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Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World

James H. Cone

When Martin Luther King Jr., achieved international fame as the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955–1956, no African country below the Sahara had achieved political independence from the colonial regimes of Europe. When he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, twelve years later, in 1968, the great majority of African countries had gained their independence. Since 1968 black Africans have continued their “stride toward freedom” overcoming the political domination of Europeans in every country except South Africa. Today black South Africans and their supporters, under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Nelson Mandela, and Winnie Mandela, and a host of others in the African National Congress and similar organizations, are currently engaged in a protracted life-and-death struggle against apartheid.

As in Africa, similar struggles for freedom occurred in Asia and Latin America. The struggles of the poor in all societies remind us that the fires of freedom are burning and that nothing short of justice for all will establish peace and tranquility in the world.

As we reflect on the significance of the life and thought of Martin Luther King, Jr., for the people of America, it is important to remember that the meaning of his life is not bound by race, nationality, or creed. Speaking of the international significance of his son, Daddy King was correct when he said: “He did not belong to us, he belonged to the world.”1 I would add that Martin Luther King, Jr., belonged particularly to the Third World, the world of the poor and the disinherited. It is therefore important to ask about his significance for peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and about their significance for him. In this essay, I will limit my analysis to the impact of Third World liberation movements on the development of King’s theology.

Martin King’s thinking falls into two periods.2 The first began with the Mont-

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1 Cited in Coretta Scott King, My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York, 1969), 294.
2 In this essay I will limit my analysis chiefly to two periods in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s thinking. However, I have found three periods in the development of his life and thought from the time of the Montgomery bus boycott (Dec. 5, 1955) to his assassination (April 4, 1968). The first period is quite brief (early weeks of the boycott) and is defined by his primary focus on justice. The second period (early 1956 to fall 1965) focuses primarily on love; the third period (1966 to his assassination in 1968) focuses primarily on hope. The distinctions are not rigid but
The Montgomery bus boycott in December 1955 and ended with the enactment of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965. The second period commenced in the fall of 1965 as King began to analyze more deeply the interrelationship of racism, poverty, and militarism in the policies of the United States government. In both periods his ideas were defined by his faith in the God of justice, love, and hope. The difference between the two periods is the shifting emphases he gave to each of those theological attributes as he sought to develop a nonviolent philosophy of social change that would eliminate racial and economic exploitation and establish peace in America and the world.

During the first period, King's thinking was defined by an optimistic belief that justice could be achieved through love, which he identified with nonviolence. The place of the Third World liberation movements in his thinking was to reinforce his liberal optimism regarding the certainty of the rise of a new world order of freedom and equality. In the early months of the Montgomery bus boycott, Martin King began to interpret the black struggle for justice in America as "a part of [an] overall movement in the world in which oppressed people are revolting against . . . imperialism and colonialism." He believed that black people's fight against segregation in America expressed the same spirit that led Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans to revolt against their European colonizers. Both revolts (that of blacks in America and that of the poor in the Third World), according to King, signified "the birth of a new age." Using that phrase for the title of an address in 1956, he said that Third World people had "lived for years and centuries under the yoke of foreign power, and [that] they were dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated." Because King saw little difference between colonialism in Africa and segregation in America, he employed the same language to describe both experiences. Speaking about the impatience of black and Third World peoples with oppression, King said repeatedly:

There comes a time when people grow tired, when the throbbing desires of freedom begin to break forth. There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of the tramper. There comes a time when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of exploitation, where they have experienced the bleakness and madness of despair. There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing in the pitying state of an Alpine November.

