To End War and Poverty: The Media Strategy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

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ABSTRACT

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Through 1967 until his assassination on April 4, 1968, American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. focused his internationally-recognized authority as a moral and religious leader against America's war in Vietnam and the values that he saw perpetuating the poverty of an estimated 40-million Americans. King's so-called "new radicalism" presented the difficult challenge of trying to win favourable news coverage for views that challenged those of the news media and mainstream America. Through the transcripts of an FBI wiretap on the home phone of King's most trusted strategist, Stanley D. Levison, and other archival documents, this thesis seeks a better understanding of the media strategy that went into advancing King's antiwar views and his efforts to rid American society of poverty. Positioning himself between go-slow moderates and go-for-broke radicals, King promoted a compelling "militant middle" that wedded radical idealism and pragmatic realism into a dramatic message that the news media could not ignore. Such a strategy was not without its risks and left King facing media coverage that was often critical of his refusal to drop his opposition to the war and adopt a more moderate approach in his fight against poverty. Yet media coverage also provided a crucial forum for his "new radicalism" that King deliberately sought out and used to warn America that its tolerance of war, racism and poverty was leading to social catastrophe and the nation's imminent "spiritual death."

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INTRODUCTION

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we see represented in today's mainstream news media is not the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. whom Americans were familiar with in 1967 and the first four months of 1968. King's modern media representation is limited to his campaigns in the Southern United States between 1955 and 1965 and emphasizes his belief in the possibility of racial reconciliation and harmony in American society, a belief immortalized in his famous "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington on August 28, 1963. Deleted from the frame are the growing doubts about his country that characterized the following four and a half years of King's short 39-year life. Notably absent is his conviction that a "radical reordering of national priorities" (King, 1968, p.100) was needed to cure the racism, extreme materialism and militarism that he believed were leading America toward her "spiritual death" (219). Forty-four years after he was silenced by a sniper's bullet on April 4, 1968, America's news media continue to direct our popular memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. away from the inconvenient prophecies of his last years.

In his essential profile on the civil rights leader in the August 1967 issue of *Harper's* magazine, journalist David Halberstam described this evolution as King's "new radicalism" (Halberstam, 1967, in *Reporting Civil Rights,* 2003, p.564). As Halberstam observed, radical thought was nothing new for King, only that "in the decade of 1956 to 1966 he was the radical America felt comfortable to have spawned" (563). King's use of nonviolent direct action in the Southern states, with its tactical emphasis on disobeying laws that supported racial segregation, was accepted by America's white majority because of his skill for swaddling civil disobedience in Christian principles and the patriotic

language of the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. While King's tactics remained largely unchanged in 1967, what was new and discomfiting was their targets – the war in Vietnam and America's economic class structure – and the climate of heightened racial tensions in cities across America that lent his "new radicalism" a threatening edge. As Halberstam wrote of the spring of 1967, "it was a time when the Negro seemed more than ever rebellious and disenchanted with the white; and the white middle class – decent, upright – seemed near saturation with the Negro's new rebellion. The Negro cities seemed nearer to riots than ever; the white, seeing the riots on TV, wanted to move further away from the Negro than ever before. A terrible cycle was developing" (565).

Given such circumstances, the news media more than ever needed King as the symbol of "respectability and moderation" that over the years he had come to represent in their pages and broadcasts, and thus to millions across America (August Meier, 1965, in *Reporting Civil Rights,* 2003, p. 456). More importantly, white America and the news organizations that represented it needed King to be what historian August Meier described as their "good friend" (ibid) who put them at ease when it seemed black dissatisfaction with the status quo was threatening to develop into open hostility towards them. By 1967, however, King could no longer provide the kind of mellifluous hope that the news media wanted and expected of him. Though he continued to preach nonviolence, King's preoccupation from 1965 onwards with the moral ramifications of America's war in Vietnam and the economic class structure that kept millions of its black citizens in poverty changed his outlook on his country and consequently the tone with which he addressed its white majority. As David Halberstam observed, King had decided

to work and speak for the ghettos, but the voice of the ghettos was "harsh and alienated. If King is to speak for them truly, then his voice must reflect theirs, it too must be alienated, and it is likely to be increasingly at odds with the rest of American society" (578). A press statement composed for King by his principal advisor and speechwriter, Stanley D. Levison, in response to an uprising in Detroit's black community in July 1967 echoed Halberstam's observation: "I regret that my expression may be sharp but I believe literally that the life of our nation is at stake here at home. Measures to preserve it need to be boldly and swiftly applied before the process of social disintegration engulfs the whole of society" (FBI, 7/24/67, 7/0442).[1]

King's increasingly discordant views, however, did not result in a consequent decline in media interest in what he had to say. If anything, his outspoken opinions drew more media coverage than ever before precisely because of his "new radicalism." While journalists like David Halberstam lent King's views increasing weight, others began to cover him with heightened skepticism if not hostility. In a private conversation with King recorded by a Federal Bureau of Investigation wiretap, Stanley Levison offered one explanation for the heightened media interest attending to his views:

> You're not just the man who's saying you must love them – they're getting the other part of the message, [that] there are certain sacrifices involved... You're going through something of a metamorphosis. They can't quite place you as conveniently as they used to be able to. And I think you'll be getting a lot of attention, not all of it necessarily favorable. You'll command attention, because they know where to put most of the [civil rights] leadership... But I think they don't know quite where to put you. And until they do, they've got to keep watching you (FBI, 3/25/67,6/0864).

[1] The referencing system that I employ for FBI transcripts in this study represents the date (M/D/Y) of the original recording followed by the microfilm reel number and the first frame of the date in question (ie 7/0442 is frame 0442 of Reel 7).

"A great media problem"

This thesis examines Martin Luther King, Jr.'s strategic response to news coverage of his "new radicalism" and in particular his positions on Vietnam and economic justice for America's poor in the last 16 months of his life, from January 1967 to his assassination on April 4, 1968. According to historian Adam Fairclough, King's opposition to the war and his shift toward more radical social and economic policies during this period presented a "great media problem" for him and his circle of advisors, known as the Research Committee (Fairclough, interview with the author, recorded March 14, 2011). King and the committee members were very aware of the fact that King could only go so far to the left of the mainstream – "Going too far to the left in America gets you labeled as a radical or a Communist or a Socialist," Fairclough said (ibid). Accordingly, Stanley Levison and King's other key advisers worked more closely with him than ever during this period to develop and frame his positions in ways that would protect him from allegations of extremism and Communist influence. Levison, who was older than King and whose past affiliations with the American Communist Party had led to a subpoenaed appearance before the anti-Communist House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), was especially determined to protect King from being smeared and "consigned to oblivion" like so many other critics of America's Cold War Establishment (ibid).

Levison outlined his understanding of America's distaste for extremism in an April 1965 letter to King, who sought Levison's views on the strong media backlash that had recently greeted his proposal for a nationwide economic boycott of products made in Alabama. Leading the criticism was an editorial in the *New York Times* that called King's proposal "wrong in principle" and contrary to the "orderly, lawful methods" that would best serve his stated goals of ending police brutality against civil rights workers in

Alabama and increasing the number of blacks registered to vote there ("Boycott," 1965/3/30). In his letter, Levison cautioned King that American society would not embrace revolutionary alterations of the economic and social order in the pursuit of racial justice and equality.

> America today is not ready for a radical restructuring of its economy and social order. Not even the appeal of equality will weld all into one fighting unit around a program that disturbs their essentially moderate tendencies... This is a subject for careful study because the movement can head into a cul-de-sac if it can see no real progress without radical alteration to the nation... It is certainly poor tactics to present to the nation a prospect of choosing between equality and freedom for Negroes with the revolutionary alteration of society, or to maintain the status quo of discrimination. The American people are not inclined to change their society in order to free the Negro. They are ready to undertake some, and perhaps major, reforms, but not to make a revolution (King Papers, 1965/4/7).

Levison saw in the media's harsh response to his boycott proposal a new fear within the Establishment regarding King, who in April 1965 was riding an unprecedented wave of national popularity among both blacks and whites for his leadership of the civil rights movement's dramatic campaign for voting rights in Selma, Alabama.

> Selma... made you one of the most powerful figures in the country, a leader not merely of Negroes but of millions of whites in motion... You are one of the exceptional figures who attained the heights of popular confidence and trust without having obligations to any political party or other dominant interests. Seldom has anyone in American history come by this path, fully retaining his independence and freedom of action... Whenever one attains a commanding position of power he also evokes fear... What are they afraid of? There are some who fear you are hitting at sacred structures of economic interests when you embrace the weapon of boycott. There are others who may not fear this, but are apprehensive that with your unique independence and influence you can err in judgment. So strong is your appeal, they are concerned that major, irreversible error is possible even though your motives may be sound (ibid).

Levison's advice was in part a response to the views being promoted by King's other key advisor at this juncture, Bayard Rustin. Rustin, a pacifist, labour activist and

expert in the tactics of nonviolent direct action, believed that the civil rights movement was evolving into nothing short of a revolutionary human rights movement whose goal was now fundamental equality for America's blacks. Bringing an end to racist Jim Crow laws in the Southern states did not end the *de facto* discrimination against blacks embedded in America's socio-economic order. Rustin saw racism as above all an issue of class that could only be addressed by a fundamental reformation of America's economic and social policies. Whereas Levison tried to work within the moderate tendencies of middle-class Americans, Rustin believed this moderation to be "immoral" (Rustin, 1965, p. 28) and the white majority's acceptance of a fundamentally racist status quo something the evolving civil rights movement now had to challenge head-on through an emphasis on developing political power and a program of radical reforms. As Rustin wrote in 1965, "It is institutions – social, political and economic – which are the ultimate molders of collective sentiments. Let these institutions be reconstructed *today*, and let the ineluctable gradualism of history govern the formation of a new psychology" (ibid).

While Levison emerged as King's primary confidant and adviser by 1967, King's "new radicalism" is clearly more in tune with Rustin's thinking on race and class and the necessity of fundamental economic and social reforms. The result is a creative tension between Levison's realpolitik pragmatism and King's determined belief that a consensus of conscience could be built around the need for radical social change. As King came to see it, he had no choice but to try to use his influence to mould a national movement against war, racism and poverty – and key to this effort was a media strategy that emphasized his belief that these "giant triplets" were imperilling America's survival. This understanding was expressed in an SCLC press release exactly one month prior to his

assassination:

> We are going to Washington on the urgent business of reform before it is too late. We must have a de-escalation of the war in Vietnam and a massive escalation of the war against poverty and racism… It is time to re-order our national priorities. All those who speak of good will… now have the gravest responsibility to stand-up and act for social changes that are necessary to conquer racism in America. If we as a society fail, I fear that we will learn shortly that racism is a sickness unto death (SCLC, 1968/4/3).

Any effort to assess how King and his Research Committee approached the inherent challenges of promoting his radicalizing agenda in the mainstream news media through 1967 until his murder on April 4, 1968, is made difficult by the fact there is very little documentary evidence of the discussions that went into the development of media strategy. As a result, this thesis is founded on evidence derived almost entirely from the transcripts of an FBI wiretap on the home phone of Stanley Levison. It also relies heavily on original documents from both King's papers and the records of his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), housed at the Library and Archives of the King Center for Nonviolent Change in Atlanta, Georgia. More information on all these sources can be found in the Methodology section below and the appended notes on my approach to researching this study.

Research Questions

This thesis approached these original sources with two basic questions in mind:

1) What did Martin Luther King, Jr. and his advisers see as the main challenges in terms of media coverage resulting from his opposition to the war and his economic justice agenda; and, 2) What strategies did they propose to overcome them?

Historical context

Answering these questions requires an appreciation of the historical context in which King and his advisors were operating and the circumstances to which they were responding. Such a perspective reveals that Martin Luther King's "new radicalism" was by no means out of place in 1967 and its harsh tone reflected the extreme and even desperate situation facing American society at this time. The following pages will serve to introduce the three main contextual elements that informed King's outlook and strategy: Ghetto uprisings, Black Power, and white backlash. Before we get to this discussion, however, we will first turn to an introduction to King's two main initiatives in this time period: The pursuit of peace in Vietnam and the Poor People's Campaign.

Vietnam

The period between March 1965 and the start of 1967 saw America's military involvement in Vietnam escalate into a full-scale if undeclared war involving almost 400,000 American soldiers. In the spring of 1965, King – then the world's newest and, at 36, its youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner – began to assert what he believed was his moral responsibility as a Nobel laureate and a Christian minister to promote nonviolence in international affairs. His opposition to the war in Vietnam proved profoundly divisive both within the civil rights movement and without, not least of all with President Lyndon B. Johnson's Administration. King's position on the war was also roundly denounced by many of his traditional civil rights allies in the mainstream news media. In essence, King was accused of stepping outside the (accepted) bounds of his civil rights turf into foreign policy concerns that his critics alleged either did not mix with civil rights or were too complex for him to understand. By September 1965, the intensity of these combined political and media attacks against his calls for peace in Vietnam

forced King to withdraw from the peace debate out of concern that the attacks were damaging his civil rights leadership. King expressed this fear in a conference call with his advisors recorded by the FBI on September 12, 1965: "I have come to the conclusion that I can't battle those forces that are out to defeat my influence," he said. "I'm convinced that the press is being stacked against me on this position. I have gotten unkind editorials on what I said. The criticism that affects me more is the one that says I am power drunk and I feel I can do anything because I got the Nobel Prize and it went to my head, that I am stepping out of my bounds. The true motive of my statements is never revealed" (FBI, 9/12/65, 5/0201).

Despite his withdrawal from the nascent peace movement in 1965, King only grew more convinced that opposition to the war was fundamental on both moral and civil rights grounds. Behind its rhetoric of protecting freedom and democracy, King saw U.S. policy in Vietnam forcing poor to fight poor in the service of a corrupt military regime in South Vietnam and America's overseas business interests. Furthermore, while economic discrimination against black Americans ensured their disproportionate representation among the conscripts in the front-lines and the casualty lists of Vietnam, King believed the deprivation facing their families and communities back home was only being deepened by the war's diversion of funds and political will from the poverty-fighting programs that were central to President Johnson's domestic "Great Society" agenda.[1] As King stated in the speech that returned him to the fore of the antiwar movement on April

[1] The concept of the "Great Society" and its accompanying "War on Poverty" were central to Lyndon Johnson's 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. The Act put in place more than $1-billion in programs that aimed to reduce poverty and effectively end what the Johnson Administration perceived as cyclical disadvantages of poor education, inadequate housing, and un or underemployment passed from generation to generation of poverty-stricken Americans. Among other features, Johnson's War on Poverty included proposals for rebuilding America's slums, improved health and social services, a broader food stamps program, and higher minimum wage.

4, 1967: “I was increasingly compelled to see war as an enemy of the poor and attack it as such” (King, 1967, in *The Lost Massey Lectures*, 2003, p. 178). Such a position, however, did not make the editorial boards of the nation’s major newspapers and news magazines any more inclined toward accepting his renewed involvement in the peace movement. Their attacks on King’s antiwar views would prove especially cutting in the spring of 1967. These attacks, and efforts by King and his Research Committee to counter them, are the core interests of Chapter One.

The Poor People’s Campaign

The fall of 1967 found America reeling from a summer of major rebellions in the ghettos of Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, and their deadly suppression by National Guard and U.S. army troops. With a reactionary Congress refusing to “reward riots” with the funding needed to address the desperate conditions behind the unrest, King announced plans to channel ghetto anger into a constructive, nonviolent direct action movement in Washington the following spring that became known as the Poor People's Campaign (PPC). Among King’s policy objectives for the PPC were government programs providing for a fundamental redistribution of America’s wealth including guaranteed jobs and, for those who could not work, a guaranteed annual income. King’s plan called for thousands of poor Americans of all races to descend on Washington and stage a massed "camp-in" in the shadow of the Washington Monument in order to dramatize the unemployment and deprivation that was sparking the rebellions in America’s ghettos. King believed that this public display of the destitution in which an estimated 40-million Americans lived would force the middle-class majority to see what author Michael Harrington had famously called “The Other America” and stimulate their vital support for the PPC’s goals. If Congress continued to resist this public outcry for

reforms, King threatened to escalate the Poor People's Campaign into massive civil disobedience targeting government operations. King's assassination in Memphis on April 4, 1968, came two weeks before the scheduled launch of the Poor People's Campaign. Chapter Two looks at the strategic development of the campaign and the imposing media challenges King faced in his efforts to defend massive civil disobedience as an effective nonviolent solution to the fearsome cycle of summer uprisings in America's inner-cities and their armed suppression by police and U.S. military.

Ghetto Uprisings

As radical as King's Poor People's Campaign and the reforms it advocated may seem by the standards of today's United States, he was by no means alone in his thinking in 1968. His economic agenda responded to the widely held view that social and economic conditions in America's ghettos were desperate and increasingly untenable and required massive federal investments to improve. Fuelling this belief in the necessity of radical anti-poverty measures was a wave of summer uprisings against police, white-owned property and businesses and other symbols of white authority and privilege in ghetto neighbourhoods across the United States. Starting in 1963, every summer through 1968 saw the ghettos of major American cities erupt in anarchic spasms of arson and looting and their suppression by police backed in many cases by units of the National Guard and the U.S. army. The year 1967 would prove especially tumultuous, with a total of 164 "civil disorders" in its first nine months, including major outbursts in Detroit and Newark in July that left a total of 66 people dead, most of them black civilians shot by military personnel, and hundreds more injured (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968, p. 6). They amounted to "the most widespread and destructive disorders in peacetime up to that date in American history" (Lentz, 1990, p.248) and produced talk

in Congress and the mainstream news media of an imminent "organized insurrection" (ibid: 266) led by armed black revolutionaries. Such exaggerations only fuelled the "terrible cycle" that Halberstam depicted above, of white America turning away from the desperation and legitimate grievances of its black compatriots. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which President Johnson established in July 1967 to assess the causes of the unrest, described this reality in no uncertain terms: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal" (1). Media coverage of the unrest, the Commission concluded, was one of the chief causes of this widening chasm. Not only were their exaggerated reports feeding the "fear and apprehension of racial unrest and violence deeply rooted in American society" (365), but they were perpetuating basic ignorance and indifference in the white community about the root causes of the disorders and the measures required to stop them:

> By and large, news organizations have failed to communicate to both their black and white audiences a sense of the problems America faces and the sources of potential solutions. The media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world. The ills of the ghetto, the difficulties of life there, the Negro's burning sense of grievance, are seldom conveyed. Slights and indignities are part of the Negro's daily life, and many of them come from what he now calls "the white press" – a press that repeatedly, if unconsciously, reflects the biases, the paternalism, and the indifference of white America. This may be understandable, but it is not excusable in an institution that has the mission to inform and educate the whole of society (366).

Black Power

The ghetto uprisings lent new weight to an emerging challenge to the traditional, nonviolent civil rights movement and one that would heavily influence the news media's coverage of King in his final sixteen months: Black Power.

Popularized by Stokely Carmichael, the young, charismatic chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC or "Snick"), a key organization in

the Southern civil rights struggle, Black Power embraced the spirit of revolutionary nationalism and self-determination that was fuelling social movements worldwide. In an interview with the celebrated civil rights photographer and journalist, Gordon Parks, Carmichael said the Black Power ethos was essentially interested in developing black consciousness and political power: "Black Power doesn't mean anti-white, violence, separatism or any other racist things the press says it means. It's saying, 'look, buddy, we're not laying a vote on you unless you lay so many schools, hospitals, playgrounds and jobs on us'" (Parks, 1967, in *Reporting Civil Rights*, 2003, p.560). The media representation of Black Power to which Carmichael referred fed on the Malcolm X-influenced rhetoric of black nationalism and armed self-defence that characterized early expressions of Black Power, along with its mockery of King's love ethic and his emphasis on racial reconciliation. Mainstream news media coverage of Black Power often emphasized its "anger," Carmichael's "fiery" invective, and its slogan-cum-warning to white America "move on over, or we'll move on over you." As journalist Paul Good wrote of the first cries of "Black Power!" in June 1966, "It knifed into the moderate, the liberal white (and sometimes Negro mind), interpreted as both threat and insult, seeming to undo past efforts at understanding and raising the spectre of violent nights under bloody southern moons" (Good, 1966, in *Reporting Civil Rights,* p.496). By July 1966, the *New York Times* was claiming that Black Power had "shattered" the unified front of the nonviolent civil rights movement, pitting the movement's older, more conservative organizations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and National Urban League, against the younger, more militant SNCC and the Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE) (*"Black Power*," 1966). Caught in the middle was

King's SCLC.

King was certainly no stranger to the revolutionary yearnings at the heart of Black Power. As he wrote in his last book, 1967's *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, "All over the world like a fever, freedom is spreading in the widest liberation movement in history. The great masses of people are determined to end the exploitation of their races and lands" (198). Though he was greatly troubled by the connotations of nationalism and black domination that he saw in the term Black Power, not to mention its advocates' derogation of nonviolence, King sympathized with the impatience of its mostly young adherents and did not join the NAACP and the Urban League in their outright condemnation of the Black Power doctrine. King understood its roots in Carmichael and SNCC's experiences trying to organize and register black voters in some of the most viciously racist regions of the Deep South. He saw the bitterness of Black Power as hopes hardened by "false promises... deferred dreams... acts of unpunished violence toward Negroes" (King, 1968, p. 30). King especially understood what Donald H. Smith described as the appeal of Carmichael and Black Power for the "dispossessed" youths of America's ghettos:

> Stokely talks of black unity and black pride in an effort to counteract a system that made the Negro believe he is inferior… The message of Stokely is that black is beautiful, and that black people must form political and economic blocks to buy and vote in their interests. Most importantly, black people must take charge of their ghettos and determine their own destinies, and they must protect themselves and their own against a predatory society" (Smith, 1968, p.182).

While King understood the psychological appeal of Black Power and even incorporated elements of it into his work promoting nonviolence in ghetto communities, he could not help but see Black Power as fundamentally "a slogan without a program"

(21). This lack of a firm program left the news media to surmise if not manipulate the meaning of Black Power and, as King wrote in *Where Do We Go From Here*, magnify and amplify its divisive effect within the civil rights movement.

> Every revolutionary movement has its peaks of united activity and its valleys of debate and internal confusion. [The Black Power] debate might well have been little more than a healthy internal difference of opinion, but the press loves the sensational and it could not allow the issue to remain within the private domain of the movement. In every drama there has to be an antagonist and protagonist, and if the antagonist is not there the press will find and build one (37).

This media-created drama would prove especially challenging for King's leadership through 1967 until his death on April 4, 1968.

White backlash

King saw at the heart of the ghetto uprisings and Black Power an intensifying and legitimate anger with America's fundamentally racist status quo. A decade of civil rights ferment had produced a new sense of dignity and consciousness in the black community and fuelled the growing call for full equality for blacks in the economic and social opportunities enjoyed by white America. Full equality for black Americans, however, meant the white majority would have to surrender its traditional monopoly on privileges like employment, housing and education. The threat of such a reconfiguration of the status quo engendered the so-called "white backlash" against the rapidly progressing demands of the civil rights movement. To black leaders like King, however, the white backlash in 1967 was really an age-old response to racial progress in America. "[The white backlash] is the surfacing of old prejudices, hostilities and ambivalences that have always been there" (King, 1968, p.80). While white apologists sought to justify this backlash in 1967 as an understandable reflex to the violence of the ghetto uprisings and the media-inflated hostility of Black Power toward whites, King pointed to roots that ran

back to when "the black man landed in chains on the shores" of the United States. "The white backlash is an expression of the same vacillations, the same search for rationalizations, the same lack of commitment that have always characterized white America on the question of race" (81). In 1967, it was the inevitable counter-revolution to the achievements and progressive demands of the civil rights movement. However, unlike previous periods when white backlash resulted in renewed black submission to the status quo, in 1967 it met with a vigorous and widening sense of black pride and consciousness cemented by the civil rights struggle and encouraged by a new and dauntless generation of black leaders like King and Stokely Carmichael.

While the ghetto uprisings and Black Power erased some of the white guilt that King knew was essential to progress on equality for America's blacks, he believed the white backlash could not withstand a massive nonviolent dramatization of the economic effects of racism that played on their inherent contradiction of the American Creed and its core values of equality, freedom, justice and humanity. Key to this effort, King believed, was the support of white liberals, not least of all those populating the ranks of the mainstream news media. The media, after all, had played a central role in promoting the rights of black Americans in the first decade of the civil rights movement. By 1967, however, King saw the news media contributing to the growing sense of alienation in America's black community:

> When Negroes looked for the second phase [of the civil rights movement], the realization of equality, they found that many of their white allies had quietly disappeared... The Negroes of America had taken the President, the press and the pulpit at their word when they spoke in broad terms about freedom and justice... The word was broken and the free running expectations of the Negro crashed into the stonewalls of white resistance. The result was havoc. Negroes felt cheated, especially in the North, while many whites felt that the Negroes had gained so much it was virtually

impudent and greedy to ask for more so soon (4-5).

Methodology

One of the key challenges to analyzing King's media strategy is the fact that King and his advisors had a vested interest in not documenting their media strategy. As David Garrow wrote in his 1978 analysis of SCLC protest strategy, "at no point in any of his writings or public statements did King fully admit just how important news coverage was to the movement" (226). This, he says, was due to the strategic belief that admitting any such dependence "would leave King and the SCLC open to the charge that they were seeking to manipulate the media" (ibid). Such a charge, and the idea that King and the SCLC were "considerably more 'calculating' than they wanted to seem" (227), would have affected the civil rights movement's image for being motivated primarily by moral and religious concerns, says Garrow. "The SCLC leadership quite likely presumed that any such acknowledgment would lend a somewhat negative hue to the movement's image, and they quite wisely avoided any such self-inflicted wounds" (ibid).

This presents a fascinating methodological dilemma: how does one go about researching a subject for which there is little if any documentary evidence? For answers, my research focused in part on King's papers and those of his organization, the SCLC, at the archives of the King Centre for Nonviolent Change in Atlanta, Georgia. It should be noted here that Adam Fairclough expressed serious doubts about the utility of this line of research. As he put it, "there are no smoking guns in terms of media strategy in the SCLC papers" (interview with author: March 14, 2011). However, given the fact Fairclough's research interest was not media strategy, I gambled that there was a reasonable chance that he had passed over documents that could still be of value to my research interests. This suspicion was supported by my preliminary examination of SCLC-related archival

material at the New York Public Library in May 2011, which turned up useful evidence of organizational media strategy. I went ahead with my visit to the archives of the King Center, where I spent eight working days between September 12 and September 21, 2011.

My interview with Adam Fairclough revealed that media strategy between 1965 and King's assassination on April 4, 1968, was mainly developed orally, over the phone for the most part, in conversations between King, Stanley Levison and other members of SCLC's Research Committee. Fairclough told me this was the "operating procedure" with regard to positioning King in the media, whether it was discussing the wording of a speech, a statement or a press release.

> [King] was very conscious about consulting with colleagues about getting the wording just right. Often he would get four or five people on the line in a conference call and they would hash out what position they were going to take. Often it was very fine nuances – that became increasingly important. For example, how to respond to 'Black Power.' They would have very long conversations about whether they should come out and attack it, what their position should be. And, of course, that was with an eye toward the media (ibid).

FBI wiretap transcripts

Transcripts for many of these conversations are available to researchers thanks to a Federal Bureau of Investigation wiretap on Stanley Levison's home phone, which was released to the public in the early 1980s as a result of David Garrow's research. As Garrow revealed, the FBI justified the wiretap as a matter of national security, citing Levison's past involvement with the American Communist Party as evidence that King was potentially being advised and influenced by a covert Communist operative. Information gleaned from the wiretaps kept both the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson abreast of King's every move for almost six years, between 1962 until his murder on April 4, 1968.

I was able to examine microfilm copies of these transcripts at the New York Public Library on a visit to Manhattan in May 2011, and then again via Inter-Library Loan at Concordia University's library in Montreal. While the quality of the transcriptions is inconsistent and seems to vary according to the FBI employee who was transcribing that day's conversations, they nonetheless provide a wealth of detail and insight on media strategy. The documents themselves range from verbatim transcripts of conversations to paraphrased summaries. Despite numerous typos, moments of obvious FBI subjectivity and the odd illegible passage, the transcripts on the whole capture the spirit of the discussions and the anxieties and complexities of the issues at hand. King's confidence in the older Levison is absolute and Levison speaks with King as a protective friend and mentor, providing him with the strategic advice and perspective afforded by Levison's extensive experience in America's left wing movements. As Garrow notes in the introduction to the guide to the microform transcripts, "since Levison was one of the few individuals to whom King could truly speak his mind – as well as voice occasional doubts and despair over the progress of the civil rights movement – these files shed light not only on King's many civil rights activities and his involvement in related causes, but on his personal feelings toward and reactions to the events that marked the last six years of his life" (Garrow, 1987: v).

A word on news sources

While this thesis is primarily interested in the response by King and his advisers *to* news coverage in his last sixteen months, it cannot avoid looking at the coverage itself. Doing so also provides a compelling *point – counterpoint* format that structures and drives the narrative in the pages that follow.

I have opted to limit my research of news coverage primarily to the *New York*

Times and the *Washington Post* for one key reason: the conversations between King and his advisers, and with Levison in particular, that deal with media coverage reveal a primary preoccupation with King's coverage in the *New York Times,* which was widely regarded as the era's de facto newspaper of record for white, liberal, middle-class America. The *Washington Post* ranked a distant second. The principal news magazines of the era – *Time, Newsweek* and the *U.S. News and World Report* – rarely factor into the conversations. The only other medium whose coverage is discussed at any length is television. However, there only exists haphazard archived news programming prior to August 1968, when CBS introduced a more systematic approach to archiving its newscasts. That said, my research in the archives of the King Center in Atlanta did reveal correspondence from producers and typed transcripts of King's appearances on broadcast current affairs and talk shows during the period, including CBS's *Face The Nation*, the syndicated *Merv Griffin Show* and NBC's *The Tonight Show* and *The Arlene Francis Show.*

Media strategy: Vietnam

Based on the research outlined above, Chapter One of this study posits that King's decision to return to the peace debate in 1967 led to the development of a media relations strategy featuring three key components: 1) *Establish whom you are with*; 2) *Retain your support, move them along*; and 3) *Assert the militant middle to neutralize criticism and radical optics*. The first element stemmed from Levison's conviction that King's priority should be developing the crisis over Vietnam within America's political Establishment by building alliances with prominent dissident doves like Senators Robert F. Kennedy and J. William Fulbright. Levison was keen to avoid a repeat of what happened to King in 1965, when he came out alone on peace and was quickly isolated and overwhelmed by his

opponents. Appearing shoulder to shoulder with Senators Kennedy, Fulbright and others, Levison believed, would position King so that an attack on him became "an attack on a lot of other powerful people" (FBI, 4/12/1967, 7/0047). Speaking alongside such men, Levison believed, would also amplify King's views on the war and give them greater resonance in Washington and throughout the country.

At the same time, both Levison and especially King were keenly aware of the need to retain King's support within his primary constituency – the black community – and move them along to more outspoken opposition to the war. Retaining King's base meant his involvement in the peace movement could not supplant his primary identification with the civil rights movement, which both he and Levison knew was the basis of his authority and national leadership. They also both understood that King's leadership on civil rights was the source of his standing with the news media and, as they learned in 1965, this standing did not transfer automatically to issues considered outside the civil rights box, and to the war in Vietnam least of all. King believed, however, that the war and civil rights were inextricably linked and used his influence to develop them as such and mobilize the black community against the war.

The "militant middle" position that was key to King's civil rights leadership also proved an effective position from which to promote peace in Vietnam and generate the kind of critical tension over the war that Washington could not ignore. King used his position between those passively concerned about the war and the peace movement's more radical, New Left wing to activate the participation of the moderate masses in peace activities and bring the movement's radicals around to a more pragmatic approach to ending the war. And he did so to great effect, with Levison noting in May 1967 that the

response King was getting was even greater than the "best point of the civil rights movement" (FBI, 5/16/1967, 7/0214). Such a position, however, also left King vulnerable to efforts by both the peace movement's more radical elements to push him toward more extreme opposition to the war and by opponents in the media eager to portray him keeping such radical company. For this reason, Levison believed King's efforts to organize from the militant middle had to be accompanied by developing alliances with the influential doves of America's political establishment and retaining his base in civil rights.

Media Strategy and the Poor People's Campaign

King's efforts to bring public attention to the intolerable conditions of America's ghettos took new and urgent expression following deadly uprisings in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan, in July 1967. These efforts saw King adapt his militant middle positioning toward winning public support for immediate federal initiatives to end poverty through, among other measures, full-employment and a guaranteed income. As he told journalists in October 1967, "I think we've got to find a kind of middle road between riots and timid supplications for justice" (King Papers, 1967/10/23, p.4). King's Poor People's Campaign would thus serve two vital purposes: channel the anger that was fuelling the "self-defeating" ghetto violence into a constructive and creative force; and bring the poverty crisis to the fore of public consciousness in order to get national opinion working toward federal job creation initiatives and other economic rights for America's poor.

As Garrow noted in his 1978 analysis of SCLC's protest strategy, "publicity in the form of news coverage is essential to the socialization of a conflict," which in turn is crucial to the "stimulation of government action" on the issue being protested (234). With

news media representatives already focused on the evolving tone and character of his leadership, King used this media attention to socialize the moral implications of the war and poverty in an effort to broaden popular support for redirecting America's national priorities from war and profit toward an emphasis on economic rights and a better quality of life for all her citizens.

SCLC's media strategy around the Poor People's Campaign continued this emphasis. Chapter Two examines the three key elements to this strategy, as determined through the FBI transcripts and original documents from both King's archives and the records of the SCLC: 1) *Downplay the disruptive and emphasize the constructive*; 2) *Emphasize the urgency that justifies disruption*; and 3) *Assert King's leadership*.

King's belief in the necessity of a massive federal job creation program became clear in the days immediately following the ghetto rebellion in Newark, New Jersey, on July 19. Levison thought that King's best approach would be to put forward "something constructive, some programs that may have a dramatic quality" (FBI, 7/19/1967, 7/0426). From this conversation emerged the idea of a massive federal employment program along the lines of the Works Progress Administration created under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 to provide jobs for Americans put out of work by the Great Depression. The outbreak of unrest in Detroit on July 24, 1967, gave new and urgent impetus to King's call for jobs, with Levison going so far as to draft a statement for him that said "If our government cannot create jobs, it cannot govern" (FBI, 7/24/67, 7/0442). This combined assertion of constructive job creation proposals and unguarded condemnation of Congressional inaction became central to SCLC's media messaging around the Poor People's Campaign in the months that followed.

