low as to make you hate him.' The reference to Washington was apposite, since King was to emerge from the boycott as a black leader with a national reputation similar to that gained by Washington after his Atlanta Exposition Address. Unlike Washington, King had been chosen by blacks themselves as their spokesman and leader.

During a 'Prayer Pilgrimage' to Washington, DC in May 1957, King, in the company of Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, and A. Philip Randolph, received the greatest ovation after an address in which he demanded that blacks now be given the ballot to enforce politically their legal rights. The editor of the black newspaper, the New York *Amsterdam News*, asserted that King had 'emerged from the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington as the number one leader of 16 million Negroes in the United States. ... At this point in his career, the people will follow him anywhere.' For the next three years, however, King appeared uncertain as to the direction he should take. In retrospect, it is clear that the Montgomery boycott was a dress rehearsal for the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Yet the boycott itself did not touch off a

national Negro revolt. 'The genius of the boycott was also its major weakness. People could refuse to ride the bus without directly and individually placing themselves at risk. The boycott was an act of omission, not commission.'[12] What was needed were new organizations and strategies.

In 1957, King and other black clergymen formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to spread and coordinate the idea of non-violent civil rights protest across the South. The philosophy of the SCLC was derived from a religious amalgam:

> The basic tenets of the Hebraic–Christian tradition coupled with the Gandhian concept of *satyagraha* – is at the heart of SCLC's philosophy. Christian nonviolence actively resists evil in any form. It never seeks to humiliate the opponent, only to win him. ... At the centre of nonviolence is redemptive love. Creatively used, the philosophy of nonviolence can restore the broken community in America. ... SCLC believes that the American dilemma in race relations can best and most quickly be resolved through the actions of thousands of people, committed to the philosophy of nonviolence, who will physically identify themselves in a just and moral struggle. ... SCLC is firmly opposed to segregation in any form ... and pledges itself to work unrelentingly to rid every vestige of its scars from our nation through nonviolent means. ... Our ultimate goal is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living – *integration*.[13]

A loosely organized and unorthodox organization, SCLC was remarkable in that its clerical leadership (traditionally dedicated to the preservation of the status quo) was uniquely equipped to communicate at the grass-roots level. 'SCLC's leaders clothed political ideas in a religious phraseology that blacks readily understood, and used Christian tenets to give the civil rights movement a divine sanction.'[14]

For the remainder of his life and career, King was to be identified with the SCLC, which was increasingly to come into competition with both the older and younger black protest organizations. The declared aim of SCLC was to promote non-violent direct action, but for the first three years of its existence it engaged in an unsuccessful effort to double the number of registered black voters in the South, in a 'Crusade for Citizenship'. Unlike the NAACP, however, SCLC did not possess the resources to mount effective organizational campaigns at the local level. Ella Baker, the temporary executive director of SCLC, believed that it was simply an extension of King's unformulated ideas on civil rights, and needed collective and expert leadership. 'The fame that King had garnered from the Montgomery bus boycott gave an exaggerated impression of his leadership abilities. In fact, King had neither instigated the boycott nor sought its leadership, and the protests' success owed as much to the collective efforts of the MIA as it did to King himself.'[15] Certainly before 1960, SCLC was without a clearly defined purpose and strategy, undecided whether to instigate its own protests or simply to assist in local actions.

In 1959, after surviving a stabbing by a deranged black woman as he was signing copies of *Stride Toward Freedom* in a New York bookstore, King (who had earlier visited Ghana, Nigeria and several European capitals, including London), made a spiritual pilgrimage to India, and went to Gandhi's shrine. The Indian visit was a significant event in King's intellectual and political development. In particular, he was impressed by Nehru's explanation that under the Indian Constitution, caste discrimination was punishable by imprisonment, and concluded that India had made greater progress against caste untouchability than had the United States against racial discrimination. Flattered by the attentions paid to him by the Indians, King returned to America with the renewed conviction 'that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to the oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. It was a marvellous thing to see the results of a nonviolent campaign.'[16]

In November 1959, King resigned as pastor of Dexter church, and moved to Atlanta, Georgia, to concentrate his energies on the SCLC. Its strategy for the election year 1960 was to continue its voter registration drive, together with direct-action protests against segregation. With many of Atlanta's established black leaders hostile to civil rights agitation (and with his father resident in the city as well), King diplomatically agreed that he would not undertake any SCLC campaigns there. When Ella Baker called the founding conference at Raleigh, North Carolina, in April 1960, of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), King agreed to serve on its Adult Advisory Committee. Aware of the extent of student activity against segregated lunch counters in the South, and concerned to unify direct-action protests, King attempted to mould the new organization in the image of SCLC.

> In addition to suggesting a nationwide campaign of 'selective buying', King advised the students to establish a permanent organization, collect a group of volunteers willing to go to jail rather than pay fines, and take the 'freedom struggle' into all parts of the South to compel the intervention of the federal government. He also urged the students to learn more about the philosophy of nonviolence.[17]

Although it was soon to move beyond what it came to regard as King's cautious and conciliatory approach to civil rights, SNCC, at its inception, accepted his philosophy in its statement of purpose.