In this and many similar statements, King's point was to emphasize that black and Third World people were fed up with segregation and colonialism. "In the

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rather a matter of emphases in his thinking. In all periods the concerns for justice, love, and hope are present and intertwined. For an interpretation of the development of King's thinking in terms of the three periods, see James H. Cone, "The Theology of Martin Luther King, Jr." Union Seminary Quarterly Review, 40 (no. 4, 1986), 21–39. See Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Legitimacy of the Struggle in Montgomery," statement, May 4, 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers (Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Atlanta, Georgia). Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Birth of a New Age," Aug. 7–11, 1956, p. 86, ibid. King, "Birth of a New Age." King also used this statement in his first major address, and it was repeated in several others. See "Address at Holt Street Baptist Church," Dec. 5, 1955, King Papers.
midst of their tiredness," something happened to them. They began to reevaluate themselves, and as a result, they “decided to rise up in protest against injustice.” The protests of the oppressed throughout the world, King believed, were nothing but a signal that “the time for freedom has come.” No resistance from the oppressors could abort freedom’s birth because, as King often said (quoting Victor Hugo), “there is no greater power on earth than an idea whose time has come.” Martin King’s travel to the independence celebration of Ghana (1957), the rapid achievement of independence by other Third World nations, and his study tour of India (1959) deepened his optimism that freedom would soon be achieved.

King’s optimism regarding the prospect of freedom’s achievement was derived partly from the success of the civil rights movement in America and liberation movements in the Third World. The Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins and freedom rides, the demonstrations in Birmingham, the March on Washington, the Selma March, and other less publicized civil rights victories throughout the South—all were linked with the success of anticolonialist movements in the Third World. King believed that freedom’s time had come, because oppressed peoples all over the world were demonstrating that they would no longer accept passively their exclusion from the material riches of God’s creation.

In Martin King’s view, segregation in America and colonialism in the Third World were nothing but the denial of the dignity and worth of human beings. Both the segregationist and the colonialist said by their actions that blacks and other coloreds are inferior beings, incapable of governing themselves or living in a relationship of equality with white Americans and Europeans. As long as there was insufficient resistance from black and Third World peoples, the old order of segregation and colonialism remained unchanged. The new age of freedom began to break forth when a “New Negro” was born in America and a “New Human Being” began to rise up from among the ragged and hungry masses of the world. Armed with a new sense of dignity and self-respect, both started to march together toward the promised land of freedom.

Of course, Martin King was aware that oppressors do not voluntarily grant freedom to the oppressed. He was also aware that white segregationists and European colonists had much more military power than their victims. Yet he contended that the coming of a new world order of freedom was inevitable. How could he be so sure? The answer is found in his faith in the biblical God of justice, love, and


6 For King’s interpretation of the impact the independence celebration of Ghana had on him, see especially Martin Luther King, Jr., “Birth of a New Nation,” address, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, April 1957, King Papers. See also Homer Jack, “Conversation in Ghana,” Christian Century, April 10, 1957, pp. 446–48. For King’s interpretation of his trip to India, see Martin Luther King, Jr., “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” Ebony, 14 (July 1959), 84–92; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Sermon on Gandhi,” March 22, 1959, King Papers. See also Swami Vishwananda, With the Kings in India (New Delhi, 1959); Martin Luther King, Jr., “Farewell Statement,” New Delhi, India, March 9, 1959, King Papers; and “Statement of Dr. King upon landing at New York City,” March 18, 1959, ibid.
hope. No idea or strategy that King advocated can be understood correctly apart from his deep faith in the Christian God as defined by the black Baptist and liberal Protestant traditions. The new age is coming and cannot be stopped, because God, who is just and loving, wills that the oppressed be liberated. That is why King could say:

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come. This is what happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom; something without has reminded him that he can gain it. Consciously and unconsciously, he has been swept in by what the Germans call the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa, and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. 

King often employed the German word *Zeitgeist* to refer to his belief that "the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness [we have] cosmic companionship." That is what he had in mind when he said that Rosa Parks "had been tracked down by the *Zeitgeist*—the spirit of the times."*8*

The role of God in King's idea of the coming new age is reflected also in his use of the striking image of the "dream." He spoke often of the "American Dream," referring to the idea of equality in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Jewish-Christian Scriptures. King's dream, however, was not limited to racial equality in the United States but was defined by its universality and eternality. To say that the dream is universal means that it is for all—blacks and whites, men and women, the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and those of the

*8* Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia, 1981), 154; Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom* (New York, 1958), 44.
United States and Europe. To say that it is eternal means that equality is not a right conferred by the state; it is derived from God, the creator of all life.9

When Martin King urged people to “make the dream a reality” or to “face the challenge of a new age,” he almost always told them to “develop a world perspective.” “All life is inter-related,” because God is the creator of all. “No individual . . . [or] nation can live alone,” because we are made for each other. No people can be who they ought to be until others are who they ought to be. “This is the way the world is made.”10

When Martin King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, it deepened his commitment to global justice and peace and reinforced his belief that God willed it. “I have the audacity to believe,” he said in his acceptance speech, “that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.” For King, the Nobel Prize was an “unutterable fulfillment,” given in recognition of those fighting for freedom all over the world. His dream of a coming new age of freedom is eloquently expressed in his Nobel Lecture.