The drama inherent to King's job creation initiative was enhanced by the PPC's dramatic threat of mass civil disobedience, which left King facing two major media challenges: 1) Reassure wary middle class whites and blacks that the potential dislocation of government operations was a legitimate and necessary tactic; and 2) counter the news media's preoccupation with its potential for turning violent and sparking riots in the heart of Washington. King approached these challenges by turning the media's frame on its head and promoting the PPC and its objectives of jobs and income as the solutions to the unemployment and economic deprivation that were provoking unrest across America. Bringing thousands to camp-in in Washington and, if necessary, engage in mass acts of civil disobedience was made necessary by the refusal of Congress to take the initiative to alleviate the frustrations and miseries causing the ghetto uprisings. As King told journalists in October 1967, "We have to do something to get national pressure, national opinion working toward it and I think you've got to have some massive act of nonviolence to do this... I think the civil rights movement has a responsibility to bring about the pressure and the power so that Congress can no longer elude our demands" (King Papers, 1967/10/23, p.3).

With the media questioning King's ability to maintain nonviolent discipline among rebellious, Black Power-inspired ghetto youth in Washington, King and Levison also became increasingly preoccupied with getting positive media coverage that highlighted King's influence in America's black community, including his herculean efforts organizing black voters in Cleveland's mayoral election in the fall of 1967. As Levison counselled King, "You have to fight for recognition, not out of immodesty but out of necessity" (FBI, 10/9/67, 7/0662). As media scrutiny of preparations for the Poor

People's Campaign mounted, the pressure found King and Levison becoming more preoccupied with avoiding mistakes that could be used to discredit the campaign and, by extension, King's leadership. As Levison observed, "there isn't any margin for having it go wrong, all the publicity will be on the period of floundering" (FBI, 3/23/68, 8/0242). Five days after this remark, on March 28, 1968, the outbreak of violence on a King-led march in Memphis resulted in just such a situation. With the media using the violence to question King's influence and his ability to bring off the Poor People's Campaign peacefully, Levison and the SCLC staff united to convince a stricken and doubtful King to continue. The SCLC stated its response to the negative publicity about its leader in a press release issued April 1, 1968, three days before King's murder: "The nonviolent movement will not be intimidated by violence. And we will not be stopped by those in positions of power who have failed to deal with poverty and racism" (SCLC, 1968/4/1, p.1).

Behind the media strategies for Vietnam and the Poor People's Campaign was King and Levison's shared belief that elements in the news media were actively working to oppose King and undermine his influence in the last sixteen months of his life. Despite this concern, King knew he needed media coverage in order to popularize his evolving vision for America and its priorities of international peace and a radical redistribution of America's wealth. This dichotomy is a central preoccupation of the study that follows. As King and his advisors knew well, the mainstream news media are essential tools in the struggle to alter the status quo that these very media tend to embrace. As we explore in more detail in the concluding chapter, King's success in this regard was founded on his skill at recognizing and exploiting emerging ideological tensions in American society,

tensions to which journalists were by no means immune. King sought and used the news media's heightened interest in his “new radicalism” to develop the fractured ideological consensus on the Vietnam war and the treatment of America's poor into a national crisis of conscience. By inserting his concerns for the moral implications of both war and poverty into the national mainstream via the national, mainstream news media, King worked to bring the legitimacy of the status quo into popular doubt and realize a radical reorientation of America's priorities away from militarism and winner-take-all capitalism toward policies that fulfilled America's promise of equality and justice for all its citizens.

CHAPTER I
AIN'T GONNA STUDY WAR NO MORE

> *Napalm, and its more horrible companion, white phosphorus, liquidize young flesh and carve it into grotesque forms. The little figures are afterward often scarcely human in appearance, and one cannot be confronted with the monstrous effects of burning without being totally shaken. Perhaps it was due to a previous lack of direct contact with war, but I never left the tiny victims without losing composure. The initial urge to reach out and soothe the hurt was restrained by fear that the ash-like skin would crumble in my fingers. (William Pepper in Ramparts, January 1967, p. 55)*

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s decision to renew his public condemnation of U.S. policy in Vietnam was influenced by a photo essay and accompanying article entitled "The Children of Vietnam" in the January 1967 issue of *Ramparts* magazine. The article chronicled the experiences of author William F. Pepper during a six-week fact finding mission in orphanages and hospitals around South Vietnam's conflict zones. King was left especially shaken by the accompanying photos detailing the horrific effects of American weaponry, and in particular napalm, on Vietnamese children. At an SCLC staff retreat five months later, King described the effect of "The Children of Vietnam:"

> [A]fter reading that article I said to myself, 'Never again will I be silent on an issue that is destroying the soul of our nation and destroying thousands and thousands of little children in Vietnam. I thought about the criticism. I thought about the abuse. I thought people were mean when we stood up on civil rights. But they threaten me a little more now when we go into a city. The security is greater now, because the threats have increased. I thought about all that. So I was prepared for everything that came. And I decided that I couldn't be silent (King Papers, 5/29/1967).

King's return to the public debate over the war in Vietnam in 1967 brought to an end a frustrating 15 month period of keeping his public comments on the conflict to a cautious minimum. This period of restraint was the result of King's initial public forays against the war between March and September 1965 and the hostile response that met his

pleas for peace in both Washington and the news media, with the possible exception of the *New York Times.* King's forced withdrawal from the peace debate as a result of such intense opposition was a bitter yet formative experience. Most troubling to him was the fact that much of the opposition aroused by his peace proposals accused him of arrogance for believing that he had the authority or even right to address issues of foreign policy. According to David Halberstam, this response "stunned" (p. 584) King, who went into the peace debate at the height of his influence as the world's newest and, at 36, youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner. Adding to this prestige was King's media-fed status as a national hero for his leadership of the SCLC's dramatic voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama, in early 1965 and the consequent signing of the Voting Rights Act into law by President Johnson five months later. Given such achievements, the widespread condemnation and paternalistic derision that greeted his pronouncements on peace left King shocked and deeply troubled by the implications of the attacks. "They told me I wasn't an expert in foreign affairs, and they were all experts," King told Halberstam about his experiences in 1965. "I knew only civil rights and I should stick to that" (ibid).

The attitude of editorialists and commentators in America's major news media would change little with the renewal of King's public pronouncements against the war in 1967. King's former advisor, Bayard Rustin, saw in the news media's attacks on King's pro-peace position in early 1967 the racist paternalism that had long defined white America's attitude toward its black citizens:

> One of the undertones of the attacks in the white press on Dr. Martin Luther King's recent statements on Vietnam may well reveal that America really does not believe that Negroes, as citizens, have yet to come of age. Like children, we should be seen and not heard. I say this because criticism of Dr. King was not limited to an evaluation of his proposals and his strategy for ending the war. It was, by and large, an attack on his right

> to debate, or even discuss, Vietnam. In substance, many editorials seemed to be asking, 'what is Dr. King doing discussing Vietnam?' or 'Who gave him the right to make proposals about our (meaning white America's) foreign policy?' (Rustin, 1967, p.169).

Riverside

The news media's condemnation of King's antiwar position reached fever pitch in the wake of his address to an overflow crowd of more than 3,000 people at Riverside Church in Manhattan's Upper Westside on the evening of April 4, 1967. Over the course of its 55 minutes, King detailed the reasons behind his decision to renew his public opposition to the war in no uncertain terms. King said his conscience left him no other choice than to speak out that night and concurred with a recent statement by the evening's sponsoring organization, Clergy And Layman Concerned About Vietnam, which began "A time comes when silence is betrayal" – "And that time has come to us in relation to Vietnam," King said (King, 1967, para. 2). Framing his speech as a "passionate plea to my beloved nation" (ibid, para.7), King asserted his right and even patriotic duty to freely express his views on the war. While this was "often a vocation of agony," it was also a reason to rejoice, "for surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history" (ibid: para. 4). This calling was also commissioned of him by his Nobel Peace Prize and his duties as a minister of Jesus Christ, both of which took him "beyond national allegiances" and "beyond the calling of race or nation or creed" (ibid, para.15). "The Good News," King said, "was meant for all men – for communist and capitalist, for their children and ours, for black and for white, for revolutionary and conservative" (ibid). King admitted to being "greatly saddened" by those criticizing his pleas for peace,

for their accusations only confirmed that they "have not really known me, my commitment or my calling. Indeed, their questions suggest they do not really know the world in which they live" (ibid, para.5).

When they weren't standing to applaud, the congregants at Riverside listened closely as King decried the war's "cruel manipulation of the poor" (ibid, para.10) and especially poor black Americans, whom he said were being sent "to fight and die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of population" (ibid). King underscored the inherent hypocrisy of "taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem"(ibid). He pointed to the futility of calling on the "desperate, rejected, angry young men" in America's ghettos to put down their weapons and embrace nonviolence when America was employing "massive doses of violence to solve her problems" in Vietnam (ibid, para.11). "I knew I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today – my own government," King said (ibid).

This last claim, and King's excoriating depictions of the cruelties and deceit of U.S. policy through the eyes of Vietnamese peasants, the National Liberation Front (Vietcong), and even North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, provoked a flurry of scathing editorials in the mainstream news media including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. On April 6, a *Washington Post* editorial entitled simply "A Tragedy" lambasted King's Riverside address, describing it as both "filled with bitter and damaging allegations and inferences the he did not and could not document" and "sheer inventions of unsupported

fantasy" (p. A20). The *Post* refuted King's claim regarding the unjust proportion of black American casualties in Vietnam and attributed it instead to "higher Negro enlistment for elite corps and the higher rate of Negro re-enlistment" and also to "the zeal and courage of Negro soldiers" whose contributions were for the first time "not limited to work battalions" (ibid). The *Post* did, however, acknowledge as an aside that limited "civil employment opportunities" available to young black men left them few options other than re-enlistment. However, noting the Johnson Administration's record on poverty programs and civil rights legislation, the *Post* concluded with the contention that King's Riverside speech did

> a grave injury to those who are his natural allies in a great struggle to remove ancient abuses from our public life; and he has done an even graver injury to himself. Many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence. He has diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country and to his people. And that is a great tragedy (ibid).

The *New York Times* followed the next day with a lead editorial entitled "Dr. King's Error" (p. 36)[1]. The war and equality for black Americans were "two public concerns that are distinct and separate," the *Times* wrote, "by drawing them together, Dr. King does a disservice" that "could very well be disastrous for both causes" (ibid). The civil rights movement's shifting focus to the more advanced and difficult goals of jobs, open-housing and better education required King's "full leadership, dedication and moral inspiration" and Vietnam was a "wasteful and self-defeating" distraction (ibid). The *Times* also refuted King's belief that the conflict in Vietnam was slowing the war on poverty in America. Defeating poverty was "at best the task of a generation" that faced deeply-rooted domestic obstacles including "local political machines, the skepticism of conservatives in Congress and the intractability of slum mores and habits" (ibid). Peace

[1] See Appendix B, p. 166 for the full text of the "Dr. King's Error"

would not change this reality, nor would it "automatically lead to a sharp increase in funds" (ibid). The *Times* saved its harshest criticism for the end by describing as "slander" King's equating of the U.S. military's testing of new weapons on the battlefields of Vietnam with Nazi medical experiments on death camp inmates (ibid). King's obligation to "explore the ethical implications of the war in Vietnam" as a Christian minister, the *Times* concluded, was equalled by his responsibility as "one of the most respected leaders of the civil rights movement... to direct that movement's efforts in the most constructive and relevant way" (ibid). Like racism, there were no "simple or easy answers to the war in Vietnam." Both were "hard, complex" issues whose linking could only lead to "deeper confusion" (ibid).

The New York Times

This editorial assertion by the *New York Times* that the war in Vietnam and the civil rights struggle were distinct and separate issues is contradicted by former *Times* staff writer, Gay Talese, who wrote that early 1967 found the newspaper preoccupied by one major concern: "the American crisis over Vietnam and the Negro" (1968, 465). These were not "distinct and separate" *crises*, but an all-encompassing, inter-connected crisis of national significance. While King had long been front page news in the *Times* on the 'Negro' half of this issue, his return to the peace debate assured the *Times*' undivided attention. In the three month period between February 25, when King gave his first public speech against the war in Los Angeles, and May 30, King's antiwar activities were either the subject of or mentioned in at least 53 articles in the *New York Times,* including the lead editorial described above and 15 front page stories.

A look at the total coverage of King's antiwar stand in the *New York Times* during this three month period suggests that he was contending with an overall unfavourable

frame, a conclusion that may seem obvious from its editorial response to his Riverside speech. However, the *New York Times* had a strict policy dictating the total separation of its news and editorial departments. This policy ensured that editorial positions did not influence news coverage, and vice versa. This was further assured by a firewall of professional pride that saw this separation on terms equal to that of church and state. Harrison Salisbury, an executive editor at the *New York Times* during this period, went so far as to write, "If, as occasionally happened, there was concordance of editorial comment and a correspondent's dispatch, the chances were that it was accidental and that neither of the great fiefdoms of the *Times*, the news department or the editorial, was aware of it. If they were aware they probably were made vaguely uneasy" (Salisbury, 1980, p. 43-4). Therefore, the *Times*' editorial condemnation of King's opposition to the war cannot necessarily be seen as representative of the overall tone of the paper's coverage of King's antiwar activities. It also cannot be overlooked that, despite the unfavourable frame for his peace stand, King's views on Vietnam did often benefit from fair coverage in the paper's news section, notably from reporters like John Herbers.

The *Times*' interest in King's peace stand escalated noticeably on April 2, when its popular Sunday edition lent itself to both a full-page verbatim transcript of a Herbers interview with King that started on the front page and an abridged version of King's address to a Chicago peace rally on its editorial pages. Such seemingly generous coverage of King's antiwar views was not without its frame, however. This was evident in the desk-written front page headline and introduction to the Herbers interview that played-up to the point of exaggerating King's "weighing" of civil disobedience as a tactic to protest the war. This *King-as-troublemaker* frame was made all the more ethically

suspect by the fact the question that elicited King's comments on civil disobedience was clearly leading and framed to get the response it did: "If the war continues and worsens despite peaceful demonstrations against it in this country, do you think the peace movement should engage in civil disobedience of the kind the civil rights movement has used with some success in the past?" King's response to Herbers was above all cautious and non-committal: "I have not yet gone that far. But I wouldn't say it won't be necessary. It depends on developments over the next few months... If our nation insists on escalating the war and if we don't see any changes it may be necessary to engage in civil disobedience to further arouse the conscience of the nation and make it clear we feel this is hurting our country" (Herbers, 1967, p.76).

The *Times*' treatment of King was symbolic of an organization struggling with its own deep internal divisions over the war. The leading voices among the staffers opposed to U.S. policy in Vietnam by 1967 were, for the most part, the very correspondents whose names had become synonymous with the war. One of them, Neil Sheehan, put his thoughts to paper in a *New York Times Magazine* article in the fall of 1966, entitled "A Correspondent Who Has Reported on Vietnam Since 1962 Sums Up: Not a Dove, But No Longer A Hawk" (Sheehan, 1966, p.27). In words reminiscent of those King would later express at Riverside Church, Sheehan wrote:

> For its own strategic and political ends, the United States is thus protecting a non-Communist Vietnamese social structure that cannot defend itself and that perhaps does not deserve to be defended. Our responsibility for prolonging what is essentially a civil conflict may be one of the major reasons for the considerable amount of confusion, guilt and soul-searching among Americans over the Vietnam war... I can only conclude that the Vietnamese will die more willingly for a regime which, though Communist, is at least genuinely Vietnamese and offers them hope of improving their lives, than for one which is committed to the galling status quo and is the creation of Washington. (ibid, p.132)

Harrison Salisbury was another. Just two months before King returned to take his place, Salisbury himself was at the vortex of the public debate on Vietnam as the first American journalist to report from North Vietnam in December 1966. As Talese wrote, his stories "landed like bombs on Washington" (1969, p.446). Salisbury's accounts of civilian areas in Hanoi and Namdinh devastated by U.S. air strikes forced American officials to admit that U.S. warplanes had indeed missed their military targets and hit civilian neighbourhoods, a fact they had long denied. Ironically, much of the resulting criticisms that Salisbury faced – that he was "politically naive," that he was being "duped by the Communists," that he did not "properly attribute" his sources (ibid, p.448) – were almost word for word the same accusations levelled at King by his critics, including the editorials in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Yet a *Times* editorial defended Salisbury, who returned to a hero's welcome from his colleagues. As Talese wrote, "His stories had gotten a fantastic reaction around the nation and the world, and the criticism of his reporting, so very trivial in view of the achievement, was now forgotten within the *Times*" (449).

The *New York Times*' editorial backing of Salisbury and its criticism of King reflected what Talese described as the paper's "never entirely predictable" tone on Vietnam (444), and such dissonance resulted in equally discordant assessments of the *Times*' position on the war. While insiders like Salisbury asserted that his paper's "increasingly strong stand" against the war from early 1965 onwards "heartened those voices... that began to speak out against Vietnam"(46), journalist Paul Good, writing in *The Nation* on May 1, 1967, saw the *Times*' rebuke of King's efforts to join those very voices as the culmination of an "internal struggle on the paper" that was producing the

"subtle but sure erosion... in the *Times*' once outspoken censure of America's Vietnamese role" (Good, 1967, p. 551).

"A frustrating and very lonesome road"

King's conversations with Stanley Levison from late March through April 1967 reveal that both were more inclined toward Paul Good's take on the editorial position of the *New York Times* on Vietnam. Levison and King sensed the paper's cooling support for King in its March 24 edition, which ran front-page coverage of the press conference at which King announced his intentions to resume his opposition to the war. Levison took special note of the fact the article was framed on the front page within a larger John Herbers report on the new black Republican Senator for Massachusetts, Edward J. Brooke, switching to support the war. Brooke, whose election in November 1966 made him America's first black Senator elected by popular vote, had previously advocated for negotiations and the de-escalation of U.S. military action until a visit to Southeast Asia convinced him otherwise. The positioning of both stories on the front page[1] clearly put Brooke in opposition to King, a fact reinforced by reporter John Herbers' observation that Brooke's support for the war "moved him away from many civil rights leaders who contend that the war against nonwhites is unjustified and draining off resources needed to attack social ills, particularly those afflicting the American Negro" (Herbers, 1967/3/24, p. 1). The report on King's press conference served to deepen this contrast with details like "Dr. King said disenchantment over the war, 'intolerable conditions' in the slums and white backlash against civil rights programs were creating an atmosphere for turmoil" ("Dr. King to Press Antiwar Stand", 1967, p.1).

Levison was less concerned by the content of these reports, which were by no

[1] See Appendix B, p. 165, for the front page layout in question

means unfavourable to King, than he was with the overall effect of their layout on the front page. Levison took the placement of the report on King's renewed opposition to the war within the dominant frame of Brooke's decision to support it as an indication that the *New York Times* was literally framing Brooke as the responsible alternative over an increasingly radical and unpredictable King. Levison told King "I think I mentioned to you that after [Brooke] was elected they would develop him into the acceptable leader and just the position of the two articles, that is what they are doing. He is moving to the right on the war and you are moving in the other direction" (FBI, 3/25/67, 6/0870). The placement of reports on King's antiwar activities in the *New York Times* frequently served to perpetuate King and Levison's shared view that the paper was trying to isolate King and undermine his leadership in the black community. Both also saw editorial opposition to King's views expressed in how a story was edited or the fact stories were written in a way that subordinated King's response to his opponents in favour of their accusations. Evidence of this latter belief in the April 13 edition of *New York Times,* which again pitted King against a prominent member of America's black Establishment, led an exasperated Levison to exclaim, "It's not only rotten journalism, it's rotten ethics because this is not a mistake... The war is affecting everything and the copy editor or rewrite man who does those stories doesn't like your position. And you are running into this everyplace" (FBI, 4/13/67, 7/0060).

This perceived editorial campaign against King by the *Times* and other news media organizations was representative of Levison's observation that the news media were starting to believe that he was "not so safe" anymore. As he told King, "You're not just the man who's saying you must love them – they're getting the other part of the

message, [that] there are certain sacrifices involved" (FBI, 3/25/67, 6/0870). King's increasing emphasis on dramatic nonviolent confrontations in pursuit of civil rights gains like open-housing in Chicago was combining with his plain-spoken views on government policies on Vietnam and ghetto poverty to produce what Levison described as "something of a metamorphosis" in him that the news media were picking up on:

> They can't quite place you as conveniently as they used to be able to. And I think you'll be getting a lot of attention, not all of it necessarily favorable. You'll command attention, because they'll know where to put most of the [black] leadership... They know where to put Stokely as well as they know where to put Whitney Young [of the National Urban League]. But I think they don't know quite where to put you. And until they do, they've got to keep watching you" (ibid).

Yet not all media were granting King extra attention, as King's literary agent, Joan Daves, discovered while trying to place advanced chapters from his latest book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Community or Chaos?,* in national magazines. According to Levison, initial interest in the chapters from senior editors at *Saturday Review* and *Look* magazines was later overruled by the magazines' publishers. Levison told King that Norman Cousins, publisher of *Saturday Review*, had allegedly told his editors that "he didn't want to run anything of yours because the kind of position you've taken on peace is so wrong that in six months your name is going to be mud. And therefore it's not worth running anything by you" (ibid). King, who was already aware of the incident, told Levison that SCLC Executive Director, Andy Young, had followed up with Cousins to clarify King's motivations for speaking out on peace. According to King, Cousins said he understood King's position but was more concerned that the peace movement was evolving into a "Hate America" campaign that was going to do "more harm than good; that they would bring about a climate that would really call for more escalation than de-

escalation" (ibid). According to Levison, Daves encountered a similar situation at *Look*, where publisher Gardner "Mike" Cowles allegedly ordered interested editors to decline the new material from King (ibid).

In an April 12 conversation with Levison, as public criticisms of his Riverside address reached their nerve-wracking climax, King acknowledged "the agony the ones who oppose [the war] go through... You take a stand against it and you get all these people coming out against you. It is a frustrating and very lonesome road that you have to go" (FBI, 4/12/67, 7/0047). And yet the perspective afforded by 12 years at the forefront of the civil rights struggle also taught King to see that determined opposition from "middle class Negroes and the power structure in the white community" (ibid), including the news media, was all part of the bruising process of "remolding a recalcitrant status quo" (King, 1968, p. 220), be it on race or war. Further buttressing King against the attacks of his opponents was the conviction that his position on the war was morally right. In response to Levison's observation that he was "not so safe" in the eyes of the media and would likely be coming into unfavourable coverage, King confided:

> [A]t times you have to do things to satisfy your conscience and they are altogether unrealistic or wrong tactically but you feel better. I just know on the war I will get a lot of criticism and I know I can hurt SCLC but I feel better and I think that is the most important thing because if I lose the fight SCLC will die anyway. But if I have a feeling I am right, I can make enough contacts to raise the money. And I feel that we are so wrong in this situation that I can no longer be cautious about this matter. I feel so deep in my heart that we are so wrong in this country and the time has come for a real prophecy, and I am willing to go that road. (FBI, 3/25/67, 6/0870)

While confident that King's position on the war would not greatly affect the public's financial support for SCLC, Levison stressed that tactical considerations were essential in order to both maximize King's influence in the peace debate and protect him

from his opponents. “It is the tactics that concern me more than anything,” he told King. “That you take a stand that satisfies your conscience is of the most importance and, second, that you are using what you’ve got to the best advantage” (ibid).

Media Strategy

As deeply troubling as King’s forced retreat from the peace debate in 1965 had been for him, it had provided an education in media relations that King and Levison would apply in 1967. From the FBI’s recordings of Levison’s conversations with King and others in this period, it is possible to identify three principal changes in their tactical approach to media and public relations around King’s renewed opposition to the war: 1) *Establish whom you are with*; 2) *Retain your support, move them along and move others along*; and 3) *Assert the militant middle to neutralize criticism and radical optics*.

Establish whom you are with

On September 12, 1965, an embattled King organized an eight-point conference call with his Research Committee to discuss the increasingly hostile opposition to his position on Vietnam in Washington and the news media. “I don’t think I have the strength to fight this issue and keep my civil rights fight going,” King said. “They have all the news media and TV and I just don’t have the strength to fight all these things” (FBI, 9/12/65, 5/0201). Convinced that the White House and the news media were uniting to “try to cut me down” (ibid), King believed his best defence was a show of support from other prominent, mainstream opponents to the war. “What can be done to give the national public a realization of the fact that I am not out here alone,” he asked his colleagues (ibid). The problem for King at this juncture, however, was the fact that few prominent Americans were speaking out against the war and King was essentially alone. This reality left King vulnerable to efforts to isolate and attack him and finally forced his withdrawal

from the peace debate altogether by the end of September 1965.

While too late for King, prominent opposition to the war began to grow in late 1965 and early 1966 as the estimated timeframe and costs of America's rapidly deepening military involvement in Vietnam spiralled beyond the initial projections of both the White House and the Pentagon. In February 1966, with journalists "bothering" (FBI, 2/1/66, 5/0524) him for commentary on renewed U.S. airstrikes against North Vietnam after a 37-day pause, a wary King turned to Levison and Bayard Rustin for their advice on how to handle the requests. Central to this conversation was Rustin's assertion that King's priority should be "establishing first who you are with" by linking his opposition to the war with newly dissenting members of the Senate and U.S. military (ibid). This point was then developed by Levison, who described it as "terribly important," not least of all because it proved King right in his lonely efforts the year before.

> This is enormously significant. Never before during a war has such a group of Senators taken a stand against it. It's particularly marked in Martin's case because when he came out on the issue he was pretty much alone except for the pacifists and the people you expect. And now he's almost forgotten. So, it's very good to keep in mind (ibid).

Establishing whom King was with would continue as a central rule in Levison's tactical playbook in 1967. Levison believed King's association with the political Establishment's powerful dissident doves like Senators J. William Fulbright, Jacob K. Javits and Robert F. Kennedy, brother of the late President John F. Kennedy, would serve the dual purpose of blunting if not protecting him from attacks by his opponents and advancing the political goals of the peace movement. As Levison advised King on Feb. 18, 1967, "if progress is to be made in changing policy it must be done in alliance with people who have weight politically" (FBI, 2/18/67, 6/0744). Levison believed the best

use of the political capital that came with King's status as the most influential black leader in America was to bring it to bear on pro-peace Congressmen and Senators in order to "push them along" (ibid). "The peace question will be solved when these forces, like the Javits, the Kennedys, the Fulbrights and the others have themselves found a direction and a kind of organization that makes them more effective. It is there that I think you can play a much greater role," he said (ibid).

Levison's belief in the tactical wisdom of allying King with dissident politicians in Washington was reinforced by *New York Times* coverage of King's first antiwar speech of 1967, which he gave at a Los Angeles event alongside four pro-peace Senators. The *Times*' front-page report put King front and centre and gave only passing coverage to the Senators' comments. Of the article's 17 paragraphs, reporter Gladwyn Hill dedicated ten to King and his views. "I never saw anything so impressive," Levison said of the *Times*' coverage in a conversation with King two days later. "They no longer say that you have no right to speak on Vietnam. This is the place for you to express your antiwar sentiments. When you are in this company, your voice is much bigger. When you are with four Senators, you are in the right place for somebody of your stature. Then you are recognized as someone with a spokesman's right to analyze" (FBI, 2/27/67, 6/0786).

Levison returned to this argument as King came under pressure to address a massive antiwar demonstration in New York City on April 15 that was being organized by James Bevel, a chief SCLC strategist who had taken a leave of absence to focus on peace initiatives. Levison opposed King's participation in the so-called Spring Mobilization largely because he feared the optics of King sharing a microphone with Stokely Carmichael and other outspoken representatives of the peace movement's radical

left. “You’ll notice they [the Senators] don’t get involved with that,” Levison told King. “I’m talking to you about Senators and people with big constituencies. They leave that for those who want to express themselves in that fashion. You can’t do both, and when you have to choose one, choose the one where you are making much more influence felt” (ibid). Levison expanded on this concern two days later in a conversation with Rachel Dubois, a prominent Quaker and pacifist, to whom he noted, “when [King] spoke with four Senators last Saturday the *New York Times* put it on the front page and put him above all the Senators. If [King] speaks with a lot of squabbling, pacifist, socialist, hippy collection that they have together [at the Spring Mobilization], his voice won’t even be important” (FBI, 3/1/67, 6/0797).

King’s address at Riverside Church and the ensuing media fallout from it deepened Levison’s concerns that, rather than developing opposition to the war within the political Establishment, King was endangering his political capital by deepening the Establishment’s misgivings about him. “Martin has to realize that he’s dealing with the State Department and the Pentagon and not some stupid sheriff in the South,” Levison told fellow SCLC Research Committee member, Harry Wachtel (FBI, 4/6/67, 7/0018). Levison put these concerns directly to King in a tense conversation two days later. Levison expressed views reminiscent of those that he had voiced two years earlier in his April 1965 letter to King regarding the Establishment’s wariness of him after his Selma success and his call for an economic boycott of Alabama. Referring to King’s Riverside speech, Levison cautioned King that he was putting himself in opposition to powerful players in American society who had the resources to damage and isolate him:

> You launched into an attack on imperialism itself which is an attack on the system and not only the war... There are a number of persons who are anti-

> you and distort what you say. If the forces that control the press and TV don't like what you say, they can distort what you say... I am afraid you will become identified as a leader of a fringe movement when you are much more. If mistakes are made, you can be cast in the light of someone [who] should be part of a fringe movement. (FBI, 4/8/67, 7/0025)

King acknowledged that his speech was "probably politically unwise" but stood by it on moral grounds. "I think I have a role to play which may be unpopular. I would say I may not have been cautious enough... I don't think careful thinking would have made me revise the speech" (ibid). King did agree with Levison's point regarding the capacity of the media to "distort" his views on the war and said he saw this reflected in the editorials in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post,* which he worried could "do damage by pushing me over to a particularly extremist position" (ibid). Levison added to this view, saying "that's right, they would say that you don't have good judgment... that you are a fine man but are being misled" (ibid).

King's post-Riverside experiences only served to deepen Levison's belief in the *Establish whom you are with* principle. Levison felt that much of the trouble that King came into as a result of his speech could have been avoided had he united with prominent advocates of peace in Washington from the outset rather than going out on his own with only lesser known peace leaders for company. In a conversation on April 12, a day that saw public criticism of King's antiwar position reach its peak, Levison told his friend, "The unity and solidarity of those who all have power and speak out would make much more of a difference" than King's associations with Bevel and the "fringe element" that Levison considered the Spring Mobilization group to be (FBI, 4/12 /67, 7/0047). Reeling from successive days of bad press, King agreed with Levison's assessment and voiced his desire to "pull away" from the Spring Mobilization crowd after his April 15 speech and

"move toward" the pro-peace Senators. The benefit of such a move, Levison added, was that it would put King "in this position where an attack on him becomes an attack on a lot of other powerful people and not an attack on easy marks" (ibid). King's association with the Spring Mobilization grouping was problematic for this reason, because it "is so easy to attack," Levison said. In this same vein, Levison observed that King's vulnerability could have been at least partially prevented by organizing support *prior to* going public with his pronouncements against the war. The benefit of this tactic, Levison offered, was that King's allies would have had their positions thought through and prepared in advance. Not doing so, he said, left King alone and exposed out front while people "think it out" (ibid). The value of such advice was made clear by the *New York Times*' coverage of reaction to his April 4 Riverside speech. The first story to suggest King had any support was an April 15 news brief on a statement in his defence by the National Council of Churches. King had to wait an agonizing 10 days for his supporters to mobilize, during which time his opponents had the *Times*' undivided attention.

Retain your support, move them along

If Levison seemed more concerned than King about the need for building ties with the doves of America's political Establishment, it was due at least in part to King's preoccupation with the second pillar of their public relations strategy: *Retain your support and move them along*.

President Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965, marked the beginning of a period of uncertainty and confusion in the traditional, i.e. Southern-based, civil rights movement. While prominent movement activists like James Bevel declared the movement "signed out of existence" (Herbers, 1965) by the Voting Rights Act, others like Bayard Rustin argued that it must now evolve into a political

movement for economic rights and genuine equality for America's blacks. King's deepening and increasingly outspoken concerns about the war in Vietnam at this time, which were echoed by the younger, more militant civil rights organizations, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), led to yet another view that saw a merging of the civil rights movement with the nascent peace movement. Amid the uncertainty and confusion, one thing was clear to *New York Times* reporter John Herbers: The civil rights movement was "groping for new ways to achieve equality for Negroes" (ibid). As one unidentified black leader told Herbers, "when they get Southern Negroes registered and voting under the bill, there will be no need for Martin Luther Kings" (ibid).

Accusations that King was "groping" for ways to maintain his leadership of America's blacks, if not irrelevant in a post-Jim Crow and increasingly "riot"-ridden United States, dogged him for the better part of his remaining days. This skepticism grew in strength over the course of 1966 as King and the SCLC brought the civil rights movement north to the ghettos of Chicago, where their campaign for integrated housing and education was credited with few successes and more broadly labeled a failure. Adding to King's leadership woes was the accelerating tempo and fury of ghetto uprisings and the emergence of Black Power in the summer of 1966 as a vigorous and existential threat to his influence in the black community – and among its increasingly restless, rebellious youth in particular.

The stress of this reality was evident in a January 1967 conversation between King and members of his Research Committee. As the FBI duly recorded, "King sees a trend where people say his day is over and he cannot appeal to the people of the ghetto...

King says this trend bothers him. He was bothered and upset by it" (FBI, 1/19/67, 6/0638). This concern was never far from the surface as King resumed his public opposition to the war in Vietnam, and it dominated a February 18, 1967, conversation on peace-related tactics between King, Levison, and SCLC Executive Director, Andy Young. As King and Levison had learned from the harsh experiences of 1965, King's standing in the news media and Washington stemmed from the authority provided by his civil rights leadership. King stepped outside of this frame and took on issues outside of civil rights at his own peril; his authority on civil rights and the standing this engendered did not carry over to other issues, the war in Vietnam least of all. Levison thus cautioned King to avoid committing himself to peace at the cost of his status as a civil rights leader, warning King that doing so would leave him "ineffective in both movements" (FBI, 2/18 /67, 6/0744). As Levison later observed, "When you speak as a man whom 90 per cent of Negroes regard as their leader, that is a big voice. When you speak as a man whom scattered peace movements regard as their leader, that is not such a big voice" (FBI, 3/25/67, 6/0870).