> We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of non-violence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Non-violence as it grows from the Judaic–Christian tradition seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. . . . Love is the central motif of non-violence. . . . It matches the capacity of evil to inflict suffering with an even more enduring capacity to absorb evil, all the while persisting in love.[18]

MLK AND JFK

Whereas King had been unhappy with the record of the Eisenhower administration on civil rights – apart from the president's stand on the 1957 Little Rock, Arkansas, school integration crisis – he entertained greater hopes for the Democratic challenger in 1960, Senator John F. Kennedy. When King was given a four-month prison sentence for an alleged driving offence in Georgia, he was released following Kennedy's intervention, an action which proved decisive in the presidential election since it gained Kennedy crucial black votes. 'Had whites only gone to the polls in 1960, Nixon would have taken 52 percent of the vote.'[19] Writing in the *Nation*, shortly after Kennedy's inauguration, King ascribed the 'intolerably' slow progress of civil rights not only to the opposition of white segregationists, but also 'to the limits which the federal government has imposed on its own action'.

> In the legislative area, he demanded that the President fight for a 'really far-reaching' civil rights programme with particular emphasis on the right to vote. In the area of executive action, he called on the President to 'give segregation its death blow through a stroke of the pen' – especially by stopping the use of federal funds to support housing, hospital and airport construction in which discrimination was open and notorious. 'We must face the fact . . . that the federal government is the nation's highest investor in segregation.'[20]

Although he declared his commitment to civil rights, and appointed blacks to federal offices, Kennedy was also aware of opposition in Congress to the passage of a civil rights bill. His naming of three 'strict constructionists' to federal judgeships in the South came as a disappointment to King, who came to believe that neither the president nor his brother, Attorney-General Robert Kennedy, were sufficiently aware of the urgency of the racial problem. As events were to prove, King's relations with both John and Robert Kennedy were to be, on both sides, ambivalent and ambiguous. In 1963, Kennedy warned King that the FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover's directive, had begun to keep the SCLC under close surveillance because of alleged Communist infiltration of the organization. Robert Kennedy, convinced that King's close associate and adviser, Stanley Levison, a white lawyer from New York City, was an active member of the American Communist Party, authorized FBI wiretaps on King. Yet President Kennedy, as King observed after the assassination in Dallas in November 1963, had after his first two years in office, emerged as 'a strong figure', actively involved in the cause of civil rights.

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destiny was unfulfilled so long as the scar of racial prejudice disfigured it.[21]

That Kennedy was moved to exercise stronger executive leadership on behalf of black Americans was, in large measure, due to the unremitting activities of the civil rights coalition from 1961 to 1963.

SCLC IN ACTION

As the civil rights movement gathered momentum in the early 1960s, King lent his prestige to various forms of direct-action protest, with varying degrees of success and failure. In 1961 he supported the CORE-sponsored Freedom Riders who were met by white violence (and federal military intervention) in their attempts to gain compliance by Alabama and Mississippi with Supreme Court and Interstate Commerce Commission rulings nullifying segregation in interstate travel. King realized that the intensive press coverage of Southern attacks on the Freedom Riders should be utilized by the SCLC and its allies, since the strongest force promoting non-violent black protest was the disgraceful behaviour of white Southerners themselves.

From December 1961 to the summer of 1962, King and the SCLC led a mass direct-action campaign in Albany, Georgia, demanding not only integrated facilities, but employment for Albany's Negroes in the city's police force, and other municipal jobs. The Albany campaign failed, partly because on this occasion, the police force did not over-react. Instead, police chief Laurie Pritchett simply closed down municipal facilities, rather than integrate them. But the chief factor in the failure of King's Albany venture was his inability to control or direct a diverse and heterogeneous group of protesters. As King later conceded, SCLC had gone to Albany without proper planning or preparation. Although King and 2,000 of his followers went to jail during the demonstrations – King himself was arrested three times – because of police 'restraint', national consciousness was not aroused, and the federal government did not intervene. 'Albany, by any standards, was a staggering defeat for King [who] ... allowed himself to be pushed into action, without adequate preparation, on a battlefield he did not choose, with a faction-ridden army he never completely commanded.'[22]

The lessons of Albany were well learned, and SCLC's next target was carefully chosen, and its strategy meticulously planned. New staff members, with direct experience of voter registration campaigns and Freedom Rides, made SCLC, after 1961, a more efficient and effective organization. King privately conceded that the success of non-violent resistance depended on the existence or fostering of 'creative

tension' – attacks by whites on non-violent demonstrators, full coverage of these events by the media, consequent national outrage, and subsequent government intervention. All of these ingredients were to be present in the Birmingham, Alabama, campaign of 1962–63. The South's major industrial city, Birmingham was also a stronghold of racial oppression, fully fledged segregation and intimidation. From 1957 to 1963, there were seventeen 'unsolved' bombings of Negro churches and the homes of black civil rights leaders. Inspired by the Montgomery boycott, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, pastor of Baptist Bethel Church, had formed the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (later an affiliate of SCLC). With the support of Negro college students, Shuttlesworth had led a boycott of Birmingham stores in an effort to desegregate lunch counters and open up jobs for blacks. His home had been bombed, his church destroyed, and he had been imprisoned eight times as reprisals for his agitation. Shuttlesworth asked King to come to Birmingham to focus and direct a campaign directed against the business community. King readily agreed.