What we are seeing now is a freedom explosion. . . . The deep rumbling of discontent that we hear today is the thunder of disinherited masses, rising from dungeons of oppression to the bright hills of freedom. . . . All over the world, like a fever, the freedom movement is spreading in the widest liberation in history. The great masses of people are determined to end the exploitation of their races and land. They are awake and moving toward their goal like a tidal wave. You can hear them rumbling in every village, street, on the docks, in the houses, among the students, in the churches and at political meetings.11

Because God is involved in the freedom struggles, King believed, they cannot be halted. Victory is inevitable. Success in the civil rights and Third World liberation movements combined with his deep faith in God’s loving justice gave King an optimistic hope that freedom was not too far away.

Turning to the second period of King’s thought, 1965–1968, I want to emphasize that certain bedrock ideas did not change. He did not change his mind about the basic principles of his faith or about the civil rights movement’s goal of freedom. In fact, his convictions regarding God’s will to inaugurate a new age of freedom deepened in the last years as he gave himself totally to the struggles for justice and peace in America and the world. His faith in nonviolence remained completely unshakable. What then was new or newly emphasized in the later period?

One new thing was his great disappointment with the failure of the majority of white moderates in the North and South (in government, labor, church, business,

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10 Ibid.
and even the civil rights movement) to support the goal of genuine equality for blacks and poor people. For several years he thought that he could win the support of the decent “white majority” in America through a moral appeal to religion and the democratic traditions that they claimed to live by. But as early as his *Playboy* interview (January 1965), he acknowledged his great letdown regarding government officials and white moderates:

> abysmal ignorance seems to prevail among many state, city and even Federal officials on the whole question of racial justice and injustice. . . . But this white failure to comprehend the depth and dimension of the Negro problem is far from being peculiar to Government officials. . . . It seems to be a malady even among those whites who like to regard themselves as “enlightened.” . . . I wonder at [persons] who dare to feel that they have some paternalistic right to set the timetable for another [person’s] liberation. Over the past several years, I must say, I have been gravely disappointed with such white “moderates.” I am often inclined to think that they are more of a stumbling block to the Negro’s progress than the White Citizen’s Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner.12

When summer riots became a regular occurrence during the second half of the 1960s, King grew impatient with whites who withdrew their support from the civil rights movement and began to say that “law and order” ought to be the highest priority of government. “I say to you,” proclaimed King, “the riots are caused by nice gentle, timid white moderates who are more concerned about order than justice.”13

Another new disappointment for Martin King was his failure to win the support of the majority of blacks to nonviolent direct action as the primary method for gaining their freedom. The Watts riot (August 1965) and others that followed in the urban centers (along with the Black Power movement) revealed the great gap between King’s optimism about nonviolence and the despair expressed in the random violence of American ghettos.

During the first ten years, King and others in the southern-based civil rights movement had assumed that blacks in the North would benefit in a derivative fashion from the victories gained in the South. The Watts riot and the subsequent rise of Black Power during the Meredith March (June 1966) showed that King had badly miscalculated the self-esteem that northern blacks would receive from the “straightened up backs” of southern blacks. When he went to Watts, he was surprised that many blacks there had never heard of him and even more astonished when he heard a group of young blacks boasting, “We won.” “How can you say you won,” King asked, “when thirty-four Negroes are dead, your community is destroyed, and whites are using the riots as an excuse for inaction?” “We won because we made them pay attention to us,” they responded to him.14 When King reflected

12 “Playboy Interview: Martin Luther King,” a reprint from *Playboy*, 12 (Jan. 1965).
13 Martin Luther King, Jr., “Transforming a Neighborhood into a Brotherhood,” address for the National Association of Real Estate Brokers, Aug. 10, 1967, p. 9, King Papers.
on that response and the hostile reactions his message of nonviolence received from Chicago street gangs and young Black Power advocates during the Meredith March, he began to realize that the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) did not significantly affect the problems of racism and poverty, especially among northern blacks.