King, however, believed that combining peace and civil rights could resonate in the black community and saw "standing up for major issues" like Vietnam as a way to "re-assert" his leadership (FBI, 2/18/67, 6/0744). King said "there is more discontent in the Negro community than most people realize" and pointed to the positive reception his views on Vietnam were receiving in black colleges, where he said his audiences "go wild" when he speaks against the war (ibid). Levison, however, doubted that King could "carry great Negro masses to the peace movement" and believed that King would "lose as much as he would gain in the ghetto" (ibid). Yet Levison could not persuade King and Young to drop their enthusiasm for mobilizing the ghettos and adopt his preferred

strategic focus on the political Establishment in Washington. Though King did not disagree with this latter strategy, his Southern campaigns had convinced him that grassroots mobilization was also vital: "You have to have masses behind you before you can go to the President," he said (ibid). With this in mind, King spoke of making a "series of speeches on Vietnam" in the ghettos and in universities in which he would "urge young men both black and white not to avoid the draft but to become conscientious objectors because this war is so evil, because our nation has become so insensitive to what it is doing" (ibid). Levison, however, believed that King would "move ten times as many Negroes" if he was associated with Bobby Kennedy and other prominent, powerful Americans rather than the peace movement's lesser-known leadership.

Levison would continue to voice his doubts about the black community's interest in mobilizing around the peace issue. Though he believed that blacks "are probably in a majority against the war," he did not believe they would take to the streets to demonstrate this opposition (FBI, 3/1/67, 6/0797). "If they're not demonstrating for their immediate interests – and they're not right now – they're not going to be joining demonstrations against the war," Levison told Rachel Dubois. "They'll be reached in different ways; they're position will be articulated in different ways" (ibid). Given the pressure on King to prove the relevancy of his leadership, Levison's doubts could only have caused him worry. It was thus with palpable relief that King reported to Levison that "a good 1,000 to 1,500 Negroes, which we never had before" joined him as he lead his first ever peace march on March 25, 1967, in Chicago (FBI, 3/27/67, 6/0886).

King versus the black Establishment

In the wake of his April 4 Riverside Speech, King faced intense opposition to his views on the war from within the black community, from reporters and editorials of the black

press to the old guard of the civil rights movement. David Halberstam later provided insight into his inner-circle's take on the black media's opposition to his peace stand. Following a press conference at which a black reporter claimed black soldiers were against King's position on the war, Andy Young told Halberstam that they were not surprised. "Every time we get the dumb question, the patriot question, it comes from a Negro reporter" (Halberstam, p. 565). A New York minister accompanying Halberstam and King observed that "it was the Negro middle class wanting respectability and playing it close on Vietnam. 'They're very nervous on Vietnam, afraid they're going to lose everything else,' the minister said, to which King added, "yes, they're hoping the war will win them their spurs. That's not the way you win spurs'" (ibid). Opposition to King's views from prominent members of America's black Establishment also came as little surprise. King had experienced their opposition in 1965, when his first pronouncements on the war had been denounced by Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP, and Whitney Young, Executive Director of the National Urban League. As predictable as their renewed opposition to his antiwar statements was in 1967, a resolution by the NAACP's Board of Directors calling efforts to merge the civil rights and peace movements "a serious tactical mistake" ("N.A.A.C.P.," 1967, p.1) and its front page coverage in the *New York Times* infuriated King. He told his advisors that he was sure the NAACP waited to see what position the *New York Times* would take on his Riverside speech and then "came out with the same point" (FBI, 4/11/67, 7/0042). He accused the NAACP of "lying" by perpetuating the false notion that he was trying to bring the peace and civil rights movements together. "I have never advocated, in fact I've made it clear that we don't have the resources in the movement" to fight for civil rights and peace simultaneously,

King said, referring to numerous personal and SCLC declarations to this effect since 1965 (ibid). "I think the time has come to stop the lie and let them attack me on the basic points they want to attack me on and stop going around making something up" (ibid). King then acknowledged feeling as though "the cards are stacked against them as far as the press is concerned and efforts are being made to have the newspapers take a stand against" his position (ibid). However, King's furor was such that he was willing to override his usual inclination to ride statesmanlike above such controversies and take the NAACP on directly through the press. Levison suggested that "in order to get maximum attention" for the fact he was not for such a merger, King should make a statement in the form of a press conference (ibid). King agreed to present a statement at a press briefing already scheduled for the next morning and said he wanted the statement to say that "he would like to urge [his opponents] to attack him on the rightness or wrongness of the war and not obscure the issue by creating a false impression and giving it to the American public" (ibid).

King's statement on the NAACP resolution asserted four key points: his credentials as a black leader; his ongoing prioritization of civil rights; the "incontrovertible" links between peace and civil rights; and the fact that King's civil rights work continues despite the war.

> I live in the ghetto of Chicago and Atlanta and I travel tens of thousands of miles each month which takes me to dozens of Negro communities across the nation. My direct personal experience with Negroes in all walks of life convinces me that they in a majority oppose the war in Vietnam…They feel civil rights is well on its way to becoming a neglected and forgotten issue long before it is even partially solved…
>
> Only weeks ago in a formal public resolution, my organization, SCLC, and I explicitly declared that we have no intentions of diverting or diminishing in any respect our activities in civil rights and we outlined

> extensive programs for the immediate future in the south as well as Chicago. I am saddened that the Board of Directors of the NAACP, a fellow civil rights organization, would join in the perpetuation of the myth about my views. They have challenged and repudiated a non-existent proposition... I challenge the NAACP and other critics of my position to take a forthright stand on the rightness and wrongness of this war, rather than going off creating a non-existent issue... (King Papers, 1967/4/12)

The *New York Times* ran King's reply to the NAACP resolution the next day on page 32, as a secondary story to a new and, for King, even more upsetting attack on his public opposition to the war by NAACP board member Ralph Bunche, the black American winner of the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize and United Nations Under-Secretary for Political Affairs. In the report's front-page lead, Bunche called on King to "positively and publicly give up" either his role in the peace movement or his leadership of the civil rights movement (Sibley, 1967, p.1). Bunche also took credit for the inclusion of the "serious tactical mistake" emphasis in the NAACP resolution, which reflected his belief that King's position on the war "is bound to alienate many friends and supporters of the civil rights movement and greatly weaken it" (ibid). This was almost too much for King, who told his advisors that "the criticism and blasts and everything are getting out of hand" and said it was evidence that "a campaign is developing to undermine my leadership in the Negro community" (FBI, 4/12/ 67, 7/0747). This view was supported by his advisors, who concurred that the press was contributing to such an effort by "suppressing" (ibid) evidence of the black community's growing opposition to the war. "They are afraid of a Negro people's uprising," offered labour leader, Cleveland Robinson (ibid). In a private follow-up conversation[1], Levison and King took exception to the Bunche report on numerous levels. Levison saw both its positioning and even its

[1] The complete FBI transcript for this conversation is attached in Appendix B, starting at page 153

very inclusion in the *Times* as blatantly unethical because it gave front page coverage to Bunche's perpetuation of what King's statement inside the same issue clearly declares a "myth" (ibid). "[I]n the first part of the [Bunche] article it doesn't even say that you deny that you are for a merger. You don't learn that till you get to the second part, indeed you get the impression that Bunche is criticizing you for a stand you have taken," Levison observed, adding that you couldn't put the front page story on Bunche next to the report on King's statement "and hold with the first story" (FBI, 4/13/67, 7/0060). Equally disturbing to Levison was Bunche's argument that King's antiwar comments were costing the civil rights movement friends and support. As the FBI transcript for April 12 records:

> [Levison] says this is sort of a fantastic position for Bunche to take because it's really the old argument that a Negro leader shouldn't say anything that might offend white folks. [Levison] says merely because people don't agree with [King's] position on peace is hardly justification for them to withdraw (from) a fight for justice and civil rights... It's only when they think an issue might be unpopular that they say [King] has no right to speak (ibid).

King admitted to being "really shocked" by Bunche's criticism, especially because he believed Bunche shared his views on U.S. policy in Vietnam and would "welcome" his taking a stand against it (ibid). Levison suggested that the best possible response to both the NAACP resolution and Bunche was a "very clear statement" in support of King signed by thousands and printed in the *New York Times.* If the thousands signing it were 75 per cent black, Levison believed it would be a "devastating answer" (ibid). Another option was commissioning a private poll designed to ascertain opinions on the war among black Americans. If they could prove that a majority of blacks opposed the war, this would "more effectively answer [King's] critics than anything else" (ibid). In a moment of doubt as to whether this was indeed the majority opinion in the black

community, a rattled King also noted that "it would be a private poll that wouldn't get out if it didn't come out [in their favour]" (ibid).

With the Spring Mobilization only days away, King believed the demonstration's outcome would determine whether the black Establishment's attacks against him would continue. As the FBI recorded him telling Levison, "[King] says he knows when Roy and Whitney and even Bunche will back up – when they think [King] has support... If the Spring Mobilization has 10,000 people, attacks will continue; if it has 100,000 they will begin to listen" (FBI, 4/12/1967, 7/0747). Wearily, King added: "it's a fact of life – that people measure" (ibid). Yet he would not have to wait the three days to the Spring Mobilization for Bunche to reconsider his position. In a phone conversation with King the day his criticisms appeared in the *New York Times*, Bunche's remorse was so obvious that King "felt sorry for him," as he later told Levison. "He wasn't telling the truth and he was trembling and all so I just got off of him," King said. "[Bunche] claimed he didn't know that this was going to get out and he misunderstood my position" (FBI, 4/13/67, 7/0060). Bunche also confirmed King's original belief that he was "absolutely opposed" to U.S. policy in Vietnam (ibid). King said he suspected that Bunche felt "the newspapers and all just used him" and "made him look bad" but it met with the approval of "certain people" whom Bunche did not feel comfortable pleasing (ibid). Bunche's efforts to correct the situation in a press statement, however, did not disappoint King's suspicion that the *Times* would bury it. As King put it to Levison, "you know they play that game" (ibid). Bunche's statement, which read "so far as I am concerned – and I speak only for myself – Dr. King's disavowal of any such intent [to merge the peace and civil rights movements] takes care of the issue to which my statement had been directed," ran as a

brief on page 21 of the *Times*' April 14 issue.

The Spring Mobilization

Given his expectation that the Spring Mobilization march would attract a "mainly white" crowd, King wanted to avoid any attempt to use it as a test of his antiwar position's strength among blacks, which he knew would only feed the media-sponsored impression that it did not have their backing. However, in order to mobilize those members of the black community whom they could, Levison thought spot ads on New York City's black radio stations the day before would have some effect: "To get those that will [mobilize] one reaches them by mass media like radio," he said. Levison's continuing doubts that the black community was going "to want to identify with this kind of mobilization" led him to caution against framing such radio spots around the message "follow Martin Luther King and show you're behind him" (ibid). King agreed, and reiterated his desire to avoid giving journalists the impression that he was using the Spring Mobilization to gauge his peace stand's popularity with his black constituency (ibid).

Resigned to King's participation in the upcoming demonstration, Levison urged him to make use of the opportunity to publicly assert that he was not "bidding for leadership of the peace movement" because he had "heavy tasks in civil rights work on which he was working and will be resuming with renewed energy" (ibid). Levison took a lead role in drafting King's Spring Mobilization speech in the hopes of protecting King from a repeat of the Riverside controversy, which Levison attributed to an overstretched King's lack of control over its largely ghostwritten text. Levison told King that it tried to deal with too many issues at once and was not representative of King's typical thinking on the war. More than this, Levison believed his Riverside text was "too advanced" for his black base and not "what constitutes the widest appeal" (FBI, 4/8/67, 7/0025).

Coverage of the Spring Mobilization march in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* played up black participation, and in doing so provided King with some respite from his media woes. *Times* reporter Douglas Robinson introduced King as one of the march's leaders alongside the popular black singer Harry Belafonte and "several other civil rights leaders and religious figures" (ibid). Arm-in-arm they walked at the head of America's largest-ever peace demonstration, which brought together "between 100,000 and 125,000" people including "housewives from Westchester, students and poets from the Lower East Side, priests, nuns, doctors, businessmen and teachers" (Robinson, 1967, p.1). The *Times,* which paid little attention to the content of King's address to marchers at a packed UN Plaza, also noted that he spoke alongside Floyd McKissick of CORE and Stokely Carmichael, whose speech was punctuated by calls of "Black Power!" from the crowd. What *Times*' readers did not learn was that these same Black Power advocates "shouted 'Down with Martin Luther King' at several points during his speech," as Leroy F. Aarons reported in the *Washington Post* (Aarons, 1967, p. A1). This disaffection with King was ultimately to his public relations benefit, however, as Aarons reported that many of these opponents also "carried the Red, Blue and yellow flag of the National Liberation Front (Vietcong)" (ibid). According to the *Post,* this "Harlem contingent" of 1,500 marched down to the UN Plaza separate from the main demonstration, shouting "Hell no, we won't go" and ejecting white students who tried to join their swelling ranks, which doubled in size as they wound their way south. "The procession was soon translated into a black power movement," Aarons reported. "No Vietcong ever called me a nigger," they chanted, and "when we fight for Uncle Sam, we fight for our slavery" (ibid). In doing so, they left little doubt as to whether the war was an issue in the black

community. Further benefitting King was the fact Aarons' report gave itself over to generous coverage of his speech and highlighted the fact that he "also took pains to clarify his views on the alliance of the civil rights movement and anti-war movements, a position that has led moderates to exhort him to moderate or repudiate his stand" (ibid). Aarons quoted King telling the thousands massed before him at the UN Plaza "I have not urged a mechanical fusion of the civil rights and peace movements... There are people who have come to see the moral imperative of world brotherhood. I would like to see the fervor of the civil rights movement imbued into the peace movement to instill it with greater strength, but I am not urging a single organizational form" (ibid).

This was music to the ears of both King and Levison, who over the next days spoke of his satisfaction with media coverage of the Spring Mobilization on a number of occasions. With King's opponents backing off their attacks in the wake of the march's historic turnout, Levison's main concern was King's need to re-assert his leadership in civil rights or risk losing his base. King, however, was now more convinced than ever that his opposition to the war was finding traction in the black community as a civil rights issue and believed it imperative that he press ahead on peace. King told Levison that in a recent Chicago meeting with ghetto representatives, they informed him that "the Negro community in the ghetto, they are just against the war" (FBI, 5/9/67, 7/0166). King also pointed to poll results in the *Chicago Defender*, a prominent black community newspaper that had earlier denounced King's Riverside speech, which found the number of local blacks voicing opposition to the war had quadrupled. A Lou Harris poll published in the *Washington Post* on May 22 painted a less encouraging picture but nevertheless gave King reason to believe his peace stand was at least resonating with America's black

citizens. While finding that 73 percent of Americans "disagree with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his denunciations of the war in Vietnam" (Harris, 1967/5/22, p. A2) and another 60 percent said his statements were hurting civil rights, Harris found that the percentages among black respondents were significantly different. Those opposed dropped to 48 percent while 25 percent agreed with King and 27 percent reserved judgment. More significantly, Harris found that "no more than one-third" of blacks polled was "willing to endorse the view that Dr. King's foreign policy stand will hurt their struggle for opportunity on the home front" (ibid). In light of these results, the pollster posited that "Dr. King may well have within his power a capability of influencing between one-third and one-half of all Negro voters behind a candidate he might endorse for President in 1968. It seems unlikely now that Dr. King will support Lyndon Johnson" (ibid). In other words, King's peace stand now had him in the all-powerful position of potential kingmaker in the November 1968 Presidential election.

One month after the Spring Mobilization, Levison expressed his confidence that King's peace stand was not adversely affecting his "standing in the black community" (FBI, 5/16/67, 7/0214). In fact, SCLC's economic initiatives in Chicago were enjoying unprecedented success. Levison highlighted this fact by pointing to the SCLC's marquee job creation program for ghetto residents, Operation Breadbasket, which had just signed its biggest agreement yet. "There is no trouble with the Negro businessman," Levison asserted. "There just isn't evidence that [the peace] issue cuts deep in the Negro community" (ibid). If anything, King's linking of peace and civil rights was beginning to penetrate and mobilize all levels of the black community and even whites. "This I swore he couldn't do," a humbled Levison admitted, but King "knew what he had" (ibid). As

evidence, Levison pointed to King's recent efforts to defuse tensions between Cleveland's black community and the city's mayor, Ralph Locher, and avoid a repeat of the previous summer's anarchy that left four dead in the city's Hough ghetto.

> He came in and spent the day doing all kinds of things: going to the high schools talking to kids, combining peace and civil rights. He spoke to white and Negro groups. By the end of the day he had taken over the city. When he got there the morning editorials denounced him as an outsider who should stay out. The evening editorials said he had the most constructive solutions and praised him. The Negro power structure turned against the mayor... Then the white power structure turned against the mayor by the end of the day. Even the black Nationalists came around in order to drive away one lone picket who was picketing Martin on Vietnam. What I think was terribly significant was that he got this fantastic mass response with every group in the city while he continued to combine the war and civil rights. If you wanted a better example in whether Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young are right, that you do damage to both movements, this was a beautiful example (ibid).

Assert the militant middle

King's effectiveness at broadening black opposition to the war was facilitated by his position at what Levison identified as the "militant middle" between moderate middle class blacks and the left-wing advocates of Black Power. From this position, King was able to reinforce and even broaden his leadership base in the black community by pulling both its small "c" conservatives and elements of the more radical left towards his activist middle. King expressed the strategic value of this position to Levison in mid-May, in light of the *Chicago Defender* poll that showed support for peace had quadrupled in the ghetto: "I think my job is to stick with [antiwar activities] because I think we will have more leverage if we can get Negroes more opposed and more people to the center. I think if we can continue to escalate opposition to the war, I believe firmly that [Johnson] is going to think a long, long time about this question of halting the bombing." (FBI, 5/11/67, 7/0185).

In an address to his staff at a retreat on May 29, 1967, King expanded on the ideology of the militant middle. He explained that the major issue facing America at this juncture was "how to keep the tension alive between a legitimate conservatism, because you have something to conserve, and a pressing radicalism, because there are millions of God's children who are living with conditions that they don't want to conserve" (King Papers, 5/29/67). King said the troubles confronting America, in Vietnam and in its restive inner-cities, were products of the fact this tension has not been maintained. "This is where we, the civil rights movement, must speak to our nation," King said. Maintaining this creative tension between what King described as "opposites strongly marked" (ibid) in American society was key to a healthy state of the union. As King noted, "what is wrong in life is that most idealists are not realists, and most realists are not idealists. Most people who are militant are not moderate and most people who are moderate are not militant" (ibid). America needed to learn, he said, "to be both conservative and radical" (ibid).

As it related to Vietnam, Levison defined the militant middle as those "interested in active programs but are not New Left [i.e. radically opposed to U.S. policy], and are not eager to join the New Left, but are not eager to attack it, either" (FBI, 5/16/67, 7/0214). He and King believed there were millions of Americans in this category who could be moved to actively support the right peace program. This translated into a strategic emphasis on what King and Levison believed to be activist yet pragmatic proposals for de-escalating the conflict and getting the belligerents to the negotiating table. This blend of idealism and realism, militancy and moderatism is exemplified in the text of King's Spring Mobilization speech and its realpolitik assertion that the "sincere"

desire of many to see U.S. forces unilaterally withdrawn from Vietnam was unfortunately out of step with the will of a "majority of Americans" (FBI, 4/13/67, 7/0060). Instead, King said, "realism compels us to look for a program they [the majority] can support and which can end the fighting. I believe there is such a program, I believe almost a majority of Americans want the bombings ended" (ibid).

The militant middle's fusion of realism and idealism was not always easy for King to maintain and at times entered into conflict with his personal views on the war, which often leaned sympathetically towards the radical idealism of the New Left. Realism too often meant moderation and compromise, and the evil that King saw in the war left little room for either. Moderating his views on the war was also tantamount to accepting the limitations that he saw the *New York Times, Washington Post* and others setting for him – limitations that he had dedicated the previous decade of his life to expunging from American society. As he told Levison in response to their Riverside editorials, "The thing is I am to stay in my place and I am a Negro leader and I should not stray from a position of moderation. I can't do that" (FBI, 4/8/67, 7/0025). Levison worried, however, that the views King expressed at Riverside were "too far out" for the "average person" (ibid), and this was the demographic he had to reach if he wanted to develop a truly mass movement against the war. It was thus imperative that King reassert the balance between idealism and realism, between satisfying his conscience and the tactics that could maximize his impact on peace.

The militant middle and the news media

Essential to achieving this maximal impact was a media strategy that ensured news coverage that reflected the militant middle's strategic balance between moderates and the activist left of the peace movement. With rising media interest in King's

"metamorphosis" as a leader, the right strategy had the potential to mobilize millions more against the war - and a message from the militant middle was key. King's combination of moral militancy and pragmatic solutions for this issue of profound national concern proved a compelling mix that the news media could not afford to ignore, especially after his role in the history-making Spring Mobilization march. Prentiss Childs and Ellen Wadley, co-producers of *Face The Nation*, summed up this interest in a note thanking King for his appearance on the show in late April 1967: "Your new involvement in the peace movement in addition to civil rights certainly places you at the vortex of the conflicting forces in our society and makes your views of increasing importance for everyone" (King Papers, 1967/4/28). The "increasing importance" Childs and Wadley placed on King's views at this time reflected and no doubt contributed to the public interest in King's appearances that he claimed was unlike any he had ever experienced, "even at the best point of the civil rights movement," Levison noted. "There's never an empty seat or space in any auditorium where he speaks. And many of these are universities" (FBI, 5/16/67, 7/0214). Levison linked this to the fact that King was "representative of the militant middle. He's neither regarded as New Left nor a passive figure" (ibid). This surging public interest in King's position contributed to the emerging sense in the news media that he was evolving into something new and, to his opponents, threatening. Levison attributed this impression to the fact King's previous antiwar statements had been just that – statements. Now that King was addressing mass audiences, it was inherently more "dramatic" and thus seemed more militant, even though the content of his earlier statements and what he was now saying publicly were essentially the same. As Levison observed:

> The press regards a statement as a formal thing that is not as serious as when you are speaking to masses of people. They feel that you are not only committing yourself but are moving people. There is no difference in quality, every time [King] made a statement on the war he was well-beyond everybody else [in terms of] militancy. But now he's getting attention because he's speaking before audiences (FBI, 4/5/67, 7/0012).

The radical frame

This perception made the militant middle a position fraught with risk. To King's immediate left were some of the peace movement's more radical critics of President Johnson's Vietnam policy and rubbing shoulders with them put King at constant risk of falling into the negative, "extremist" frame that the news media applied to them. Defending King against this was made all the more challenging by active efforts within the news media to push him into this frame, not to mention the equally active pull of his own sympathies toward the radical idealism of those to his left. The inherent tensions of his militant middle stand are evident in a conversation between King and Levison on media coverage of King's first peace march in Chicago on March 25, 1967, and the speech that followed. King expressed satisfaction that coverage mentioned his assertion of love for America, a detail that Levison agreed was vital. Given the fact that King's involvement with the peace movement saw him "associated with a lot of young people who are rejecting society," which Levison said "boils down to a rejection of the nation," he cautioned King to avoid being tied to them. "I'm not talking opportunistically. It's unsound thinking," Levison said (FBI, 3/27/67, 6/0886).

There is no small irony in the fact King's Riverside speech was organized specifically to counter the controversial optics that his advisers feared his participation in the Spring Mobilization would entail. Levison and the vast majority of King's Research Committee had grave misgivings about the other speakers he would be appearing

alongside, not least of all Stokely Carmichael, whose Black Power radicalism and tendency to characterize the country's leadership as "a racist named McNamara, a fool named Rusk and a buffoon named Johnson" (Davies,1966. p. 62) made him a favourite with the news media for all the wrong reasons. The only member of King's inner-circle who supported his participation in the Spring Mobilization was James Bevel, who had taken a leave of absence from SCLC to chair the march's organizing committee. Much to the chagrin of Levison and his Research Committee colleagues, who believed Bevel had also taken a permanent leave from reality (FBI, 2/18/67, 6/0744)[1], King ultimately sided with his mystical, yarmulked friend. King felt that avoiding the mass march would make him seem a "coward" (FBI, 3/6/67, 6/0816) and cater to the morbid phobias of his red-baiting, reactionary opponents. Levison countered this, believing his participation would lead him into a deeper association with the peace movement's extremist fringe at the expense of his hard-earned status and influence in civil rights (ibid). To appease his advisers' fears, King agreed to "neutralize" (FBI, 3/27/67, 6/0886) the potentially negative associations of his Spring Mobilization speech with an advance presentation of his antiwar views in a more "respectable setting" (Garrow, 1986, p.550). His address at the venerable Riverside Church to the clean-cut members of Clergy And Laymen Concerned About Vietnam seemed the ideal antidote to the "squabbling, pacifist, socialist, hippy collection" that Levison considered the Spring Mobilization to be (FBI, 3/1/67, 6/0797). This need to "neutralize" King's Spring Mobilization appearance was supported by allegations in a report by the House Un-American Activities Committee that the march was "principally the work of Communists," as the *Washington Post* reported on April 1 (Levy, 1967, p.A6). The HUAC report charged that the involvement of King

[1] Bevel openly attributed his antiwar activities to a visit from Jesus while he was doing his laundry.

and James Bevel was "evidence that the Communists have succeeded, at least partially, in implementing their strategy of fusing the Vietnam and civil rights issues in order to strengthen their chances of bringing about a reversal of U.S. policy in Vietnam" (ibid). Bevel "scoffed" at the HUAC allegations, calling its report "dishonest" and part of the government-sponsored "myth of conspiracy" (ibid). Rather, Bevel said that for the first time "civil rights groups, churches and universities are very concerned, serious and prepared for work" (ibid). Levison's fears about the Spring Mobilization were further reinforced by Stokely Carmichael's rumoured plans for ensuring that everyone including the news media would be talking about his speech after the Spring Mobilization, not King's. "He's going to try to steal the whole thing from Martin," said Levison, who saw this as further evidence that Carmichael was becoming "a real danger" to King (FBI, 4/14/67, 7/0071). Clarence Jones, SCLC's lawyer and a member of King's Research Committee, added: "he is going to have the effect of being the bomb-thrower to get the reaction off without any thought of its political objective or if it achieves one" (ibid).

History, of course, saw the roles of the Spring Mobilization and Riverside reversed: King's dignified, respectable presence at the head of the Spring Mobilization's sea of upstanding, concerned citizenry served to neutralize its more controversial, radical aspects and quiet some of the public fallout from his Riverside speech. Both Levison and King expressed satisfaction with the media coverage of the march, which Levison felt highlighted and deepened King's "moderate appeal" (FBI, 4/18/ 67, 7/0087). However, concern among King's advisors and friends that the Spring Mobilization's more radical elements wanted to use King's participation in the march to "box" him in and "capture" him (FBI, 4/14/67, 7/0071; 4/22/67, 7/0103) were not misplaced, and Levison saw the

New York Times facilitating their efforts. On April 22, the *New York Times* reported the intentions of the New Left-affiliated National Conference for New Politics (NCNP) to ask King to run for President in 1968 on a third party "peace ticket" with Benjamin Spock, the famous paediatrician and prominent opponent of the war in Vietnam. In a discussion about the article, Levison told King that such speculation was useful in the sense it gave the White House another reason to worry along with the Spring Mobilization's massive turnout. Levison expressed concern, however, that "the aggressiveness of the New Politics group enabled King's critics to talk about the "Leftist grouping that is parrying you along" (ibid). Reports of King's participation in a closed-door NCNP conference the following day produced further concerns that *New York Times* readers were being led to believe that King was in fact working with the New Left. Levison's brother, Roy Bennett, said King wasn't helping matters with his presence as the "only liberal" at the private and "exclusively New Left" meeting (ibid). Taken together with his leadership in the Spring Mobilization, Bennett worried that the *Times* was facilitating the conclusion that King "is making a decision and is joining the New Left community and becoming their leader" (ibid). Given the prominent coverage of the NAACP's misleading resolution on a peace-civil rights merger, Levison believed that "it was probably by design" that the press was portraying King as holding positions that he in fact did not (ibid). Levison told King that this made it necessary to clarify his positions at every given opportunity in order for them to gain traction with the American public. This would take extra effort, however, given his view that the news media were "working against" King (ibid).

On April 25, King held an Atlanta press conference at his home parish, Ebenezer

Baptist Church, to officially quiet any confusion over talk of his candidacy for President in 1968. King started out with a touch of humour, saying he was "quite surprised" by the various newspaper reports on the topic, and found it "very hard to take them seriously (King Papers, 1967/4/25). King said he understood the "stirrings" across America for "a candidate who will take a principled stand on the question of the war in Vietnam and the problems of the urban ghettos" (ibid). In declining that he was this candidate, King explained,

> I have come to think of my role as one which operates outside the realm of partisan politics, raising the issues and through action create the situation which forces whatever party is in power to act creatively and constructively in response to the dramatic presentations of these issues on the public scene. I plan to continue that role in the hope that the war in Vietnam will be brought to a close long before the 1968 elections and that this present Congress finds both the courage and the votes to once again move our nation toward a truly great society for every citizen. (ibid)

Efforts by the *New York Times* to portray King as a spokesman for the New Left were perceived once more by King and Levison in a July 9 article on the NCNP's first national conference in Chicago. Headlined "New Left convention next month will seek strategy to defeat Johnson," the article was accompanied by a picture of King, whom the articled billed as the convention's "keynote speaker" (Jansen, 1967, p.38). Levison called King to discuss the article, which he found "very damaging" for the unmistakeable impression it gave that King was the leader of a New Left movement to oust President Johnson in 1968. King said the only information that he had about the conference was that he was to be one of the speakers, to which Levison replied "They have turned it around cleverly and made you the principle speaker" (FBI, 7/9/67, 7/0395). King mentioned that this had been the basis of a question put to him in an NBC interview earlier that day and it had caught him off-guard. The article's potential for hurting King

was heightened by the inclusion of a quote from the "red-bearded" 25-year-old chair of the convention's steering committee, Michael P. Wood, who told reporter Donald Jansen that "old left" organizations like the Communist Party had not been invited because they were "too conservative" (ibid). The deeper issue with the article, Levison offered, was that it put King in association with "people who do not know their politics," which could only reflect negatively on him (ibid). King was especially troubled by the idea people would think that he was participating in a "Hate Johnson thing," which he said he "wanted to be above" (ibid). Despite this new evidence of the paper's suspected agenda against him, King nonetheless put forward the idea of approaching another reporter at the *New York Times* to cover a statement that Levison was going to draft in response to Jansen's article. In a nod to their faith in John Herbers, Andy Young proposed him as the reporter they should approach to write it.

Levison's carefully worded draft statement for King asserted that failing to correct the "unmistakeable impression" of King's close association with the NCNP convention would be "misleading and a distortion" of their relationship on the part of the *New York Times*.

> I am solely related to the Convention merely as a guest speaker at its mass rally. My presence there is not an endorsement of any decisions made by the Convention, in none of which I shall be participating. In addition to having no relationship with the general policy or strategy of the organization, I am specifically not involved with any plans to start a third party with myself as its Presidential candidate. I excluded any such possibility last April and that decision remains unaltered. It would not be possible for the convention to make plans concerning me since I am in no way subject to its decisions. (FBI, 7/10/67, 7/0399)

Such efforts at damage control did not get far, however. *New York Times'* coverage of the meeting on August 31, 1967, affirmed King's place amid the "2,000 radicals" in

attendance and their campaign to defeat Lyndon B. Johnson in November 1968. If King did in fact want to avoid a "hate Johnson thing," his speech to the convention made little effort to go easy on the president. The *Times* portrayed King as "advising" convention delegates to make "the 1967-68 elections a referendum on the war" – "The American people must have an opportunity to vote into oblivion those who cannot detach themselves from militarism, those who lead us not to a new world but drag us to the brink of a dead world," King is quoted saying (Weaver, 1967, p.15). The radical frame, however, was moderated somewhat by reporter Warren Weaver Jr.'s claim that organizers expected trouble from "black power advocates, some of whom do not regard [King] as sufficiently radical" (ibid).

These concerns, however, were already becoming secondary to a more urgent issue on the domestic front: "riots." On July 12, the arrest and beating of John Smith, a black cab driver, by police officers sparked five days of anarchy in the Central Ward ghetto of Newark, New Jersey. Twenty-one black civilians died, including two children hit by stray bullets, along with two whites. Things would get worse on July 22 in Detroit, where a police raid on a "blind pig" – a private social club known for illegal after-hours drinking and gambling – flared into another five days of arson, looting and military intervention that left 43 people dead. The unrest in Newark and Detroit marked a dramatic escalation of the unrest in America's ghettos and led King to see in this cycle of black uprisings and military suppression a fearsome trend that had to be confronted before it evolved into even more terrible violence and the establishment of fascist-like repression over America's cities and black communities (King Papers, 1968/4/16, p.25). The moral disorder engendered by American policy in Vietnam was coming home to

roost, King believed, and his antiwar crusade was about to evolve into one for a radical reformation of the values of mainstream America that left the nation's poor on the outside, and with dangerously little to lose.

CHAPTER TWO
THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

On August 11, 1965, the predominantly black neighbourhood of Watts in Los Angeles erupted in the first major ghetto uprising of the 1960s and one of its deadliest. Six days of arson and anarchy and their suppression by a deployment of 14,000 National Guard troops left 34 people dead, 33 of them black civilians (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968, p. 38). At a loss to bring calm to their community, black church leaders in Watts turned to King in the hopes his celebrity and moral influence might help convince their fellow blacks to put down their weapons and police and city officials to adopt much-needed improvements to racial policies (Garrow, 1986, p.439-40). King's arrival in Watts on August 15, however, affected him much more than he did the situation. He was especially jarred by "joyous" ghetto youths who saw in the destruction of their neighbourhood and its national media coverage a kind of victory. As King recalled them saying, "we won because we made them pay attention to us" (King, 1968, p.133). While not unaware that the issues facing black residents of America's Northern ghettos were different from those he had experience with in the South, Watts revealed a depth of nihilistic despair among Northern blacks that surprised and shook him (Garrow, 1986, p.439). For the first time, he fully understood that bridging America's racial divide was greater than a question of civil rights. His celebrated Southern victories improved the lives of middle-class blacks who could afford to eat and shop at desegregated department stores, but they did nothing for poor, unemployed ghetto blacks with no money and poor educations (Lewis, 1978, p.306). Accordingly, many in Watts thought little of King, if

anything at all. *Newsweek* reported that King was even mocked by ghetto youths, who derisively referred to him as "Martin Luther Who?" (Lentz, 1990, p.185-6). Bayard Rustin, who accompanied King in Watts, said King was "undone" by his experiences there and came to see Rustin's long-standing view that "the most serious issues facing the movement were economic problems of class rather than race" (Garrow, 1986, p.439). If King was indeed "groping" for a sense of direction for the civil rights movement in August 1965, as John Herbers of the *New York Times* alleged at the time, King found it in Watts. Seeing the fires and violence there as "the language of the unheard" (King, 1968, p.133), King took it as his duty to give it eloquent expression and use his moral influence to stir white America to conscientious action on their behalf. From Watts onward, King biographer David L. Lewis wrote, his "national role as a champion of massive federal assistance to the urban poor was henceforth a moral necessity" (1978, p. 307).