> Along with Fred Shuttlesworth, we believed that while a campaign in Birmingham would surely be the toughest fight of our civil rights careers, it could, if successful, break the back of segregation all over the nation.[23]

He decided to confront the business community with three demands:

1. The desegregation of lunch counters, fitting rooms, rest rooms and drinking fountains in department stores.
2. The upgrading and hiring of blacks on a non-discriminatory basis in business and industry.
3. The creation of a biracial committee to work out a timetable for desegregation in other areas of Birmingham life.

'The dispersal of energies that had characterized the Albany demonstrations was not to be repeated.'[24] Demonstrations were twice postponed; once to allow for (abortive) negotiations with business leaders, and a second time, to await the outcome of a mayoralty election between the white supremacist police commissioner, Eugene 'Bull' Connor, and a racial moderate, Albert Boutwell. Despite criticisms from some Birmingham blacks, as well as whites, that King was not giving the new mayor a fair chance, demonstrations were ordered to begin. When Connor obtained a court order enjoining all demonstrations pending a court decision, King deliberately defied the order, and marched on city hall – wearing the denim overalls that had become the uniform of the SCLC. He was arrested and held for two days in prison, without being allowed to communicate with his wife, lawyers or the SCLC. The intervention of President Kennedy, for a second time, on King's behalf, restored contact with his wife and attorneys.

When King's activities in Birmingham were criticized by eight white clergymen in the city, who described him as an outside agitator and extremist, and urged blacks to end their demonstrations, his response

was to produce a classic statement on civil rights and non-violence, 'Letter from a Birmingham jail'. King asserted that he had been invited to Birmingham by the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, and claimed that no one could be an 'outsider' to injustice. He responded to the charge that the demonstration had been ill-timed with the statement that:

> Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was 'well-timed' in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This 'Wait!' has almost always meant 'Never'.[25]

He also claimed that direct action must necessarily precede negotiation, and reasserted his belief in resistance to unjust laws. King also expressed disappointment that 'fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist', and warned that black disaffection had already produced the Black Muslim Movement made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable "devil"'. In contrast, King presented himself as having 'tried to stand between these two forces saying that we need not follow the "do-nothingism" of the complacent or the hatred and despair of the black nationalist'.

Released on bond after eight days in prison, King now brought the demonstrations to a well-orchestrated climax, sending hundreds of black schoolchildren into direct confrontation with the white authorities. Bull Connor met the marchers with fire hoses, police dogs and clubs, and 2,500 were arrested and jailed. (Malcolm X's comment on these tactics was: 'Martin Luther King is a chump not a champ. Any man who puts his women and children on the front line is a chump, not a champ.')[26] Press and television coverage of the events in Birmingham outraged the rest of the United States and shocked the world. Eventually, the Justice Department opened negotiations between the SCLC and the city government, and an agreement was signed which promised to meet the limited demands of the demonstrators within ninety days, and the setting up of a biracial committee within two weeks.

> Yet, despite the modest scope of the agreement itself, it had far-reaching implications for the city and its leaders. Since 1950 ... white business leaders in Birmingham had been involved in an unsuccessful quest for racial harmony. Before 1963, they had always been restrained by the limitations imposed by segregation. But the negotiations to end the demonstrations in that spring of 1963 finally freed them from the bonds of segregation, and thus liberated their search for racial order. ... King's demonstrations ... provided the catalyst both for change and for restoration of harmony. Although the groundwork had already been laid by the change in government and the previous biracial bargaining, the end of segregation in Birmingham was dramatically

> hastened because King and his demonstrators threatened chaos in a city whose leaders were now desperate for order. When the settlement was finally reached, both blacks and whites could claim some measure of victory. The blacks had won pledges of desegregation in the most segregated city in the South, and the white leaders had won what they had really been seeking all along – racial harmony.[27]