Martin King experienced a third disappointment. He expected American blacks’ success with nonviolence to help persuade the majority of the oppressed of Africa, Asia, and Latin America to adopt a similar method in their struggles for freedom. But instead of adopting the creative method of nonviolence, many Third World people were openly advocating armed revolution. King was aware that even some theologians in Latin America were joining revolutionary groups in their efforts to overthrow oppressive governments.

All of this caused him to reevaluate not the efficacy of nonviolence, but the depth of the problem of injustice in a global context. When King began seriously to analyze global injustice, he concluded that the three evils of racism, poverty, and militarism were interrelated and deep rooted, both in the sociopolitical life of America and in the international economic order. King’s focus on the global implications of racism in relation to poverty and war led him to conclude that the slums in American cities were a “system of internal colonialism” not unlike the exploitation of the Third World by European nations.15

King’s global vision helped him to see that the sociopolitical freedom of blacks was closely tied to the liberation of their sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Token integration (that is, a few professionals moving into the existing mainstream of American society) was not true freedom. “Let us,” wrote King in 1967, “not think of our movement as one that seeks to integrate the Negro into all the existing values of American society.”16

The economic exploitation of Third World nations and the deepening poverty of the poor in the United States led King to the conclusion that there was something desperately wrong with America.

“Why are there forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence?” Why has our nation placed itself in the position of being God’s military agent on earth, and intervened recklessly in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic? Why have we substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order?

These questions suggested to King the “need for a radical restructuring of the architecture of American society,” so that it can serve the needs of humanity throughout the world.17

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15 James Bevel, one of King’s aides, spoke often of the Chicago slums as a “system of internal colonialism.” King also adopted the same description. See Martin Luther King, Jr., “Chicago Plan,” Jan. 7, 1966, p. 3, King Papers; Martin Luther King, Jr., “European Tour,” speech, March 1966, p. 8, ibid.

16 King, Where Do We Go from Here? 133.

17 Ibid.
The later years of Martin King’s theology are also defined by a shift in the emphasis and meaning given the themes of love, justice, and hope. Except for his great Holt Street address (December 5, 1955), with its powerful focus on justice, the first period of King’s spiritual and intellectual development centered on love, with justice and hope being interpreted in its light. But as a result of the experiences and bleak reflections just described, hope becomes the center of Martin King’s thinking, with love and justice being interpreted in its light. The main difference between his early and later years in regard to hope was this: In the early period, King’s hope was similar to a naive optimism, because it was partly based on the progress of the freedom movement in America and the Third World and the support it received from both the oppressed (by their active commitment to nonviolence) and from the majority in the dominant classes (by their apparent commitment to formal equality). In contrast, King’s hope, in the later years, was not based on the backing he received from blacks and whites in the United States or from the international community. Rather, his hope was grounded almost exclusively on his faith in the God of the biblical and black traditions who told him, during the early months of the Montgomery bus boycott: “Stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world.”

Instead of trusting human allies to produce a victory over the forces of organized evil, King’s hope was now a transcendent one, focusing on the biblical God of the oppressed who “put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.” The shift came out in his critique of United States policy in Vietnam, which he knew would alienate his former allies.