A new challenge: dramatizing poverty

On his return to the public debate on Vietnam in February 1967, King initially envisioned using his participation in the peace movement to mobilize mass support for rehabilitating America's ghettos and economic rights for the nation's poor. Though he would later deny his belief in any "mechanical mergers" between the peace and civil rights movements, King did speak privately of "tying the peace movement to the civil rights or vice versa," as he told Levison and Andy Young (FBI, 2/18/67, 6/0744). "I don't see getting out of civil rights but we could be much more successful if we could get the peace people to do it, to cooperate, to have a march on Washington around the cut backs to the poverty program," King said (ibid). Accordingly, he used the news media's heightened interest in his position on the war to sensitize their audiences to his conviction that America must reconsider priorities that put the morally-corrupting violence of Vietnam ahead of a life-

giving war on poverty in America. We can see this strategy at work in King's June 19, 1967, appearance on NBC's *The Arlene Francis Show*:

> We spend approximately $500,000 to kill every enemy soldier in Vietnam while we spend $53 per person in the so-called War Against Poverty, per person for those who are categorized as poverty-stricken... So one can see a tremendous gap here, and it is my contention that if we can spend approximately $35 billion to fight what I consider an unjust, ill-considered war in Vietnam and about $20-billion to put a man on the moon, then our nation has the resources to spend billions of dollars to put God's children on their own two feet right here on Earth. The problem is not that we don't have the resources, it is that we haven't yet had the will. Because once we have the will, the resources are available, and it does mean reordering our priorities (King Papers, 1967/6/19, p.3)

King saw linking ghetto poverty to the growing peace movement as a possible solution to one of the key frustration of the SCLC's Chicago campaign in 1966, which was its inability to generate significant public tension and drama around the much more subtle cruelties of Northern race relations. David Halberstam described King's difficulties in this regard:

> His great strength in the old fight was his ability to dramatize the immorality he opposed. The new immorality of the ghettos will not be easy to dramatize, for it is often an immorality with invisible sources. The slum lords are evil enough, but they will not be there by their homes waiting for King and the TV crews to show up, ready to split black heads open. The schools are terrible, but there is no one man making them bad by his own ill will, likely to wait in the school yard with a cattle prod. The jobs are bad, but the reasons Negroes aren't ready for decent jobs are complicated; there won't be one single hillbilly waiting outside the employment agency grinding cigarettes into the necks of King and his followers (Halberstam, 1967, in *Reporting Civil Rights*, 2003, p. 578).

This reality, combined with the bustle and daily dramas of a major metropolis like Chicago that absorbed and minimized the impact of marches, left King and his organizers at a loss for recreating the kind of all-encompassing urban crisis that had been key to their direct action strategy in the smaller cities of the South. King outlined his evolving

understanding of this challenge in an address to his staff at an SCLC retreat in late May 1967. As King saw it, the central difficulty was the fact the civil rights movement was now delving into issues of fundamental human rights, which tended to be more abstract than legal, Constitutionally-enshrined civil rights, and thus inherently more complicated to illustrate through direct action.

> You see, when we think of civil rights we are referring to those rights that are clearly defined by the Constitution – the denial of those rights can be dealt with by going to court, by demonstrating to dramatize the denial, or by an Executive Order from the President of the United States... But when you deal with human rights, you are not dealing with something clearly defined by the Constitution... Although the Constitution guarantees the right to vote, it does not guarantee the right to an adequate liveable income. Although the Constitution guarantees the right to have access to public accommodations, it is not clearly stated in the Constitution that a man must have a decent sanitary house in which to live. Although the Constitution guarantees the right to attend an integrated school, it does not guarantee that that school will be filled with quality (King Papers, 1967/5/29).

A Revolution of Values

Further complicating King's efforts to sway public opinion in favour of his poverty fight was the perceived decline in white support and sympathy as the civil rights movement evolved from a reform movement into a revolutionary mobilization for full racial equality. As he told his staff, many Northern whites who supported their Southern campaigns did so more out of revulsion for the thuggish violence of racist white authorities than out of any desire to achieve genuine equality for blacks in America. "A lot of people who supported us, supported us because they were against extremist behaviour toward Negroes, but they never intended for us to live next door to them. They never intended to lift the Negro out of poverty. They never intended to make adequate, quality, integrated education a reality in all its dimensions" (ibid). Given the fact that

such a level of equality required a "radical redistribution of economic and political power" (ibid), King knew achieving it would be met with deep resistance on behalf of the white community, which enjoyed a virtual monopoly on both. "We must recognize that if we are to be given our God-given rights now, principalities and powers must be confronted and they must be changed," he said (ibid). In its reformist stage, the civil rights movement sought to improve adherence to the existing "rules of the house" as prescribed by the Constitution, King said. Now, as the civil rights movement entered an "era of revolution," fundamental questions about America and the laws that governed her had to be asked:

> Now we are in a situation where we must ask the house to change its rules, because the rules themselves don't go far enough. In short, we have moved into an era where we are called upon to raise certain basic questions about the whole of society. We are still called upon to give aid to the beggar who finds himself in misery and agony on life's highway. But one day, we must ask the question of whether the edifice which produces beggars must not be restructured and refurbished. That is where we are now... this means a revolution of values and other things (ibid).

The values that King had in his sights were the inter-related "evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism" that he believed were destroying America's soul (ibid). The prevalence of these three evils, King said, meant America's values needed to be much more than merely reformed; they needed to be "born again" (ibid). Speaking to the connection between these evils, King said

> somebody must say to America: America, you have contempt for life, if you exploit human beings in seeing them as less than human, if you will treat human beings as a means to an end, you thingify human beings. And if you thingify persons, you will exploit them economically. And if you will exploit persons economically, you will abuse your military power to protect your economic investments... So what America must be told today is that she must be born again. The whole structure of American life must be changed (ibid).

The Do-Nothing Congress

King's conviction that America's corrupted values were leading to imminent social catastrophe helped fire his frustration with Washington's diminishing interest in helping America's poor. The hopes that King had invested in President Johnson's Great Society initiatives, largely dashed already by the Administration's preoccupation with Vietnam, reached a new low with the mid-term elections of November 1966, which saw numerous liberal Democrats fall to conservative Republican rivals. Their defeat left the balance of power in Congress with a coalition of Republicans and conservative Southern Democrats, known as Dixiecrats, and all predictions for the 90th Congress pointed to a rough ride for the anti-poverty programs at the heart of Johnson's Great Society agenda. This became apparent on May 18, 1967, when Republicans and their Dixiecrat allies joined forces to halt Johnson's rent supplement program, which provided subsidies for poor tenants. In a statement reflecting the depth of King's disaffection with Washington, Stanley Levison described the vote as nothing short of provocative.

> A reactionary Congressional coalition has poured on the Negro's burning indignation the combustible fuel of rejection and bitterness. When the question is asked 'who starts riots in the ghettos,' the list of the true instigators can now easily be identified in the roll call of Congress. This was a historic opportunity for statesmanship and brotherhood; it emerged a snarl of meanness and social blindness. The tragedy is that the American people, who are not indecent, will pay for these social atrocities committed in their name (FBI, 5/18/67, 7/0236).

From mid-1967 onwards, King and Levison developed the 90th Congress into the symbol of immorality and cruelty that his ghetto campaign had thus far been lacking. King's condemnations of Congress took on a new urgency as his fears came to pass and unrest mounted in the ghettos of America's big cities through May and June 1967 and

culminated in the death and destruction of Newark and Detroit in July. On July 26, as the anarchy in Detroit entered its fourth full day, King sent a telegram to President Johnson to warn that "Negro rioting would spread" if Congress did not immediately enact "some creative and massive program to end unemployment" ("Dr. King Supports Troops," 1967, p.19). "Revolts come out of revolting conditions," his telegram to Johnson continued. "A riot is the language of the unheard. It is a suicidal act – that last desperate act – when the Negro says, 'I'm tired of living like a dog'"(ibid). The next day, with Congress moving to adopt a repressive "anti-riot" bill inspired by exaggerated evidence that the uprisings in Newark and Detroit were part of a "national pattern or timetable" (Herbers, 7/27/67, p.1) of organized insurrection, the *New York Times* quoted King attributing blame for the unrest to "a very insensitive, irresponsible Congress" ("Dr. King Blames Congress," 1967, p. 17) instead. "We do not need measures like the 'anti-riot' bill, which has sailed through the House of Representatives; we need legislation like the 'anti-rat' bill and the rent-supplement proposal which were hooted down in the same chamber," King told a Chicago press conference (ibid). "Congress has created the atmosphere for these riots. It has shown it is not concerned with rats, it is not concerned with the deaths of children in rat-infested slums" (ibid).

King was by no means alone in his opinions, which were reflected in commentary and editorials in the *New York Times* and other news media organizations in the wake of Detroit. In fact, King even re-emerged as a "moderate" in a number of articles in the *New York Times* alongside the N.A.A.C.P.'s Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young of the Urban League and A. Philip Randolph, a founding father of the modern civil rights movement. The *Times* was clearly pleased to see King's name alongside these three representatives of the

civil rights movement's old guard on a statement condemning the riots and calling for law and order and listed King ahead of them in its front page coverage of the statement, which was published in its entirety inside the paper. An editorial in the same issue called the statement "courageous and wise, a timely act of responsible citizenship that deserves the respect and active support of Negroes and whites alike" and praised the four "moderate" leaders for making a "clean break with the extremists and the latter's mindless followers" ("The Voice of Negro Leadership," 1967, p.34). King, however, was far from thrilled about his return as a "moderate" in the pages of the *Times,* not least of all because he had not authorized the final version of the statement in question. In a conversation with King that same day, Levison expressed concern that the "moderate" frame and the statement, which he said dealt "nine-tenths with the culpability of the Negro community," was creating a "fuzzy picture" in light of King's earlier statements on the situation that blamed Congress and the white community for creating the conditions that ghetto blacks were rebelling against. In a letter to the *Times* to which King gave his full consent, Levison did his best to correct the frame and reassert King's militant middle credentials: "The rioters have behaved irrationally, but are they any more irrational than those who expect injustice eternally to be endured? To do too little to relieve the agony of Negro life is as inflammatory as citing a riot. To put an Asian war of dubious national interest far above domestic needs in order of priorities and to pit it against reforms that were delayed a century is worse than blind policy. It is provocative policy" (FBI, 7/29/67, 7/0479).

Civil Disobedience

Three weeks later, King used the occasion of the SCLC's 10th anniversary convention in

Atlanta to set out his plans for the coming year. In his annual report, King said SCLC had to "develop a program that will drive the nation toward a guaranteed annual income and/ or full-employment" (SCLC, 1967/8/16). In his August 15 address to convention delegates, King outlined his emerging belief that the only way to get a callous Congress to enact such a program was a campaign of massive civil disobedience. "Our real problem is that there is no disposition by the Administration nor Congress to seek fundamental remedies beyond police measures," King told convention delegates. "The tragic truth is that Congress, more than the American people, is now running amok with racism. We must devise tactics, not to beg Congress for favors, but to create a situation in which they deem it wise and prudent to act with responsibility and decency" (King Papers, 1967/8/15, p.6). King framed civil disobedience as a militant middle path between suicidal "riots" and reckless talk of "armed insurrection," on the one hand, and the futility of "obsequious pleas to an insensitive government" on the other (ibid, p. 9). However, for civil disobedience to be effective in the major cities of the North, it had to be on a large enough scale to avoid being absorbed as "merely transitory drama" by the "normal turbulence" of city life (ibid).

> To raise protest to an appropriate level for cities, to invest it with aggressive but nonviolent qualities, it is necessary to adopt civil disobedience. To dislocate the functioning of a city without destroying it can be more effective than a riot because it can be longer-lasting, costly to society but not wantonly destructive. Moreover, it is more difficult for government to quell by superior force. Mass civil disobedience can use rage as a constructive and creative force. It is purposeless to tell Negroes not to be enraged when they should be. Indeed, they will be mentally healthier if they do not suppress rage but vent it constructively and use its energy peacefully but forcefully to cripple the operations of an oppressive society. Civil disobedience can use the militancy wasted in riots to seize clothes or groceries many did not even want (ibid, 10).

SCLC's 1966 Chicago campaign provided the insight that, in order for civil

disobedience to prove effective in a metropolitan setting, its actions had to be sustained, multi-pronged and have mass support. "If they are developed as weekly events at the same time as mass sit-ins are developed inside and at the gates of factories for jobs, and if simultaneously thousands of unemployed youth camp in Washington... without burning a match of firing a gun, the impact of the movement will have earthquake proportions," King told convention delegates (ibid). King said that such a plan of action would not be easy, that "to have effect we will have to develop mass disciplined forces that can remain excited and determined without dramatic conflagrations" (ibid, p.11). Effective leadership was essential, King said, noting that the ghetto uprisings while largely the responsibility of the white majority, were also partially caused by the failure of the civil rights movement's leadership to organize their "slum brothers" effectively. "Our internal squabbling, compromising and capitulating for cheap gains leaves them essentially leaderless," he said (ibid). By correcting this, by organizing the ghetto masses and channelling their righteous anger into nonviolent direct action, King was convinced that civil disobedience could serve to convert the negativity of riots into a positive tool for social change.

This view was disputed by an August 17 editorial in the *New York Times* that set the tone for its coverage to come. King's civil disobedience proposal, the *Times* posited, "seems certain to aggravate the angry division of whites and Negroes into warring camps" ("Formula for Discord," 1967, p.36). Claiming that nonviolence was "losing its appeal," the *Times* worried that King's attempts to engage angry young ghetto blacks to act "peacefully but forcefully to cripple the operations of a repressive society" could go terribly wrong: "once the spark of massive law-defiance is applied in the present

overheated atmosphere, the potentiality for disaster becomes overwhelming" (ibid). Furthermore, the *Times* asserted that King's "perilous project," whether it came off or not, would only serve to strengthen the "powerful Congressional elements already convinced that the answer to urban unrest lies in repression rather than expanded programs for eradicating slum problems" (ibid).

The *New York Times*

Though it disagreed with him on tactics, the *New York Times* and Martin Luther King were in fact not so far apart in terms of their outlook on the crisis facing America in August 1967. While he didn't name the *New York Times* by name, it was certainly among the "very distinguished newspapers, magazines, commentators and TV programs" that King's August 15 convention address commended for their insight into "the basic causes [of the ghetto unrest]" and their calls for "fundamental reform, not revenge or military might" (ibid, p.9). As the last sentence of the *Times* editorial suggests, the paper agreed with King's view that Congressional support for repressive anti-riot legislation over expanded anti-slum initiatives was wrongheaded. In fact, the *Times*' editorial even expressed what could be taken as a reversal of its original position that the war in Vietnam and the crisis in America's ghettos were "separate and distinct." As the editorial sympathetically noted, "It is easy to understand the frustrations that spur Dr. King, the depth of resentment at the lack of any sense of urgency in either the White House or Congress for applying to the problems of the racial ghettos the same energies and resources that are being expended in Vietnam" (ibid).

The *New York Times'* perplexing position on Vietnam and its tendency to see peril rather than possibility in civil disobedience reflected the newspaper's unwillingness to let condemnation of the status quo go too far. While many on its staff shared King's

criticisms of the war and Washington's irresponsible attitude toward the ghetto uprisings, and said so in print, they did so within the context of a paper long-defined by a perceived duty that "so far as possible consistent with honest journalism attempts to act and support those who are charged with responsibility for Government" (Salisbury, 1980, p. 30). Gay Talese described this as the *Times*' role as "responsible spokesman for the system" (1969, p.460) and its twin pillars of "capitalism and democracy" (ibid, p.7). This function translated into an editorial policy founded on two imperatives that Roger Starr, a former editorial board member, said governed the *Times*' approach to political and economic matters. The first imperative was to ensure that government programs supported "the efficient functioning of the private economic system" (Starr in McKenzie, 1994, vii), which the *Times*' considered "the only way in which a satisfactory standard of living can be produced" (ibid) for all Americans. This dedication to capitalism worked in conjunction with a second democratic imperative, which Starr said was the corollary belief that economic policy had to "assure that an adequate share of goods and services be available to every American" (ibid). With this editorial policy, the *Times* filled the dual and often conflicting and confusing roles of defender of the capitalist Establishment and benevolent friend and spokesperson for America's have-nots.

The mounting chaos in America's cities during the summer of 1967, however, pushed the *New York Times* toward an increasingly hostile view of Washington's punitive, law-and-order response to the situation. When its August 9 editorial cited the celebrated black psychologist, Kenneth B. Clark, saying "I find myself becoming more and more extremist because of government inaction. I am becoming less moderate and less balanced" ("Slogans," 1967, p.38), the *Times* was asserting its duties as both responsible

spokesman for the system and "early warning system" (Gitlin, 1980, p.52) for the Establishment, which had to know that Washington's dereliction of its duty to govern responsibly was radicalizing even the system's moderate critics. The intransigence of the White House and Congress on the ghetto uprisings was, in effect, endangering the system itself.

As King found out the next week, however, the *New York Times*' impatience with Washington had its limits. Forcing Washington to alter course by way of massive civil disobedience went beyond the scope of legitimate protest. The "system" and the rule of law that supported it had to be respected, even if the elected government was resisting what the *Times* itself considered the best interests of the nation and imperiling the system itself.

Civil disobedience and media Strategy

The *New York Times* was by no means unique among U.S. news organizations in its concerns for massive civil disobedience. Two days before King went public with his emerging plans in his August 15 convention speech, the topic dominated the questions that he faced from host Lawrence E. Spivak and media panelists Simeone Booker, Haynes Johnson and Wallace Westfield on NBC's *Meet The Press*. Spivak's opening question went back to the April 2 edition of the *New York Times* in which it was reported that King was "weighing" the use of civil disobedience to protest the war in Vietnam if the conflict escalated (see page 33). Spivak wanted to know what King meant by that and whether King was now advocating civil disobedience in light of the fact the war had indeed escalated in the interim (King Papers, 1967/8/13, p.1). Haynes Johnson of the *Washington Evening Star* asked King: "Some of your strongest critics have charged that you yourself are responsible for part of the urban violence that afflicts us recently in the

riots, in that by advocating civil disobedience the logical and inevitable effect of that is civil disorder, that people who have no respect for law and authority then take things into their own hands. How do you answer such charges?" (ibid, p. 3) King called the allegation "absurd" and countered:

> I have never advocated anarchy, I have never advocated lawlessness, I have never advocated violence, I have never advocated arson, I have never advocated sniping or looting. I have only said, and I still believe this, that if one finds a law unjust, then he has a moral responsibility to take a stand against that law, even if it means breaking that law. But I have also gone on to say that he must break that law openly, he must not seek to defy the law, he must not seek to annihilate the law in the same sense that you would find the Klan doing, but he must do it openly and cheerfully and in the right spirit. It is still my conviction that he who breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust and willingly accepts the penalty for breaking it is at that moment expressing the very highest respect for the law. So anyone who says that what we have done in the civil rights movement in the South, for instance, created an atmosphere of riots is misreading history and certainly dishonestly interpreting everything that we have done (ibid).

Johnson followed this with a question about the possibility of a "widening division" among blacks in America's cities on the question of "whether to proceed in a nonviolent manner" (ibid). King replied that there was "no doubt that some Negroes are disenchanted with nonviolence... they feel that we haven't made enough progress in general [through nonviolence] and as a result are talking more in terms of violence" (ibid). However, King said he still believed that the "vast majority" of America's blacks believed nonviolence was the "best strategy, the best tactic to use in this moment of social transition" and claimed that only one percent of America's blacks were actively involved in the uprisings in its cities (ibid, p. 4). Wallace Westfield of *NBC News* asked King whether it was true that the 99 percent of blacks whom he claimed believed in nonviolence "in a sense, tolerated, tacitly approved the violence of the [one percent]"

(ibid). King replied by reasserting his view that, while it was true that some blacks no doubt gained a kind of "psychological" satisfaction from the violence, most blacks "still believe that the best approach, the best way to really bring about the social changes that we are seeking will be through the nonviolent approach" (ibid, p.5). Haynes Johnson returned to this point after a discussion of King's views on President Johnson's policies in Vietnam and the talk of King running for President. Johnson asked King for his thoughts on how he could reach the "one percent – those who are committing violence and are the rioters themselves" given that he had not yet been able to convert them to nonviolence (ibid, p.6). King offered that, while he would continue to emphasize that "riots... are socially destructive and self-defeating," the way to reach them was not through "pronouncements and through preaching" but through firm commitments by the larger, white society to "social justice and progress," which he called "the absolute guarantors of riot prevention" (ibid).

> As long as these intolerable conditions of poverty, terrible housing conditions and the syndrome of deprivation surrounding slumism – as long as these things exist, we have the dangerous possibility of people becoming so angry, so depressed and so caught up in despair that they will engage in this kind of misguided activity, and I think the best way to reach them is to get them jobs, is to give them a new sense of hope, a new sense of dignity, a new sense of self-respect as a result of a good, solid job, as a result of a decent sanitary home in which to live and as a result of good school, with quality and everything else, that their children can attend. (ibid, p.6-7).

King expressed confidence that "the forces of good will, white and black, in this country can work together to bring about a resolution to this problem" (ibid, p.7). America had the resources to solve the situation, but "at present we don't have the will," King said (ibid). This meant that the black community together with "decent committed whites" had to "work together to so arouse the conscience of this nation and at the same

time to so articulate the issue through direct action and powerful action programs, that our demands can no longer be eluded by the government or by Congress or all of the forces in power" (ibid). Given the fact that the civil rights victories of the previous ten years had done little to "penetrate the lower depths of Negro deprivation in the North," King told the *Meet The Press* panel that nonviolence had to be escalated on a larger scale in Northern cities. "I think a powerful nonviolent movement can be just as effective in the North as in the South, and I think we can do it, we can disrupt things if necessary, militantly and nonviolently, without destroying life and property" (ibid).

The questions King faced on *Meet The Press* and in the *New York Times* reflected what he and his advisors knew was moderate, middle-class America's profound fear of social unrest and its mounting intolerance for the lawlessness and disorder engulfing the ghettos. And yet, as King told Levison on August 22, 1967, he also saw "understanding" in the news coverage of his plans for civil disobedience (FBI, 8/22/67, 7/0537). Both King and Levison knew the challenge inherent to his plans was to develop this understanding by convincing middle class whites and blacks that civil disobedience could produce positive benefits, not least of all an end to the fearsome ghetto unrest. They took encouragement from a recent Lou Harris poll that found two-thirds of Americans "willing to take an aggressive step towards the elimination of the ghettos," which Levison called "amazing because it puts Johnson and Congress in opposition to the will of the people" (ibid). King took the Harris poll as evidence that the time was ripe for "the dramatization of the poverty problem in a specific location" and a nationwide "appeal for legislative action" (ibid). Together they agreed that the specific location had to be Washington D.C.

Key to winning public support for a campaign of massive civil disobedience in the

nation's capital was the need to convince moderate, middle-class Americans that civil disobedience was the lesser of two evils, with the greater evil being not the ghetto uprisings but rather the interrelated evils of racism, militarism and a heartless brand of capitalism that took no responsibility for the plight of America's 40-million poor. King endeavoured over the course of his remaining eight months to make the 90th Congress the personification of these corrupt values and convince Americans that this indifference to the desperation of America's poor was producing the unrest in America's cities and bringing the country to the edge of catastrophe. It was a radical message, but it was not out of place given the circumstances facing America in 1967 and 1968. Key to winning public support for what would become known as the Poor People's Campaign (PPC) was a media strategy that employed the ongoing media and public influence derived from King's militant middle position on the ghetto uprisings in three ways: 1) emphasize the positive, constructive nature of the PPC's goals of jobs or income for America's poor; 2) emphasize the urgency of the situation and the PPC's goal of rescuing the country from greater unrest and social catastrophe; and 3) assert the continuing strength and appeal of King's leadership and nonviolence.

Disruptive acts, constructive goals

On July 19, 1967, as America struggled to make sense of the anarchy and death toll in Newark's Third Ward, King and Levison discussed the most effective contribution that King could make to resolving the crisis. King felt it imperative that his contribution be "dramatic" enough to cut through the hysteria and bring attention to the heart of the matter. "I can't be merely condemning the riots," he said. "I've got to be condemning the intolerable conditions leading to them, and the fact that not enough is being done" (FBI, 7/19/67, 7/0426). As we read above, King understood that the ghetto uprisings were

expressions of the legitimate rage of black youths with no prospects in an essentially racist society that deprived them of quality education and job opportunities. Rather than alienating them further through a blanket condemnation of their actions, King wanted them to see him as an ally and win them over to nonviolence and constructive militancy. Furthermore, King wanted white Americans to understand that resorting to repression and law-and-order would not solve the problems and that "a massive act of concern will do more than the most massive deployment of troops to quell riots and still hatreds" (King Papers, 1967/8/15, p. 3).

Given the SCLC's difficulties dramatizing ghetto conditions by marches and other traditional tactics up to this point, Levison suggested that King put forward a program proposal "that may have a dramatic quality" (ibid). Given the general acceptance that unemployment in the ghettos was a principal source of instability, Levison advised King to call on the Johnson Administration to establish a massive federal job creation program in the spirit of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Depression-fighting Works Progress Administration. "You can make the dramatic point that when the country had no money, this was done and put millions to work, and removed a dangerous situation, so why isn't it being done when we are sick with money," Levison said, adding that it might resonate with Johnson, who got his start in the Roosevelt Administration (ibid).

Levison developed his proposal into a statement for King as the chaos in Detroit entered its second day. With the "flames of riot and revolt" illuminating "the skies over American cities," Levison established King as the one with a constructive, sensible plan for saving America from further destruction:

> Every single outbreak without exception has substantially been ascribed to gross unemployment particularly among young people. In most cities for

> Negro youth it is greater than the unemployment level of the Depression Thirties. Let us do one simple, direct thing – let us end unemployment totally and immediately... I propose specifically the creation of a national agency that shall provide a job to every person who needs work, young and old, white and Negro... I am convinced that a single, dramatic, massive proof of concern that touches the needs of all the oppressed will ease resentments and heal enough angry wounds to permit constructive attitudes to emerge (FBI, 7/24/67, 7/0442).

Levison, King, Andy Young and Manhattan lawyer Harry Wachtel, another of King's close advisors, got together by conference call the next day to discuss what to do with the statement. With Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and the Urban League's Whitney Young condemning the ghetto rebellions, Levison said it would be a "grave mistake" for King to be seen joining them in doing so. On the other hand, King's silence up until this point was also starting to get noticed and it did not look good. Given the "overwhelming view of the press, which condemns the Administration and Congress for its own crimes," Levison believed his statement would be welcomed because it "contains a specific proposal" (FBI, 7/25/67, 7/0453). Levison also reassured King that the constructive position on the uprisings that he was proposing was shared by "some very distinguished opinion-makers and a very large mass of people who have seen through to the real issue here" (ibid). As the four spoke, President Johnson came on television to address the nation about the situation in Detroit. All agreed that "Johnson sounds afraid" (ibid). This perceived fear was also seen to be affecting the white community, which meant King "may expect a certain amount of understanding rather than antagonism if he does not strongly condemn the looting and destruction" (ibid). Levison also believed that, if SCLC played its cards right, it could emerge as the "reasonable alternative" in the crisis. A gloomy King, however, was less optimistic, saying that America "is headed the way of the Roman Empire" as a result of "the riots, the war in Vietnam, excessive materialism"

(ibid). To Wachtel, however, this meant the ghetto uprisings had to be treated as a "sickness rather than a wrong" (ibid) and it was agreed their plan should be "not to point the finger but to put forward constructive acts" (ibid). As Wachtel pointed out, President Johnson had taken bold action recently to resolve a strike by the nation's railway workers and might be willing to embrace King's dramatic proposal if it meant calming the rebellion spreading through America's cities. Accordingly, Wachtel believed it was crucial that King hold a press conference the next morning to answer President Johnson directly, whose "exhortations for law and order and his request that the Negroes 'go back to your homes'... was not dealing with the problem" (ibid). King agreed to the press conference, which he would hold at his church in Atlanta, and asked Wachtel if he could help assure full coverage in the *New York Times.* Wachtel said he would contact John Oakes, the paper's editorial pages editor, "and make a very special plea to him in this regard" (ibid).

Coverage of the press conference in the *New York Times,* however, was limited to a United Press International report that ran amid a two-page spread of stories detailing incidents of unrest in cities across America. Headlined "Dr. King supports troops in Detroit," the first two paragraphs played up King's response to a journalist's question about his opinion on the deployment of U.S. army soldiers in Detroit. "I am very sorry that Federal troops had to be called in. There's no doubt that when a riot erupts in has to be halted," King said (1967, p.19). Six of the report's eight paragraphs, however, dealt with the contents of King's statement and emphasized his claim that ridding the ghettos of unemployment would dramatically reduce the anger and resentment fuelling the uprisings. "I proposed specifically the creation of a national agency that shall provide a

job to every person who needs work," it quoted King saying. In a conversation the following day, Levison and King agreed that his press conference got "much better treatment" (FBI, 7/27 /67, 7/0462) in papers in Chicago and Atlanta and in the *Washington Post*, all of which emphasized King's call for a massive job creation program. Levison enthused that the *Post* "even saw the necessity of giving the job program a name and said 'Dr. King called for a NATIONAL FULL EMPLOYMENT ACT,' all capitalized" (ibid). Levison advised King to keep repeating the need for such a program, saying that "as time moves on it will become clearer that the only one who is not talking platitudes is you, that you are talking about something concrete. And because it is simple and direct, I think it will get through to a lot of people" (ibid).

A Poor People's Campaign

In a week-long mid-September SCLC retreat in Warrendon, Virginia, King met with his senior staff and advisors to discuss the organization's strategic priorities and the implementation of King's Washington campaign. Fairclough's account of the meeting suggests that the emphasis on a federal jobs program was not only because it was "simple and direct," but also because it was much easier to rally media and public support around than other possible actions, like James Bevel's call for an all-out SCLC campaign against the war in Vietnam (Fairclough, 1987, p.358). According to Fairclough, King deemed Bevel's proposal for a 'stop the draft' movement "impractical," in part because he felt "the majority of the press was still behind the administration over the war" (ibid, p.359). Meanwhile, King noted that there was growing support in the news media and the American public for "a stepped-up attack on poverty" (ibid). King tried to reassure Bevel that compelling the government to "reassess its priorities" and take action on poverty would inevitably "weaken support for the war," as well (ibid). The retreat concluded with

the decision to pursue a "go for broke" anti-poverty campaign targeting Washington (Garrow, 1986, p.578).

On October 23, 1967, King was in Washington to testify before the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, the inquiry initiated by President Johnson to study the causes of the ghetto rebellions. Speaking to reporters after his testimony, King went against Levison's entreaties that he not discuss the Poor People's Campaign until his plans were more concrete, which Levison worried would leave King appearing "as if all he is doing is talking" (FBI, 10/2/67, 7/0647). King told the gathered journalists, however, that "the time has come if we can't get anything done otherwise to camp right here in Washington... and stay here by the thousands and thousands until the Congress of our nation and the federal government will do something to deal with the [unemployment]" (King Papers, 1967/10/23, p.1). King said other activities would be considered "without destroying life or property but making it clear that the city will not function" (ibid). King then informed the gathered reporters of his proposals to the civil disorders commission: "My major point was that the time has come for a massive program on the part of the federal government that will make jobs or income a reality for every American citizen" (ibid, p.2). Furthermore, King said he was also proposing a massive program of "civil rights for the disadvantaged," which he said would cost the government around $20 billion a year for the next 10 years to eradicate slums, unemployment, poor education and ultimately poverty itself through a guaranteed annual income. As King told the reporters, this was not a new program but one that he had promoted before. Since the summer of 1966, King had been calling for this "Marshall Plan" for America's cities, after the massive U.S. aid package that rebuilt Europe after the

Second World War. However, given the lack of will in Congress for implementing such a program, King told reporters:

> I think the civil rights movement has a responsibility to bring about the pressure and the power so that Congress can no longer elude our demands... As long as the programs don't emerge, the slums will get worse and unemployment will get worse and the despair and cynicism will get worse and I don't see any change until our federal government has the will to emerge with a program that really goes all out to solve these basic problems (ibid, p.3).

Countering the radical frame

Three days later, an editorial in the *Washington Post* condemned King's "vague proposal" and expressed its hope that he would, "on reflection, change his mind" ("King's Camp-in," 1967, p. A20). Far from constructive and more militant than middle, the *Post* described King's "deliberately contrived" plan as "intimidation" and "a massive invasion and sit-down... intended to cause the suspension of Government operations" (ibid). Whereas "any real democracy" had to accept the inconvenience of conscientious protest that "incidentally discommodes the operations of Government," the *Post* said "any ordinary government must resist" King's "appeal to anarchy" and its efforts to force Government compliance with "the dictates of a minority" (ibid). "Those who conjure up mobs to force the suspension of Government itself are talking about revolution – even if they call it 'passive resistance' or 'civil disobedience'" (ibid). The *Post* concluded by warning King that such tactics were more likely to entrench the attitudes in Congress that he was trying to change and "invite... a reaction even from those broadly sympathetic to Dr. King's larger purposes" (ibid).