Yet the Birmingham agreement left untouched the issue of school desegregation, and was disowned by Alabama's segregationist governor, George Wallace. Some black critics accused King of negotiating a surrender when total victory was in sight, but he claimed the outcome of the campaign as a victory for direct-action and massive non-violent resistance. A *Newsweek* opinion poll of Negroes indicated that 95 per cent now regarded King as their most successful black spokesman. Moreover, the Birmingham campaign moved Kennedy to 'ask Congress for a major civil rights bill that would not only solve the public accommodations problem, but would attempt to protect the Southern blacks' political rights and provide national legislative sanction for fair-employment practices'.[28] His successor, Lyndon Johnson, was finally to secure congressional agreement which resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which not only included Kennedy's proposals but also gave the executive the power to withdraw federal funds from state and local governments that practised racial discrimination. The Birmingham protest also atoned for the miscalculations of SCLC's Albany campaign, and propelled King into leadership of the civil rights coalition. At the March on Washington in August 1963, when a quarter of a million people, about 20 per cent of them white, converged on the capital in an effort to obtain passage of the Civil Rights Bill, King delivered his 'I have a dream' oration from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, one of the great speeches of the twentieth century.

> I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked

> places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.[29]

In 1964, King appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, in which he was credited with 'an indescribable capacity for empathy that is the touchstone of leadership'. In the same year, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Significantly, in his acceptance speech, King linked the civil rights movement with the larger cause of world peace and human rights.

At the height of his power and influence within the civil rights movement, King joined forces with SNCC and CORE in a voter registration drive focused on Selma, Alabama, in 1965. The SNCC field-workers were ambivalent about the project, and interorganizational tensions soon became evident. In Alabama, SNCC's members 'knew that King's effort would aid their own voter registration work by attracting national publicity and perhaps prompting federal intervention against white Alabama authorities'. But they also feared that King's involvement 'would undermine their long-standing efforts to develop black leadership. They agreed not to hamper SCLC's campaign and even offered the use of their equipment and facilities to SCLC representatives, but expected to remain on the sidelines, hoping that local blacks would recognize the deficiencies of SCLC's leader-centered approach to organizing.'[30] Many SNCC members also disliked the excessive religiosity of King's style and his tendency to compromise at critical junctures. When King, leading a march from Selma to Montgomery, refused to break through a police barricade, led the marchers in prayer, and then turned back to Selma (with many of the marchers singing 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round'), SNCC workers were openly contemptuous. King had, in fact, after discussions with the United States Attorney-General, decided against a confrontation with the Alabama police, but had not informed the SNCC workers of his resolve.

But again, King had dramatized an already violent situation. Demonstrators had earlier been gassed and beaten in Selma, and the killing of a white Unitarian minister from Boston, James J. Reeb, by Alabama whites, produced a highly charged atmosphere which moved President Lyndon Johnson to call Congress into special session and call for new voting rights legislation. On 17 March 1965, a federal court approved the Selma-to-Montgomery march, Johnson mobilized the state militia to protect the marchers (who were also accompanied by Justice Department Officials), and on 25 March King spoke to 25,000 people from the capitol steps in Montgomery. 'The march from Selma had brought the Negro protest full circle, since it had all begun with the Montgomery bus boycott a decade before.'[31] Urging his audience on to 'the realization of the American Dream', King indicated a shift in his thinking when he advocated a 'march on poverty' as well as a continuing assault on segregation and racism, as the unrealized goals of black

protest. In retrospect, the Selma campaign was King's finest hour. He had masterminded a massive demonstration, and as the *Washington Post* declared, had revealed 'the plight of the Negro in the South as had never been done before. ... Dr King brought Alabama dramatically into the homes of Americans. He made racism in the South come alive.'

CHICAGO AND VIETNAM

After the Selma campaign, King began to suggest to his colleagues in SCLC that they should direct their attentions to the problem of urban poverty, and in particular, to that of the Northern ghettos. Concurrently, he was also coming to express concern over the course and implications of the escalating American presence in Vietnam. These two issues – which King believed were intimately related – were to dominate his thoughts and actions for the remaining three years of his life. Together, they offer convincing evidence to support the contention that King became increasingly radical (and less reformist) in his last years. His positions on these issues were to alienate him from most of the established black civil rights leadership, and, in the case of the Vietnam War, earned him the enmity of Lyndon Johnson, and the renewed attentions of the FBI. Although King's position on Vietnam allied him with the younger elements of the civil rights coalition – CORE and SNCC – his opposition to the concept of Black Power and its spokesmen exacerbated the growing rift within the black protest movement. King's final years, then, were marked by change and controversy. They revealed his strengths and weaknesses as a leader in more heightened forms than had been apparent earlier in his career.