Among the many disappointments that shaped the second period of his thinking, none pained King more than America’s military involvement in Vietnam and the criticisms he received from his white and black friends (in government, the media, and the civil rights movement) for opposing it. The escalation of the war in Vietnam by the United States, along with a de-escalation of the War on Poverty, and American indifference toward massive poverty in the Third World motivated King to become one of the severest critics of the domestic and foreign policies of his government during the second half of the 1960s. He began to speak like a prophet, warning of the Day of Judgment, proclaiming God’s wrath and indignation on a rich and powerful nation that was blind to justice at home and indifferent to world peace. Instead of speaking of the American dream as he had done so elo-

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18 See Martin Luther King, Jr., “Thou Fool,” sermon, Mt. Pisgah Missionary Baptist Church, Aug. 27, 1967, p. 14, King Papers. This sermon includes King’s account of the deep crisis of fear during the Montgomery bus boycott that led to his appropriation of the faith of his early childhood. I think this is the most critical turning point in King’s life. Although I have always maintained that King’s faith, as defined by the black church, was indispensable for understanding his life and thought, David J. Garrow was the first person to identify King’s “kitchen experience” (as it might be called) as the decisive experience in defining his faith. See David J. Garrow, “Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Spirit of Leadership,” Journal of American History, 74 (Sept. 1987), 438–47; David J. Garrow, Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955–1968 (New York, 1986); and Cone, “Theology of King,” 26–39.

19 Luke 1:52 RSV.
quently in the first half of the 1960s, he began to speak, over and over again, of an American nightmare, especially in Vietnam.20

Martin King did not enjoy criticizing his government. He loved America deeply, particularly its democratic and religious traditions of equality and justice. But he could not overlook the great contradictions of racism, poverty, and militarism. For King there was no greater inconsistency between creed and deed than America's military adventures in Vietnam. He frequently referred to Vietnam as a small nation whose own document of freedom, declaring independence from France in 1945, had quoted our Declaration of Independence. “Yet,” King said, “our government refused to recognize them. President Truman said they were not ready for independence. So we fell victim as a nation at that time of the same deadly arrogance that has poisoned the international situation for all these years.”21

The arrogance King referred to was racism. He believed “our disastrous experiments in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic have been . . . a result of racist decision making. Men of the white West . . . have grown up in a racist culture, and their thinking is colored by that fact. . . . They don’t really respect anyone who is not white.” King also felt that the vehement criticisms of his opposition to the Vietnam War emanating from the white community were motivated by racism. He spoke against his white allies in government and the media who had supported his stand on nonviolence during the sit-ins and freedom rides and in Birmingham and Selma and then rejected his position on Vietnam.

They applauded us in the sit-in movement when we nonviolently decided to sit in at lunch counters. They applauded us on the freedom rides when we accepted blows without retaliation. They praised us in . . . Birmingham and Selma, Alabama. Oh, the press was so noble in its applause and . . . praise when I would say “Be nonviolent toward Bull Connor, . . . Be nonviolent toward Jim Clark.” There is something strangely inconsistent about a nation and a press that would praise you when you say, “Be nonviolent toward Jim Clark,” but will curse and damn you when you say, “Be nonviolent toward little brown Vietnamese children!”22

Martin King refused to accept the idea that being an American citizen obligated him to support his country in an unjust war. He refused to equate “dissent with disloyalty,” as many of his critics did. On the contrary, he contended that he was the true patriot, because in his opposition to the war, he was in reality defending America’s tradition of freedom and democracy, which was being violated in Vietnam. Furthermore, King believed that as a Nobel laureate he was obligated to

transcend nationalism, and thereby to take a stand for world peace. But much more important than his obligation as a citizen of the United States or of the world was his vocation as a minister of God. When people queried him about the wisdom of mixing peace and civil rights, King responded:

Before I was a civil rights leader, I answered a call, and when God speaks, who can but prophesy? I answered a call which left the spirit of the Lord upon me and anointed me to preach the gospel. . . . I decided then that I was going to tell the truth as God revealed it to me. No matter how many people disagreed with me, I decided that I was going to tell the truth.23

For Martin King, telling the truth meant proclaiming God's judgment on America for its failure to use its technological resources for the good of humanity. “Here we spend thirty-five billion dollars a year to fight this terrible war in Vietnam and just the other day the Congress refused to vote forty-four million to get rid of rats in the slums and the ghettos of our country.” “The judgment of God is on America now,” he said. He compared America to the rich man, Dives, who passed by the poor man, Lazarus, and never saw him. And like Dives, who went to hell because he refused to use his wealth to bridge the gulf that separated him from Lazarus, “America,” King said, “is going to hell too, if she fails to bridge the gulf”

that separates blacks from whites, the United States and Europe from the Third World.24