Levison was undeterred by King's rebuke in the *Post*. In a conversation recorded by the FBI on November 16, Levison turned to the latest issue of *Newsweek* magazine as

proof that important voices in the white community understood the need for the Poor People's Campaign. The issue, entitled "The Negro in America: What Must Be Done" was dedicated almost in its entirety to the concerns of black Americans and what it billed as a "program of action" for addressing them. Levison described *Newsweek*'s new embrace of advocacy journalism, which saw the magazine renounce its long-standing tradition of not taking an editorial position on issues, as "what has to be said by the white community" (FBI, 11/16/67, 7/0770). Taken together with other high profile voices in the white community that were calling for federal action on ghetto conditions, and the entrenched resistance of Congress to all of them, Levison called the situation "marvelous support for a campaign of civil disobedience in the spring" (ibid). Levison said it sounded "a note of desperation" from "white forces" that would help provide traction for King's militant middle message, which Levison interpreted as "I am giving you a last chance on my terms and I am doing you a favor and not being vengeful" (ibid).

The belief that there was high profile support in the white community for a major push on racism and poverty was underscored in the following issue of *Newsweek*, which ran a full page of letters applauding the magazine's progressive prescriptions for bridging America's racial divide. The various authors were a *Who's who* of prominent white politicians spanning America's left and right, including New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Zbigniew Brezezinski of the U.S. State Department, New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay, Senator Robert F. Kennedy and Senator Jacob K. Javits. Appearing alongside them was a letter from King, who congratulated *Newsweek* on its refusal "to hide behind a cloak of analysis" and its "commitment to things that are right and humane," which he hoped would "culminate in national action" (King Papers, 1967/12/4,

p.4).

That same week, a poll by Lou Harris published in the *New York Times* on November 20 provided King and Levison with further evidence of popular support for constructive federal programs in aid of America's ghettos and its poor. The Harris poll found that a majority of Americans continued to favour "decisive Federal action to raze slums, establish work programs to provide jobs for the unemployed, create a Federal rat extermination program and provide summer camps for poor children" (Harris, 1967/11/20, p.32). According to Harris, 57 per cent of Americans polled favoured "a Federal program to tear down ghettoes in American cities" (ibid) and 56 per cent supported "a Federal program to provide jobs for the unemployed of the ghettos" (ibid). Despite a drop in support from a previous poll on the same subject immediately following the uprising in Detroit, Harris reported that "the underlying opinion about correcting conditions in the ghettos remains unchanged" (ibid).

The Harris poll findings would prove central to King's official announcement of the Poor People's Campaign at a press conference on December 4, 1967. King told reporters that the coming spring would see SCLC "lead waves of the nation's poor and disinherited to Washington D.C. next spring to demand redress of their grievances by the United States government, and to secure at least jobs and income for all... In short, we will be petitioning our government for specific reforms, and we intend to build militant nonviolent actions until that government moves against poverty" (King Papers, 1967/12/4, p.1). He pointed to the Harris poll to frame the campaign as one seeking only what a "substantial majority of Americans" agreed was necessary – federal investments in job creation and the rebuilding of America's slums (ibid, p.2). Furthermore, the Poor

People's Campaign reflected the interests of "concerned leaders of industry, civil rights organizations, labor unions and churches" (ibid) who were also mobilizing in pursuit of "progressive economic measures at a national level" (ibid). King pointed to a growing number of mayors in major American cities who were willing "to carry out enlightened programs if only the federal government will provide the needed financial support" (ibid). Last but not least, King turned to *Newsweek* and its "sound proposals" for correcting race inequality to underscore parallel concerns in the news media. "I cite these facts merely to show that a clear majority in America are asking for the very things which we will demand in Washington," King told reporters (ibid).

As the civil rights movement had learned from "hard and bitter experience" (ibid), Washington "does not move to correct a problem involving race until it is confronted directly and dramatically," King continued. Seeking to frame the Poor People's Campaign in the context of hallowed civil rights victories past, King told reporters: "It required a Selma before the fundamental right to vote was written into federal statutes. It took a Birmingham before the government moved to open the doors of public accommodations to all human beings. What we need now is a new kind of Selma or Birmingham to dramatize the economic plight of the Negro, and compel the government to act" (ibid). With "unrest among the poor in America, and particularly among Negroes" (ibid, p.4) escalating, national priorities that put "killing people 12,000 miles away" and the "glamour of multi-billion dollar exploits in space" ahead of the basic needs of people had to be reconsidered, King said (ibid). "Patronizing gestures and half-way promises" would no longer be tolerated, King said. For its part, SCLC would aim to constructively "channelize the smouldering rage and frustration of Negro people into an effective,

militant and nonviolent movement of massive proportions in Washington and other areas" (ibid). King justified the focus on the nation's capital with the assertion that "The President and Congress have a primary responsibility for low minimum wages, for a degrading system of inadequate welfare, for subsidies for the rich and unemployment and underemployment of the poor, for a war mentality, for slums and starvation, and racism" (ibid). In order to "move our nation and our government on a new course of social, economic and political reform," King said SCLC would "use any means of legitimate nonviolent protest necessary" (ibid). Doing so was SCLC's duty as an "organization committed to nonviolence and freedom" (ibid). King finished by calling on all Americans to join SCLC in its efforts to bring creative, positive social change to the nation. "In this way, we can work creatively against the despair and indifference that have so often caused our nation to be immobilized during the cold winter and shaken profoundly in the hot summer," King said (ibid).

King's rationale for the Poor People's Campaign did little to convince the *New York Times* that massive civil disobedience was a justifiable tactic. Echoing the *Washington Post*'s earlier rebuke, a *Times* editorial on December 6, 1967, condemned King's plans as a violation of "the principles of responsible protest" ("Responsibility for Dissent," 1967, p.46). The *Times* said King's "proclaimed goal of massive dislocation" belied his "profession of peaceful intent" (ibid) and warned that such dislocation "would probably involve some overt violence" while violating "the rights of thousands of Washingtonians and the interests of millions of Americans" (ibid). All things considered, the *Times* declared that the "means are not justified by the end" (ibid).

To heal a sick nation

The condemnation of King's threat to shut down Washington with massive civil

disobedience by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* was countered by King's view that such a tactic was legitimized by the resistance of the 90th Congress and the Johnson Administration to widely supported programs that would bring quality to the lives of millions of poor Americans and peace to the nation's cities. One of the best expressions of King's rationale is found in a lecture that he gave as part of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Massey Lectures series in November 1967. Entitled "Nonviolence and Social Change," King likened civil disobedience to an ambulance going through a red light as it rushes to the hospital:

> Massive civil disobedience is a strategy for social change which is at least as powerful as an ambulance with its siren on full... The emergency we now face is economic. For the 35-million poor people in America – not even to mention, just yet, the poor in other nations – there is a kind of strangulation in the air. In our society, it's murder, psychologically, to deprive a man of a job or an income. You're in substance saying to that man that he has no right to exist. You're in a real way depriving him of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, denying in his case the very creed of society (King, 1967, in *The Lost Massey Lectures*, 2007, p. 199-201).

A "sick" Congress

From his official announcement of the Poor People's Campaign in December 1967 until his assassination five months later, King made an increasingly dramatic and patriotic case for his belief that the Poor People's Campaign was the nation's last chance at a nonviolent solution to the ghetto unrest before the arrival of a summer that he feared would bring unparalleled turmoil and military repression to its cities. As he told a press conference in Chicago on January 5, 1968, the Poor People's Campaign was necessary because "this sick Congress keeps on going [in] its reckless ways creating the atmosphere for riots and violence, so we have to go to Washington" (King Papers, 1968/1/5, p.3). What is important to note here is the fact that, when talking to the press, King usually

qualified civil disobedience with the tension-ratcheting threat "if necessary." Among other examples, we see this dramatic tactic at work in a press conference on January 16, 1968, in which King told gathered reporters "we are willing, if necessary, to fill up the jails in Washington, and surrounding communities" (King Papers, 1968/1/16, p.8). King always made it clear that whether it went that far was up to Congress. Rather than King being the source of anarchy, as claimed by the *Washington Post* editorial from the previous October, he continually framed the 90th Congress as the instigators of disorder and PPC participants as patriotic, responsible citizens no different from the dignified civil rights marchers of the past decade. King would often establish Congressional responsibility for the ghetto unrest with a favourite quote from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables:* "If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin, but he who causes the darkness" (King, 1967, in *The Lost Massey Lectures*, 2007, p.169). In the August 15 convention address in which he first proposed a campaign of civil disobedience, King followed this quote by asserting that

> the policy makers of the white society have caused the darkness; they have created discrimination; they created slums; they perpetuate unemployment, ignorance and poverty. It is incontestable and deplorable that Negroes have committed crimes [in Detroit, etc.]; but they are derivative crimes. They are born of the greater crimes of the white society. When we ask Negroes to abide by the law, let us also declare that the white man does not abide by law in the ghettos. Day in and day out he violates welfare laws to deprive the poor of their meagre allotments; he flagrantly violates building codes and regulations; his police make a mockery of law; he violates laws on equal employment and education and the provisions for civic services. The slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society. Negroes live in them but do not make them any more than a prisoner makes a prison (ibid).

The approaching flashpoint

Working alongside his efforts to establish the racism of the white power structure as the true source of disorder in American society was a parallel assertion that civil

disobedience was necessary because America was running out of time. In the months to come, King's speeches and press statements were peppered with foreboding references to his belief that the ghetto uprisings were pushing America toward the precipice of anarchic social meltdown and the establishment of a right wing law-and-order regime. This view lay at the heart of Levison's draft statement for King on the uprising in Detroit discussed above, which concluded: "I regret that my expression may be sharp but I believe literally that the life of our nation is at stake here at home. Measures to preserve it need to be boldly and swiftly applied before the process of social disintegration engulfs the whole of society" (FBI, 7/24/67, 7/0442). Three weeks later, in his convention address on civil disobedience, King said "the time we have is shorter than many of us believed. Patience is running out and the intransigence and hostility of government – national, state and municipal – is aggregating grievances to explosive levels" (King Papers, 1967/8/15, p. 7). In a January 5, 1968, press conference, King told reporters:

> I think we're drifting [as a] nation at this point with no basic sense of purpose, priorities or policy and if we continue down this road I have no doubt that we could [go] the same way as so-called empires and civilizations of the past. I must honestly say that when I go back to reading *The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire* I find myself saying that the parallels are frightening. Until we find in America [a] new sense of purpose, a new sense of priorities and policy where persons are more valuable than property and where the ends for which we live are as important as the means by which we live and where we make love rather than war we are going to destroy ourselves with our abuse of power (King Papers, 1968/1/5, p. 4).

The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders

On March 1, 1968, King's foreboding outlook on America, and his prescribed remedies for pulling the nation back from the brink, were echoed by the final report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, which put the blame for the ghetto uprisings

squarely on the shoulders of America's white majority. "White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II," the report read (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968, p. 10). "Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the very future of every American... To pursue our present course will involve the continuing polarization of the American community and ultimately, the destruction of basic democratic values" (ibid, p.1). Vitally, the Commissioners – led by Illinois Governor, Otto Kerner, and drawn primarily from the white political and business Establishment – called for radical reforms to race relations in America that they saw dividing the country into "two societies: one black, one white – separate and unequal" (ibid, p. 1). Healing this dangerous cleavage, the Commission concluded, required "a commitment to national action on an unprecedented scale" in order to "shape a future compatible with the historic ideals of American society. The great productivity of our economy, and a federal revenue system which is highly responsive to economic growth, can provide the resources. The major need is to generate a new will – the will to tax ourselves to the extent necessary to meet the vital needs of the nation" (ibid, p.23). Federal action – including the creation of two million public and private sector jobs over three years, new federal funds to desegregate and improve the education system and nationalized welfare standards that would provide a minimum floor of assistance no lower than the federally set "poverty level" – were necessary to "fulfill our pledge of equality and to meet the fundamental needs of a democratic and civilized society – domestic peace and social justice," the report asserted (ibid).

The next day, the front page of *New York Times* ran a report on responses by King

and other black leaders to the Commission's findings. Though he welcomed the Commission's recommendations, King found it hard to be too enthusiastic given the fact they "have been made before almost to the last detail and have been ignored almost to the last detail" (Zion, 1968, p.1). As reporter Sydney E. Zion wrote, King said that the Commission's report "confirmed what he had been saying all along: that the United States faces 'chaos and disintegration' if the Negro is not brought into the mainstream of American life" (ibid, p.14). King called the findings both "timely" and welcome support for SCLC's call "on all Americans to go to Washington [this spring] to demand that Congress address itself to this problem" (ibid).

At King's request, Levison dictated a statement on the Commission's findings for a March 4th press conference. The statement, recorded and paraphrased by the FBI, said the Commission "deserved the gratitude of the nation because they had the wisdom to perceive the truth and the courage to state it" (FBI, 3/4/68, 8/0185). Levison said the Commission's findings, that "white racism" was the "chief destructive cutting force" that was cleaving America into two "hostile societies," reflected the conclusions of none other than Thomas Jefferson, who "would have no respite from his fear" that the "killing disease of white racism" would destroy America in the end (ibid). Levison underscored the importance of Congressional action on the Commission's findings, which he warned "should not just be filed away as other White House conferences and reports... the duty of every American is to solve this problem without regard to cost" (ibid). As King had remarked in the *Times*, the likelihood of Congress shelving the report provided dramatic new impetus for the nation-saving Poor People's Campaign:

> The people must now take charge of the preservation of the nation. We will not permit the government to uncover the truth and rebury it. An America

> split by white racism is an America on the threshold of doom... The highest patriotism demands the end of the Vietnam war and the opening of a bloodless war over racism and poverty. We will try through militant mass pressure to transform the Commission's report from recommendations to national policy. The final answer must come from Congress and the White House (ibid).

Speaking to Andy Young after the press conference, which Young said "went very well" (ibid), Levison enthused that the Poor People's Campaign and the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders were now essentially putting forward the same proposals for federal action on the ghettos and poverty. In light of this, Levison suggested that it would be "much cleverer" for SCLC, rather than running with its own draft program, to now base PPC strategy around a message like "Administration, these are your recommendations, of your Commission, and we are coming to Washington to demand that you implement your program" (ibid). Levison observed: "We will be the only organization that has an action program in support of these recommendations because we are already in motion" (ibid).

Convincing the middle-class

King's assertion that the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders provided a "timely" justification for SCLC's Washington plans reflected what he knew was the vital need to link the Poor People's Campaign to the concerns and sympathies of mainstream, middle-class America. As Levison advised King shortly after the December press conference at which he made public the details of the campaign, "we're going to have a real job of interpretation for the middle class whites and middle class Negroes... They're going to have trouble with [civil disobedience]" (FBI, 12/13/67, 7/0841). If middle-class Americans were inclined to dismiss King's tone as fear-mongering or extremism, the dire assessment of race relations in America by the respectable members

of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders suddenly made it that much more difficult to do so. As columnist Tom Wicker wrote in his introduction to the *New York Times* edition of the report, the composition of the Commission, with its mix of liberal Democrats, fiscally-conservative Republicans, and representatives of police and business, made it impossible "to doubt the urgency of the case, the shock of the findings, the truth of the need" (ix).

In Levison's opinion, the Poor People's Campaign was gaining traction with middle class Americans through February and into March 1968. On February 24, Levison told SCLC lawyer, Clarence Jones, that contributions from SCLC's primarily middle-class donors lists were "running way ahead of last year," and repeated "*way ahead*" for emphasis (FBI, 2/24/67, 8/0162). Levison took this as an endorsement of the Poor People's Campaign because the fundraising letter that people were answering was "very carefully gotten up to center it on the mobilization and explain the rationale for it. So what we're getting is a vote on the mobilization... it's a real test of the middle-class, intellectual, most concerned type of people" (ibid). This middle-class response combined with what Levison said were reports from SCLC field organizers in Mississippi, Alabama and Philadelphia that people there were "raring to go" (ibid). Taken together, Levison said "You got a real response from the Negro community and you got white understanding that this must be done. And this is something new" (ibid). In a conversation with muckraking *Village Voice* journalist Jack Newfield, whom *Life* magazine had assigned to write a 3,000 word feature on the Poor People's Campaign, Levison enthused that the mobilization was "developing very well – the response in the South is tremendous, and the response among the white middle class has been much

better" (FBI, 3/8/67, 8/0198). Off the record, Levison told Newfield that income from SCLC's white middle class contributors was better than the previous year.

On March 15, Adele Kantor of SCLC's New York office reported to Levison that the Poor People's Campaign was attracting "a lot" of contributors from 1964 and 1965, when King was at the height of his popularity and moral influence as a result of his Nobel Peace Prize and the SCLC's dramatic voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama. Kantor took this as an indication that "people are realizing the correctness of Dr. King's position" (FBI, 3/15/68, 8/0213). Four days later, Levison told Harry Wachtel that the Washington Jewish Community Council had endorsed the Poor People's Campaign, on the condition that SCLC notifies the police of its every move. Levison said the Council was the voice of the "Jewish Establishment" in Washington and the "real power boys" who represented Jewish Community Councils all around the country (FBI, 3/19/68, 8/0224) – "When they don't take a Roy Wilkins position then you know that sentiment is running in your favor," Levison observed (ibid). Further evidence that King's message was resonating positively among Washington residents was word that 3,000 local families had offered to house Poor People's Campaign participants if necessary, which Levison noted was "important public relations-wise" (FBI, 3/26/68, 8/0251). On March 28, Levison told Tudja Crowder, the new head of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), one of the country's leading peace organizations, that the Poor People's Campaign had "a remarkable amount of white support that I didn't expect" (FBI, 3/28/68, 8/0263). Levison noted, however, that middle-class whites were still "a little bit wary: they're afraid that this type of action could provoke violence. And we've never been more convinced that it won't. The government doesn't want it in an election year and our people just don't do it

when King is around. But you can't convince people. They're just going to have to see it" (ibid).

Asserting King's Leadership

Leading those proving difficult to convince that the Poor People's Campaign could remain nonviolent were the middle-class representatives of the news media. Despite King's efforts to focus attention on his constructive proposals and the dire urgency of the situation that many Americans were clearly coming to understand, significant media coverage of his plans continued to emphasize their risk of violence. Nonviolence, the media narrative went, was a relic in this new age of violent ghetto uprisings and revolutionary Black Power with its popular if empty rhetoric of guerrilla warfare in America's streets. Where it was once celebrated for its ability to unify blacks, nonviolent direct action was now condemned as a "formula for discord," as the *New York Times* described King's plans it in its August 17, 1967, editorial. While acknowledging the validity of King's desire to "defuse the rage that erupts in riots and also prevent leadership of the Negro community from passing by default to such advocates of black separatism and violence as Rap Brown[1] and Stokely Carmichael," the *Times* concluded that "nonviolence is losing its appeal" and civil disobedience could very well spark "disaster" ("Formula for Discord," 1967, p. 36). Given King's stature both nationally and internationally as the living symbol of nonviolence, it was impossible not to take the *Times'* assertion of nonviolence's diminished influence as a comment on King himself.

Showdown for Nonviolence

King and his advisers knew that massive civil disobedience had to be attempted if nonviolence was to re-establish its tactical and moral value and bring the violence

[1] H. Rap Brown succeeded Stokely Carmichael as the national director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the summer of 1967.

overtaking America's ghettos, and those encouraging it, to heel. In the wake of Newark and Detroit, King also understood that such a campaign was an important test of the strength of his leadership in the black community. King expressed this understanding in an article entitled "Showdown for Nonviolence" that *Look* magazine published just after his murder: "We believe that if this campaign succeeds, nonviolence will once again be the dominant instrument for social change – and jobs and income will be put in the hands of the tormented poor. If it fails, nonviolence will be discredited, and the country may be plunged into holocaust – a tragedy deepened by the awareness that it was avoidable" (ibid, p. 24).

In order to reinforce King's leadership status in America's volatile ghettos and defend against his critics, Levison believed it imperative that King get media coverage for his civil rights work, namely his Herculean efforts through the fall of 1967 to get Cleveland's black community registered to vote in that city's mayoral elections. As Levison saw it, news coverage of King's activities was still too focused on his involvement with the peace movement and it was creating the impression that King himself was prioritizing such issues over his work with ghetto blacks. On September 27, 1967, Levison told Andy Young of his concern that King had "not been in the news on civil rights in any sustained way for quite some time" (FBI, 9/27 /67, 7/0625). Levison noted that this absence was ceding too much room in the news media to the inflammatory, insurrectionist rhetoric of Stokely Carmichael and his new replacement as Chairman of SNCC, H. Rap Brown, and leaving nonviolence open to questions about its appeal as a result. Levison's view reflected that of journalist Earl Caldwell, who in the August 20 edition of the *New York Times* wrote that the violent summer of 1967 had left

King and his fellow "moderate" leaders of the civil rights movement struggling to "recapture the impetus in the movement" from the likes of Carmichael and Brown. "'It's time for us to start calling the shots," an unnamed "moderate" source told Caldwell (Caldwell, 1967, p. E3).

Fight for recognition

Ironically, part of the problem as Levison saw it was his belief that the *New York Times* was ignoring King's efforts to build a constructive counter-narrative to Brown's "burn, baby, burn" provocations. While he acknowledged healthy coverage in other news media, Levison felt the nation's paper of record was not giving King credit for his role organizing black voters behind Cleveland lawyer, Carl Stokes, in his bid to become the first black mayor of a major American city. In a conversation with King, Levison pointed to a news analysis of Stokes' Democratic nomination victory by *New York Times* reporter Gene Roberts that mentioned Stokes' relations with the NAACP and the Urban League but conspicuously left out King's high profile contributions to getting out the black vote for him. Levison told King: "Did you see that – no mention... I suspect that the guy who wrote this had a view and did not want to see you" (FBI, 10/9/67, 7/0662). The glaring nature of the omission was underscored by King's assertion that Stokes "won because of SCLC and me" (ibid, p.2) and that Stokes even told King that SCLC's work organizing and registering voters in the black community had been instrumental to his victory. Levison told King that the scenario highlighted the need to "fight for recognition, not out of immodesty but out of necessity" (ibid) because elements in the news media were framing his work in the Northern ghettos as a failure. Alluding to King's yeoman service educating Cleveland's ghetto residents on the power of the vote and the futility of expressing their frustrations through violence, Levison called Cleveland "a magnificent

answer" (ibid) to those who were declaring King's influence and nonviolence "dead and buried" (ibid). If they couldn't get this point across through the media, Levison said they at least had the SCLC's well-organized contributors and mailing lists through which to promote this emerging story, which, he added, "was always important" (ibid).

King believed that the story was an especially important one to get out because his efforts in Cleveland proved his ability to gain the confidence of the ghetto's "Black Nationalist" leaders, and the restless youngsters who looked up to them, through "dialogue and listening to them" (ibid, p.3). "I told them I wanted their cooperation and made it clear that we could share philosophies and told them we are all brothers," King said (ibid). Referring to Fred Ahmed Evans, the influential Black Nationalist leader in Cleveland's Hough ghetto, King said he got Ahmed to help him think "in terms of programs which are militant yet not violent" – "Ahmed's reaction was 'we will cooperate' and the interesting thing is that he was not agreeing with me philosophically but in communication with me spiritually and psychologically," King said, noting that the very fact he took time out to speak one on one with Ahmed helped to win his support. What was vital, King told Levison, was that he was able to convince Ahmed to see the tactical and pragmatic value of nonviolence. "We told him in substance that [Ralph Locher, Cleveland's incumbent Democratic mayor] wants us to burn the city down because that would assure his re-election," King said. "Then [the Black Nationalists] started saying some very practical things. When the boys would get out of line, Ahmed would call them in and tell them that was not the way they were doing this. I think the major thing was that I was neutralizing them, not changing them on violence" (ibid). King added that the last time he saw Ahmed and his young followers "they were happy as

could be" because they had seen "one or two victories" through nonviolent direct action. Levison drew from this a strategic lesson that he thought would help affirm King's militant middle position in the community: the need to establish "achievable goals" that would move both Black Nationalists and more conservative elements of the black community like its preachers. "When you achieve goals which are real, everyone is impressed," offered Levison (ibid).

Neutralize Black Power/Black Nationalists

King's desire to see his work in Cleveland reported in the national news media underscored the pressure he was feeling to validate the continuing efficacy of nonviolence and the strength of his popular appeal in the ghettos. "These things are said in [the Cleveland press] yet the nation does not realize what has taken place there in terms of our work," King told Levison. "It would be unwise to say SCLC did it alone but my presence there kinda pulled it together and gave the Negro hope... I know I walked 15 miles a day before the election: stopping in bars, pool rooms and everywhere [I] could find people: it is an interesting story that needs to be told" (ibid, p. 4-5). Levison agreed, adding cynically that there was "no use trying to get the *Times* or a magazine to do it because they don't have a conception of what a story there is here" (ibid). Levison said that getting publicity for the story would be easier once the news media realized that it was connected to their two chief preoccupations at the time: "elections and riots" (ibid). Given King's positive reception by ghetto residents, whom he said referred to him as a "mellow dude" (ibid) and joined him as he walked and drove the ghetto streets, Levison said it was a crucial point to publicize considering his many detractors who were claiming that King had no appeal in the ghetto (ibid).

Neutralizing the Black Power / Black Nationalist opponents of nonviolence and

affirming his ability to influence restless ghetto youngsters became vital components of media strategy around the Poor People's Campaign. In his press conferences, statements and published work, King stressed the intensive training in nonviolence that SCLC was providing to the first wave of 3,000 participants from the ghettos of 10 Northern cities and poor rural regions of five Southern states. These original 3,000 participants would then act as marshals responsible for ensuring the nonviolent discipline of successive waves of participants. As King told a January 16, 1968, press conference: “We feel that if a pattern is set in the beginning, people will fall into line... We cannot be responsible for everyone in the country, but certainly we are going to be responsible for and to the people who are involved in the demonstration” (ibid, p.8-9). King said he would visit each organizing region himself and meet with local leaders, including Black Nationalists, in order to explain his plans and extract from them a pledge to respect SCLC’s philosophy of nonviolence. If they could not agree on nonviolence, King said he would negotiate at the very least their non-interference in SCLC plans. “We don’t expect anybody to be disrupting or attempting to disrupt our plans,” King told the press conference. “Our staff are very well trained in this kind of thing. We’ve worked in communities before where nationalists have existed; where persons who believe in violence have existed, and yet we’ve been able to discipline them” (ibid, p.9). As he often did, King underscored this point with the example of Chicago’s Blackstone Rangers, a violent ghetto street gang that he was able to convert to nonviolence for his open-housing demonstrations in the city's all-white neighbourhoods. “They never retaliated with a single act of violence,” King said. “It’s my contention that people can be amazingly nonviolent when they find themselves in a nonviolent situation, where there is a commitment to tactical nonviolence

on the part of the group" (ibid).

A more thorough analysis of SCLC's strategic defence of nonviolence at this time is found in the text that Levison drafted for King's CBC Massey Lecture entitled "Nonviolence and Social Change." Acknowledging that "many people feel that nonviolence as a strategy for social change was cremated in the flames of the urban riots of the last two years," Levison argued that the unrest in fact revealed a de facto commitment to nonviolence among most participants in the unrest: "The violence, to a startling degree, was focused against property rather than against people... the vast majority of the rioters were not involved at all in attacking people. The much-publicized 'death toll' that marked the riots, and the many injuries, were overwhelmingly inflicted on the rioters by the military" (King, 1967, in the *Lost Massey Lectures*, 2007, p. 201). Levison offered that this violence against property was "a demonstration and a warning... directed against symbols of exploitation, and it was designed to express the depth of anger in the community" (ibid, p.202). Levison called this "a core of nonviolence towards persons" that should not be overlooked nor dispelled but rather developed. King's experiences in the Southern states and Chicago revealed that even men of "very violent tendencies" can be disarmed and turned into disciplined foot soldiers of nonviolent direct action. "I am convinced that even very violent temperaments can be channelled through nonviolent discipline, if the movement is moving; if they can act constructively, and express through an effective channel their very legitimate anger" (ibid, p.203). The greater question, Levison argued, was whether the government and the status quo would accept responsibility for the unrest and heed the just demands of the Poor People's Campaign. Noting that the Johnson Administration's "only concrete response was to

initiate a study and call for a day of prayer," Levison declared that such actions by a government that "commands more wealth and power than has ever been known in the history of the world" was "worse than blind, it is provocative. It is paradoxical, but fair to say, that Negro terrorism is incited less on ghetto street corners than in the halls of Congress" (ibid, p.204).

Alongside a whirlwind series of visits by King to the ghettos where his field organizers were recruiting participants for the Poor People's Campaign, SCLC set about organizing broadcasts of his speeches on black radio stations serving ghetto communities in order to educate listeners on the campaign's goals in Washington and extend the reach of King's nonviolent message into the ghetto. By January, King's program was being aired on at least 11 stations across the United States with a combined audience of an estimated two million people (FBI, 1/12/68, 8/0039). In a conversation with King, Levison said his program on two stations in Detroit and New Orleans saw their normal audiences figures double (ibid). Levison believed the program was crucial because ghetto blacks tended to get their news and information via the radio rather than newspapers. "On a program like this you are reaching a large group of them," he said. King said many people on his travels across the country had mentioned hearing him on the radio, which led him to see the medium as a worthy substitute for television in terms of reaching ghetto audiences. Levison said several stations had complained of not being invited to King's speaking engagements in their cities and it was crucial that SCLC draw up a list of local radio stations and keep their news departments informed about King's local visits. They agreed that SCLC's Public Relations department had to put more effort into notifying local radio stations when King was in town.

Stokely Carmichael

On February 6, 1968, a King-led SCLC delegation held a key meeting with Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown and other Black Power / Black Nationalist representatives in Washington in a bid to ensure either their nonviolent participation or their pledge not to interfere in the Poor People's Campaign. Despite tensions between the two sides, including a brief shouting match that heard SCLC organizer Hosea Williams accuse Carmichael of trying to "screw" King and SCLC (FBI, 2/8/68, 8/0121), the meeting produced a pledge of non-interference from Carmichael. In a phone call to Levison the next day, SCLC Executive Director, Bill Rutherford, said Carmichael adopted the attitude that if SCLC "flunk out in Washington, we're going to get a lot of new recruits, but if [SCLC] make it in Washington, we are going to be in trouble because we are not going to get any new recruits" (ibid). Carmichael understood what Levison knew well and expressed in a conversation with fellow Research Committee member, Harry Wachtel, on March 19: "A victory in terms of countable jobs would do magnificently in my opinion for Martin: It would be a first real victory on the economic front" (FBI, 3/19/68, 8/0224).

King's strategic concerns with Carmichael and his Black Power associates were discussed in a conference call with his advisors that King organized to think through questions that he might face on his aforementioned *Meet The Press* appearance on August 13, 1967. All on the call agreed that Carmichael and Rap Brown's talk about the ghetto uprisings being dress-rehearsals for guerrilla warfare in the United States gave the white community and Congress an excuse for avoiding their root causes of poverty and unemployment. "Stokely is now being used to hide and confuse the real issues," Levison said (FBI, 8/12/67, 7/0509). King added that their incendiary rhetoric freed whites "who would otherwise be ashamed of their anti-Negro feelings" from any guilt and even

facilitated calls for armed repression of the ghetto rebellions (ibid, p.3). However, given the widespread respect for Carmichael in the black community, and his appeal among black youths in particular, it was also understood that attacking him would only serve to alienate the very audience that King needed to reach most with his message of nonviolence. King settled on the idea that the best approach was not to condemn Carmichael himself but his "call to violence" instead (ibid, p.4). King's Washington advisor, Walter Fauntroy, later added the possible question "Don't you think Rap Brown and Stokely have set back the Negro cause" (ibid, p.8). While Levison thought King had to say that he disagreed, King ventured instead that it was Congress and the white community who had in fact "pulled the rug out from under nonviolent leaders by not responding" to their pleas for funding for the ghettos. The impression this gave, he said, was that nonviolence didn't work and rioting was the only way to get anything (ibid).

The appeal of Carmichael and Rap Brown's talk of armed revolution among disaffected ghetto youth led King to seek the group's views on the expected question "Does this trend not reveal that your leadership is being rejected?" (ibid, p.4). Levison and Andy Young encouraged King to take the position that the "existence of nonviolence does not wipe out violence" (ibid, p.7), that violence has always existed alongside nonviolence and this does not make nonviolence irrelevant. King ran with this idea, suggesting the massive civil disobedience was necessary because nonviolence had to be "stepped-up on a larger scale, to be escalated" in order to have a greater impact than the ghetto violence (ibid, p.7).

Media coverage of SCLC's Washington summit with Black Power representatives revealed two duelling tendencies: While continuing to cast doubts on King's ability to

maintain nonviolent discipline among his followers, news reports also reflected an emerging understanding that King's success in Washington would be a major blow to opponents of nonviolence. This tension was evident in an article by reporter Walter Rugaber in the February 11, 1968, edition of *New York Times* that navigated between fears of the campaign generating "rioting" on one hand and the claim of an unnamed "observer" of the civil rights movement that "most Negroes will move" toward King and nonviolence if Congress takes action on the PPC's demands for jobs or income (Rugaber, 1968/2/11, p. E4). As Rugaber noted, "many [PPC] sympathizers warn that some progress is essential" (ibid). This emerging understanding also had the effect of shifting the tone of the *Washington Post*'s editorial response to King's evolving plans for the PPC. While still refusing to in any way countenance massive civil disobedience as an acceptable response to Congressional inaction on poverty, the *Post* conceded that seeing King re-established as "the major spokesman for discontented Negroes... in light of the alternatives, may be as important to the Nation as a whole as it is to Dr. King" ("The Spring Campaign," 1968, p. A20).

A trouble-obsessed news media

In a column published four days later, the *Washington Post*'s William Raspberry wrote about King's frustration with what he took to be the news media's preoccupation with the PPC's potential for violence and failure rather than the issue of poverty in America that the campaign sought to highlight. According to Raspberry, King felt the PPC's goals held little interest for media representatives next to the chaos they worried the campaign could produce, which he alleged had been "magnified... all out of proportion" (Raspberry, 1968, p. D1). King's concerns were later echoed by *New York Times* reporter, Ben Franklin, in a letter written to Executive Editor, Harrison Salisbury, during the last days of the Poor

People's Campaign. Franklin expressed concern that his paper's coverage had not been up to what he considered "the standards of the *Times*" (Franklin in NYTC, 1968, p.2) and charged that both he and the rest of the *Times* staff who worked on the PPC "suffered from a pretty total preoccupation with the comic-tragic-*Amos 'n Andy* malfeasance of the Movement, to the detriment of the truths in it about hunger and poverty and the disinherited" (ibid). While not advocating that the *Times* alter its long-standing policy against "crusades," Franklin wrote that the paper "could have done a contemplative job right on the hunger issue (and in spite of Abernathy's Follies[1]) and laid it to rest journalistically, at least, as true or false, or something in between" (Ibid). Franklin also told Salisbury that he was sorry to detect what he felt was the *Times'* "relaxing interest" in the poor "without ever having ever gotten very far past the arrests, the mud of Resurrection City[2] and the rhetoric... (I) (we) should have done better" (ibid).