In 1966, against the advice of Bayard Rustin, King decided to move to Chicago to lead a non-violent direct-action campaign against segregated slum housing, *de facto* segregated schools, unemployment and job discrimination. In effect, as he was aware, King was taking on the formidable Richard J. Daley, mayor of Chicago, a consummate politician and power broker in the Democratic Party. As the Reverend Arthur Brazier, leader of the South Side's Woodlawn Association, observed:

> King decided to come to Chicago because he thought Chicago was unique in that there was one man, one source of power, who you had to deal with. He knew this wasn't the case in New York or any other city. He thought if Daley could be persuaded on the rightness of open housing and integrated schools that things would be done.[32]

As events in Chicago were to prove, SCLC tactics did not transpose easily from the rural South to the urban North. In Chicago SCLC

workers soon discovered 'that the black preacher lacked the prestige he enjoyed in the South and that the church alone was an inadequate organizing tool. SCLC thrived on spontaneity and dramatic confrontations; it had little experience of the tedious job of community organizing. The sheer size of the task overwhelmed SCLC resources.'[33] (SCLC workers did not even possess adequate clothing for Chicago winters.) Although Daley treated King outwardly with respect, the considerable resources of the city government were used to frustrate the campaign. Thus when King, in a move to dramatize the housing crisis, moved into a rat-infested apartment, Daley sent in building inspectors with slum violation notices. When SCLC marched through the blue-collar suburb of Cicero (under police protection), they faced the bitter opposition of working-class whites, and King himself was assaulted. (He commented later: 'I've never seen anything like it in my life. I think the people from Mississippi ought to come to Chicago to learn how to hate.') Although Daley was forced to the negotiating table, and appeared to concede an open housing agreement with the city's banking, real estate and political interests, it achieved little in practice. Chicago was King's first, and last, campaign outside the South.

The growing rift between SCLC and SNCC increased during the civil rights continuation of James Meredith's one-man 'March Against Fear' of 1966. In 1962, James Meredith had become the first Negro to enrol at the University of Mississippi, but only after a confrontation between President Kennedy and the state's segregationist governor, Ross Barnett, the deployment of 600 United States marshals and 15,000 federalized National Guardsmen, and riots which resulted in the loss of two lives and the injury of 375 people. When Meredith was shot and wounded by a white sniper in Mississippi, King joined with Stokely Carmichael of SNCC and Floyd McKissick of CORE in a march through the state. In the course of the march, McKissick and Carmichael stressed the need for greater black militancy, and criticized the federal government for its continuing indifference to the plight of Southern blacks. Carmichael's use of the emotive slogan 'Black Power' became the central controversy of the march. King, opposed to the phrase because of its connotations of racial separatism and apparent acceptance of violence, threatened to withdraw from the march unless it made a commitment to non-violence.

> I pleaded with the group to abandon the Black Power slogan. It was my contention that a leader has to be concerned about the problem of semantics. Each word, I said, has a denotative meaning – its explicit and recognized sense – and a connotative meaning – its suggestive sense. While the concept of legitimate Black Power might be denotatively sound, the slogan 'Black Power' carried the wrong connotations. I mentioned the implications of violence that the press had already attached to the phrase.[34]

While agreement was reached between King and McKissick and Carmichael not to use the competing slogans of 'Black Power' and 'Freedom Now' for the remainder of the march, the dispute was indicative of the approaching demise of the civil rights coalition.

> For King, the Meredith March Against Fear was a terrible blunder. He had undertaken it to unify the civil rights movement and confront whites Mississippi under the banner of nonviolence. Instead, the march had unleashed a combustible slogan that embarrassed and bewildered him.[35]

When King began publicly to denounce United States involvement in Vietnam, he gained the support of SNCC and CORE, but the hostility of the NAACP and National Urban League, both of which declared their opposition to the conjunction of the war with the civil rights movement. Since 1965, King had questioned the morality of the war in South-East Asia, but did not join the anti-war lobby until early in 1967, when he appeared in demonstrations with Dr Benjamin Spock. Coretta King, an ardent pacifist and a member of Women Strike for Peace, supported her husband's position. However, as he continued to protest against the war, King aroused critical press comment; *Newsweek* magazine accused him of being 'in over his head', and of displaying 'simplistic political judgment'. King's response was to assert that there was a connection between racism, poverty, American militarism and imperialism, and that Lyndon Johnson's projected Great Society had 'been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam'. The FBI kept Johnson informed of King's anti-war activities, and intensified its surveillance of the SCLC.

In an effort to bridge the divisions within the civil rights movement, King, by the end of 1967, had conceived of a Poor People's March on Washington – a reassertion of the principle of non-violence that would unite a coalition of the poor and disaffected along class rather than racial lines. In an article published after his assassination, King explained the rationale of the projected march (which was to take place after his death).

> The time has come for a return to mass non-violent protest. . . . We believe that if this campaign succeeds, non-violence will once again be the dominant instrument for social change – and jobs and income will be put in the hands of the tormented poor. . . . Our Washington demonstration will resemble Birmingham and Selma in duration. . . . Just as we dealt with the social problem of segregation through massive demonstrations, and we dealt with the political problem – the denial of the right to vote – through massive demonstrations, we are now trying to deal with the economic problems – the right to live, to have a job and income – through massive protest. It will be a Selma-like movement on economic issues. We hope that the sight and sound of a growing mass of poor people walking slowly toward Washington will have a positive, dramatic effect on Congress. . . . Our idea is to dramatize the whole economic problem of the poor. . . . We'll focus on domestic problems, but it's inevitable that we've got to bring out the question of the tragic mis-