Because Martin King believed that America’s war in Vietnam violated its own democratic values and the moral principles of the universe, he could not keep silent. There comes a time “when silence is betrayal.” A nation that spends five hundred thousand dollars to kill an enemy soldier in Vietnam and only fifty dollars to get one of its citizens out of poverty is a nation that will be destroyed by its own moral contradictions. “If something doesn’t happen soon,” King said, “I’m convinced that the curtain of doom is coming down on the U.S.”25

Although King was often depressed about his government’s refusal to stop the war in Vietnam and to eliminate poverty at home and in the Third World, he did not lose hope. In December 1967, in “A Christmas Sermon on Peace,” he proclaimed that despite the nightmare of racism, poverty, and war, “I still have a dream, because . . . you can’t give up on life. If you lose hope, . . . you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you to go on in spite of all.”26

It was Martin King’s hope that sustained him in the midst of controversy, enabling him to make solidarity with the victims of the world, even though he failed to achieve the justice for which he gave his life. King’s hope was grounded in the saving power of the cross of Jesus Christ, and it enabled him to see the certainty of victory in the context of an apparent defeat.

When you stand up for justice, you never fail. The forces that have the power to make concession to the forces of justice and truth . . . but refuse to do it . . . are the forces that fail. . . . If there is no response from the federal government, from the Congress, that’s the failure, not those who are struggling for justice.27

It is difficult for people who do not share Martin King’s faith or his solidarity with the Third World to understand his meaning for poor people today. King’s name is well known and greatly admired in the Third World because his life and thought disclose profound insights about humanity that are relevant to all who struggle for freedom.

“There is nothing in all the world greater than freedom.”28 Martin King gave his life for it. South African blacks, endowed with the same liberating spirit, are facing death daily, because they do not believe that whites have the right to determine the nature and the date of their freedom. Poor people throughout the world are demonstrating with their bodies that one cannot begin to live until one is ready to die for freedom. Freedom is that quality of existence in which a people recognize

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24 Martin Luther King, Jr., “Standing By the Best in an Evil Time,” sermon, Aug. 6, 1967, pp. 7–8, 6, King Papers.
26 King, Trumpet of Conscience, 76.
27 Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Other America,” address, March 10, 1968, p. 11, King Papers.
28 King, “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 34.
their dignity and worth by fighting against the sociopolitical conditions that limit their recognition in society.

Martin King's foremost contribution as a moral thinker was his penetrating insight into the meaning of justice during his time. No one understood justice with more depth or communicated it with greater clarity in the area of race relations in the United States and the world than Martin Luther King, Jr. Because of King, the world is not only more aware of the problem of racial injustice but equally aware of its interrelatedness with poverty and war. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."29

The "anemic democracy" to which King pointed is still present in America and around the world. The dream is still unfulfilled. Whether we speak of the relations between nations or of the relations between persons within nations, the rich few are still getting richer and the poor many are getting poorer. To incorporate the true meaning of Martin Luther King, Jr., into America's national consciousness would mean using our technological resources to bridge the huge economic gap that separates the rich and poor nations.

Martin King's greatest contribution was his ability to communicate a vision of hope in extreme situations of oppression. No matter how difficult the struggle for justice became, no matter how powerful were the opponents of justice, no matter how many people turned against him, King refused absolutely to lose hope, because he believed that ultimately right will triumph over wrong. He communicated that hope to the masses throughout the world, enabling them to keep on struggling for freedom and justice even though the odds were against them.

I am not going to stop singing "We shall overcome," [he often said] because I know that "truth crushed to the earth shall rise again." I am not going to stop singing "We shall overcome," because I know the Bible is right, "you shall reap what you sow." I am not going to stop singing, "We shall overcome," because I know that one day the God of the universe will say to those who won't listen to him, "I'm not a playboy. Don't play with me. For I will rise up and break the backbone of your power." I'm not going to stop singing, "We shall overcome," because "mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He's trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. Glory hallelujah, his truth is marching on."30

30 "To Minister to the Valley," address, Feb. 23, 1968. p. 21, King Papers.