Levison had an intrinsic understanding of this tendency in the news media, which he expressed in a March 23 conversation with SCLC Executive Director, Bill Rutherford. Rutherford told Levison of his concern that SCLC's organization of the PPC seemed to be based largely on a governing faith that everything would fall into place once they arrived in Washington, including how to cover the campaign's spiralling costs and house its 3,000 participants in Washington. This news led Levison to reply, "It is one thing to proceed on faith but to launch into something this important that will get a lot of publicity, there isn't any margin for having it go wrong... all the publicity will be on the

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1 Ralph Abernathy, Vice-President of SCLC and King's best friend, succeeded King as President after his assassination. Abernathy lacked King's influence, political sophistication and leadership skills, which Levison and others blamed for the disorganization and in-fighting that overtook the Poor People's Campaign and produced its lack of results.

2 Resurrection City was the name given to the collection of plywood A-frame shacks erected by the SCLC on the National Mall in Washington to house PPC participants.

period of floundering" (FBI, 3/23/68, 8/0242). Five days later, the news media's relentless search for signs of weakness in King's leadership and the disorganization of an over-stretched SCLC met head on in Memphis, Tennessee.

Memphis

On March 18, King accepted an invitation to address the black community in Memphis in support of a five-week-old strike by black sanitation workers protesting discriminatory practices by the city's government. King – physically and emotionally drained by the stress of organizing, promoting and defending the Poor People's Campaign – addressed an enthusiastic crowd of 15,000 at the city's Mason Temple and found in the Memphis campaign a spark that gave new meaning and hope for his Washington crusade. As he told Levison in a conversation on March 26, "I've never seen a community as together as Memphis" (Garrow, 1986, p.606; FBI, 3/26/68, 8/0251). King noted, however, that the Memphis strike had not received much coverage in the news media, but Levison assured him that this would change with his scheduled return there two days later to lead a mass march in support of the striking sanitation workers. Levison compared the situation in Memphis to King's 1956 campaign in Montgomery, Alabama, which received scant coverage at the start but from which he emerged a household name in America. "I think by your going there and leading this march you may very well turn that around from a publicity standpoint and people will start to pay attention," he told King. "I think it's excellent for you to be identified with an action that is a solid, all-community action" (ibid).

King's return to Memphis on March 28 did focus the news media's attention on the strike and his leadership there, but for all the wrong reasons. A flight delay saw King and his staff arrive an hour past the scheduled start of the march to a crowd of 6,000

demonstrators impatient to get going (Garrow, 1986, p.610). Within minutes of its start, with King at the front with his staff, local organizers and most of the marshals assigned to maintain order, youngsters at the unguarded rear of the march began smashing shop windows and running off with looted goods. Baton and Mace-wielding Memphis police quickly set in on looters and peaceful demonstrators alike. A shocked King was immediately hurried from the scene by his staff to a local hotel. The reports coming in from the riot zone that afternoon only served to deepen his woes: a 16-year-old black youth shot dead by Memphis police along with at least 50 injured and 120 arrested for the looting of an estimated 60 shops and other charges. That evening, Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington ordered 4,000 National Guard troops into Memphis to enforce a dusk-to-dawn curfew (Rugaber in *New York Times*, 1968/3/29, p.1; Chriss in *Washington Post*, 68/3/29, p.A1)

At 8:10 pm, Andy Young placed a call to Levison and asked him to get in touch with King, whom he described as "very depressed about the incident in Memphis" (FBI, 3/28/68, 8/0263). Levison rang the number Young provided and spoke briefly with King's closest friend and SCLC Vice-President, Ralph Abernathy, who informed him that they had not been told of a "strong group of Black Power advocates" mixed in among the marchers (ibid, p.7). Had they known, Abernathy said, they would have insisted on taking them aside and training them in the tactics of nonviolence first. He admitted that "it was a mistake" not to have been better informed of the local situation (ibid). After getting another run down of the incident from King, who mentioned calling off the Poor People's Campaign, Levison assured him that there was no reason to be on the defensive and encouraged him to take heart from the fact "the majority of people in the Memphis march

did not join in the rioting," which Levison said proved the effectiveness of his leadership and nonviolence (ibid). The best position that King could take, Levison offered, was that his presence in fact prevented the wider chaos that similar events had sparked in other cities (ibid). As to its potential impact on the Poor People's Campaign, Levison assured King that it would be minimal. SCLC would be the sole organizers in Washington and they had much more skill at promoting "the importance of nonviolence" than the inexperienced local leadership in Memphis (ibid). The FBI noted that King "agreed in every respect with Levison's evaluation of the Memphis incident" (ibid).

King awoke the next morning, March 29, to national coverage of the disastrous march, including front-page news stories in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post.* Both reports described how a march "led" by King had turned into a riot of black vandalism and looting and extreme police violence (Rugaber, 3/29/68, p.1; Chriss, 3/29/68, p. A1). Only the *Times* noted that the SCLC did not organize the march. According to the *Post*, King and "his monitors" were unable to fully control "the young militants who began shouting and jeering as the protest march began" (ibid, p. A6). The *Times* reported that King was "whisked away at the first sign of trouble" (ibid) while the *Post* asserted that he "fled" after being "hustled into a car by associates" (ibid). Though the *Times* report avoided associating the youngsters with the march itself, reporter Walter Rugaber did highlight the implications of their behaviour for the Poor People's Campaign, namely the possibility of "violent forces infiltrating the ranks of [King's] nonviolent protestors" (ibid). Rugaber reported that King "acknowledged that the Washington drive was 'risky' for this reason, but he said that his 3,000 demonstrators would be carefully trained in nonviolence and the destructive forces could be kept away

from the activities of his group" (ibid).

Desperate to control the damage, King held a press conference that morning at which he underscored the fact that he had no role in organizing the Memphis march and vowed to return to the city to lead one fully organized by SCLC. King also denied reporters' efforts to frame the new march as a "second chance" for nonviolence (Rugaber, 3/30/68, p.31). As to the Poor People's Campaign, King put on a confident face in response to a chorus of Congressmen who wanted him to call it off. "Riots are here," the *Times* reported King saying. "Riots are part of the ugly atmosphere of our society. I cannot guarantee that riots will not take place this summer. I can only guarantee that our demonstrations will not be violent" (ibid). SCLC's staff were "eminently qualified" to keep the PPC's participants in line, King declared, while underlining his conviction that the situation in Memphis, with its mix of race and poverty, proved the importance of his Washington campaign (Garrow, 1987, p.613).

The "logic of the press"

Levison called King after the press conference and found him a deeply-troubled mood.[1] With the "hostile, disparaging tone" (ibid, p. 614) of reporters' questions still on his mind, King told Levison that "from a public relations point of view, and every other way, we are in serious trouble. I think as far as the Washington campaign is concerned we are in trouble" (FBI, 3/29/68, 8/0271). King said the violence in Memphis was bound to deter people from participating in the PPC for fear of a similar outbreak in Washington, and it was sure to dominate future media coverage. "It is a personal setback for me. Let's face it, there are those who are vindicated now," he said, pointing to Roy Wilkins, Bayard Rustin and others in the civil rights movement whom he accused of being "influenced by

[1] The complete FBI transcript of this conversation is attached in Appendix B, starting on page 160

what they read in newspapers" – "You know their point, 'I'm right, Martin Luther King is dead, he's finished, his nonviolence is nothing, no one is listening to it,'" King said. "Let's face it, we do have a great setback where my image and my leadership are concerned" (ibid). Levison countered that it would be a "profound error" to "accept their definition" of failure and tried to assure King that the present crisis would blow over. King, however, was convinced that he needed to mount a powerful action that would "somehow, affirm what the press will refuse to affirm," i.e. that he possessed the influence necessary to ensure the nonviolent discipline of his followers in Washington. Levison, however, challenged King's submission to what he called the "logic of the press," which dictated "100 per cent adherence to nonviolence even by those who are not your followers" – "How can you ever get that," Levison asked (ibid). He warned King that subscribing to such logic would put nonviolence in a hopeless "box or a trap" because it was virtually impossible to achieve and would only serve to immobilize the nonviolent movement. Even if he could guarantee nonviolent discipline among his own followers, "the other side can always find a few provocateurs to start violence no matter what you do," Levison said, referring to the strike-breaking tactics of anti-labour forces in the 1930s. King believed, however, that his status as "a symbol of nonviolence," as one whose life and leadership was dedicated to the philosophy, made him uniquely susceptible to the undermining effects of violence. "The press is not going to say what you are talking about," he told Levison. "Everything will come out weakening the symbol. It will put many Negroes in doubts. It will put many Negroes in a position of saying, 'Well, that's true – Martin Luther King is at the end of his rope.' So I've got to do something that becomes a kind of powerful act... of unifying forces and refuting the

claims of the press" (ibid). King said there was no way to stop the media from imposing the logic Levison described, telling him "You watch your newspapers. Watch the *New York Times* editorials. I think it will be the most negative thing about Martin Luther King that you have ever seen. There will not be one sympathetic – even with friends, it won't be there" (ibid). Levison tried to offer some hope to King, telling him that it was not "absolutely inevitable that the truth is going to get buried," to which King replied "It will, Stan, unless I do something now" (ibid). Levison assured King that doing so would only perpetuate the news media's "logic that there cannot be one percent that are violent without destroying your position. We have to find a way in which we don't accept this" (ibid). As to the Poor People's Campaign, King pondered what he felt was the contradictory claim that SCLC could control the demonstrations but not 100 per cent of the violence. Levison offered that the way around this was to assert his ability to control his followers, just as he had done at the press conference that morning and had been doing since he announced the Poor People's Campaign. "You are not undertaking to control everybody else," Levison said. He cautioned King to avoid a position that would leave him responsible for controlling all violence, which would leave him "destined to fail" (ibid). "You can take a position that your followers are nonviolent and that your followers will do as they must. It is not up to you to control others," he repeated (ibid).

The editorial pages of both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* addressed King's disastrous Memphis march the next morning.[1] Both editorials turned to the experiences of King's hero, Gandhi, and his willingness to suspend his civil disobedience campaigns if they erupted into violence in order to enforce his followers' discipline. Both papers asserted that King would be well-advised to follow Gandhi's lead.

[1] See Appendix B, pp. 167-168 for the complete texts of both editorials

Only the *Post,* however, saw this as a temporary delay until King could assure the nonviolent discipline of his followers. "No aspect of the march can be left to chance or improvisation," the *Post* said in urging King not rush into a campaign that it now acknowledged "could be a gain for the Nation" if planned and conducted properly ("On the March," 1968, p.A10). The *Post*'s new, cautious support for the Poor People's Campaign contrasted the *Times*' inability to see the mobilization as anything but "counterproductive" ("Mini-riot in Memphis," 1968, p.32). Erroneously asserting that King organized the Memphis march, which "left store windows on Beale Street smashed and one Negro youth dead," the *Times* claimed that the "mini-riot" only served to prove that conditions in America were too dangerous for King's Washington plans. "None of the precautions [King] and his aides are taking to keep the capital demonstration peaceful can provide any dependable insurance against another eruption of the kind that rocked Memphis," the *Times* declared. Embracing the logic that Levison and King discussed the night before, the *Times* condemned nonviolent protest as the source of trouble rather than the "rowdy elements bent on violence" that used it for cover (ibid). While acknowledging that "no more than fifty teen-agers" out of 6,000 marchers were responsible for the vandalism and looting and that Memphis police responded with excessive, indiscriminate force, the *Times'* still found King ultimately accountable for the results, including the expected white backlash against the strikers demands for fairness (ibid). Likewise, the *Times* asserted, King will be to blame for "an April explosion in Washington" (ibid).

Fightback

In a tense ten hour meeting the same day the editorials appeared, SCLC staff overcame their stricken leader's inclination to cancel the Poor People's Campaign and their return to Memphis and won King over to their conviction that SCLC could bring both off

successfully. “Martin had a minority position and we corrected his position,” Levison told his friend, Alice Loewi, the following day (FBI, 3/31/68, 8/0282). “We can’t let a couple of kids keep mass action from being our weapon,” he said (ibid). Levison’s conversation with Loewi also provided insight into SCLC’s emerging strategy for the PPC: King would work to control violence-prone youths by going through the high schools to convince them that “the Establishment wants them to [riot]” – “once they grasp that, there isn’t a chance of it happening,” Levison stated (ibid). SCLC’s main concern in Washington was “a double cross from Stokely Carmichael,” who might renege on his promise not to interfere in the campaign or encourage its disruption. Levison said King’s response in such an event would be that “our job is not to stop violence but to be nonviolent ourselves... We are not going to get out of the streets because it may start some violence” (ibid). This thinking was also behind a shift toward a harder SCLC line in response to questions about the PPC’s potential for sparking “riots.” The SCLC’s new line held that riots were Washington’s problem, not theirs. As Levison said “why should we worry about what upsets them. They are the ones who are afraid of violence, we are not” (ibid).

A confidential internal memorandum circulated to SCLC staff by Public Relations Director Tom Offenberger on April 1 laid out the organization’s three-point response to the media’s coverage of the Memphis riot. While recognizing that it was a “particularly soul-searching time for us,” the memo said that SCLC would work to reframe the issue away from the media’s fixation on the effectiveness of nonviolence toward a renewed emphasis on the PPC’s root issues of racism and poverty. “Rather than proving that nonviolence is no longer an effective tactic, Memphis illustrated the emergency state of

just those conditions which we are attempting to abolish through our demonstrations" (SCLC, 1968/4/1, p.1). SCLC would also return to Memphis, which it considered a test run for the Poor People's Campaign. "[The campaign in Memphis] concerns jobs and poverty and racism and a community that wants to correct all three injustices. We do realize, however, that the community wants training for more effective nonviolent action" (ibid). Accordingly, the SCLC would dispatch its top organizers to Memphis to lay the groundwork for a second King-led march on April 5. Lastly, the memo asserted that the SCLC's plans for Washington were still on track and events in Memphis only underscored the urgent need for the Poor People's Campaign. In a follow-up press release issued that same day, the SCLC proclaimed that "the nonviolent movement will not be intimidated by violence. And we will not be stopped by those in positions of power who have failed to deal with poverty and racism" (SCLC, 1968/4/1, p.1).

King took this message to reporters the day after his staff meeting. As he told a press conference in Washington, the Poor People's Campaign was coming to the nation's capital "to re-establish that the real issue is not violence or nonviolence, but poverty and neglect" (Franklin, 1968, p. 20). The *Times'* Ben Franklin reported that King offered to call off his Washington campaign in exchange for a "positive commitment" from the White House for assistance that summer for America's slums, though he admitted that he did not see it forthcoming. If such commitments were not produced by the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, King promised to take SCLC's campaign for economic rights for America's poor to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that August. "They will have a real awakening in Chicago," King said, adding that SCLC would also confront the Republican National Convention in Miami (ibid). The press conference

followed King's sermon to a capacity audience at the 3,000 seat Washington National Cathedral, which another 1,000 people listened to over loudspeakers outside the church. King's sermon called for a "national awakening" (ibid) that would make the American dream a reality for all its citizens, including its poor. King told the congregants gathered before him that he knew SCLC's Poor People's Campaign was facing "a Goliath" yet expressed his belief that "it will make a difference" (SCLC, 1968/4/2, p.3). They would confront this giant of Congressional indifference with a "massive show of determination" that, if it accomplished nothing else, would "call attention to the gap between promises and fulfillment" and "make the invisible visible" (ibid). In a glimpse of the global movement for poor rights that King saw the civil rights movement joining, he told his audience that "the destiny of the U.S. is tied up with the destiny of every other nation... It behooves America to show compassion on hungering millions, particularly in light of millions of dollars spent annually to store foodstuffs which the poor direly need" (ibid).

Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis four days later.

CHAPTER THREE
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

There is no denying the importance of media coverage to any social movement. As Harvey Molotch observes, "social movements represent those portions of society that lie outside the ordinary routines of exercising power and influence. For them, the mass media represent a potential mechanism for utilizing an establishment institution to fulfill non-establishment goals" (Molotch in Zald and McCarthy,1979, p.71). This was especially true in the case of the black civil rights movement in the United States.

The struggle for "meaning"

Effective social movement media strategies seek to link the desired social change to fundamental values or what we might call "common sense" in a target audience or, more broadly, the public at large. The ascription of such "meaning," as Stuart Hall called it, is primarily indebted to the modern mass media, which Hall said "circulate meaning between different cultures on a scale and with a speed hitherto unknown in history" (Hall, 1997, p.3).

This preoccupation with the transferal of meaning through the mass media is made clear in David Garrow's examination of the academic literature on protest strategy in *Protest at Selma.* As Garrow illustrates, any effective media strategy must successfully project the link between core social values, i.e. the right to vote, and the protest in question. This link is vital to what E.E. Schattschneider called the process of conflict "socialization," in which a contestant in a struggle works to broaden the struggle's scope beyond their opponent in an effort to win undecided public opinion to their cause (cited in

Garrow, 1978, p. 214). It is therefore of central importance that protest movements employ a media strategy that results in the symbolic association of their protest with values that are broadly perceived as legitimate and worthy by target audiences. Schattschneider observed that contestants trying to socialize a conflict are most likely to link their protest to values like equality, justice, liberty, freedom of association, etc. (ibid). "These concepts tend to make conflict contagious; they invite outside intervention in conflict and form the basis of appeals for such intervention" (ibid). Garrow cites James S. Coleman's early understanding of this fact. Writing in 1957, Coleman observed that the strategic question every protest leader must determine is "the relative strengths of different values" (ibid, p.213) so that the values projected by the protest have a broader appeal than the values represented by its opposition (ibid). In order to communicate their association with these values to their target audience or audiences, Harvey Seifert observed in 1965 that protesters must gain the attention of the news media through activities that were "thought unusual enough" (ibid, p. 215) to deserve coverage. However, protest leaders have to consider their activities and tactics very carefully. A majority of Americans, Seifert noted, considered the very act of protesting of "dubious legitimacy" (ibid) – "A problem of the resister is to keep to a minimum the defection of [possible] support due to his nonconformity," he wrote (ibid). Particularly noxious from the point of view of public sympathy and support was violence. "When anyone goes beyond the bounds of tolerated behavior, society tends to be alienated from his cause," wrote Seifert (ibid). If protesters' actions are perceived as going too far by the audience, repressive measures taken against them may in fact be seen as justified. Audience support will tend to favour protesters over the agents of such violence if they are able to project

the image that they are the "undeserving victims" of such repression. And "every additional brutality helps to convince those on the fence" that the protester's cause is just. Furthermore, "as enemies of the resisters become more violent, [supporters of the protesters] become more numerous and outspoken," observed Seifert (ibid, p. 216).

Garrow writes that Michael Lipsky's studies on protest strategy in the late 1960s were the first to clearly outline the news media's importance to a protest movement's efforts to win public support for its cause. "If protest tactics are not considered important enough by the media or if newspapers and television reporters or editors decide to overlook protest tactics, protest organizations will not succeed. Like the tree falling unheard in the forest, there is no protest unless protest is perceived and projected" (ibid, p.217). Accordingly, Lipsky noted that protest leaders must understand the media and what makes the news: "Protest leaders must continually develop new, dramatic techniques in order to receive their lifeblood of publicity" (ibid). In order to accomplish this, protest leaders must have a profound and detailed understanding of the news media's attitude and interests regarding protest movements.

The news media and protest

For a newsroom perspective on the media's attitude toward protest and social movements, Herbert Gans' *Deciding What's News* is an invaluable ethnographic study on the outlooks and ideologies at play within America's mainstream news media organizations. It is especially useful for the purposes of this study since Gans conducted the bulk of his research between 1965 and 1969. While his research focused on national American newsmagazines and television news programs, the attitudes and values that Gans identified apply to national newspapers like the *New York Times* as well.

On the topic of protest movements, Gans observes that demonstrations, marches

and other forms of protest are "almost always" treated as "potential or actual dangers to the social order" (53). The news, Gans says, "keeps track" of protests, especially those involving a large number of people, in a way that treats them as a "threat to public peace" and potential sources of "trouble" or violence (ibid). Stories on protest fall into the category of "moral disorder" news, a frame mainly occupied by "ordinary people, many of them poor, black, and/or young" (60). This, Gans says, reflects the news media's tendency toward a conception of order rooted in upper-class and upper-middle-class values and the social order of the middle-aged and old and the white male (61). "The news," Gans writes, "deals mostly with those who hold the power within various national and or societal strata; with the most powerful officials in the most powerful agencies; with the coalition of upper-class and upper-middle-class people which dominate the socioeconomic hierarchy; and with the late-middle-aged cohort that has the most power among groups" (62). Gans notes, however, that the news is not "subservient" to these groups and monitors their behaviour as well "against a set of values that is assumed to transcend them" (ibid). Gans calls these transcendent values the news media's "enduring values" of which he identifies eight: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order and national leadership (42). These values are the basis of what Gans calls the news media's unique conception of the "good social order" and the guidelines with which all behaviour in society is judged, from the president on down. "The news," he writes, "is not simply a compliant supporter of elites or the Establishment or the ruling class; rather, it views nation and society through its own set of values and with its own conception of the good social order" (62). The news media's concept of "good social order" is structured by what

Gans calls a "paraideology" that does not adhere to one side of the traditional ideological spectrum, i.e. left / liberal and right / conservative, but tends toward all things "moderate" (52). As Gans notes, "individual stories and journalists can span various parts of the spectrum, although their values rarely coincide with those on the Far Right or the Far Left," Gans writes. "Even the news media as a whole, and the news, analyzed over time, are not easily classified, for the paraideology reflected in the enduring values moves within the boundaries of conservative and liberal positions" (68).

In his 1970 essay "A world at one with itself," Stuart Hall suggests that journalists, while ostensibly independent, subscribe to an "unwitting bias" toward the Establishment. Hall describes this bias as an "institutional slanting, built-in not by the devious inclination of editors to the political left or right, but by the steady and unexamined play of attitudes which, via the mediating structure of professionally defined news values, inclines all media toward the status quo" (Hall in Cohen and Young, 1973, p.87-88). This "informal ideology" reveals itself through the typical arguments put forth by journalists when interviewing what Hall calls "unaccredited" sources representing non-Establishment views. "Unofficial strikers are always confronted with 'the national interest,' squatters with the 'rights of private property,' civil rights militants from Ulster with the need for Protestant and Catholic to 'work together'…" Hall is careful not to suggest that such questions should not be asked. Rather, he is more interested in the assumptions behind such lines of questioning, which he claims "are coincident with the official ideologies of the *status quo*" (89). Hall calls this the news media's "hidden consensus" (ibid) with the Establishment, which translates into the news media's inclination toward defending the social, economic and political structures that perpetuate

Establishment power. This arrangement, Hall says, renders the news media "consistently unable to deal with, comprehend and interpret" (ibid, p.90) groups in conflict with this consensus. The resulting "nervousness" (ibid) in the news media's tone with these groups reflects what Hall says is "the basic contradiction between the manifestation which the media is called on to explain and interpret, and the conceptual/evaluative/interpretive framework which they have available to them" (ibid)

Media standing

Hall's views on the news media's treatment of "accredited" versus "unaccredited" sources reflect William Gamson's writings on the concept of *standing*. Gamson defines standing as "the endpoint of a contest over which sponsors of meaning will have an opportunity to appear in a mass media forum that defines membership in terms of political power" (Gamson, 2006, p.116). While traditional authority figures like the president and other representatives of government are granted automatic standing by the news media, non-Establishment actors like social movement leaders have to prove they have the "organization, resources, and media sophistication" to gain standing as a serious challenger (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993, p.121). Through the very act of ascribing standing or not, Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld say "journalists act as self-appointed surrogates for political elites" through their "assuming, perhaps unconsciously" whether a source should be taken seriously (ibid). As a result, the media's perception of a source's standing determines how they frame that source's message. Uncontested standing makes it more likely that a source's "preferred meaning" will be conveyed to the news medium's audience, often unchallenged through direct quotations (119). The frames attached to contested standing, on the other hand, render efforts to control one's representation in the news media "difficult, perhaps unimaginable," according to Todd Gitlin (1980, p.3):

> Just as people *as workers* have no voice in what they make, how they make it, or how the product is distributed and used, so do people *as producers of meaning* have no voice in what the media make of what they say or do, or in the context within which the media frame their activity. The resulting meanings, now mediated, acquire an eerie substance in the real world, standing outside their ostensible makers and confronting them as an alien force. The social meanings of intentional action have been deformed beyond recognition (ibid)

As we have seen, however, protest leaders have no choice but to court media attention. And, Gitlin notes, "the media do amplify" issues promoted by movements and "expose scandal in the State and in the corporations" (4). However, Gitlin contends that they do so within boundaries defined by the hegemonic order. Antonio Gramsci's concept of *hegemony,* which Gitlin defines as "a ruling class's domination through ideology, through the shaping of popular consent" (9), is central to his analysis of the news media's approach to protest movements. Movements that are perceived as a threat to dominant interests are subjected to the various means of persuasion at the disposal of the ruling class for minimizing opposition and maintaining popular consent to the status quo. This persuasion, however, is seldom perceived because it is communicated through the common language of shared ideologies naturalized as 'common sense' through upbringing, class and education. Journalists are not immune to ideology and contribute to this process of persuasion under the guise of what Gitlin describes as their "bounded but real independence" (12). This autonomy is vital because it serves to "legitimate the institutional order as a whole and the news in particular" (ibid). It also facilitates some opposition to the status quo, which further legitimates the system and, in doing so, "serves the interests of the elites as long as it is 'relative,' as long as it does not violate core hegemonic values or contribute too heavily to radical critique or social unrest" (ibid).

Hegemonic crisis = opportunity

Successful protest movements are those that manipulate or exploit differences between elites and disputes over the core values themselves in order to achieve their goals. Gitlin notes that at such moments of hegemonic crisis "journalism itself becomes contested" (12) and openings are produced in the news media for outsiders seeking to socialize their challenge to the established order: "Society-wide conflict is then carried into the cultural institutions, though in muted and sanitized forms," he posits (12). Such threats are ultimately "tamed" and "domesticated" by the institutional order (13).

Stephanie Greco Larson and Harvey Molotch both apply this thinking to the civil rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. Larson observes that "protest seen as consistent with American principles were acceptable to the elite, the media, and the public... The dominant ideology supported some moderate reforms (voting rights, abandoning forced segregation), but it was not open to a wholesale critique of racism in American economic and social institutions" (161). While the civil rights movement certainly challenged the status quo, the reforms it sought between 1955 and 1965 did not extend beyond the Establishment's comfort zone, or what Larson calls the "sphere of legitimate controversy" – "Reforms advocated by the civil rights movement... were not radical in a national mainstream. Instead, they were part of the emerging ideology that would soon become the dominant one" (161).

Such moments of hegemonic or ideological shift can produce what Harvey Molotch labels the "Bedfellow Dialectic" between social movements and the Establishment media. This dialectic sees the news media avail themselves to a social movement seeking changes to the status quo with which they happen to agree. Molotch

observes this dynamic at play between the news media and both the early civil rights movement and the antiwar movement in the early 1970s, when "the movements increasingly had the same news needs as the media" (89). In both cases, cleavages between elites on race and U.S. policy in Vietnam were reflected in the news media and produced openings for oppositional movement voices. In such moments of movement-media synergy, media coverage greatly facilitates a movement's ability to win concessions from the Establishment by socializing the movement's efforts to bring the legitimacy of the established order into doubt, as King did so successfully on the issue of race relations in the Southern states. "Important segments of northern opinion saw the continued exposure of blatant inequities as damaging to the larger legitimacy of U.S. institutions," Molotch writes. Consequently, "Martin Luther King, Jr... became legitimized as a figure with whom reconciliation should occur" (90). Yet such standing is narrowly defined and usually limited to a single issue. Molotch says King's legitimacy in the eyes of the Establishment lost its traction as he expanded the civil rights movement's scope to take on de facto segregation in Northern cities and the war in Vietnam. "*At that historical stage*, King – erected in large part as a public celebrity by northern media – was using his celebrity in a counterproductive manner. That is, he was not being useful by feeding the news needs of those guarding the *national* status quo," writes Molotch (90).

Discussion: Martin Luther King, Jr. versus the media?

This study has tried to avoid the error of portraying the news media as monolithically united against King. As we saw in Chapter One, for example, news organizations like the

New York Times were riven by internal differences over the war and, accordingly, I have taken pains to qualify "elements" and "efforts" within the news media that worked in opposition to him in a conscious bid not to attribute the actions of some to all. Therefore, as I hope to make clear in what follows, I believe it is important to avoid an over-emphasis on a macro/structuralist point of view. Certainly, vested interests in the hegemonic order at newspapers like the *New York Times* played a determining role in how King's opposition to the war in Vietnam and his Poor People's Campaign were framed and represented. However, it is my contention that an overriding emphasis on structure incorrectly limits and downplays the agency and positive contributions of individual journalists at these organizations, many of whom covered King fairly, if not favourably. While King and Levison clearly believed a media bias was working against King during his last 16 months, it is also crucial to note their many references to favourable coverage during this same period. The contributions of sensitive, professional journalists like David Halberstam are the essence of Molotch's vital observation at the start of this chapter that "the mass media represent a potential mechanism for utilizing an establishment institution to fulfill non-establishment goals." To ignore this fact and focus solely on corporate media's vested interest in undermining movements opposing the status quo disregards their very real potential during times of hegemonic shift to serve as vital allies in the struggle for social change. Despite their suspicions of bias, *King and Levison actively solicited media coverage and worked to shape it for their own ends*.

The "vortex of conflicting forces"

During the last 16 months of his life, King had privileged access to popular mainstream television shows and influential print journalists like David Halberstam and many others of the era through whom he gave eloquent expression to the antiwar movement and the

"unheard" millions in America's ghettos. As harsh as King's tone was through 1967 until his assassination, it did not deter Merv Griffin, the popular talk show host, from introducing King to his audience on June 7, 1967, as "one of the great voices in America" (King Papers, 1967/6/7, p.1). Through the likes of Griffin, Halberstam and others, King's "new radicalism" was heard from the television sets and read in the morning paper in millions of middle class homes across America. While elements within the news media clearly became increasingly hostile toward King in his last sixteen months, many of their peers continued to lend significant weight to his opinions. As Prentiss Childs and Ellen Wadley, co-producers of CBS's *Face The Nation,* wrote to King after his April 1967 appearance on the show: "Your new involvement in the peace movement in addition to civil rights certainly places you at the vortex of the conflicting forces in our society and makes your views of increasing importance for everyone" (King Papers, 1967/4/28).

King understood that it was from precisely such a position that a movement leader drew his strength and ability to influence social change. This understanding is evident in the interpretation of civil disobedience that he offered one gathering of journalists on October 23, 1967: "Civil disobedience is standing in the midst of an unjust law, an unjust system and engaging in an act nonviolently, openly and cheerfully in order to dramatize the issue, in order to bring the community to the point of seeing that the situation is so crisis packed that the problem must be dealt with" (ibid, p.6). Over the course of his thirteen year leadership of the civil rights movement, King and his advisers used moral persuasion and the coercion of nonviolent direct action tactics like civil disobedience to creatively manipulate ideological tensions in American society, and within its political Establishment and news media in particular, on the issues of racism, war and poverty in

an effort to build the national consensus required to end them. King's position at the "vortex" of ideological conflict afforded him the dual status of militant field marshal for the have-nots contesting the status quo and their eloquent, respectable emissary to America's political and media Establishment. This fine balance between revolutionary black leader and "good friend" to White America was key to King's leadership and his early civil rights successes between 1955 to 1965 and led to historian August Meier's perceptive description of King as the civil rights movement's "conservative militant" (ibid, p.454).

Between 1965 and 1968, America's rapidly escalating war in Vietnam and the fury of ghetto uprisings in cities like Los Angeles, Newark and Detroit inspired new and profound anxieties in American society. Both developments also deeply affected King, who saw them as symptoms of a morally and spiritually sick society that he would spend his last 16 months working to heal. Like any good doctor, King understood that the nation's anxiety not only signalled fear and danger but also served to alert it to the realization that a change in course was necessary. The trick was to develop this unease with the status quo and the accompanying openness to social change, and media strategy was a vital means to this end. This process had been central to the SCLC's southern campaigns, where its exposure of racist violence in the South through national and international news media evoked anxious national soul-searching and broad public support for the civil rights movement's two crowning legislative achievements – the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In much the same way, King hoped to develop and leverage the evolving national crisis of conscience over Vietnam and the ghetto uprisings into an end to the war and a federal package of economic rights for

America's poor. As King told journalists on October 23, 1967, on the topic of Vietnam, demonstrations and direct action tactics were necessary tools in these efforts: "They educate the population, they force people to think about the issue. I'm sure they appeal to the conscience of some people and people are forced to look at the war situation and respond with a yes or no answer in their own minds" (ibid, p.4).

Mainstreaming King's "new radicalism"

This appeal to conscience was central to King's media strategy on both Vietnam and the Poor People's Campaign and represented his keen intellectual understanding that protest, in order to be successful, had to petition society's core values. Through 1967 until his murder, King exploited the news media's attention to his perceived "metamorphosis" from moderate / conservative militant into radical to raise popular awareness of both the social values falling victim to *and* the social values facilitating America's massive military intervention in Vietnam and its indifference towards its 40-million poor. King's go-for-broke opposition to the war and poverty in his last 16 months lent his rhetoric a dramatic edge that journalists could not resist nor their Establishment-friendly colleagues ignore. Through their heightened coverage of King's outspoken nonconformity on these top national issues, his call for a radical "revolution of values" found its way into the national mainstream consciousness.