up in priorities. We are spending all of this money for death and destruction, and not nearly enough money for life and constructive development. We've seen no changes in Watts, no structural changes have taken place as the results of riots. ... We plan to build a shantytown in Washington, patterned after the bonus marches of the thirties, to dramatize how many people have to live in slums. ... But essentially, this will be just like our other non-violent demonstrations. We welcome help from all civil rights organizations. There must be a diversified approach to the problem, and I think that both the NAACP and the Urban League play a significant role. I also feel that CORE and SNCC have played very significant roles. I think SNCC's recent conclusions are unfortunate. We have not given up on integration. ... Some of the Black Power groups have temporarily given up on integration. We have not. So maybe we are the bridge in the middle, reaching across and connecting both sides.[36]

The planned march also revealed King's growing belief that American society needed a fundamental redistribution of wealth and economic power. He informed an interviewer:

America is deeply racist and its democracy is flawed both economically and socially ... the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It is exposing evils that are deeply rooted in the whole structure of our society.[37]

In February 1968, Negro sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, went on strike to win union recognition and improved wages and working conditions. King accepted an invitation from James Lawson, an old friend and pastor of the Centenary Methodist Church, to lead a protest march in Memphis. The demonstration (which King regarded as a dress rehearsal for the Poor People's March on Washington) ended in tragedy, when police shot a black youth during a pitched battle with Negro teenagers. King admitted that he had gone to Memphis without adequate preparation or knowledge of the local situation, and left abruptly. The *Memphis Commercial Appeal* commented on the episode: 'Dr King's pose as a leader of a non-violent movement has been shattered. He now has the entire nation doubting his word when he insists that his April project (the Poor People's March) can be peaceful. In short, Dr King is suffering from one of those credibility gaps. Furthermore, he wrecked his reputation as a leader when he took off at high speed when violence occurred, instead of trying to use his persuasive prestige to stop it.' Other newspapers – taking their cues from FBI informants – predicted that the violence in Memphis would be repeated on a larger scale on the Washington march. King was deeply disturbed by the events in Memphis, and press comment on his own culpability. But Lyndon Johnson's unexpected announcement that he would not seek re-election in 1968, appeared to offer some hope that the anti-war and anti-poverty movements might achieve unified victory

under a new Democratic president. In the event, Richard M. Nixon won the election.

King returned to Memphis in a more optimistic mood to lead a new (and carefully planned) march. Addressing an enthusiastic audience at Mason Temple, he referred to the increasing number of threats on his life, but asserted:

... it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop, and I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its grace. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land of justice and freedom.

The next day, Martin Luther King, Jr was shot and killed by a white sniper as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

King's death touched off a wave of black violence across the United States, in which more than twenty people died. Stokely Carmichael, an acerbic critic of King's commitment to non-violence, mourned the murder of 'the one man of our race that this country's older generations, the militants and the revolutionaries and the masses of black people would listen to'.[38] *Newsweek* commented that:

King's martyrdom on a motel balcony did far more than rob Negroes of their most compelling spokesman, and whites of their most effective bridge to black America. His murder, for too many blacks, could only be read as a judgment upon his nonviolent philosophy – and a license for retaliatory violence.[39]

Floyd McKissick announced simply: 'Dr Martin Luther King was the last prince of nonviolence. Nonviolence is a dead philosophy and it was not black people that killed it.'[40] For Eldridge Cleaver, King's assassination was a 'requiem for nonviolence'.

... here was a man who refused to abandon the principle of nonviolence in the face of the hostile and racist nation which has made it clear that it has no intention and no desire to grant a redress of the grievances of the black colonial subjects who are held in bondage.[41]

KING'S REFLECTIONS ON FOUR BLACK LEADERS

In his writings and speeches, King expressed his not always consistent assessments of the triumvirate of black leaders – Washington, Du Bois and Garvey – who had preceded him, and of his contemporary rival,

Malcolm X. Not surprisingly, none received his unequivocal endorsement. Washington's message, King asserted, was: 'Be content with doing well what the times permit you to do at all.' But many Negroes had come to believe that Washington's programme 'had too little freedom in its present and too little promise in its future'.[42] Four years later, King offered a more judicious estimate of Washington.

> I do not share the notion that he was an Uncle Tom who compromised for the sake of keeping the peace. Washington sincerely believed that if the South was not pushed too hard ... it would voluntarily rally to the Negro's cause. Washington's error was that he underestimated the structures of evil; as a consequence his philosophy of pressureless persuasion only served as a springboard for racist Southerners to dive into deeper and more ruthless oppression of the Negro.

King drew the appropriate moral from his judgement of Washington's 'failure', which was that 'every ethical appeal to the conscience of the white man must be accompanied by non-violent pressure'.[43] Yet King also frequently expressed admiration for the Washingtonian virtues of self-help, thrift, personal cleanliness, and a detestation of black irresponsibility and failure to conform to middle-class standards of morality.