This means to socializing protest was not without its perils, however. While likely to appeal to radicals and progressives, King and Levison understood that the harshness of his nonconformity ran the risk of alienating the great mass of "average," moderate Americans that King ultimately needed to reach and convince with his petitions on peace and poverty. Ensuring media coverage that communicated the legitimacy of King's views and linked them to core social values was therefore essential and the three-point public

relations strategies on both Vietnam and the Poor People's Campaign developed in the two previous chapters sought to do precisely this. On Vietnam, efforts to establish King's links to pro-peace Senators like Robert F. Kennedy and to underscore his influence and leadership in the black community while positioning himself at the activist middle of the peace movement had one common purpose and that was to frame King's protest against the war as undeniably *respectable*, *responsible and patriotic*. On poverty, King's efforts to downplay the disruptive potential of civil disobedience in favour of its constructive ends of jobs and income, while underscoring the urgency of the situation and, above all, the strength of his nonviolent leadership, worked together to convince moderate, middle-class Americans that the Poor People's Campaign, and its threat of massive civil disobedience, was a legitimate and necessary means to solving the fearsome unrest in America's cities. Furthermore, through its emphasis on jobs and income, King sought to link the Poor People's Campaign to core American values with his claim that depriving the poor of such fundamental necessities amounted to a denial of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – "the very creed of society," he said (ibid).

It is impossible to judge conclusively whether these strategies succeeded in any quantifiable way. King and Levison's observations regarding public responses to both issues, taken at face value, show that they believed they were having an effect. On Vietnam, King told Levison that mail from the public was running "10 to 1" in favour of his position (FBI, 4/11/68, 7/0042). King's intuitive sense of the black community's opposition to the war, and his prioritization of moving blacks toward more active opposition, translated into polls that found a coincident rise in antiwar feeling among black Americans. Contemporary national polls, however, suggest that national public

opinion on the war did not shift dramatically after King's return to the peace movement in 1967 but rather settled into a polarizing and, for King, depressing split. However, he did live to see a sharp rise in antiwar feelings in America after the massed Tet Offensive by North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces in February 1968 led a majority of Americans to conclude that the United States was losing the war. On the Poor People's Campaign, Levison's multiple assertions of middle-class support for the mobilization, as suggested by indicators including donations that were running "way ahead" of the previous year, were evidence that SCLC's aggressive, if disorganized, efforts to connect the PPC with middle-class concerns and values were having an effect.[1] Adele Kantor of SCLC's New York office perhaps said it best as she noted the renewal of donations from people who hadn't contributed to SCLC since the height of King's public celebrity in 1964-65: "People," she said, "are realizing the correctness of Dr. King's position" (FBI, 3/15/68, 8/0213).

The news media and King's "new radicalism"

King's ability to gain what Gamson called 'preferred meaning' for his protests against the war in Vietnam and poverty was complicated by what he and Levison believed was a campaign by forces in the news media – and the *New York Times* in particular – to negatively portray his positions and undermine his influence in the last 16 months of his life. While the research required for properly investigating and assessing the validity of their suspicions is beyond the scope of this study, their allegations and the evidence they

[1] While it falls outside the scope of this thesis, evidence from the FBI wiretap on Levison suggests that King's assassination, rather than undermining the Poor People's Campaign, served to in fact rally both public and media support behind the SCLC's efforts. Despite the widespread criticism of the news media's coverage of the PPC at the time and since, a view supported by *New York Times* reporter, Ben Franklin, in the previous chapter, Levison attributed most of the blame to the incompetence of King's successor, Ralph Abernathy, and the clash of unleashed egos among SCLC's senior staff that King's leadership had kept in check.

pointed to correspond with many of the observations by Gans, Hall, Gamson, Gitlin, Larson and Molotch described above. Since this thesis is not able to determine *if* forces in the news media did in fact want to undermine King in his last 16 months, it will conclude with a consideration of the reasons *why* they might have felt discrediting King was necessary.

Critical to any understanding of King's relations with the news media in his final 16 months is Stanley Levison's aforementioned observation in April 1965 that King's emergence as "one of the most powerful figures in the country, a leader not merely of Negroes but of millions of whites in motion" was striking fear in the heart of the American Establishment. As Levison saw it, King's danger stemmed from the fact that he was one of the "exceptional" few in America to attain "the heights of popular confidence and trust *without having obligations to any political party or other dominant interests*" (ibid, italics added). The "independence and freedom of action" (ibid) afforded by this unique position meant the Establishment and its allies in the news media had to keep a close eye on King to ensure that he did not use his influence to challenge their "sacred structures" and enduring values like capitalism or for ends that they otherwise considered illegitimate. Added to this was Levison's belief that elements within the Establishment were "apprehensive" that an independent and influential King could "err in judgment" and cause "major, irreversible error" (ibid). This desire to control King and keep him in line with Establishment interests and values, Levison believed, lay at the heart of the news media's vocal opposition to his call at that time for an economic boycott of Alabama.

This interest in limiting King to what Larson above called the "sphere of

legitimate controversy" was clearly at play in media coverage of King in the last 16 months of his life. What emerges in this timeframe is a struggle between King and Establishment-oriented members of the news media *to define the limits of legitimate debate and action on the war in Vietnam and crisis in America's ghettos.* This struggle grew in intensity as King's "new radicalism" and its revolutionary challenges to the 'enduring values' identified by Gans resulted in more aggressive efforts within the news media to curtail his influence. This resulted in frames for King's leadership that portrayed him as radical and out of touch with his black constituency on the war and, on the Poor People's Campaign, weak and therefore dangerous given the nature of his plans for Washington.

Of the eight clusters of 'enduring values' that Gans identified in mainstream news coverage – ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership – *King's peace stand and the Poor People's Campaign entered into direct conflict with at least six: ethnocentrism, moderatism, national leadership, social order, altruistic democracy, and responsible capitalism*. King's opposition to the war, with its emphasis on the "higher patriotism" of Christian love and universal brotherhood, was not welcomed by an ethnocentric news media that freely referred to North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front forces as "the enemy." This tension was exacerbated by his expression of so-called "radical" opposition to U.S. policy, not least of all his public condemnation of the U.S. government as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." With this and other attacks on the legitimacy of U.S. policy and the national leadership during a time of war, King struck at the very roots of what Gans says is the news media's preeminent value of

social order and social cohesion, both of which are intimately linked to the political order. This was also true for the Poor People's Campaign, with its rhetorical focus on Congress and its tactical threat of bringing the operations of government to a standstill through massive civil disobedience in the nation's capital. The emphasis on Washington, where King had earned fame as a beacon of altruistic democracy with his famous "I have a dream" speech on August 28, 1963, only underscored how his once shining symbol of respectability and moderation had metamorphosed into a looming, radical threat. Finally, while it did not assert itself as a dominant concern in the news coverage of King, his frequent calls for a "radical redistribution of economic and political power" and his criticism of American foreign policy serving exploitative investment practices overseas could only have run afoul of the news media's commitments to free market capitalism and private enterprise.

With King using his "independence and freedom of action" to launch what amounted to an all-out assault on the "sacred structures" of the American Establishment and the enduring values of the news media, coverage of King brought the news media's tendency toward the Establishment out into the open. This bias is evident in the *New York Times*' concentrated coverage of King's peace stand in the three-month period between the end of February and the end of May 1967. Taken as a whole, the 53 articles published during this period clearly indicate an overall negative frame, one led by the newspaper's lead editorial on April 7 that warned King to drop his criticisms of the war. King's subsequent refusal to heed the *Times'* advice to, as he interpreted it, be a responsible "Negro leader" and "stay in my place… and not stray from a position of moderation" saw the paper pay special attention to King's associations with radical opponents of the war

and President Johnson and their efforts to recruit King as a third party "peace" candidate in the 1968 Presidential election. Given the *New York Times'* well-known concerns with the war, which even earned it the nickname the *New Hanoi Times* with pro-war hawks in Washington, it is a wonder that the paper did not welcome the addition of King's influential voice to its own. One theory to emerge from this study is that the *New York Times* offered King as a kind of sacrifice to counter what Gitlin says were accusations on America's right of a left-wing bias at the *Times* that was seen to be encouraging the peace movement and effectively preventing the Johnson Administration from employing the kind of decisive force needed to win the war. According to Gitlin, if America lost in Vietnam, the *Times* feared it would be held accountable. That the *Times'* negative treatment of King followed so closely on the heels of Harrison Salisbury's explosive reports from North Vietnam cannot be overlooked. Salisbury's Hanoi exposés had rocked the political order and criticizing King would have provided a convenient counterpoint to the impression of the *Times*' ideological dissent against the war. Sacrificing a radical King was, in effect, an easy price to pay for the greater good of Harrison Salisbury.

Opposition within the news media to King's dissent on the war was often framed as a matter of *standing*. This was clearly the case in 1965, at which time media criticism revolved around King's lack of credibility on matters of foreign policy. Such criticism clearly established the idea that King's media standing was limited to civil rights and matters related to the black community. Beyond such issues, King did not have the accreditation necessary for favourable framing, regardless of his Nobel Peace Prize. With the exception of the *New York Times,* media criticism of King's antiwar stand in both 1965 and again in 1967 tended toward a satiric, scornful tone, which Gans says is

characteristic of news media moderatism and its treatment of behaviour perceived as extreme or that of an "over-simplifying popularizer" (51). From King's point of view, the mocking conformity also betrayed a desire to keep him "in his place." Bayard Rustin, as we saw, interpreted this tone as proof that black Americans in 1967, no matter what their credentials, were still expected to defer to the wisdom of their white superiors.

A key clue to the news media's shifting attitude toward King in light of his "new radicalism" is indicated by the *New York Times* editorial response to the violence that overtook the Memphis demonstration on March 28, 1968. King, the *Times* declared, had become "*counterproductive*" (ibid, italics added). Whereas nonviolent protest had served a useful purpose in the first decade of the civil rights movement, it was now little more than a "cover for rowdy elements bent on violence" (ibid). Why the *Times* reached this conclusion is suggested in the *Washington Post*'s response to this same event, which reflected a marked shift from its earlier, slightly hysterical claims that the Poor People's Campaign was tantamount to "anarchy," "intimidation" and "mob" rule. By March 30, 1968, this view had given way to the *Post*'s belief that the Poor People's Campaign could, in fact, be a "gain for the Nation" if King could assure the nonviolent discipline of his followers.

Taken together, the two editorials bring into sharp focus the fractured hegemony that King was exploiting to advance the goals of the Poor People's Campaign and, ultimately, to see American society "born again." Whereas the *New York Times* saw King as a threat to social order, the *Washington Post* joined the many prominent Establishment voices that were coming to see the status quo as the source of disorder and accepted the need for change. King, despite his "new radicalism," once again was emerging as "the

figure with whom reconciliation should occur." The *Post* editorial expressed the spreading recognition within society's elites that the consensus on which social order is dependent had been smashed by the ghetto uprisings and fixing it necessitated the kind of concessions that King, via the news media, was inserting into "sphere of legitimate controversy." This understanding clearly began to expand within the Establishment after the chaos in Newark and Detroit in July 1967, a fact that was evident in news coverage that followed the uprisings. Of crucial concern to the news media was the idea that Washington's resistance to poverty relief programs in America's ghettos and its embrace of reactionary law-and-order measures was radicalizing normally moderate black leaders and creating a situation that was endangering the legitimacy of the political order itself. Concessions were needed – for the poor, yes, but also to secure the 'system.'

This fear among society's elites as voiced through the news media was not lost on King, who applauded the "very distinguished newspapers, magazines, commentators and TV programs" calling for "fundamental reform, not revenge or military might" in his address to SCLC's annual convention in August 1967. The addition of *Newsweek's* new militancy on racism and poverty in November, and the *Who's Who* of America's political, business and religious communities who applauded it, provided further proof that the white Establishment was "desperate," as Levison observed, and accepting of the need for a new consensus with America's poor. This idea was developed in King's press conference announcing the Poor People's Campaign on December 4, 1967, at which he pointed to "prominent leaders of industry, civil rights organizations, unions, and churches," mayors of major American cities and, of course, *Newsweek* to "show that a clear majority in America are asking for the things we will demand in Washington." In

doing so, King worked to both underscore the legitimate controversy of the Poor People's Campaign, and delegitimize Congressional resistance to its demands.

Working both for and against King in terms of media coverage was his threat of massive civil disobedience. While its inherent drama attracted media attention, the very idea of it being exercised in the streets of Washington in a bid to bring the operations of government to a standstill went against the news media's enduring values of moderatism, national leadership and social order. Massive civil disobedience was an undeniable threat to all of them and was framed as such. Those opposed to it in the news media saw it as a flagrant and unjustifiable attack on the rule of law – the very basis of social order and even social cohesion itself. Worse was its potential for being taken over by violence – the most *anti-social* of behaviour – that spurred news media efforts to delegitimize King. Levison and King perceived this effort to discredit his leadership in the *New York Times'* purposeful neglect of King's pivotal role in black Cleveland lawyer Carl Stokes' campaign for mayor in favour of Stokes' relations with the moderate and more 'responsible' NAACP and Urban League. With this determined embrace of moderatism, the *Times* turned a blind eye to King's very real capacity for neutralizing the potential threat of violence by Black Power advocates and their young followers in Washington.

King's threat of civil disobedience also provided those opposed to his radical vision for America with a ready excuse for undercutting his evolving power and influence. Efforts in this regard within the *New York Times* met the full light of day with its editorial on March 30, 1968. With its emphasis on the possibility of violence taking over the Poor People's Campaign, the *New York Times* ignored the potential power of King's nonviolent message that David Halberstam, the *Washington Post* and others had

come to clearly see. Instead, the *Times* embraced the fear of black mob violence that the likes of Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown hoped to sow into the hearts and minds of the white community but had no real intentions of acting on. This *imagined violence* was their power, and gave the white community a taste of the fear and psychological violence that blacks had for so long endured in America. By perpetuating this largely mythical threat, the *Times* lent its weight to determined efforts to undermine the emerging potential of King's success in Washington.[1]

If the *Times'* preoccupation with violence was rooted in a genuine concern for peace and social order, it was the "rowdy elements" using nonviolent protest as a cover and the extreme police violence that met looters and peaceful demonstrators alike in Memphis that it should have condemned as "counterproductive," not King. The *Times*' real concern, however, was that King had become counterproductive to the *Times'* conception of social order, which his Poor People's Campaign sought to fundamentally reform. King's opponents within the newspaper understood that he was not merely seeking concessions from the Establishment on behalf of the poor but rather a radical redistribution of economic and political power and a revolution of values that saw profanity and inhumanity in many of the "sacred structures" that the *Times*, as responsible spokesman for the system, took as its duty to protect. With King's refusal to conform to the *Times'* efforts to bring him to heel through its insistent calls for moderation, it declared the days of nonviolent protest, and Martin Luther King, Jr., over.

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[1] The *New York Times* later acknowledged this in an internal assessment of its coverage of the black community commissioned by National editor Claude Sitton and written by reporter Doug Kneeland. Reflecting on his interviews in the community, Kneeland wrote "Most people in the field agree, for instance, that we have done a disservice in the past by making it appear that the likes of Stokely, Rap and the Black Panthers had the power to do the things they were threatening instead of making it clear that they were more a manifestation of a disorganized anger that certainly exists among black youth. Of course, we should keep an eye on them, listen to them and understand the anger they are reflecting, but we should always put this in perspective" (Kneeland, 5/27/68, p.1)

APPENDIX A
Notes on Methodology

Scope and bias

Given the massive volume of original documents and media coverage produced during the sixteen month timeframe of this study, I have tried to provide as representative an account of the historical record as possible within the limited space allowed for this study. However, given this study's primary interest in responses by King and his advisors *to* media coverage, there is an obvious weighting of the record toward their views and the media coverage that concerned them. Providing a global impression of media coverage of King in his final 16 months was simply not possible given the limitations of this study.

Despite these limitations, this study has endeavoured to be as thorough as possible in order to preserve the integrity of the original sources used. The admittedly heavy use of block quotes reflects this concern. This study has been especially preoccupied with maintaining the integrity of newspaper sources and strove to avoid removing citations from their original context. Aware of my intellectual bias toward King's views, I was especially preoccupied with treating negative coverage of his activities fairly. This effort to use newspaper sources responsibly also guarded against the tendency to attribute intention to a journalist based on the content of a report. As far as possible, I left assumptions of intention to King and his advisors.

Using archives

This study is based primarily on material derived from five different archival collections: the King Papers and the Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, housed at the King Library and Archives in Atlanta, Georgia; The FBI's King-Levison file

(on microfilm); The records of the New York Times Company, housed at the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library; and digital back issues of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, obtained through Proquest (available at library.concordia.ca). Three of these archives – the Records of the SCLC; the FBI's King-Levison file; and the New York Times Company records – are accompanied by digital finding aids, which I was able to access online and allowed me to pinpoint my research before entering the physical archives. A finding aid for the King Papers exists but is not digitized and only available on-site in paper format. However, the basic organization of the King Papers into two parts, Correspondence (Personal and General) and the chronologically-ordered Sermons and Speeches, allowed for easy research.

The scope of my research was mercifully narrowed by both the sixteen month timeframe of my thesis (January 1967 to April 1968) and the fact I was specifically interested in documents dealing with media relations and organizational communications around Vietnam and the Poor People's Campaign. Beyond these boundaries, the scope of my research was left open. While this entailed a great amount of reading, it also provided for a number of useful, serendipitous discoveries. This extensive reading also provided me with a detailed understanding of the circumstances in which King was operating and the complexities of the issues that he was facing, not to mention an appreciation of the enormity of the problems facing American society in 1967. This original reading also fleshed out the academic literature that I was using as guides to the topic and led to the insight and intuition required to determine which secondary materials preserve the spirit and context of the original sources, and which take excessive liberties with the record.

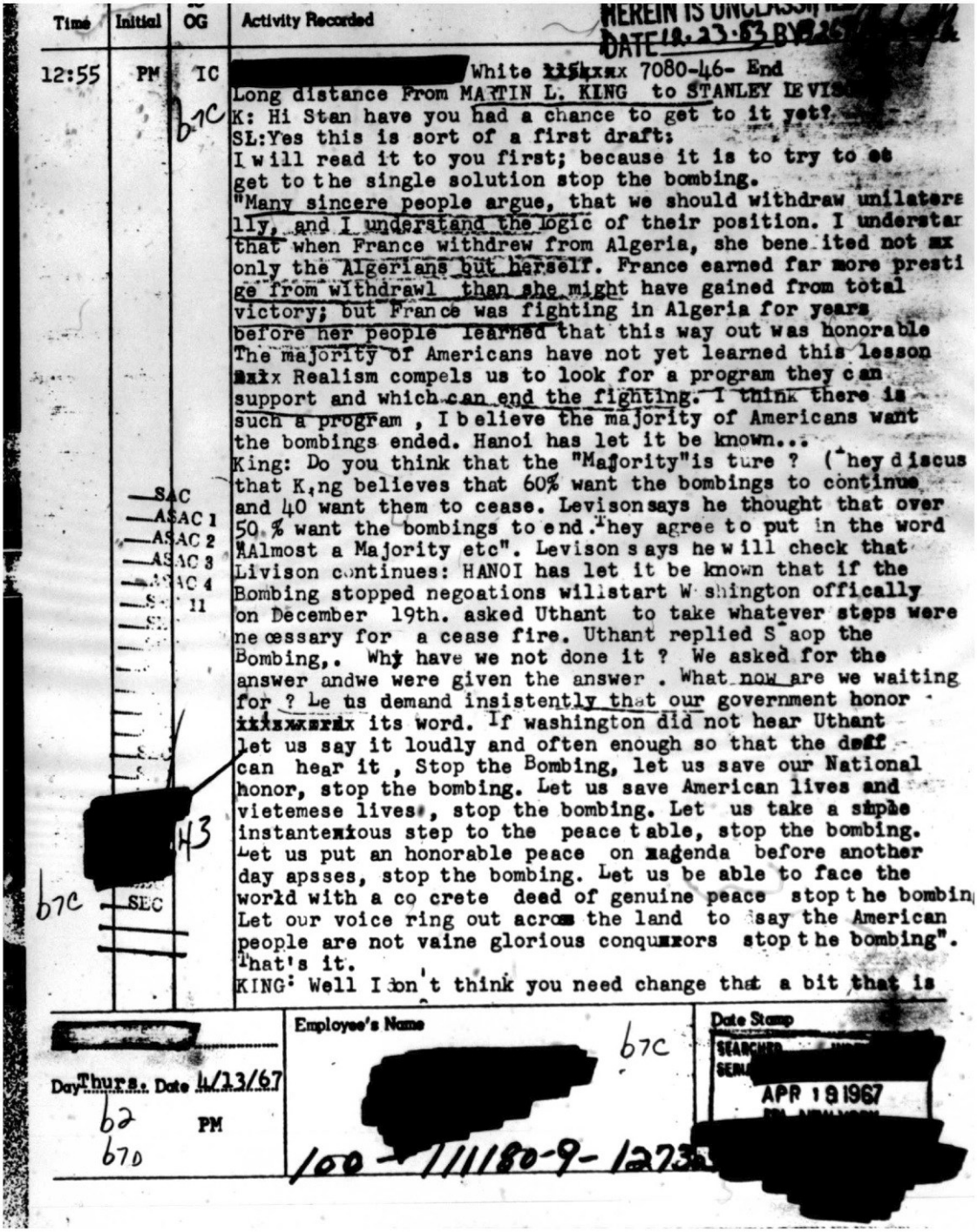
FBI transcripts

My research of the FBI transcripts was initially limited to those dealing with Vietnam and the Poor People's Campaign, as indicated by summaries found in the accompanying PDF guide to the microfilm. However, as my research progressed, I eventually read through each transcript between January 1967 and King's death (and beyond). I also included the transcripts of conversations dealing with Vietnam between March and September 1965. I began my research with the microfilm edition of the FBI transcripts at the Schomburg Center for Black Studies in Harlem in May 2011 and continued at Concordia in July 2011 with copies obtained via Inter-Library Loan. Whereas microfilm viewers at the Schomburg were only equipped to make photocopies, those available at Concordia allow researchers to make scans. This greatly facilitated my ability to compile and organize the transcripts for home reference.

Using the FBI transcripts requires extreme caution: not only are they full of typos and obvious misunderstandings, they are in many cases verbatim records that reflect the natural ebb and flow of human conversation and, as such, are replete with sentence fragments and unfinished thoughts cut off by the interjections of others. Accordingly, researchers have to be careful not to misconstrue or infer what King and his advisors meant to say. That said, between the FBI transcripts, King's papers, his published works and newspaper archives, it is possible to piece together these narrative fragments into a reasonably certain whole.

APPENDIX B
FBI transcripts and newspaper clippings

The following are examples of the FBI transcripts and four of the central newspaper clippings employed in this study



Time | Initial | OG | Activity Recorded

HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED DATE 10-23-63 BY [redacted]

12:55 PM IC [redacted] White [redacted] 7080-46- End
Long distance From MARTIN L. KING to STANLEY LEVISON
b7C
K: Hi Stan have you had a chance to get to it yet?
SL:Yes this is sort of a first draft:
I will read it to you first; because it is to try to et
get to the single solution stop the bombing.
"Many sincere people argue, that we should withdraw unilatera
lly, and I understand the logic of their position. I understar
that when France withdrew from Algeria, she bene ited not
only the Algerians but herself. France earned far more presti
ge from withdrawl than she might have gained from total
victory; but France was fighting in Algeria for years
before her people learned that this way out was honorable
The majority of Americans have not yet learned this lesson
Realism compels us to look for a program they can
support and which can end the fighting. I think there is
such a program , I believe the majority of Americans want
the bombings ended. Hanoi has let it be known...
King: Do you think that the "Majority"is ture ? (They discus
that King believes that 60% want the bombings to continue
and 40 want them to cease. Levison says he thought that over
50 % want the bombings to end. They agree to put in the word
"Almost a Majority etc". Levison says he will check that
Livison continues: HANOI has let it be known that if the
Bombing stopped negoations willstart Washington offically
on December 19th. asked Uthant to take whatever steps were
necessary for a cease fire. Uthant replied Stop the
Bombing,. Why have we not done it ? We asked for the
answer andwe were given the answer . What now are we waiting
for ? Let us demand insistently that our government honor
its word. If washington did not hear Uthant
let us say it loudly and often enough so that the deaf
can hear it , Stop the Bombing, let us save our National
honor, stop the bombing. Let us save American lives and
vietemese lives , stop the bombing. Let us take a single
instantaneous step to the peace table, stop the bombing.
Let us put an honorable peace on agenda before another
day apsses, stop the bombing. Let us be able to face the
world with a co crete dead of genuine peace stop the bombin
Let our voice ring out across the land to say the American
people are not vaine glorious conquerors stop the bombing".
That's it.
KING: Well I don't think you need change that a bit that is

SAC
ASAC 1
ASAC 2
ASAC 3
ASAC 4
S 11
SL
[redacted]43
b7C SEC

[redacted] Employee's Name [redacted] b7C
Day Thurs. Date 4/13/67
b2 PM
b7D

Date Stamp
SEARCHED [redacted]
SERIALIZED [redacted]
APR 19 1967
FBI - NEW YORK

100-[redacted]-9-[redacted]

excellant., It really gets everyting I need to say
andIt opens up just right aause it dosn.. It says
many persons sincere about it say etc. That last part
is beautiful for a speech. I would just check onthat thing
about a majority and about that thing where youtalked
about France and where you said "Total Victory" maybe you s
should say "Total Military Victory"
Levison: Right.
King: Now what I am doing I am going to hae Debbie
they are going todo it in Chicago and she is going to call
you and take it down in shorthand Andy is in Chicago.
Now do you have your copy of the whole thing?
Levison: Yes.
KING: It seems tome it should start right there at the
bottom of page 35. Levison: Oh I didnot receive a
copy.
King: Oh I see where it should go in. Levison: I would
say at he end.
King: Yes instead of the 5 Concrete things or the Historical
thingsI would just go right into this thing.
CONENGER did it briefly something like this and I think
I could re word this. He said " We quite deliberately sabatag
the Genevax Agreements, calling for elections in South Vietnaum
and providing that the 17 parallel was but a temporary
military line. "equite deliberately put up DIEMand maintained
hi as long as we could. Jus as we deliberately put up and
maintaine and endure Priemere KY ,endure him even when
he reprudiates our own policy. We quite delib ately steped up
the war transformed advisors intosoilders andincreased them
from 10,000 to a half million, launched bombing raids upon
the north ona scale as great as that in World War 2
aganinst Germany or Japan
LEVISON: That is a good summary.
King: Yah I could reword that and just do the whold thing
on a paragraph. Imtaking out the part on Dissent,the Un and
the H,storical part and probably Conscieous Objection
I just got a call from Dr. MARROW (who is the chairman of the
Board of Morrhouse college) he is opposed to our policy on
Vietnaum, and he istalking about a View Naum Summer where
they are going to have students aro nd Harvard do do Community
Educations knowc on doors andtake survays and talk about
the War inVietnaum. And this may chandel dome of these students
intodoing something who are aganist the war.

2.	Employee's Name [redacted] b7c	Date Stamp
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62 PM =		
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Time	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
			(King and Levison continued) LEVISON. I would like to get a Private Poll in the Community, because if we believe is true it would be marvelous to come up with a poll showing that a majority inthe Communitywantedthe warended and itwould more effectively answer your critics than anyt ing else. King: hey are so expensive. LEVISON:Yesbut maybe I could get a number of people King I had the impression that they would be about $10,000 King: I Think so also Levison: I think it would be worth it. King: andIt would be a private Poll that wouldn't get out if it did not come out.. LEVISON: Exactly that is the value of them. King : Yes I talked to BUNCHE thismorning. LEVISON: I don't think you made much headway, am I right ? KING: No , it was the other way around,he just felt so guilty that I felt sorry for him . Hewasn't telling the truth and he was trembling and all so I jus got off of him. He claimed he didn't know that this was going to get out and he misunderstood my position. Before I couldsay anything He said "I'm so glad yo called Martin I have just written out a press statement." He told me he was getting ready to have a press conference I think what must have happened somebod must have gotten me on him or someting, somebody must have called him. He didn't say this but he was just backing up too much. LEVISON: In the Times thismorning he claims he was in the board meeting . King : hat he toughened the Resolution.....

[redacted] 3.

Day THURS Date 4-13-67

PM 62 = 67C

Employee's Name 67C [redacted]

Date Stamp [redacted]

me	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
		b7C	[redacted] B9153 cuts 19-34 KING* -- the Resolution . Stan.L Yeahand I think it was this he was not too anxious to get out.He boasted a little , then he was sorry. Does he intend to modify . King.He read a statement to me that he xxxxsaid he had already released to the press and he said two or three televisions. People had called him to expand on his statement. yesterday. He said that in expanding he was going to make this statementx which was a pretty good statment. He said that in the statment that he had read excerpts of the statement that I had made in Los Angelesand he was happy to know that I had clarified my position or something like that -then he goes on to talk about me being a clergyman and that I have a perfect right to take a stand on this issue. He read the statment. S.L. He doesn't reiterate the position that he took that you have to choose between oneand the other. KING No- he did not reiterate that. S.L. Very good. King The problem is that this part-they wont get any coverage. S.L. Thats right. King You know they play that game-like they made him in the New York Times and the Constitution put my statment down in there . SL More than that, in the first part of the article it doesn't even say that you deny that you are for a merger. You dont learn that till you get to the second part,indeed you get the impression that BUNCHE is criticizing you for a stand you have taken. KING Thats right-exactly. SL Its not only rotten journalism- it is rotten ethics because this is not a mistake. KINGThats right. SL. You cant put the two stories together you know and hold with the first story. K,ngThats right SL They are deliberately- the point is that the war is affecting everything and the copy editor or the re write man who does those stories doesn't like your position . King Thats right. SL And you are running into this everyplace. We ran into

Log [redacted] Page 4

Day Thurs Date 4/13/ [redacted]

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Employee's Name

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Time	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
			that with the chapters on the book, now I am more co[illegible] than ever. When NORMAN COUZZINS responded the way he [illegible] was sorta shocked , indeed I said to JOAN that an edi[illegible] shouldn't take a position like that - if he happens to disagree he shouldn't be looking at articles from the point of his personal preference but from the point of his readers. There is no reason why he sho ldn't give DR. KING'S view and another time he gives some one elses view that opposes it, instead he acts as if this is his personal letter to the subscribers , but now I see these people have a bit of blood in their eye, and ethics have gone by the board. KING Yeah, well I talked with PHIL too- he responded very good and he is going to try and get a conference call. He wanted a meeting but I told him I couldn't come to N.Y. because I had another speech to make and I have to leave Sunday so he is going to try and get a conference call this afternoon with me, WHITNEY, ROY, and BAYARD. I dont know how this will go but at least I 'll have a chance to make my position clear. My impression is th t a lot of people are going to get on them for the position they have taken and they along the way are going to modify what they said. ROY went in to that meeting trying to avoid taking a strong and to try to avoid giving the impression that he was attacking me, according to what BUNCHE was saying that the resolution was too mild. SL. I wonder what role ALTHER REUTHER played? because BUNCHE referred to him . KING I may call WALTHER. SL I think this would be a good idea because I could see that ALTHER REUTHER could become the spokesman in such a meeting for the offended white community, and not emotionall; he could just say that it is just not sound that there is too many white people who agree with the war and DR. KING oughtn't to be offending them and when he offends them himse he offends them for us because so many of these white people dont know the difference between organizations. He would carry a lot so I think it would be a good idea for you to call him. KING. Good, I'll do that. SL. Its clear that when you do and when they are confronted by you as HARRYBELLAFONTE said last night, it makes quite a difference because not only does their conscience have to bother them because none of these are stupid men , but to be confronted by an outer manifestation of their conscience

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Day Thur Date 4/13/67 PM
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Employee's Name [redacted] b7C

Date Stamp

Time	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
			makes them back up. KingRight and like BUNCHE saying to me this morning [redacted] AND I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I AGREE WITH EVERYTHING [redacted] SAYING ABOUT VIET NAM. I AM ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO [redacted]. I wanted to say so bad Why dont you say it.He told me that he agreed with me. SL Isn't that interesting. KING Yeah, sais he absolutely agreed . SL Thas intersting. KING That he doesn't have the moral courage to say it but he is not employed by the United States and he could say it. SL Look at U THANT. Thas one of the things that shocked my that BUNCHE was so far behind U THANT who has a much more sensitive postion , the United States votes on him, whether he has his officeor not and he hasbeen amgnificent. KING I'll see [redacted] Saturday, stress the importance of my being there. He said he is looking forward to seeing me. I think the way it came out made him look bad and it didn't make him look bad to certain people and I guess he sees that too that certain people upon his views, the newspapers and all just used him and he s aw that and probably some one has talked to him or written him, he just felt like backing up. SL I think it was good that you called him. It was a hard ship on you K know but when some one in this kind of position attacks you and who has never been one of the hatchet men toward you. It is so effective when you talk to him yourself It makes quite a difference when you say explain it to me pleaseand no one else quite substitutes for that .Certainly if BUNCHE and STIL(phon) are as easily persudaded to modify their position and even to give you acertain kind of support then this adm we are talking about ought to muster tremendous support.I am very anxious when this thing is over to get to it. KINGANDY said last night and maybe it is trueth t maybe my reaction rather than the fact that people who I thought would understand , didn't understand and didn't come to my support. but as I understand whenever I made a new move, the press was against me, the middle class negro community was against me and finally they came along. This was very true in Birmingham. SL I think this is a dangerious oversimplication.Ultimately it comes to the point that in Birmingham do the American people support Barbaricanasia. You had to win on that.

Page [redacted] of 6 Pages

Day Thur Date 4/13/67 PM

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67D

Employee's Name [redacted] b7C ?

Date Stamp [redacted]

me	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
	Martin		if you can reach the American people and they were [redacted]. We are in a minority in this situation and indeed [redacted] small minorityrelatively. We are in a large minority [redacted] as minorities in a war are concerned, but still a small one. BOBBY KENNEDY put it quite well the day before yesterday. KINGI like that. SLAbout if we had not protested we would have probably escalated the war much more. kING Right. It s true , Andy was going to say this to LOUIE MAUDMAN(phon) and CLIFF ALEXANDER that JOHNSON is under tremendous pressure from the hawks and he should welcome pressure from doves that can keep him restrained in the situation. SL He had actually welcomed it at the beginning and then he became afraid that the dove postion might grow too big W. can go ahead and say we will do al we can to prevent this war fr om becoming a big one.It will take a period of time to get a more just settlement and this will be because we existed, but it will be harder than BIRMINGHAM. KINGI agree. I feel some of the people will be pulled around to my position and get away from this idea that I am hurting the civil rights movement. SL I agree, that you can withdraw from this war with honor like FRANCE did. It will take more time AS their people are much more advanced politically than we are. This is the prospect that you will be understood and understood by the majority. Now, I would like this done- a public relation tactic. A picture of you and BUNCHE together. The thing that bothered me most was BUNCHE. ROY does not have that king of presteige.BUNCHE is a Nobel Prize winner and his statement was much worse than the NAACP's was. To be able to change his postion is very very important. We should have a copy of his press release as I would like it for our contributors. You cant even count on our contributors all knowing the extent of how BUNCHE modified his position. I want to be able to quote it. END

[redacted] Page 7	Employee's Name	Date Stamp
Thur Date 4/13/67 PM 62 67D	[redacted] 67C	

Time	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
3:30	PM	OG [redacted]	W 5632 - 4.

b7C

STANLEY LEVISON, long distance, to MARTIN LUTHER KING:

SL: I t seems to me that not only are you going to find it lamost impossible to get 12 people on a conference call, but even if you got them all together, it's not of much value. Because you know how hard it is on these conference calls when we have 4 or 5 to have a thoughtful conversation. With 12 it won't amount to more than each one expressing himself once.

MK: One reason I wanted to get them was before my press conference, it isn't of too much value now anyway. Because there were some things I had thought about that I felt the need of doing, and I was going to announce it in the conference, but that conference is over and I couldn't announce it anyway. So I don't see much value in the conference call, and we are going have a meeting tomorrow morning. So I'll just call it off altogether. The only thing is there are one or two Memphis men I wanted in on it, maybe I could get them to come to Atlanta.

SL: Yeah, that would be better, because you really won't accomplish anything with 12 people on a conference call. It would be better to place 2 calls. What was it you wanted to raise that you thought you'd discuss at the press conference.

MK: I think that we are, I know I appreciated your words last night, I think that we have to face the fact that from a public relations point of view and every other way we are in serious trouble. I think as far as the Washington campaign is concerned it is in trouble. It is going to be much harder to recruit people now, beca se most people we are recruiting are not violent people. And if they feel they are going to be in a campaign that is going to be taken over by violent elements you know they will hold back, and I think we will have some holding back just out of fea and the emphasis is going to be that now and you'll begin to see it in the newspapers. This is not a failure for SCLC, we have enough of a program to affirm its own position, but it is a personal setback for me. Let's face it. There are those who are vindica

[redacted]

Day Fri. Date 3/29/68

62
b7D

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Employee's Name

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Date Stamp

Time	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
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3:30	PM	OG	LEVISON to KING, continued.
			MK: now. You know LUTERS(ph) raised that question at HARRY BELAFONTE'S(ph) the other night.
			SL: No, MARTIN, I couldn't disagree more completely with you.
			MK: All I'm saying is that ROY WILKINS(ph), the BAYARD RUSTIN(ph) and that stripe and there are many of them and the negroes that are influenced by what they read newspapers, ADAM CLAYTON POWELL(ph) for another reason, you know their point is, I'm right, MARTIN LUTHER KING is dead, he's finished, his non-violence is nothing, no one is listening to it. Let's face it, we do have a great public relations setback where my image and my leadership are concerned.
			SL: That is only if you accept their definition, and this, I think, is a profound error youare making.
			MK: But I'm saying I don't accept it myself, what I'M saying is that many people will accept it.
			SL: And I say the people will accept it for a few days, but if events prove otherwise, they will not accept i
			MK: That's the point, if events prove otherwise. And events aren't just going to prove otherwise unless we think very soberly through this period, and I've got to, somehow, reaffirm what the press will refuse to affirm. They aren't going to deal with it that way, I mean everybody knows, we all know it was just a few people, and frankly, it was a failure of the leadership here. I talked to the fellows who organized the violence business this morning in my room. They came to me, I didn't even call for them. They came up here, they love me. They were fighting the leadership of Memphis. They were fighting JIM LAWSON(ph) and the men who ignored them, who neglecte them, who would not hear them wouldn't give them any attention, ordered their telephone cut off, wouldn't even give them the $20.00. All of these things. You know I had no knowledge of all this. I know the fellows, and they really do, they love me. They were too sick to see that what they were doing yesterday was hurting me much more than it could hurt the local preachers. But it is out now. What do we do. I have come to the conclusion that I was so upset about this

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Day Fri. Date 3/29/68

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Date Stamp

Time	Initial	IC OG	Activity Recorded
		b7C	S[redacted]

KING:(CONT'D)

thing and so shocked, that I was just going to announce that I was going on a fast, and through this fast to appea to the leadership of Memphis as well as those who partici-pated in the violence to come to me in a united front and lets take up the cudgel and move on in this movement. I think that that kind of powerful spiritual move would be the kind of thing that would pull all the forces, and make all the students come to me. I think it will make my staf work harder everywhere along the way. It will force them into a position to come in here and get with these student and say that we can't allow this to happen. It would be a way of unifying the movement, and transforming a minus into a plus. I can have press conferences and talk about it until I have another march in Memphis that is non violen I was really just down town, and I think our Washington campaign is doomed.

LEVISON: MARTIN, one thing that bothers me terribly is that you are saying that you must have 100% adherence to non violehce even by those who are not your followers. How can you ever get that?

KING: We can't get it but the fact is that this was a demonstration, STAN. If a riot had broken out on the South Side,--let's face it this was a riot that broke out right in the ranks of our march. These fellows would be in line and they would jump out, do something, and come back to hi within the group.

LEVISON: MARTIN, I'm not just talking about this march. I'm talking in general about what seems to me the box or the trap that you are placing non-violence in. The other side can always find a few provocateurs to start violence no matter what you do. There is a long history of this in the labor movement. Every time, 30 or 40 years ago, a strike started, they--the employers--got some guys to star some violence, and that broke a thousand strikes.

KING: It's totally different in that situation, STAN.

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Day FRI. Date 3/29/68

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KING: (CONT'd) You did not have a labor leader [illegible] who rose up as a symbol of non-violence. It didn't matter about violence. It mattered tactically but not philosophically and in terms of the leadership of the man. He had not become the symbol of rallying people around a philosophy and method of non violence. What we are faced with now is that the press is not going to say what you are talking about. You are right that they are not going to deal with it, and everything will come out weakening the symbol. It will put many Negroes in doubts. It will put many Negroes in the position of saying, "Well, that's true MARTIN LUTHER KING is at the end of his rope." So I've got to do something that becomes a kind of powerful act, and not playing with it, I mean taking it seriously, and make it a powerful act of unifying forces and refuting the claims that would be made by the press.

LEVISON: If it would have that result, I would agree with it. I'm just very bothered by the idea that you would be accepting the logic of the press which is that if you can' control 100% but only 99%, you are a failure. This kind o arithmetic makes sense no where else but they have imposed this on you.

KING: That's what I am saying, and you can't keep them from imposing it.

LEVISON: This is what I am not so sure about.

KING: Well, you watch your newspapers. Watch "The New Yo Times" editorials.

LEVISON: Yes, I'm willing to watch, particularly after th Memphis--

KING: I think it will be the most negative thing about MARTIN LUTHER KING that you have ever seen.

LEVISON: For a time, yes.

KING: There will not be even one sympathetic--even with friends, it won't be there..

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Time	Initial	OG	Activity Recorded
		b7C	SA [redacted]

LEVISON: I think there will be but it will take a couple of weeks. The first reaction will be exactly what you are describing but I don't think that it is absolutely inevitable that the truth is going to get buried.

KING: It will stay buried, STAN, unless I do something now.

LEVISON: I agree with that but what I am saying is that what you do should not feed their logic that there cannot be 1% that are violent without destroying your position. We have to find a way in which we don't accept this. Otherwise you'll never be able to do anything unless you always spiritually reach the level where you absolutely hypnotize every single Negro alive. That's too much to ask.

KING: I know that. I agree with that. But how can I say that we can control our demonstrations in Washington, and at the same time conclude that we are going to have 1% violence.

LEVISON: What you can say is that you can control your followers. You are not undertaking to control everybody else. MARTIN, I think what we are really getting into here is what we are going to have to discuss in depth tomorrow. I just can't see you getting into a position where you are undertaking to eradicate all violence becaus you are destined to fail. I believe there is a way that you can take a position that your followers are non violen and that your followers will do what they must do. It is not up to you to control the others. When we can get into it at length I'd like to insist upon my analogy with the labor movement because it had to come through a whole peri in which strikes were made analogous with violence, and finally they did it when there were bombings, dynamiting, and everything else that accompanied strikes. They did it by persisting and carrying on the strikes, and saying that we are not responsible for the dynamiting. I'm inclined to feel that this is the road, no matter how difficult it is because the press is so opposed to you, but I think th just persistently doing it may be a better answer (CONT'D

[redacted]

Day FRI. Date 3/29/68

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Date Stamp

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

LATE CITY EDITION

Weather: Partly cloudy today, fair tonight; sunny tomorrow. Temp. range: today 44-31; Thursday 35-28. Full U. S. report on Page 62.

VOL. CXVI . . No. 39,871 © 1967 The New York Times Company. NEW YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 1967 10 CENTS

ALBANY LEADERS FAIL TO PRODUCE CITY FISCAL PLAN

Governor and Legislative Chiefs Quit for Weekend After 3-Hour Meeting

ZARETZKI IS PESSIMISTIC

Travia Says All Proposals Are 'Wide Open'—End of Session Approaching

By RICHARD L. MADDEN
Special to The New York Times

ALBANY, March 23—Governor Rockefeller and the legislative leaders failed tonight to reach agreement on a fiscal package for New York City.

A three-hour meeting between the legislative leaders and Mr. Rockefeller in the Governor's second-floor office in the Capitol broke up shortly before 7 P.M. with mixed reports of what had been accomplished.

Leslie Slote, Mr. Rockefeller's press secretary, described the session as "very constructive" and remarked that "there was some progress."

He said that the Governor was reporting the result by telephone to Mayor Lindsay in New York and that the leaders and their staffs would keep in touch by telephone during the next few days.

Went 'Round and Round'

Senate Minority Leader Joseph Zaretzki, Democrat of Manhattan, had a more pessimistic version. Asked if agreement had been reached, he replied: "Like hell."

"I think we're worse off than we were the other day," Senator Zaretzki told reporters. "Instead of sitting around a round table, we sat around a square table, but we still went round and round."

Mr. Rockefeller and the leaders of the politically divided Legislature had hoped to reach an agreement on providing more financial aid to the city by today, before the start of the Legislature's Easter recess.

Thus, unless there is a break over the weekend, the Legislature will be returning to work next week—the Senate on Monday, the Assembly on Tuesday —with a major obstacle still remaining in its road to adjournment. Legislative leaders are striving to adjourn the session by the end of next week to make room for the Constitu-

Continued on Page 32, Column 6

INSURANCE RISE FOR AUTOS VOTED

A Bill Increasing Coverage for Injury Gains in Albany

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL
Special to The New York Times

ALBANY, March 23—The Senate passed today a bill that would mandate higher minimum car insurance coverage for about three-million motorists in the state.

The bill, which sailed through the Republican-dominated Senate without debate by a vote of 49 to 5, is expected to win passage in the Democratic-controlled Assembly before the scheduled adjournment next week and to be signed into law by Governor Rockefeller.

The measure would raise the minimum coverage from $10,000 for injuries to one person and $20,000 for injuries to more than one person to $15,000 and $30,000, respectively. Minimum coverage for property damage, now set at $5,000, would not be changed.

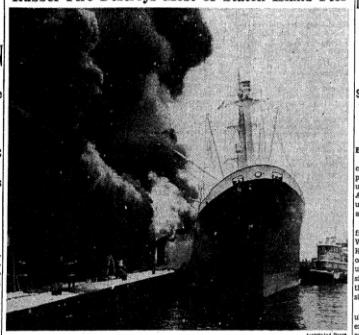
Beginning Jan. 1, the greater coverage would cost motorists an additional $3 to $17 a year, depending on where they lived.

Action on the measure, two years in preparation, came as the Legislature wound up an uneventful week that is expected to be its second-to-last before adjourning to make room for the Constitutional Convention that opens here April 4.

After the long Easter weekend, the Senate will convene Monday and the Assembly Tuesday to act on some of the most important business of the session — the supplemental budget,

Continued on Page 33, Column 4

Rubber Fire Destroys Most of Staten Island Pier



The Norwegian freighter Fernfield being towed away from fire at Pier 21, at Clifton

Associated Press Wirephoto

By EDWARD C. BURKS

A three-alarm fire, feeding on 4,000 bales of crude rubber, destroyed nearly three quarters of an 850-foot pier at Clifton, S. I., yesterday afternoon. The owners estimated the total loss at more than $1-million. The flames and fiery debris from the frame-roof structure spread quickly to a 9,880-ton Norwegian freighter, the Fernfield, docked alongside, but tugs pulled the ship to safety within a few minutes. The vessel, which had unloaded a third of its cargo, apparently escaped with minor damage although small fires were reported briefly in two open holds and on parts of the superstructure. No injuries were reported to about 90 longshoremen who were unloading the ship and many other workers who were on the pier when the fire

Continued on Page 61, Column 4

U.S. TAX LOWEST IN WESTERN BLOC

O.E.C.D. Figures Are Based on Gross National Product of Industrial Nations

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 23—American individuals and businesses, taken together, are taxed less than their counterparts in any other major industrial country in the Atlantic world.

This unexpected conclusion has emerged from the first compilation ever made of national statistics on a comparable basis. The compilation has just been completed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris and the results have been made available here.

The figures are based on tax collections, from all kinds of taxes, at all levels of government in the year 1965.

Higher Income Tax

They do not deal with such details as rates of income tax. Americans pay more in income tax than the citizens of many other countries. But the total tax burden is at the bottom of the list for the major countries, with only the Swiss among the smaller countries paying less in total taxes.

Canada, less industrialized than the European countries, has about the same tax burden as the United States.

The burden is measured simply: total tax collections as a percentage of the gross national product, which is the money value of the total output of goods and services. Revenues rise in all countries as the G.N.P. grows, and so, differences in size of G.N.P. do not affect the comparison.

The United States tax burden is 27.3 per cent. Sweden tops the list with 39 per cent.

Because the figures deal with tax collections, they avoid the problem posed by widespread income tax evasion in such countries as Italy. The burden measures taxes paid.

The taxes covered include income, local property, sales, excise, corporate profits and Security and (for many Euro-

Continued on Page 16, Column 8

Good Friday

Today is Good Friday, and although it is not a legal holiday, many business offices will be closed. Following is a list of services and facilities that are or are not affected:

Public and parochial schools —Closed.

Banks, department stores and retail business — Generally open.

Stock and principal commodity exchanges—Closed.

Post offices—Normal service.

Sanitation Department—Normal service.

Parking — Alternate-side parking rules suspended.

9 Catholic Scholars Join Move to Let Clergymen Marry

By EDWARD B. FISKE

Nine prominent Roman Catholic scholars have become advocates to a new unofficial Catholic organization seeking a change in canon law to permit priests to marry.

The organization, known as the National Association for Pastoral Renewal, was formed at a meeting in an unidentified Midwestern city last November by 23 Catholic priests from dioceses throughout the country.

The priests drafted a specific proposal for modifying the 800-year-old requirement that priests not marry. Last month they began polling priests on their views.

Wide Support Believed

An officer of the association said yesterday that the purpose of the survey was to demonstrate that there was widespread support for a change among clergymen, and to persuade the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to "begin serious discussion of the celibacy problem."

The officer said that 10,000 priests in more than 25 dioceses had been reached and that about a quarter had returned the questionnaire. Of these, he said, "about 90 per cent" favored the proposal.

The leaders of the association have declined to make their names public. The only address they give is Post Office Box 384, Madison Square Station, New York, N.Y. 10010.

The officer reached yesterday said that publication of the names of the 12 members of the organization's coordinating committee "would put some of them on the hot seat and would restrict the freedom that we now have to discuss the issue

Continued on Page 29, Column 5

Sarisohn Is Silent On 35 Questions

By F. DAVID ANDERSON

Suffolk County Judge Floyd Sarisohn refused 35 times yesterday to answer questions on his dealings with a convicted prostitute. He told the justices who are trying him on charges of misconduct that to reply would violate the lawyer-client relationship and "might tend to degrade and incriminate me."

Justice Henry L. Ughetta, who is presiding over the five-man panel of the Appellate Division of State Supreme Court in Brooklyn, had spoken sternly to Judge Sarisohn before questioning about the prostitute began.

"I just want to warn you, judge, at this time," said Justice Ughetta, "that your attitude in this case, your refusal to answer, even on the advice of counsel, may have a serious

Continued on Page 18, Column 1

WIDE ATOM CHECK IS WEIGHED BY U.S.

It Would Open All Civilian Power Plants to Inspection as Example for World

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 23—The United States is preparing an offer to open all its civilian atomic power plants to international inspection. The intention is to set an example for worldwide acceptance of international controls over such plants.

It is tentatively planned to present the offer to the General Disarmament Conference when it reconvenes after a six-week recess that started today.

In Moscow, the United States and the Soviet Union opened preliminary talks on possible limitation of offensive and defensive missiles.

Nations that produce nuclear weapons and those that do not are split on the issue of safeguard controls. The United States with the support of the Soviet Union, is proposing that under a treaty to bar the spread of nuclear weapons all atomic power plants in the nonmilitary states be subject to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency to assure that

Continued on Page 12, Column 1

Columbia Moves to Keep Status Of Students From Draft Boards

Columbia University took a major step yesterday toward withholding the class standings of its students from draft boards.

The University Council, composed of about 40 faculty members and 30 university administrators, recommended that the rankings no longer be made available to the Selective Service system.

Final decision in the matter rests with the university's board of trustees. In academic and nonfinancial matters, however, the board generally defers to Columbia's president and the University Council.

Draft boards use the class standing of students as an aid in determining which students should keep their student deferments. Students with poor grades are more likely to be drafted than those with high academic standings.

The next meeting of the board of trustees is scheduled early next month. If the recommendation of the University Council is approved, Columbia will no longer provide Selective Service with the standings of men in Columbia's four undergraduate units: Columbia College, the School of Engineering, the School of General Studies and the College of Pharmacy.

The University Council's recommendation averted an organized boycott of classes that was scheduled for next Tuesday and Wednesday.

More than 450 Columbia students maintained an hour-long "silent vigil" on the campus as the University Council, called into special session by Dr. Grayson Kirk, president of Columbia, drew up its recommendation in the Low Memorial Library.

In announcing the council's recommendation, Dr. Kirk emphasized that it had acted out of concern for preservation of the teacher-student relationship at Columbia."

Dr. Kirk said the council's recommendation "should in no way be construed as a vote on Selective Service, on student deferment, on foreign policy in general, or on the war in Vietnam in general."

"Rather," he said, "the action was based upon the belief that the intrusion of the use of class rankings by Selective Service has tended to affect adversely the well-being of the education process at the university."

If the council recommendation is approved, Columbia will become the first nationally prominent university in the country to withhold its class standings

Continued on Page 5, Column 1

NASA SUSPENDS APOLLO TRAINING FOR ASTRONAUTS

Space Assignments Are Off Till Impact of Fire Is Clear —House Inquiry Slated

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD

Active training of astronaut crews for the nation's space program has been suspended until the full impact of the Apollo spacecraft fire last January can be assessed, space agency officials said yesterday.

Telephone interviews with officials and other sources in Washington, Houston and Cape Kennedy, Fla., disclosed that, because all future flight scheduling was in doubt, no crew assignments had been made for the first manned Apollo mission.

The mission, originally scheduled for last Feb. 21, is now expected to come no sooner than early 1968. It usually takes about eight months from the time a crew is designated until its flight.

Simulator Lacking

Because of expected changes in the Apollo design to make the cockpit safer and more fire-resistant, it was learned, the astronauts are without any simulated vehicle in which to train.

As a result, most of the 47 astronauts are reported to be taking vacations, working on the fire investigation, doing classroom work and acting as advisers to the spacecraft manufacturer, North American Aviation, Inc.

A final report on the fatal fire by special investigators is now expected to be released the first week of April. There are strong indications that the board of inquiry's two-month study has failed to pinpoint the exact cause of the accident other than to establish that an electrical malfunction was the most likely source of trouble.

Nonetheless, the report will serve as the basis for a full-scale Congressional investigation.

Oxygen Record Cited

Space agency officials generally reject suggestions by basic changes in the Apollo's pure-oxygen environment system.

Fires, once started, tend to spread faster when supported by 100 per cent oxygen, rather than a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen, as in normal air. In rejecting a drastic change, space officials point to the safety record and experience of dealing with pure oxygen in all of the nation's 16 manned flights.

The Soviet Union's manned space vehicles are designed for the two-gas—oxygen and nitrogen—system.

Representative Olin E. Teague, Democrat of Texas, announced in Washington yesterday that a hearing into the accident by a House Science and Astronautics subcommittee would

Continued on Page 15, Column 3

Mao Foe Accused Of Bridge Playing

By TILLMAN DURDIN
Special to The New York Times

HONG KONG, March 23—A condress for bridge that virtually amounted to an addiction of Tung Fang Hung (The East Is Red), a Peking tabloid newspaper, received here recently. Tung Fang Hung is produced by Red Guard units of universities and colleges in Peking.

Along with President Liu Shao-chi, the 63-year-old Mr. Teng has been denounced since last winter by Maoist partisans as the focus of reactionary,

Continued on Page 6, Column 4

New Senator Makes Maiden Speech

Associated Press Wirephoto

Senator Edward W. Brooke, Massachusetts Republican, after presenting his new views on U.S. policies in Vietnam.

Brooke Shifts War View And Supports President

By JOHN HERBERS
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 23—President Johnson won a prime convert today in the Congressional debate on the Vietnam war. Senator Edward W. Brooke, Republican of Massachusetts, who had advocated a reduction of the American military effort, said in his first formal Senate speech that he had changed his mind after a two-week tour of Southeast Asia.

"Since I believe that North Vietnam is not prepared to negotiate in a meaningful way at this time," he said, "I reluctantly conclude that the general direction of our present military efforts in Vietnam is necessary. This is far from an easy position for me to take."

The speech was received with somewhat more fanfare than is generally accorded a freshman Senator. Mr. Brooke is the first Negro elected to the Senate by popular vote. He is considered one of the more promising new members of the 90th Congress, and he has been discussed as a possible Vice-Presidential candidate on the Republican ticket in 1968.

Moves Toward Center

His speech moved him closer to the Republican center on Vietnam. Most Republicans advocate a strong military posture in Southeast Asia in hopes of ending the war quickly.

But his speech also moved him away from many civil rights leaders who contend that the war against nonwhites is unjustified and draining off resources needed to attack social ills, particularly those afflicting the American Negro.

When he entered the Senate less than three months ago, the 47-year-old former Massachusetts Attorney General said he would not pretend to be a national Negro leader but a representative of all the people of Massachusetts.

He has since been one of the most sought-after members of Congress and has received more than 1,400 invitations to speak in all parts of the country. He received 40 requests to make Lincoln Day speeches.

He is recognized by tourists almost as frequently as are Senators Everett McKinley

Continued on Page 5, Column 5

DR. KING TO PRESS ANTIWAR STAND

Says Vietnam Is the Major Obstacle to Rights Gains —Fears Summer Riots

By The Associated Press

ATLANTA, March 23 — The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. says the war in Vietnam has become the major obstacle to the civil rights movement and that he plans to take "a much stronger stand" against it.

"I feel it's playing such havoc with our domestic programs that I'm forced into [opposing the war]," Dr. King said in an interview.

The war has shifted attention and resources from the civil rights struggle, he said, adding that he believes civil rights programs will suffer less from his actively opposing the war than from not opposing it. The criticism, he said, "will be much less than the frustrations and anxieties we will face in not opposing it."

Sees New Rioting

Dr. King will speak at an antiwar rally in Chicago next Saturday and then join his first antiwar demonstration in New York on April 15. He said the nation and President Johnson had become obsessed with the war.

Dr. King disclosed that he recently made plans for intensive organizing of Negro slums as a base to seek a guaranteed annual income and a nationwide campaign for economic improvement of Negroes through backgaining with major businesses.

"We have got to go all out to grapple with this economic problem," he said, talking of his plans for the first time since finishing a book about the racial struggle. Negro slums still retain explosive conditions, he said.

"Nothing much has changed," Dr. King said. "I'm afraid we're going to get a repetition of last summer."

Rioting erupted in Chicago, Cleveland, Omaha and several other cities in 1966.

Chicago again will be a target, Dr. King said, in an effort to "highlight or expose the problems of the ghettos through demonstrations." The demonstrations will center on housing and school segregation, he said, and might include marches by Negro pupils to predominantly white schools.

Dr. King described an agree-

Continued on Page 5, Column 4

NEWS INDEX

News Summary and Index, Page 33

COMBAT LOSSES OF U.S. AND ENEMY SET NEW MARKS

American Killed, Wounded and Missing Total 2,092, 475 Above Past Record

FOE'S DEATH TOLL 2,675

Week's Figures Show Rise in Pace of Ground War—G.I. Force at 427,000

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 23 — The number of American and enemy combat casualties in Vietnam set records last week, a United States military spokesman reported tonight.

American losses totaled 2,092 —211 killed, 1,874 wounded and 7 missing.

The enemy lost 2,675 killed. The United States cannot accurately calculate enemy wounded and missing, the spokesman added.

The previous record for American casualties was 1,617, reported for the week that ended March 4.

Until today, the 2,449 enemy dead reported for the week that ended Feb. 25 stood as a record.

Saigon's Loss Also High

Losses among the South Vietnamese armed forces were 237 dead, substantially higher than the average of 220, but not a record. The South Vietnamese do not report the number of their wounded.

Military officials report that 1,642 American servicemen were killed in action in North and South Vietnam between Jan. 1 and March 18. In the same period, 10,864 were wounded.

The spokesman said that more than 19,500 of the enemy were killed this year.

Statistics on enemy casualties are theoretically based on battlefield body counts by allied troops. Military observers suggest, however, that the reports are often exaggerated, in some instances because of confusion on the battlefield.

The rise in casualties last week reflected an increase in the tempo of the war.

Without alluding to the recent upturn in enemy activity, the United States military command issued this statement along with the casualty figures:

"Allied ground forces increased the level of ground, air and sea operations against the

Continued on Page 3, Column 5

INDIA TO CONDUCT INQUIRY ON C. I. A.

Official Pledges a Watch on All Foreign Intelligence

By J. ANTHONY LUKAS
Special to The New York Times

NEW DELHI, March 23 — Foreign Minister M. C. Chagla told Parliament today that the Government would conduct a "thorough inquiry" into the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency in India.

Replying to a barrage of questions and charges about the American intelligence agency, Mr. Chagla promised increased Government vigilance to "unearth any activity that is objectionable, that is against the national interests."

However, despite persistent demands from Opposition benches, Mr. Chagla refused to commit the Government to the appointment of an independent commission to investigate the agency's operations here.

He made clear that equal vigilance would be kept over the activities of other countries' intelligence organizations here.

The Minister's statement followed an hour-long debate in the lower house of Parliament. It was the second such debate in four days and, if anything, it was more tumultuous.

It began with a long speech by Ramnath Umanath, a member of the pro-Peking Communist party from Madras, who said he was disclosing new facts about the "C.I.A. apparatus" in India.

Mr. Umanath said that the agency's headquarters in India was on the first floor of a build-

Continued on Page 5, Column 1

Dr. King's Error
New York Times (1923-Current file); Apr 7, 1967;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2007)
pg. 36

Dr. King's Error

In recent speeches and statements the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has linked his personal opposition to the war in Vietnam with the cause of Negro equality in the United States. The war, he argues, should be stopped not only because it is a futile war waged for the wrong ends but also because it is a barrier to social progress in this country and therefore prevents Negroes from achieving their just place in American life.

This is a fusing of two public problems that are distinct and separate. By drawing them together, Dr. King has done a disservice to both. The moral issues in Vietnam are less clear-cut than he suggests; the political strategy of uniting the peace movement and the civil rights movement could very well be disastrous for both causes.

Because American Negroes are a minority and have to overcome unique handicaps of racial antipathy and prolonged deprivation, they have a hard time in gaining their objectives even when their grievances are self-evident and their claims are indisputably just. As Dr. King knows from the Montgomery bus boycott and other civil rights struggles of the past dozen years, it takes almost infinite patience, persistence and courage to achieve the relatively simple aims that ought to be theirs by right.

The movement toward racial equality is now in the more advanced and more difficult stage of fulfilling basic rights by finding more jobs, changing patterns of housing and upgrading education. The battlegrounds in this struggle are Chicago and Harlem and Watts. The Negroes on these fronts need all the leadership, dedication and moral inspiration that they can summon; and under these circumstances to divert the energies of the civil rights movement to the Vietnam issue is both wasteful and self-defeating.

Dr. King makes too facile a connection between the speeding up of the war in Vietnam and the slowing down of the war against poverty. The eradication of poverty is at best the task of a generation. This "war" inevitably meets diverse resistance such as the hostility of local political machines, the skepticism of conservatives in Congress and the intractability of slum mores and habits. The nation could afford to make more funds available to combat poverty even while the war in Vietnam continues, but there is no certainly that the coming of peace would automatically lead to a sharp increase in funds.

Furthermore, Dr. King can only antagonize opinion in this country instead of winning recruits to the peace movement by recklessly comparing American military methods to those of the Nazis testing "new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe." The facts are harsh, but they do not justify such slander. Furthermore, it is possible to disagree with many aspects of United States policy in Vietnam without whitewashing Hanoi.

As an individual, Dr. King has the right and even the moral obligation to explore the ethical implications of the war in Vietnam, but as one of the most respected leaders of the civil rights movement he has an equally weighty obligation to direct that movement's efforts in the most constructive and relevant way.

There are no simple or easy answers to the war in Vietnam or to racial injustice in this country. Linking these hard, complex problems will lead not to solutions but to deeper confusion.

Mini-Riot in Memphis . . .
New York Times (1923-Current file): Mar 30, 1968;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2008)
pg. 32

Mini-Riot in Memphis . . .

The disorder in Memphis that left store windows on Beale Street smashed and one Negro youth dead exposes the danger in drawing large numbers of protesters into the streets for emotional demonstrations in this time of civic unrest. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who organized the Memphis march, is organizing a "Poor People's Campaign" for Washington, D. C., next month. None of the precautions he and his aides are taking to keep the capital demonstration peaceful can provide any dependable insurance against another eruption of the kind that rocked Memphis.

For what the Memphis mini-riot shows is that nonviolent protest if taken to the streets can be used as a cover by rowdy elements bent on violence. Dr. King organized the Memphis march to demonstrate support for Negro garbage workers in their strike against the city. The unquestionable effect was to solidify white sentiment against the strikers.

Dr. King must by now realize that his descent on Washington is likely to prove even more counterproductive. After all, 6,000 persons participated in the Memphis march, yet officials estimate that no more than fifty teen-agers took part in the window-smashing and looting. Though the overwhelming bulk of the marchers did not join the rowdy element, the police waded into the parade ranks with billy clubs swinging. Some marchers were chased into a nearby church and police continued to lob tear gas after them.

* * *

The whole incident underscores the general national edginess. It reinforces the need for Negro and white leaders of goodwill, mutually, to do everything possible to keep spring in Memphis from becoming another hot summer in communities all over the country.

In assessing his future course Dr. King would do well to recall the example of his mentor, the greatest exponent of nonviolent dissent in this century, India's Mahatma Gandhi. Soon after the Mahatma launched his first massive experiment in nonviolent protest in 1919, violence broke out in a number of Indian cities. Gandhi immediately suspended his protest and fasted as penitence for the misdeeds of his followers. He declared that he had made a "Himalayan miscalculation" by asking his people to adopt civil disobedience before they understood or were ready for it. Dr. King will be making a "Himalayan miscalculation" if he fails to appreciate the consequences for the civil rights movement and the nation of an April explosion in Washington.

On the March
The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Mar 30, 1968;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post (1877-1995)
pg. A10

On the March

The riots in Memphis teach some valuable lessons and it is to be hoped that Dr. Martin Luther King and the government and citizens of Washington will be among the apt pupils.

The basic instruction surely is that honest intentions and good faith on the part of leaders are not reliable insurance against the disorder and violence that may arise out of the deliberate malevolence or mere mischief of others. The safest assumption to be made about any march or demonstration is that there will be violence and disorder if appropriate steps are not taken to forestall it.

The distinction between a lawless mob and a lawful assembly arises not only from the rectitude and integrity of leadership, but from its managerial ingenuity and its preparatory exertions.

Washington citizens will not feel reassured that disorder will not attend the proposed march on Washington by mere demonstrations of Dr. King's good faith, which few doubt or challenge. Nor will they be comforted by Dr. King's demonstrated unwillingness to countenance violence or his habit of showing that unwillingness by leaving the scene of the disturbances that occur. This does him credit, but it repairs no buildings, restores no property and resurrects none of the lives lost.

It has to be said in defense of Dr. King that the Memphis march was not planned by him, staffed by him or policed by the marshal system that he has often employed. He was merely invited to participate. It is nonetheless a sad demonstration of how easily such marches can get out of hand and how uncontrollable they are when they do get out of hand, even if the leaders are well-intentioned.

Mahatma Gandhi, whose techniques of nonviolence have been studied by Dr. King, well understood the difficulty of using these methods. In February 1922, when a mass campaign of civil disobedience in Gujarat led to violence, Gandhi suspended the campaign and imposed upon himself a five-day penitential fast. He repeatedly resorted to such devices to enforce the discipline of passive resistance. In 1934, he resigned from the Congress because he was not satisfied that the Congress fully believed in nonviolence. During the tragic India riots of 1947, Gandhi embarked on a fast unto death that he said he would break only if the communal riots stopped. His threat had an immediate effect.

Dr. King would be following respectable precedent if he were to similarly show his dissatisfaction with looting and violence by suspending further demonstrations until the restraint, training and discipline of his followers can be relied upon.

If he thinks no such delays are counseled or necessary and is willing to assure responsibility for the order and discipline of those who come to Washington at his summons, he has an obligation to society, to see to it that there are the most detailed, explicit and workable preparations to maintain the public peace. If the peace is to be maintained, his own plans will have to be explicit, detailed and specific—both as to methods and objectives. And the ground rules for the behavior of the demonstrators will have to be agreed upon in advance by Dr. King's agents and public officials. No aspect of the march can be left to chance or improvisation.

If the march takes place, the world will be watching it. It will be watching to see how Washington behaves toward the marchers and how the marchers behave toward Washington. A careful, restrained and law-abiding demonstration, protected by well disciplined police and adequate military forces, could be a gain for the Nation. An outbreak of lawlessness and looting would be a calamity that would not leave untouched the reputation of any persons involved in its organization or its protection.

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