> Negroes must be honest enough to admit that our standards do often fall short. ... We must not let the fact that we are victims of injustice lull us into abrogating responsibility for our own lives. Our crime rate is far too high. Our level of cleanliness is frequently far too low. ... We are often too loud and boisterous, and spend far too much on drink. Even the most poverty-stricken among us can purchase a ten-cent bar of soap; even the most uneducated among us can have high morals.[44]

King expressed greater respect for Du Bois because his concept of the 'Talented Tenth' had 'served somewhat to counteract the apparent resignation of Washington's philosophy'. But Du Bois was also an unabashed élitist – 'in the very nature of Du Bois' outlook there was no role for the whole people'. Rather was he the effective propagandist for 'an aristocratic élite who would themselves be benefited while leaving behind the "untalented" 90 per cent'.[45] But in the last major address before his assassination, delivered at Carnegie Hall on the occasion of the centennial of Du Bois' birth, King softened and broadened his verdict. Du Bois was 'one of the most remarkable men of our time ... unsurpassed as an intellect ... passionately proud to be black'. He was also a 'tireless explorer and gifted discoverer of social truths ... a man possessed of priceless dedication to his people'. A man of many parts, 'it was never possible to know where the scholar Du Bois ended and the organizer Du Bois began. The two qualities in him were a single unified force. ... He exemplified black power in achievement and the organized black power in action.' On the eve of an anti-Vietnam war rally in Washington, DC, King also used the occasion to claim Du Bois as a supporter of non-violent direct action.

> We have to go to Washington because they have declared an armistice in the war on poverty while squandering millions to expand a senseless, cruel, unjust war in Vietnam. ... Dr Du Bois would be in the front ranks of the peace movement today. He would readily see the parallel between American support of the corrupt and despised Thieu–Ky regime and Northern support to the Southern slaveholders in 1876.

Having pressed Du Bois into the ranks of the peace movement, King concluded that his greatest virtue 'was his committed empathy with all the oppressed and his divine dissatisfaction with all forms of injustice'.[46] Coretta King, recalling this address, believed that in praising Du Bois' achievements, King wished to demonstrate to 'the black nationalists, with whom he hoped to find reconciliation, that Du Bois was as much our hero as theirs'.[47]

As with Du Bois, so too, with Garvey; King measured his estimates of the man and the movement to suit particular audiences. Garvey's appeal to blacks, King asserted in 1963:

> had the virtue of rejecting concepts of inferiority. He called for a return to Africa and a resurgence of race pride. His movement attained mass dimensions, and released a powerful emotional response because it touched a truth which had long been dormant in the mind of the Negro. There was reason to be proud of their heritage as well as of their bitterly won achievements in America.

But King concluded – echoing a familiar criticism – Garvey's 'plan was doomed because an exodus to Africa in the twentieth century by a people who had struck roots for three and a half centuries in the New World did not have the ring of progress'.[48] But on a visit to Jamaica in 1965, when he placed a wreath on Garvey's memorial, King informed Jamaicans only that:

> Marcus Garvey was the first man of colour in the history of the United States to lead and develop a mass movement. He was the first man on a mass scale and level to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny, and make the Negro feel he is somebody. You gave Marcus Garvey to the United States of America, and gave to millions of Negroes in the United States a sense of personhood, a sense of manhood, and a sense of somebodiness.[49]

Two years later, in an assessment of the Black Power concept, King reverted to a negative appraisal of one element in Garveyism. Black Power in the 1960s, he argued, was very similar to Garveyism in the 1920s – 'it represents a dashing of hope, a conviction of the inability of the Negro to win and a belief in the infinitude of the ghetto'.[50]

Frustrated in his attempt to adapt SCLC techniques and philosophy

to the problems of the Northern ghettos, King also faced competing claims for leadership. Most notably, he encountered in Malcolm X (also the son of a black preacher), a direct challenge to (and rejection of) the goal of racial integration based on non-violent resistance to the forces of white supremacy. Although he once remarked to a friend: 'I just saw Malcolm X on television. I can't deny it. When he starts talking about all that's been done to us, I get a twinge of hate, of identification with him', and conceded that he had a genuine concern for the problems faced by blacks, King deplored Malcolm's apparent preoccupation with violence.[51]

> ... violence is not going to solve our problem ... in his litany of articulating the despair of the Negro without offering any positive, creative alternative, I feel that Malcolm has done himself and our people a great disservice. Fiery, demagogic oratory in the black ghettos, urging Negroes to arm themselves and prepare to engage in violence, as he has done, can reap nothing but grief.[52]

Yet, like other black spokesmen, King deplored Malcolm's untimely and violent death. When a young white student informed him that his grandmother had just read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and thought 'it was marvellous, a book of love', King replied:

> It was tragic that Malcolm was killed, he was really coming around, moving away from racism. He had such a sweet spirit. You know, right before he was killed he came down to Selma and said some pretty passionate things against me, and that surprised me because after all it was my own territory down there. But afterwards he took my wife aside, and said he thought he could help me more by attacking me than praising me. He thought it would make it easier for me in the long run.[53]

James Baldwin, writing seven years after Malcolm's assassination, offered a similar assessment of his true relationship to King and the civil rights movement:

> Malcolm considered himself to be the spiritual property of the people who produced him. He did not consider himself to be their saviour; he was far too modest for that, and gave that role to another. ... Malcolm was not a racist, even when he thought he was. His intelligence was more complex than that. ... What made him unfamiliar and dangerous was not his hatred for white people but his love for blacks, his apprehension of the horror of the black condition, and the reasons for it, and his determination so to work on their hearts and minds that they would be enabled to see their condition and change it themselves.[54]

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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: MILITANT CLERGYMAN

On 1 December 1955, Mrs Rosa L. Parks, a forty-three-year-old black seamstress in a downtown Montgomery store, refused a bus driver's order to vacate her seat to a white man. The secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP, Mrs Parks had been ejected from Montgomery buses on several occasions for refusing to obey the Alabama segregation ordinance which required Negroes to give up their bus seats for whites, if ordered to do so by (white) drivers. On this occasion, however, she was arrested, charged with breaking a city segregation law and fined $14.00. The Reverend E. D. Nixon, head of the local chapters of both the NAACP and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, conceived of a bus boycott as a direct-action black protest against the treatment of Mrs Parks, and on behalf of all Southern blacks exposed to the ritual humiliations of Jim Crow. Under Nixon's leadership, a group of black ministers formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to direct and coordinate what became a 382-day boycott of the bus company. The modest demands of the MIA were that black passengers receive courteous treatment from white bus drivers; that black drivers be hired on predominantly black routes; the seating of Negro passengers on a first-come-first-served basis, with blacks seated from the back to the front of the bus, and whites from the front to the back.

Martin Luther King, Jr, a twenty-six-year-old Negro minister, who had arrived in Montgomery from Atlanta only a year before, was unanimously elected to preside over the MIA. Nixon agreed to serve as treasurer, but refused to run for the presidency of the new organization because he would be away from Montgomery for long periods on railroad business. By all accounts, including his own, King was surprised to gain leadership of the MIA. During his first year in Montgomery, he had concentrated his energies on his pastorate of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a black middle-class parish, and on completing his doctoral dissertation. King later recalled that his election as MIA president 'caught me unawares. It happened so quickly I did not even have time to think it through. It is probable that if I had, I would have declined the nomination.'[5] In fact, a month before his nomination, King had refused the presidency of the city chapter of the NAACP, and had not engaged in any organized civil rights protests. Moreover, he had not yet met Mrs Parks. But on several counts, King was an ideal choice for the MIA presidency. As a relative newcomer, he was not involved in the factionalism of local black politics, and had not been compromised by his dealings with the white community. In addition, as Nixon recognized, King possessed the personal and educational qualities necessary in a leader who would have to conduct negotiations at a high level. In other respects, however, Martin Luther King was an unknown

quantity. The Montgomery bus boycott was to bring him American and international recognition and fame.

Martin Luther King, Jr, was born in Atlanta, Georgia, the son of a share-cropper who attended Morehouse College, and became a Baptist minister. King's maternal grandfather, the Reverend Alfred Daniel Williams, had founded the Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Martin Luther King, Sr, a forceful preacher, active Republican and member of the NAACP, was a strong personality. Martin Luther King, Jr, grew up in a close-knit, middle-class, religious family, and seemed himself destined for the ministry. At the age of fifteen, he entered Morehouse College, where he was influenced by its president, Benjamin E. Mays, a leading black theologian and church historian. May's attacks on racial injustice, and his beliefs in Christian social responsibility and political engagement, greatly impressed King (who had considered studying law or medicine), and he elected to continue the family tradition and become a Baptist minister. At Morehouse, King read Henry David Thoreau's classic essay *Civil Disobedience*, and accepted its central assertion that the individual should refuse to cooperate with an evil system and is entitled to disobey unjust laws.

In 1948, King graduated from Morehouse with a degree in sociology, and enrolled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, to study for the ministry. At Crozer, he discovered the writings of the Social Gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, and endorsed his contention that the church should concern itself with social conditions, as well as with the salvation of souls. King later asserted:

> It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch, that any religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar that soul, is a spiritually moribund religion, only waiting for the day to be buried.[6]

Already a declared pacifist, King added Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance to injustice to his intellectual system, and came to celebrate the redemptive power of love and suffering as forces for social change.

> Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective force on a large scale. It was in this Gandhian emphasis on love and non-violence that I discovered the method for social reform that I had been seeking. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. . . . My study of Gandhi convinced me that true pacificism is not non-resistance to evil, but non-violent resistance to evil.[7]

At Crozer King also encountered the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr's