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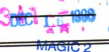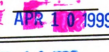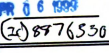has been accepted towards fulfillment
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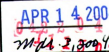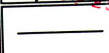
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The Power to Transform the Nation: The Theories of Racial
Empowerment of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael

By

Jeffrey J. Janowick

A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

THE POWER TO TRANSFORM THE NATION:
THE THEORIES OF RACIAL EMPOWERMENT OF
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND STOKELY CARMICHAEL

By

Jeffrey Jerome Janowick

The study of Martin Luther King, Jr. often focuses on the earliest period of his leadership in the civil rights movement. This concentration ignores his later career, leading to a portrayal of King as a moderate leader with modest goals. By studying King after 1966, however, a more radical leader emerges, determined to effect fundamental change .

This essay examines the ideology of King through the counterpoint of Stokely Carmichael, a "black power" radical within the mainstream civil rights movement. By comparing the thinking of these leaders a clearer understanding of both is possible. The fundamental similarities between a militant like Carmichael and the seemingly moderate King challenges those who wish to draw a dichotomy between their ideas. Both leaders sought to empower black people as the best means to achieve the liberation of African-Americans from the oppression of racism. This goal required a fundamental transformation of American values.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

On a sultry summer night in central Mississippi in 1966, Stokely Carmichael introduced the slogan "Black Power" into the national discussion of civil rights. This precipitated a conflict within the mainstream civil rights movement over the issue of empowerment. Carmichael's ideology of black power rejected both the methods and goals of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership and challenged his commitment to integration as the best way to achieve equality for African-Americans. Although King remained committed to nonviolence and integration, Carmichael and other black power advocates forced him to re-assess the nature of the problems facing blacks, leading him to radicalize his thought. While never accepting the separatism proposed by Carmichael, King nevertheless began to criticize the federal government and his white liberal allies. Although Carmichael hoped for blacks to develop the strength to challenge white domination in power relations without concern for morality, King insisted that blacks link power with justice and began to search for a moral means of empowering black people. Despite vast differences in goals and methods, both leaders reached a similar conclusion: the empowerment of black people so that they could participate equally in American society required a fundamental transformation of American values.

It is important to recognize this similarity between two leaders of such different political persuasions. Martin Luther King, Jr. is

generally represented as a moderate leader who sought merely to reform America. This focus on the "I Have A Dream" element of King's philosophy disguises the radical King who advocated dramatic social and economic change in his later years. To forget this element of King's career distorts his legacy as a leader of the black struggle for liberation. Stokely Carmichael is often considered to be a fiery revolutionary who advocated violence and the destruction of white America. His rhetorical style contributed to this perception. However, such a characterization diminishes the sophistication of his analysis. Carmichael's critique of both American society and the civil rights leadership was cogent and well-developed. More than a demagogue, Carmichael was an intellectual searching for solutions to the powerlessness of African-Americans in American society.

This essay will explore the differences in the ideologies of these leaders, as well as the fundamental similarity that emerges in their definition of the solution. First, I will establish the background and ideology of each leader before the introduction of the black power slogan and the debate over empowerment. Then I will compare and contrast the manner in which both leaders developed their own definitions of how to empower black people. I chose Martin Luther King because he was the quintessential leader of the mainstream civil rights movement., and is too often portrayed as a moderate leader unwilling to advocate radical change. Stokely Carmichael represented an alternative ideology that developed within the mainstream movement and challenged King's leadership, forcing King to radicalize his own beliefs. At the same time, he occupied an important position among black radical or militant leaders of the

sixties due to his early realization of the need for black empowerment and his popularization of the "black power" slogan.

Both leaders struggled with the problem of creating power for black people. I have used the term "empowerment" to describe the goal they strived for to liberate their people. The word empowerment is currently politically charged, with different connotations depending on the political persuasion of the user. In this essay, I hope I have escaped the baggage associated with this term and instead used it as a practical term that describes what both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael desired for their people: a meaningful share in the power structure of this country. Although their means of achieving this empowerment of African-Americans were dissimilar, both leaders argued that a transformation of values was required if that power was ever to be meaningful. In this way, both leaders advocated a similar philosophy of empowerment despite the vast differences that separate their ideas of how to achieve or use that power.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr., first entered the national spotlight, and the black civil rights struggle, as the leader of the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955-56. Under his leadership, the mainstream civil rights movement shifted its focus from moving through the courts to a policy of nonviolent direct action to prod whites into treating blacks equally. Through movements across the South, from Albany, Georgia to Birmingham to Selma, Alabama, King led blacks in a dramatic struggle with the forces of segregation that moved whites, especially in the North, to support their cause. The federal government passed laws and made rulings that supported the rights of blacks to enjoy the full privileges of citizenship. At the March on Washington, King shared his dream for America from the steps of the Lincoln memorial, and white America professed to share that dream. After Selma, in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson told the nation that "we shall overcome" the problems of racial hatred, quoting a civil rights song on the occasion of introducing the most sweeping voting rights act in almost one hundred years. Yet three years later, this same Martin King would be assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, as he supported a strike of sanitation workers; estranged from Lyndon Johnson, with declining northern white liberal support, and in many ways isolated from his own movement. This change occurred as King became alienated from his earlier views on the solubility of the problems blacks faced in the United States.

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King spent the first years of his career as a civil rights leader developing an ideology and generating the strategies and tactics that best enabled him to work for the cause of black people. By grounding his strategies of resistance in an ideology, King provided both stability and flexibility to his methods. Since King based his strategies on a belief system that guided his entire life, his actions would be consistent. At the same time, because his ideas were malleable and could be altered to fit changing situations, King was able to develop new strategies that were both consistent with his fundamental ideology and relevant to the new perceptions of the issues. This development of King's ideology over time is a tribute to his ability to re-evaluate his own ideas as his experiences indicated their weaknesses and strengths, yet remain committed to a basic core of values.

King's fundamental ideology was nonviolent direct action. This method of dealing with oppression was not only a tactic to King; he considered it to be a way of life.[1] The fundamental premise of nonviolent direct action was that only by awakening the moral instincts in the oppressors could the oppressed hope to achieve justice. Violent actions only increased injustice and justified the evil actions of the oppressors in their minds. As King stated: "To meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe".[2] By actively resisting an evil system nonviolently, and refusing to cooperate with its structures,

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[1]Martin Luther King, Jr. Stride Towards Freedom. (New York: Harper, 1957) pg 101; "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence", A Testament of Hope. (ATOH) Ed. Washington (New York: Harper, 1986) 38.
[2]King. "Experiment in Love", ATOH. 17.

the oppressed could prick the consciences of the oppressors until they repented of their erroneous ways. Using direct action, the oppressed could bring the evil and violence inherent in any system of oppression into the open, dismissing the justifications and rationalizations that hid the true nature of the problem. "We do not march to precipitate violence. However, we are aware that the existence of injustice in society is the existence of voiceless, latent violence."[3] Targeting the system rather than the individual left open the chance of redemption for the oppressors and did not make them into implacable enemies who could only be defeated on a personal level. Rather, the evil system is the problem which limits both oppressor and oppressed, and individual oppressors can be saved along with the oppressed.

The Roots of Nonviolent Direct Action

King grounded this doctrine in a system of beliefs best described as black folk religion. Not to be confused with the organized black church, black folk religion is a cultural belief system and is not institutional in nature, although its elements may be manifested in the established black churches. Black folk religion incorporates Christian teachings found in both white and black institutional churches with the particular needs and learned experience of African-Americans.[4] This religious worldview is not

[3]Stephen Oates. Let the Trumpet Sound. (New York: Harper, 1983) 411.
[4]C. Eric Lincoln. The Black Church in the African-American Experience. (Durham: Duke, 1990 2; Gayraud Wilmore. Black Religion and Black Radicalism. (New York: Orbis, 1983) 26; James Cone. Martin, Malcolm and America. (New York: Orbis, 1991) 12.

confined to a limited notion of "church" and permeates all areas of life, much in the way African traditional religion acts in the lives of African peoples.[5] Important elements of black folk belief are a personal God who is active in history, a universe that moves towards justice, a belief that unearned suffering is redemptive, and the importance of resistance to injustice and evil.[6] These ideas are reflected in the Old Testament stories of the Exodus and the prophets, leading American blacks to identify with the struggles of the ancient Hebrews and to see themselves as a Chosen People of God. Martin Luther King drew heavily on ideas within this cultural belief system in the formation of his own ideology of nonviolence and political struggle that shaped his development as a civil rights leader. It was this foundation of his ideas in black culture that made his leadership so successful among blacks: they recognized in his philosophy and leadership familiar elements of their own beliefs and experiences. At the same time, this cultural baseline would later limit his effectiveness, both among whites and among Northern urban blacks, who were not familiar with this Southern black religious tradition and did not find familiarity or relevance in his philosophy.

The central idea behind King's philosophy is the concept of Christian love, or *agape*. King defined *agape* as love in action; it was not an emotional sort of love but rather the love of God operating in the human heart, a love for all men.[7] Only through love could

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[5]John Mbiti. Introduction to African Religion. (Oxford: Heineman Books, 1991) 29.

[6]King, " Nonviolence and Racial Justice", ATOH 9; "Power of Nonviolence", ATOH, 13; "Experiment in Love". ATOH. 18-20; Strength to Love. ATOH. 504.

[7]King, Stride Towards Freedom. (STF)105.

humans overcome the divisions of evil within their society and create the "beloved community" that would be a fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Through this love, blacks could transform their oppressors by showing their own humanity and shaming whites into recognizing their own failure to act in a Christian manner.

Personalism, or the belief in a personal God who is active in history, is another important element of black folk religion that King used to develop his philosophy. This Old Testament conception of a God who actively takes the part of His people gave blacks hope in their ultimate success, so that although they faced great suffering and seemingly insurmountable opposition, they knew that their God was an active ally in their struggle.[8] Thus, when the United States Supreme Court declared segregation illegal on public transportation just as the city of Montgomery enjoined the car pool that had made the bus boycott so successful, one observer stated that "God Almighty has spoken from Washington, DC.".[9] Blacks believed that God was acting for them and was not merely an impersonal deity who took no interest in His people's tribulations on earth.

At the same time, blacks did not use this personalistic belief to justify inaction. Indeed, they understood that God required them to act on their own behalf if they desired freedom. "Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as the cooperation with good," King argued in an early defense of direct action.[10] Only through struggle against oppression could blacks hope to overcome it. A

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[8]Cone, Martin. 126; Strength to Love in ATOH. 504, 507; Keith Miller. Voice of Deliverance. (New York: Free Press, 1992) 37.

[9]King, STF. 160.

[10]King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience", ATOH 48.

personal God may make the struggle easier to bear on an individual level, and the fruits of human actions may be interpreted as evidence of divine action, but only through hard work against evil could justice reign. Being the Chosen People thus carried the responsibility of actively working to achieve His will on earth and was not a passive role.[11]

A belief parallel to personalism is the belief in a moral order to the universe. Even as physical laws govern the actions of physical bodies, so too do moral laws govern the actions of moral bodies. These moral laws put the universe on the side of justice, another element strengthening black resolve to persevere in the face of oppression with a hope for ultimate success. As King argued, though darkness may rule for a day, eventually light would drive it out; Good Friday would give way to Easter.[12] This eventual triumph of justice was not some kind of otherworldly salvation, either: justice would reign in this world. While the struggle might be long and difficult, in the end, this-worldly salvation would occur and victory would be achieved. As King stated in Selma, "The arm of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice".[13]

The redemptive power of suffering is linked to this idea. Unearned suffering had a transformative power for both oppressed and oppressor. Freedom was not a thing freely given, but rather must be earned through struggle and suffering. Because the universe sided with justice, the unearned suffering of the oppressed would

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[11]Wilmore, Black Religion. 26; Major Jones. Christian Ethics for Black Theology. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974) 49.

[12]King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice", ATOH 9.

[13]King, " How Long?" ATOH 230.

buy relief from oppression because injustice could not survive long in the face of moral resistance. "The nonviolent say that suffering becomes a powerful social force when you willingly accept that violence on yourself, so that self-suffering stands at the center of the nonviolent movement and the individuals involved are able to suffer in a creative manner, feeling that unearned suffering is redemptive and that suffering may serve to transform the social situation."[14] Again, the redemption of this suffering was not a reward in heaven: the redemption of the oppressed was a this-worldly phenomenon that manifested the will of God and the moral order of the universe upon the hearts of humanity. By suffering under the blows of the segregationists, blacks both bought their own freedom and paid the price of salvation for the oppressors, who were harmed by the evil system of segregation just as blacks were. Thus, by suffering for the cause of justice and goodness, blacks fulfilled the will of God and brought justice to the world not only for their own benefit but for the good of all.

All of these elements demonstrated to blacks the need for struggle. Redemption was not going to be achieved through waiting or accommodation but through active resistance to evil. God, the moral order of the universe and justice demanded that they fight oppression and injustice. The idea that black religion emphasized an otherworldly salvation as the reward for this-worldly suffering does not seem accurate given this belief system. While otherworldly salvation is not unimportant in the black folk religious context, acceptance of injustice is not a part of this kind of salvation. The

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[14]King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience" ATOH 47.

promise of otherworldly salvation enabled blacks to survive under the oppression of slavery and racism; at the same time, the hope for this-worldly redemption was not forgotten.[15] Indeed, blacks have resisted oppression and fought for freedom since the days of slavery, and folk religious beliefs were an important element of this resistance. Again, it is important to distinguish folk religion from institutionalized religion. During slavery, institutional religion was often controlled by whites and directed at convincing blacks to accept their position as slaves. Yet the slaves developed their own interpretations of Christianity that whites could not control, and it was from this folk religious practice that a tradition of resistance developed. Black preachers emphasized the Old Testament stories of the ancient Hebrews, especially the tale of the Exodus and their redemption from slavery. This kind of salvation is certainly not otherworldly. Using this belief system, black preachers forged a tradition of resistance. Major slave rebellions, such as those of Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner, were partially inspired by religious beliefs. Prosser's revolt, though it was betrayed before it could be attempted, had religious overtones through the roles of black preachers. Turner was a preacher who believed that God had ordered him to lead a bloody slave revolt to redeem his people from slavery.[16] Folk religion remained important after emancipation, as black churches were involved in establishing themselves in the new

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[15]Lawrence Levine. Black Culture and Black Consciousness. (London: Oxford, 1977) 50.
[16]Wilmore, Black Religion, 45, 54; Albert Raboteau. Slave Religion. (London: Oxford, 1978) 147, 163.

order and were not able to be active in issues of racial justice.[17] During Reconstruction, men like Henry Turner emphasized the need to continually resist the racist oppression of whites. By the beginning of the twentieth century, when blacks faced tremendous oppression and violence and the black freedom struggle was at its nadir, the black church had become increasingly a middle class institution and was marginalized by its unwillingness and inability to confront racial issues.[18] Yet even at this time, blacks understood the need for resistance.

African-Americans created these folk religious beliefs to give them dignity in the face of oppression and also to enable them to fight for the ultimate victory of justice. The themes of justice and hope permeate this cosmic worldview of blacks; so too does the theme of resistance.[19] Black folk religion emphasizes a belief in an Old Testament, personal God who is active in history to establish justice for the weak. This religious system also interprets Jesus as a liberator; the heart of His gospel is the creation of justice for the poor and meek. The Beatitudes bless those who the world does not; and from this tendency in Christianity blacks forged a liberating tradition for their own beliefs. Suffering was an inherent part of this Christian life: by bearing the cross, blacks reaffirmed their faith in God and carried on Christ's work of redemption and reconciliation. The price of freedom was working to make justice a reality as God willed and

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[17]Wilmore, Black Religion, 141.

[18]Wilmore, Black Religion, 145.

[19]Cone, Martin, 126.

to restore the beloved community in which color was secondary to a notion of universal humanity.[20]

King learned this folk religious tradition through his own life. He was raised within an African-American religious context: his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been preachers. His father in particular was trained in the tradition of black folk preaching, with its own distinctive style and belief system. Although the younger King was raised in an affluent section of Atlanta, his father had been raised in poverty. The preaching style and message of the Ebenezer Baptist Church where he pastored showed this influence. Other local churches, and the services at Morehouse College, which King attended as a teenager, had less emotional, more "dignified" services than Ebenezer, where the elder King often preached in the folk style and stimulated emotional responses from his congregation. Martin Luther King, Jr. learned a great deal from this style, and while he valued the less emotional style of Morehouse services, he was also adept at the more passionate style of his father.[21]

King himself, in an autobiography of religious development written at Crozer Theological Seminary, recognized his father and his early church experiences as the most important influences on his beliefs as an adult. In explaining why he described his early life in the essay, King stated that these experiences were "highly significant in determining [his] religious attitudes", such as the belief in a friendly universe, a personal God of love, and a sense of optimism

[20]Cone, Martin, 127; King, "Love, Law and Civil Disobedience" ATOH 47.
[21]Lewis, King: A Critical Biography 4, 11, 23, 26.

about human nature.[22] These ideas would all be central to his ideology of nonviolence, and were rooted in the folk religion of African-Americans. King did not have to go to Boston University to discover the foundations of his nonviolent philosophy; he had learned them as a youth and took them to Boston with him.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the importance of non-black thinkers to King's intellectual development. The key is not to over-emphasize their role. Much of the historiography on King's formulation of his nonviolent philosophy emphasizes the thought of Gandhi, Thoreau, and white theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Raushchenbusch. All of these thinkers did influence King. King left Morehouse College for Crozer Seminary and then Boston University and was trained in the tradition of white Christianity. His "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" is a well-documented description of how he developed his ideas of nonviolence by studying these mostly white theologians and philosophers. However, these thinkers only served to buttress beliefs that King already held. None of the ideas described in "Pilgrimage" were unique from his learned black folk religious knowledge. Indeed, King took bits and pieces from non-black thinkers as necessary, while leaving out elements that did not serve his own needs. For example, from Gandhi he borrowed methods and tactics for nonviolent direct action, and those supporting ideas that reflect the doctrine of Christian love, while leaving out the Hindu elements such as fasting. Of course, this sifting of ideas does not prove that King was not influenced by outside thinkers. Like any intellectual, King refined the knowledge he

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[22]King, Autobiography of Religious Development, 6 (275 in Warren).

learned to create his own ideology and understanding of the world, accepting those ideas that seemed to fit his understanding and criticizing or rejecting those that did not.

However, as Clayborne Carson discovered, King plagiarized portions of his dissertation.[23] In another study of King's use of language, Keith Miller discovered that large portions of "Pilgrimage" were also plagiarized. In particular, those portions of the essay in which King explained what it was he learned from these white thinkers were taken from general evaluations of these men and were not original to King.[24] This would seem to indicate that King was not being entirely truthful when he indicated that Reinhold Niebuhr and other white theologians were instrumental in his belief in a personal God and a moral order to the universe. Miller argues that King used these thinkers to appeal to white audiences, validating his movement by utilizing traditional white Protestant thinking. Black folk beliefs may not have gained support among whites; established white Christian ideas were more likely to generate a sympathetic response.[25] While these non-black sources may not have been the foundation of his ideas, they did provide the cornerstone of his appeal to white Americans.

The key to this question relates to the audience King was appealing to when he wrote "Pilgrimage" and his other published works. The majority of King's published works, and many of his

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[23]Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers Project, The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., (Berkely:University of California Press, 1992).
[24]Miller. Voice, 55.
[25]Miller. Voice, 65-7.

speeches, were directed at whites in the North and not at blacks.[26] Thus, an appeal to black folk religion would be an appeal to alien, unfamiliar ideas in this context. Therefore, King cloaked ideas he learned in the African-American folk context in the respectability of white Protestant religious thought. This suggests that white influences were not seminal in the development of his ideas. White Protestant thought served both to buttress black religious beliefs and to open the door to a wider dissemination of his ideas. Thinkers such as Gandhi and Thoreau did add elements not directly related to black folk religion, such as specific direct action tactics and the doctrine of non-cooperation. The same holds true for certain elements of the thought of white theologians; his reactions to them certainly influenced his own concepts of Christianity. But the central ideas of his philosophy did not come from white Protestant thought but from black religious thought. He cloaked these ideas in the respectability of white thinkers so that whites would consider them and be familiar with them so they would seem neither threatening nor irrelevant due to their source.

Further evidence of King's debt to black folk religion can be found in *Stride Towards Freedom*. At a critical moment in the boycott, after threats against his life, King almost broke down. As he searched his knowledge for a justification for continuing, he came up empty, and so turned to prayer. As he prayed, he felt the presence of God and reaffirmed his commitment to the movement.[27] James Cone interprets this moment as a conversion experience in the tradition of

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[26]Cone. Martin, 123.
[27]King. STF, 134-5.

black religion. Searching through his knowledge of white Protestant beliefs, he came up empty and so turned to the beliefs engrained in his soul in his early life, to the black folk religion he had unconsciously absorbed as a youth. These beliefs are what gave him the strength to continue and to lead the movement for so long. These beliefs became the basis for his philosophy of nonviolence, which was tested only a week later after his house was bombed and he had to calm an angry mob bent on retaliation. This black folk religion, and not white philosophy, became the dominant element in his thinking.[28]

Nonviolence in Action

This ideology provided the basis for King's leadership of the civil rights movement. Although his ideas developed over the course of time, his commitment to the doctrine of Christian love and nonviolence never faltered. Still, three major phases can be seen in King's implementation of this ideology over the course of his leadership. During his emergence as a major force in the civil rights movement, from Montgomery through 1962, King remained committed to nonviolence in its purest form as defined in his earliest published works. He relied upon moral persuasion to awaken the conscience of white America and believed that racial justice could be achieved through an end to segregation. After the failure of the movement in Albany, Georgia, King altered his emphasis from moral persuasion to coercion in response to the entrenched white resistance to the movement. His efforts were no longer directed mainly at

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[28]Cone. Martin. 124 ff.

moral persuasion of Southerners so much as towards forcing the federal government to intervene on behalf of blacks. King hoped that violent confrontation with whites would expose the violence of segregation to northern liberals and push the federal government to take action. At this time, he shifted his emphasis from ending segregation towards gaining the ballot as the best way to improve the condition of blacks.[29] Ending segregation did not seem to be enough; only through voting could blacks hope to alter the social system of the South. The third and final phase of King's leadership began after the Watts riot. On the heels of the signing of the sweeping Voting Rights Act of 1965, these riots demonstrated that large segments of the black population had not been affected by the movement, and that an end to legal segregation and the right to vote were not enough to create justice for blacks in the United States. During this period, King became much more radical and identified the key reasons for the oppression of blacks as economic domination and white racism.[30] He began to organize the poor, advocating sweeping governmental reforms and a wholesale transformation of the values of American society if the nation hoped to solve the race and poverty problems and avoid massive conflict. His vocal opposition to the war in Vietnam was his most public repudiation of the federal government, which he now saw as part of the problem rather than the solution.

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[29]King. Why We Can't Wait. (WWCW)(New York: Harper, 1963) 165-6; King. "Civil Right No. 1", ATOH 183.

[30]King. Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? (WDWGFH)(New York: Harper, 1967) 8-10.

Each of these phases of King's career can be explored through an analysis of the major movements that he led during that part of his career. In his early years as a leader, King led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and helped organize other movements throughout the county. The pivotal experience during this period was the failure of demonstrations in Albany, Georgia. Although not truly a failure in the sense that the movement did manage to maintain protest for an extended period in a Southern city in the face of white opposition, it was a failure in that it achieved no concrete gains and tended to discredit direct action in the eyes of the nation.[31] The chief reason for this failure was the manner in which Police Chief Laurie Pritchett of Albany handled the protesters. Having read King's *Stride Towards Freedom*, Pritchett had some understanding of King's tactics and methods. He avoided confrontation and refused to allow his men to act violently towards demonstrators in the open. He tried to avoid arresting King, and when he was forced to, he had him released on bail so that King could not bring attention to the movement through a long prison stay. When he did make arrests, he sent prisoners to jails throughout the whole area through a pre-set plan so that the movement could not fill up the jails in Albany. This meant that there was no end in sight to arrests, which took some heart out of the protesters. After seeing the dramatic influence that violent actions by whites could have on national opinion, and witnessing the lack of impact of blacks being arrested without such violence, King began to reconsider his reliance on moral persuasion. The Albany movement continued for months, with little apparent impact. The white leaders

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[31]King. WWCW 34.

of the city were just as committed to segregation after months of protest as they were before; nonviolent direct action had not affected their consciences at all.

With these facts in mind, King and his Southern Christian Leadership conference (SCLC) were careful about deciding where they would lead the next major movement. They finally chose the city of Birmingham, Alabama, not only because of the strength of segregation in this city, but because of the personality of Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene "Bull" Connor. Bull Connor was an avowed segregationist who was infamous for his violent treatment of Negroes. The SCLC planned carefully, and the movement went into Birmingham with specific goals and an organized strategy of attack.[32] Initially, Connor refused to cooperate, taking a page from Pritchett's playbook and refusing to use open violence in his handling of demonstrators. However, his restraint was short lived, and soon pictures of blacks being attacked with clubs, fire hoses, and dogs spread across national television and newspapers. King violated a state court order prohibiting further demonstrations, a calculated decision that risked white support and was the first time King disobeyed a court's ruling. "We did not take this radical step without prolonged and prayerful consideration....we had decided that if an injunction was issued to thwart our demonstrations, it would be our duty to violate it."[33] A similar court order had destroyed the Albany movement, and SCLC hoped to avoid this error again. King's arrest for this violation would also generate publicity for the movement. He

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[32]King. WWCW, 35, 47-50.

[33]King. WWCW, 68.

used his prison stay to write the "Letter from Birmingham Jail", which defended the Birmingham movement against criticism from white clergymen, and at the same time dramatized the plight of black citizens to the rest of the nation.

The Birmingham movement proved to be an enormous political success. Northern whites condemned the actions of Bull Connor and the leadership of Birmingham, and the movement gained both financial and political support. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was a direct result of the Birmingham movement, as the popular support mobilized by the movement forced President Kennedy to act on the behalf of blacks. In Birmingham, the white business community agreed to the end of segregation of public facilities, and Bull Connor lost his position as Commissioner of Public Safety. The "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" generated tremendous popular appeal and support for King and the civil rights movement by demonstrating the justice of their cause and linking civil rights for blacks with American ideals and Christian values.

However, this phase of the movement reached its apex only two years later at Selma, Alabama. Like Birmingham, this movement was carefully planned and organized to achieve maximum white liberal support and to force the federal government to act. After the usual confrontations with local leaders, the Selma movement planned a march on the state capital in Montgomery. This march was banned by the state courts, and when, in King's absence, it was attempted anyway, Alabama state police and Selma's police force attacked the marchers on the Edmund Pettis Bridge. The resulting carnage made national headlines and mobilized white support throughout the

North. Capitalizing on this, King invited white religious leaders of all denominations to Selma to lead another march the following week. However, an appeal by SCLC to remove a state injunction against the march dealt King a blow by enjoining further marches until a decision could be made in federal court, in a hearing scheduled after the date of the planned protest. Unbeknownst to his followers, King agreed to this ruling and marched only to the Pettis Bridge, where he obeyed an order to turn back. To some activists, especially those in SNCC, this seemed timid and even treasonous.[34]

The Selma movement was nevertheless an enormous success. When the Selma-Montgomery March did occur two weeks later, thousands joined in, and the final demonstration in Montgomery drew 50,000. Although Governor Wallace refused to receive their petition, the march was in many ways a celebration of victory for the movement. After the second march in Selma was turned back, a white minister had been killed in Selma, and the white North had again reacted to the violence of segregationists and had demanded action. President Lyndon Johnson went on national television and called for a sweeping civil rights bill. He ended his address by quoting the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome". In July, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law, and victory seemed to be at hand for the civil rights movement. All of its major legislative and legal goals had been achieved.

At the same time, Selma showed some of the problems the movement faced. Internal division surfaced when the Student

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[34]Cleveland Sellers. The River of No Return. (New York: Harper, 197) 118; Clayborne Carson. In Struggle. (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981) 158.

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) refused to sponsor the march on Montgomery. The SNCC was unhappy because they felt that the SCLC and King were moving in on its territory.[35] They had worked to develop resistance locally in Selma for more than a year and felt that SCLC was taking advantage of their hard and dangerous work to run away with the publicity and fund raising donations and then would leave them with the pieces after SCLC left. Once King turned back the second march, SNCC workers were even more upset. They felt betrayed by King's actions, which the more militant and radical SNCC workers believed to be too conservative. The SNCC rejected King's reliance on federal support; for too long the government had not acted for black people except when forced to, and SNCC perceived the government more as an enemy than a friend.

The Watts riot in August, 1965 also overshadowed the dramatic success of Selma. After visiting the riot torn area, King realized that his southern movement had done little or nothing for blacks in the North, who still suffered under the weight of oppression and racism. The difference between North and South was that the racism of the South was overt and easily identified by segregation; in the North, racism was more covert and was not legally recognized, but was engrained in the institutions of government and the economy. The plight of blacks in the North, where there was no legal segregation and where blacks had been able to vote for years, also showed King that even in the South blacks had only just begun the struggle for liberation. Economic deprivation and *de facto* segregation in housing and employment meant that blacks had a long way to go

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[35]Sellers, River, 118; Carson, In Struggle, 158.

before equality would become a reality. The intensity of white racism and resistance would make this task even tougher.

King's first movement in the North began in Chicago in January, 1966. The tactics that had served the movement so well in the South were immediately challenged in the North. It was difficult to organize support because the issues of contention were not so clearly delineated as was segregation or the denial of citizenship rights in the South. "Poverty" is a complex issue that defied easy solution or identification. Whites were much less likely to support a movement against poverty, because American ideals suggested that in a land of opportunity, each individual had the chance to succeed if they worked hard enough. Thus, those who were poor were at least partially to blame for their condition. Poverty also contains many internal issues, such as housing and jobs, that are difficult to mobilize a mass movement around. While the Poor People's Campaign of 1968 attempted to raise awareness of the problem of poverty, in 1966 King was unable to confront these issues in a clearly developed manner. Yet perhaps King's greatest challenge in Chicago was Mayor Richard J. Daley.

Daley had run Chicago since 1955, and was the last of the great machine bosses. Daley's political clout had been instrumental in the election of John Kennedy to the presidency in 1960, and his political power was formidable in 1966. To complicate matters, Daley had enjoyed tremendous black support in previous elections.[36] To prevent King from organizing a southern style movement in Chicago,

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[36]James Colaiaco, Martin Luther King, Jr.:Militant Apostle of Nonviolence. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) 153.

Daley moved to counter King's every action. For every issue King raised, Daley produced a committee or policy or funding to demonstrate that he was already acting. Although many of the changes he made were cosmetic, Daley managed to maintain the initiative as much as possible. Earlier agitation in Chicago had centered around the city's Superintendent of Schools, Benjamin Willis, but Daley had replaced him before King arrived. King planned to start an anti-slum campaign, but Daley unveiled his own plan to end slum conditions by the end of the decade. The mayor proposed millions of dollars in improvements to the physical structure of the ghetto and to services to ghetto residents. King criticized the city for cooperating with slum lords who allowed their buildings to fall into disrepair, and Daley announced an investigation of the Housing Inspector's office and the hiring of new inspectors. After six months in Chicago, King had been unable to mobilize blacks around any issue without Daley eliminating it. King seemed unable to successfully confront the issues facing blacks outside the South.

Fair housing soon became the focus of the campaign. In 1966, Chicago was one of the most segregated cities in the nation.[37] Although blacks comprised one-quarter of the city's population, they were concentrated in two large ghettoes, one on the West Side and another on the South Side. Attempts by blacks to move outside these area into white neighborhoods had been met with violence in the past. King proposed an agreement with the mayor to ensure fair housing in the city through a commission to monitor real estate agencies, banks and other lenders in order to be sure they obeyed

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[37]Colaiaco, Militant, 152.

fair housing laws and that the city enforced such laws. Daley angrily refused to accept such an agreement, claiming that it was unnecessary. King finally had his area of conflict.

Although a riot in July disrupted planning for this phase of the movement, King was able to begin the marches for open housing in August. During the first march, through the Southwest Side of the city, King was struck in the head by a stone. White protesters waving Confederate and Nazi flags stood along the march route. Another march in nearby Gage Park resulted in white rioting that left several police officers injured and hundreds of whites arrested. King summed up the intensity of this opposition: "The people of Mississippi ought to come to Chicago to learn how to hate".[38] The "creative tension" reached it peak when King threatened to march in neighboring Cicero after a state court forbid further marches in Cook County. Illinois Governor Otto Kerner immediately mobilized the National Guard in anticipation of violence in the volatile white suburb. Previous attempts by blacks to move into the neighborhood had resulted in bombings and riots. Daley capitulated and agreed to support statewide legislative reform, to enforce the city's own laws, and to monitor real estate agencies and banks to make certain that blacks were not unfairly excluded from predominately white neighborhoods. It seemed as if nonviolent direct action had achieved yet another victory despite the difficulties of working in the North.

However, the Chicago movement demonstrated many problems that made it difficult to practice direct action as it had worked in the South. Large urban areas restricted the effectiveness of direct action

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[38]Oates, Trumpet, 143.

tactics. Mass protests and rallies were limited in the context of a city of two million. The city tended to absorb any but the largest of demonstrations. Black neighborhoods were segregated from those of whites and the downtown area, making it more difficult to galvanize city-wide attention. Police forces in urban areas were generally larger and better trained than their southern counterparts, and better able to maintain control of demonstration situations. There was also more jail space available. Although the future would show the inability of police to quell urban riots, they were well suited to handle nonviolent demonstrators.

Perhaps an even larger problem facing King was the fact that his message, based on religious tenets and a southern cultural foundation, lost some of its familiarity and appeal with the more secularized northern urban blacks. The more modernized African-Americans of the northern cities were not impressed by the religious tone of King's ideology. Concrete issues such as jobs and housing dominated their concerns, and morality seemed to have little place in these arguments. They already had the legal rights King had fought for in the South; he had to establish a new record of an ability to deal with Northern problems. Urban blacks were also less certain in their commitment to nonviolence, perhaps because of its religious basis or because of the more impersonal nature of oppression in the cities. They were unconvinced of its ability to apply to the secular problems they faced.

The lack of an obvious enemy also hurt the movement in that it made it difficult to focus criticism on any one individual or system. The city government seemed a likely candidate, but Daley enjoyed

widespread black support, even after the movement entered the scene. The city claimed to be taking steps to rectify the problems that blacks identified, and did institute slum programs. It was one thing to make poverty the enemy; it is another to place the blame for this injustice on any particular person, organization or institution. For some blacks, particularly black power advocates and other nationalists, the enemy became white society at large. While King never quite came to this conclusion, he did begin to criticize the federal government and white society in general for its unwillingness to effect meaningful change.[39]

Watts and then the experiences of the Chicago movement forced King to re-evaluate both his conceptions of what the problems facing black people were and how they could best be confronted and solved. Obviously, the victories achieved in the South were only a step toward actualizing justice. Equally as obvious, direct action as practiced in the South was not as effective in the North in dealing with the new conception of the problem. Combined with these concerns was the development of the ideology of black power, promoted even within the mainstream civil rights movement by Stokely Carmichael of SNCC. King gradually grew more radical during the last three years of his life, as the continued oppression of African-Americans and the militance of some blacks drove him further from his initial conceptions of what needed to be done. King realized that for blacks to share equally in the benefits of American life, they needed to develop group power. This empowerment would have to encompass the economic, political and social spheres of life if

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[39]King, WDWGFH 8.

African-Americans were to be equal. This realization included the recognition that whites in general, and the federal government in particular, would be for the most part unwilling to assist in this empowerment.[40] A whole new conception of the civil rights movement was needed. As Bayard Rustin said, "The civil rights movement is evolving from a protest movement into a full fledged social movement".[41] No longer content with calling for reform of specific inequities, such as segregation, King began to focus on a broader critique of society. Recognizing that change would not be easily achieved, he advocated a complete transformation of the values of society. Despite these vast changes in focus, the vital root of his ideology continued to be a commitment to nonviolence and Christian love. While his appeals and arguments lost some of their religious tint after he entered the North, this seems to be more a function of his audience than a change in his own thinking. Even as he called for power, he insisted that it be linked with love in the cause of justice. Before a broader discussion of this radical King can be attempted, it is necessary to look at one of the elements that forced him to re-evaluate his position: Stokely Carmichael and the rise of "black power" within his own movement.

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[40]King, WDWGFH, 5, 8.

[41]Bayard Rustin. "From Protest to Politics- The Future of the Civil Rights Movement", Commentary, XXXIX (Feb. 1965) 25.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL

Stokely Carmichael began his career as a civil rights leader as a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1961. As he moved through this organization, advancing from volunteer to field secretary and eventually to Chairman, he underwent a radicalization that paralleled the development of SNCC as a whole. Carmichael popularized the slogan "Black Power" on the Meredith march in central Mississippi in 1966. As the primary and most vocal exponent of black power within the mainstream civil rights movement, Carmichael attempted to define this ideology in his 1967 work *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, written in collaboration with political scientist Charles Hamilton. In evaluating the pre-black power Stokely Carmichael, it is useful to study the development of SNCC at the same time. While Martin Luther King was much more an individual figure, defining the SCLC by his actions, Carmichael was a more organizational figure, defined by his experiences in SNCC.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, founded as a loose organization to facilitate cooperation among student movements throughout the South, originally had a heavily religious tendency linked to its deep commitment to nonviolent direct action as a means of social change. By 1966, however, SNCC was a major civil rights organization, committed to voter registration and the development of "black power". Its members had eschewed

nonviolence even as a tactic, and had expelled whites from their organization. Indeed, SNCC was by far the most militant and radical of the major civil rights organizations. As SNCC workers experienced the reaction of whites to their efforts to empower black people, they created their own ideology of social protest and criticism. While SNCC had always been on the leading edge of militancy, philosophically the shift to black power was a change from its earlier involvement in the movement.

An example of the course of this change can be seen in the experience of Stokely Carmichael. Although not a field secretary of SNCC until 1964, Carmichael was active in SNCC from 1961. Through his experiences as a Freedom Rider, an organizer in Mississippi, and later director of an alternative political structure in Alabama, Carmichael lived the experiences that would radicalize SNCC. Ambivalent about the floater-hard-liner debate between those favoring greater centralization and those supporting a looser organization for SNCC, Carmichael underwent the identity crisis that afflicted the organization after Freedom Summer. He chose the trend towards structure to increase the effectiveness of SNCC as an organization for the mobilization and empowerment of black people. Elected Chairman in 1966, he led the move to the slogan Black Power that split the civil rights coalition. While Carmichael was a leader in the radicalizing process, this radicalization was not a product of Carmichael, but rather he was a product of it.

Beginnings

Born in the West Indies in 1941, Carmichael moved to the United States in 1952. New York City was very different from his native Trinidad. There, although whites maintained true control of the island, blacks did hold some positions of power, including visible ones such as police officers or local officials. In Harlem, this was not the case. His father was a hardworking man who died young trying to prove that a black man could make it in a white man's world.[42] The family lived in a white neighborhood in the Bronx by the time Stokely entered high school, and he attended the elite Bronx High School of Science. When he first heard of the Negro college student sit in movement, he was skeptical. According to a 1966 *Ebony* article, he felt that "niggers would do anything to get their names in the paper". Yet within two weeks he was involved in a sympathy picket, although only a high school student. [43] His experience led him to attend Howard University in Washington, DC. rather than a Northern white institution. At Howard, he joined the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), an organization affiliated with SNCC. His involvement with NAG led him to participate in the 1961 Freedom Rides.

As Negro college student protest swept the South, Ella Baker of the Southern Christian Leadership conference (SCLC), thought it important that these diverse groups of students keep in contact in order to share experiences and maintain the momentum of the movement. In April 1960 in Raleigh, North Carolina, she organized a conference for the students under the auspices of SCLC in order to

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[42]Ebony article reprinted in SNCC papers, AI 49.
[43]Ebony article reprinted in SNCC papers, AI 49.

facilitate the exchange of ideas. The students involved decided to create an autonomous organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to coordinate efforts and facilitate communication. From this limited beginning, SNCC developed into a major civil rights organization in its own right.

The SNCC emphasized nonviolent direct action as a means of social change. A deep commitment to nonviolence, not only as a tactic but as a way of life, was very important to SNCC at this time. In its statement of purpose, SNCC's founders stated:

> We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows in the Judeo-Christian traditions seeks a social order of justice permeated by love. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step towards such a society.
> Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear;love transforms hate....The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality.[44]

Thus, although extremely militant, and radical in the context of the day, SNCC was philosophically moderate for the most part, and fit well into the other civil rights organizations. At this point, the most influential group within SNCC came out of Nashville. Led by James Lawson, such important figures as Diane Nash, Marion Barry, and John Lewis all came out of the Nashville group. Their commitment to nonviolence was complete, and their religiosity is evidenced in that both Lawson and Lewis were theology students. Marion Barry was elected the first chairman of SNCC in May 1960.

The focus on direct action made SNCC the most militant of all civil rights organizations. Thus, SNCC forged a reputation, and a self-image, as the leading edge of the movement. This appealed to the

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[44]Carson, Struggle, 27.

militant elements of the black community, assuring that those seeking radical change would seek out SNCC. The concentration on direct action also led to the brutal experiences that made SNCC activists question their faith in the Federal government, American society, and the viability of nonviolence.

At the time of the Freedom Rides, SNCC was facing one of its first important philosophical and policy debates. One group within SNCC favored direct action as the best means of social protest, both because of its success and because of their commitment to the philosophy of nonviolence, with its focus on converting the oppressor through an appeal to conscience. This group pointed to the success of nonviolent direct action, evidenced in the Freedom Rides and the sit-ins, to support their case, as well as the morality of this method. This group was the more militant, but was more conservative philosophically.

Another group within SNCC favored voter registration as the best way to further the struggle for equality. They argued that the results of direct action were limited and that while victories had occurred, the real battle involved political representation and power. The success of nonviolent direct action also worked against it- there seemed to be little more that could be accomplished with this method. While in some ways this group was less militant than the direct action faction, in that they advocated less militant means of achieving their ends, and because the Federal government also advocated voter registration as a way to divert attention from the Civil Rights movement, in some ways the group was more radical. If their means were moderate, their end, political power for black

people, was radical in its challenge to the institutions of the South. By identifying the real problem as the ballot, and not segregation, SNCC moved from social to political challenge. This was not in itself more radical, but was certainly more threatening to Southern whites. The focus on voter registration also held the roots of SNCC's future development as a radical organization: the development of local leadership, the brutality involved in voter registration, and the realization that even the ballot was not enough and that the government would provide limited assistance.

The conflict was resolved by doing both: one faction of SNCC emphasized direct action and another voter registration. When it became apparent that the two methods were often linked in the reality of the struggle despite their theoretical differences, the potential split within SNCC was healed.

This was the SNCC that Stokely Carmichael entered in 1961. Although not one of the original Freedom Riders, Carmichael answered SNCC's call for activists to test the Supreme Court's ruling on the illegality of segregation in facilities for interstate transportation. After his arrest in Jackson, Mississippi, Carmichael served forty-nine days in Parchman Penitentiary. He apparently was quite a rabble rouser in the prison; when guards tried to take his mattress as punishment for singing freedom songs, he refused to let go of it despite being dragged out of his cell and beaten. Howard Zinn suggests that the warden breathed a sigh of relief when he was finally released.[45]

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[45]Howard Zinn. The New Abolitionists. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965 edition) 40.

Carmichael in many ways demonstrates the character of SNCC at this time. Using nonviolent direct action, he was involved in desegregation of public facilities. After his arrest, he refused bail and served his sentence in prison as part of SNCC's commitment to non-cooperation with the system. Once in prison, he joined in freedom songs and disrupted the prison with his refusal to accept the role expected of blacks at the time, while retaining his nonviolent ethic. Yet even at this time, Carmichael was not wholly in tune with the religious brand of militancy favored by many SNCC members. When John Lewis led prayers in prison, Carmichael and other NAG members who had been arrested that summer refused to participate.[46]

After his release, Carmichael returned to Howard and was active in NAG. Cleveland Sellers, who entered Howard in 1962, remembers Carmichael's apartment as the group's unofficial headquarters.[47] The NAG was active in picketing and desegregating facilities in the nation's capital. One difference between SNCC and NAG, suggested by Mary King, was that as Northern college students, NAG members were often more theoretically sophisticated than other SNCC members, and that later this allowed them to wield a disproportionate influence within SNCC.[48] Other differences from SNCC included a socialistic tendency and a greater emphasis on economic issues, even as early as 1963. These elements would prove important in Carmichael's formulation of black power.

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[46]Carson, In Struggle 38.

[47]Sellers, River, 59.

[48]Mary King. Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. (New York: William Morrow, 1987) 313.

Radicalization: Freedom Summer

Carmichael continued his work with SNCC over the summers of his years at Howard. In 1962 and 1963 he was involved in voter registration in Mississippi, honing his skills as an organizer. After graduating from Howard in 1964 with a degree in Philosophy, he joined SNCC full time for Freedom Summer. This ambitious project, the brainchild of Bob Moses, hoped to dramatize the plight of southern blacks in relation to voting rights. SNCC planned to register blacks in the Mississipi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and elect delegates to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City as an alternative to the white controlled state party delegation. This protest vote would focus attention on the disenfranchisement of African-Americans in the South, and some in SNCC even hoped to actually unseat the white Mississippi delegates. To ensure maximum exposure, large numbers of northern white students were brought in to help in the registration process. This massive effort, and its eventual failure, served both to define SNCC's approach to organizing and to forge it into the most radical mainstream civil rights organization. In the summer project, Carmichael was named District Director of the Second Congressional District, headquartered in Greenwood, Mississippi.

In some ways one can see the development of SNCC in this period encapsulated through Carmichael's career. He started out desegregating public facilities through nonviolent direct action. As the intense religiosity of earlier SNCC members began to fade, a more political bent took hold of the organization, symbolized by the

conflict between proponents of direct action and voter registration. This is the time when Carmichael joined the organization. The Freedom Rides both politicized SNCC and attracted radical or militant segments of the black community, such as Carmichael and his companions from NAG. Early experiences in voter registration convinced SNCC workers of the importance of this endeavor to the movement, and began the development of the legendary organizing skills of SNCC field secretaries. As a District Director in Freedom Summer, Carmichael's refusal to accept whites into his district reflected the ambivalence within SNCC over the use of white volunteers. Many in SNCC feared interracial action in the South might generate even greater local hostility, increasing the danger for all involved. They also feared the negative influence whites might exert on local blacks by perpetuating tendencies of deference within the black community. Carmichael's recruitment of an all-black staff foreshadows his later emphasis on the need for blacks to develop and lead their own organizations without white interference. Only Bob Moses' assurances of the importance of white participation in terms of media attention convinced SNCC of the need of this participation. Carmichael's turn to full-time membership in SNCC coincided with the influx of NAG members and other militant blacks who were more theoretically sophisticated than their southern counterparts. Thus, it is possible to see the growing changes within SNCC: voter registration phased out direct action, northern students, and a more politicized group of activists such as James Forman entered the movement, and discussions over the role of whites began.

SNCC was still committed to nonviolence, although by this time it was seen more as a tactic than a way of life.[49] Integration continued to be its main goal. SNCC concentrated its actions at developing local leadership that could continue the struggle after SNCC left the area. By being program rather than leadership oriented, SNCC differed from SCLC and Dr. King because they did not come to an area to lead the movement themselves, but raised awareness among local blacks so that they could lead their own movement.[50] SNCC never developed a rigid ideology to support their organizing; field secretaries worked within the local situation. "Let the people decide" was the loose rule for their work. Ella Baker noted that this worked within SNCC as well.[51] Decisions were made by consensus, through long and intense discussion in which all members were given an opportunity to express their opinion. This early vision of participatory democracy was grounded in a pure vision of what American democracy should be.[52] This idealism about American society and democracy is an important characteristic of SNCC at this time. The students believed that if they demonstrated the failure to live up to the promise of democracy, the society and the government would move to correct this. Thus, they worked to register voters and to develop the Freedom Democratic Party: SNCC believed in the system and attempted to work within it by calling on America to live up to its ideals.

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[49]James Forman. The Making of Black Revolutionaries. (New York: MacMillan, 1972) 158.

[50]Forman. Revolutionaries 244.

[51]Carson, In Struggle 20.

[52]King, Freedom Song 281.

Yet by the time of the Atlantic City challenge, most SNCC staff members doubted the possibility of success. Their faith in American democracy had been shaken by their experiences in the South and would be destroyed by the actions of the President and white liberals at the convention. The failure of the American public to respond to the needs of blacks convinced SNCC that the values of the society themselves had to be questioned. When public reaction only reflected SNCC's moral outrage when mass brutalization occurred, such as in Birmingham, or when whites were involved, such as in the Freedom Summer, SNCC began to question their commitment to American ideals. The organization brought in white students to increase awareness, but did so bitterly at the knowledge that black suffering was not enough to awaken America. This belief was confirmed when two bodies were discovered while searching for the Freedom Summer volunteers, sparking media interest, but turned out to be local blacks and thus not worthy of national coverage.[53]

Disappointment with the government's actions was another factor in the radicalization of SNCC. Initially, SNCC counted on government cooperation with their efforts. Yet after the Freedom Rides yielded only reluctant federal action, and voter registration protection was nonexistent, and when FBI agents did nothing but take notes when blacks were beaten and arrested, SNCC's workers grew disillusioned. When three SNCC field secretaries in Americus, Georgia were charged with inciting to insurrection, a capital crime, and the government did nothing, SNCC grew more hostile. After the indictment by the Justice Department of SNCC workers involved in

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[53]Doug McAdam, Freedom Summer, (New York: Oxford, 1988) 103

picketing a store owned by a man who happened to be on a federal grand jury, SNCC became incensed. Why was it that the federal government could do nothing to protect civil rights workers but could indict them so easily? John Lewis's unedited text at the March on Washington asked "Which side is the government on?"[54] . SNCC truly wondered due to the reticence of the Federal government to become involved in enforcing the law and protecting the rights of black citizens.

Local blacks also contributed to the change within SNCC. Mary King writes that locals fueled the movement: an organizer could not create a movement in a community unless the will existed within the community already.[55] Many of these locals were more militant than the SNCC organizers. They had lived their entire lives under the conditions SNCC now encountered for the first time, and held no misconceptions about ideal democracy or federal assistance. They had no commitment to nonviolence and often carried guns in self-defense. One local farmer told Stokely Carmichael "if you turn the other cheek, you get handed half of what you're sitting on".[56] Fannie Lou Hamer, a share cropper who became a member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and a field secretary of SNCC, was another local black who influenced SNCC workers who were inspired by the lengths to which blacks were willing to go and the risks they were willing to take for the movement. These local influences pushed SNCC workers to transcend their own conceptions of the struggle.

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[54]Text of John Lewis's speech to the March on Washington, SNCC papers, A I 42.
[55]King, Freedom Song 91.
[56]Ebony , July 1966. Reproduced by SNCC in SNCC papers, A I 49.

Because SNCC concentrated its field work in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi: the Deep South; they faced incredible brutality and isolation. Although they argued that by breaking the toughest nut, the rest of the South would come apart easier, the question became one of who would crack first. By working in such areas, SNCC worked away from the other civil rights organizations. While this helped in developing an *esprit de corps* of being the toughest and most militant civil rights organization, it also meant that they were isolated from the resources and support of these groups and that they were exposed to incredible brutality. Beatings and arrests without end, and often without apparent result, raised questions about tactics, goals and ideals.

The Freedom Summer campaign brought all of these matters to a head. Although successful in raising awareness, both among blacks and whites, and in organizing black Mississippians, the voter registration aspect of the project was not overwhelmingly successful.[57] In terms of the radicalization of SNCC, it was a watershed. Cleveland Sellers described the experience as the "longest nightmare I ever had".[58] Three workers were killed at the outset, but this was only the beginning of the brutality. Beatings, arrests, bombings and shootings occurred daily. Harassment by police and other whites was intense. Although white involvement did arouse national awareness, it was a bitter pill to SNCC that these white students could create more attention in three months than SNCC could get in three years. Black fears about white influences on the

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[57]Carson, In Struggle 117. Only 1600 blacks were registered, although 80000 registered for MFDP.
[58]Sellers, River 94.

black community were realized to some extent, and tensions developed.[59] The rejection of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) dispelled the notion that either the President or white liberals held the interests of blacks at heart and completed this process of radicalization within SNCC. All of their efforts to work within the system had been dismissed.

The Freedom Summer challenged SNCC's identity. Integration, coalition, cooperation, morality, and democratic ideals were now open to question as goals. What role would SNCC play in changing the society or forcing it to live up to its professed values? What was the ideal society? Was SNCC supposed to lead the change to this society, or was it a model for it? What was the role of whites? What was the role of the organizer, or the leader? What structure, if any, should SNCC take as an organization to lead the struggle in this new direction? All of these question were raised by the experiences of the previous three years.[60]

Identity Crisis: The Search for Ideology

This soul searching came at a time when SNCC was ill prepared to handle it. SNCC veterans were suffering from battle fatigue from their work over the previous years but especially the previous summer. An influx of new members, mostly white, raised questions about structure and created problems in rule by consensus. The ideal of a circle of trust was challenged by so many new members, by the tensions between whites and blacks, and by the growth of faction

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[59]See Sara Evans Personal Politics for a fuller discussion of this tension, especially between white and black women.
[60]Forman, Revolutionaries, 448ff.

within the organization. Because the MFDP challenge failed, the direction of the movement was in question. Instead of conceiving of the problem being one of how to mobilize federal intervention and white support, a new idea had to be created. The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act also meant that many SNCC goals were realized and that organizing would take on a new character. Rather than raise awareness, SNCC needed to work for more concrete gains in its work.

These questions resulted in an acrimonious debate within the organization. A rift developed between those identified as "floaters" and the so-called "hard-liners". The floaters were also called "Freedom high"; they were considered to lack discipline and be more concerned with exploring issues of personal freedom than with pushing the struggle into more concrete gains. They advocated following one's conscience, integration, and feared leadership and structure as coercive and oppressive forces. Hard-liners criticized them for having "local-people-itis"; they still held completely to a belief in local leadership to the extent that they rejected the idea of SNCC's role being to lead and shape the direction of the struggle. The hard-liners exhibited a strong nationalistic tendency, saw a need for discipline and organization, and felt that SNCC must increase its leadership role in the black community.[61]

Up to this point in its history, SNCC had created its own ideology through experience. Ideology had never been rigidly defined as such, but had rather been of the tendency to accept what worked within the concept of a commitment to democracy. SNCC

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[61]Sellers. River. 130; Forman Revolutionaries. 422.

found its own ideology; its ideas came from action.[62] However, as it searched for answers in this identity crisis, SNCC turned to outsiders. Mary King first read Frantz Fanon in 1963; Cleveland Sellers puts his influence in late 1966. Most likely he became important to SNCC's discourse sometime in 1965.[63] Malcolm X certainly influenced SNCC a great deal at this point, especially in terms of his cultural nationalism. Pride in blackness became important to SNCC's program in this time, and of course his insistence on self-defense gained adherents within SNCC as well. Pan-Africanism, and the international dimensions of the black struggle, entered SNCC's awareness to a greater extent during this period. Of course, all of these elements had existed within SNCC prior to the influence of Malcolm X, and in many ways he simply affirmed SNCC thinking. But at this point in its history, SNCC began to accentuate these ideas in large part because of their admiration for Malcolm's rejection of white values.

Stokely Carmichael's role in this identity crisis was an ambivalent one. Although identified with the NAG group, which was seen as theoretically sophisticated and committed to shifting the struggle to more concrete problems such as economic domination, Carmichael in many ways identified with the floater faction. While Cleveland Sellers, his good friend from NAG, was a leader of the hard-liners, Courtland Cox, another NAG member, was a leader of the floaters. In the course of grappling with these issues, SNCC held a

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[62]King, Freedom Song. 283. Also see Zinn, 273 and Carson 155.

[63]King's early reading of Fanon, which first appeared in the US in 1963, seems to be prior to its widespread familiarity in SNCC. Sellers later date seems to be too late in that Carmichael's 1967 work Black Power, as well as his speeches of the time, reflect a familiarity with Fanon, especially the colonial analogy. Thus, a middle date, during or immediately following the resolution of the identity crisis, seems most likely.

conference at Waveland, Mississippi, at which it was decided to pursue the development of alternative institutions for black people as the best means of continuing the struggle. At this point, Carmichael was still unsure of his own position on the factional debate, which this decision did not solve. However, soon thereafter, Carmichael adopted the hard-liner perception of the struggle, probably because of the argument that only increased structure and discipline would allow SNCC to remain an effective agent of change for the black community.[64] By the end of 1965, SNCC had been purged of floaters through firings and resignations, and the factional debate was effectively ended, albeit with rancor.[65]

The Birth of Black Power

The development of alternative institutions was an important step in SNCC's radicalization. It symbolized the change that had occurred within the organization, as it rejected the hope for assistance from liberals and the federal government and lost faith in the American ideals that had been so important to SNCC's development. SNCC's changing goals also can be seen; rather than integration into mainstream American society, SNCC rejected the values of that society and attempted to create institutions to serve black people that could challenge white dominance. More concrete gains such as economic and political power replaced the earlier emphasis on desegregation and the ballot. This rejection of white values and acceptance of the need for alternative avenues for black

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[64]Carson, In Struggle 155.
[65]Sellers, River 145-6.

people was not entirely new; the Freedom Schools of Mississippi Summer were the beginning of replacing corrupt institutions with ones that served the needs of blacks. SNCC chose Lowndes County Alabama as the sight of their first large scale attempt to build an alternative political structure and to gain power for black people. And they chose Stokely Carmichael to lead it.

Carmichael entered Lowndes County in March 1965. With the resignations of such organizers as Bob Moses and Charles Sherrod, he was probably SNCC's best remaining organizer. His tremendous success in creating the Lowndes County Freedom Organization(LCFO), which nearly defeated the established Democratic party in a county that was 80% black with no registered African-American voters when he arrived, propelled him to SNCC's chairmanship in 1966. It also radicalized Carmichael and SNCC to the point that enabled them to advocate Black Power as the future of the black struggle for liberation.

The Lowndes County project was very exciting for SNCC. Like Freedom Summer, it involved registering black voters and holding alternative party actions like a convention. However, in the Lowndes County case, the SNCC party was supported by real voters as federal registrars entered the county to enforce the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Instead of relying on the goodwill of whites to allow them a share of power, the LCFO depended upon black voters to bring them power. Despite intense white resistance, SNCC registered enough black voters to outnumber whites. The LCFO, whose symbol was the black panther, organized primaries, and at the party convention, the people created their own platform through the process of participatory

democracy. Carmichael and SNCC had high hopes for the success of the party. [66] Despite a high turnout by black voters, the presence of black poll watchers and government supervision, the LCFO did not win a single position in the county government. Local plantation owners had brought their tenants en masse and had made sure they voted for white candidates through intimidation and threats. The economic vulnerability of the majority of southern blacks had enabled the whites to retain their power.

Still, SNCC had learned a valuable lesson. The alternative institution had created great excitement and strength within the black community. It was possible for blacks to develop their own arenas of power and to challenge white authority. SNCC had also learned that despite their best efforts, the problem of black economic exploitation needed to be addressed before true power could be developed. This type of pressure had been exerted before, and SNCC was already aware that one of the most difficult problems blacks faced was economics.[67] The experience of the LCFO merely accentuated this. This experience, particularly for Carmichael, created the awareness of the true need for black power.

John Lewis had argued of the need for black power as early as 1963. In the unedited text of his address at the March on Washington he had called for the development of means of power outside of the government.[68] The MFDP had been an attempt to challenge the white power structure and to give not only

[66]Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power. (New York: Random House, 1967)115.
[67]Sellers, River 130.
[68]Text of Lewis Speech, SNCC Papers, A I 42.

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representation but power to black people. In many ways, the LCFO was the summation of SNCC experiences in the South. Carmichael developed local leadership, let the people decide the direction of the party, concentrated on political power rather than desegregation, and worked to create a black organization that would make concrete changes in the situation of black people. Although the LCFO did not win the election, it did galvanize the black community and prepared them for future challenges to white control.

In 1966, Carmichael was elected Chairman of SNCC in a controversial election. Although John Lewis was elected on the first ballot, some questioned whether Lewis reflected the attitudes of the organization. His commitment to nonviolence and integration were at odds with the trends within SNCC that favored the development of alternative institutions and rejected nonviolence even as a tactic in some cases. Lewis was asked to resign so that a new election could be held; when he did so, Carmichael was elected. His experiences in Lowndes County were much more reflective of the radicalization of goals and ideology that had taken place within SNCC since Lewis's first election in 1963.

This long process of radicalization, culminating in the experience of Lowndes County, created the ideology of black power. Although when originally expressed, black power was more slogan than program, it was not simply "a pathetic cry of anguish, without forethought or analysis" as Nathan Wright claimed.[69] Indeed, although it advocated no specific program, black power did identify the ideology SNCC had created through its experiences as a civil

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[69]Nathan Wright, Black Power and Urban Unrest, (New York: 1967) 2.

rights organization. The analysis behind the slogan came from five years of protesting, organizing, being arrested, experiencing disappointment with white liberals and the federal government, and seeing white America ignore the problems of its black citizens. For Carmichael, it was the product of 27 arrests, numerous beatings, Parchman Penitentiary, Cambridge, Greenwood, and Lowndes County. But it was not only Stokely Carmichael. It was SNCC. In June 1966, SNCC was an organization dedicated to developing power for black people.

Even in the definitions of Black Power that he undertook throughout 1966-7, Carmichael never truly strayed from SNCC policy or attitudes as evidenced by the organization's experiences. The need to develop black institutions and organizations had been recognized by SNCC in 1965 when they sent Carmichael to Lowndes County. SNCC had rejected coalition with white liberals and the federal government since the Atlantic City experience. The importance of creating black economic power was evidenced by the problems of voter registration in Mississippi as well as by the experience of the LCFO. Whites had been expelled from SNCC in December, 1966, after the introduction of the Black Power slogan but before Carmichael identified separatism as a key to black power. While Carmichael expanded on all of these ideas, their roots could be found within the experience of SNCC.

These were the experiences that shaped Stokely Carmichael's perception of the problems facing black people. Although after he left the chairmanship of SNCC in 1967, his association with the organization diminished in importance in terms of its influence on his

thinking, his earlier experiences in the organization were vital in shaping his approach to the issue of liberation. The unwillingness of even white liberals to make significant concessions to black demands for meaningful power, and the powerlessness of blacks in the face of white economic exploitation drove him to reject integration and the moral emphasis of nonviolence. Instead, he began to concentrate on the empowerment of black people through separatism and the development of political, economic, and social strength.

Carmichael therefore entered the discussions of empowerment within the civil rights movement after 1966 with a greater degree of sophistication than King. He had actively participated in attempts to empower African-Americans politically through alternative institutions and had participated in the development of black power as an ideology within SNCC before that slogan had been popularized and linked to his name. While King was reacting to many of the same issues that had driven Carmichael and SNCC to challenge the values of American society and to seek power for black people, he was doing so after Carmichael had refined his thinking. Thus, entering the discussion, Carmichael had a more sophisticated conception of what black power meant. King might have eventually surpassed Carmichael in terms of concrete programs, but in 1966 he was trying to catch up with the new situation, while Carmichael was helping to define it. Carmichael's ideas emphasized distrust of whites, the development of alternative institutions for blacks, and the need for blacks to develop sources of power that were separate and independent of whites. These are the central ideas that guided his development of black power as an ideology after 1966, at a time

when discussions of empowerment began to dominate the national discourse on civil rights.

THEORIES OF EMPOWERMENT

Thus, we see the divergent ideologies which King and Carmichael brought to the discussion of empowerment in 1966. King was in the process of radicalization, as he recognized the entrenched nature of racism in the United States, and the difficulty of the struggle ahead. He had also begun to alter his conception of the problems facing African-Americans by placing emphasis on their complex economic problems, and was in the process of identifying the elimination of poverty and its social ills as the key to black liberation. Even with these changes however, he remained committed to nonviolent direct action as the best way to end injustice. Carmichael, on the other hand, had already rejected integration as a goal and instead focused on developing separate black institutions. Alternative structures, such as the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, were one example of the direction his thinking was taking. He also recognized that the economic powerlessness of blacks also had to be confronted in order for African-American political power to develop into an effective force.

The key to analyzing the differences between these ideologies is to grasp their concepts of empowerment. King defined power as "the ability to achieve purpose". This ability had to be linked with love if it is to be moral power, which is love implementing the demands of justice.[70] If power was not tempered with love, only

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[70]King, WDWGFH, 37.

immoral uses could result. Rather than working for justice, immoral power became corrupted and was a tool of oppression. The problem in the United States was that immoral power too often faced powerless morality, resulting in domination and the perversion of virtue. The only way to bring justice to society was for power to be shared so that immoral whites could not use it to dominate the black minority.[71]

This concept of power reflects King's continued commitment to morality and religiously oriented values. Empowerment by itself was not enough for African-Americans; rather, they had to link power to Christian values. This meant that for King, the goal of African-Americans could not be power alone, but justice. The early civil rights movement emphasized that its true goal was not simply a seat on the bus or at the hamburger counter, but justice; King continued to hold that idea although the stakes were different and the strategy had changed. This allegiance to a higher cause - Christian values - meant that blacks must use moral means to achieve their goals. Even though the problems he was addressing, such as poverty and racism, were more subtle than the blatant segregation of the South, King remained committed to the fundamental ideas that formed the foundation of nonviolence.

This is evident in the manner in which King sought power. First, he demanded government assistance to equalize the disparities blacks faced. He called on the President and Congress to implement justice by altering the economic and political structures that

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[71]King, WDWGFH, 37.

rendered blacks powerless and kept them in an inferior status.[72] At the same time, he was urging blacks to develop their own avenues of power without government assistance. Operation Breadbasket, a program supporting black economic growth, and the Chicago movement are two examples of this kind of organizing. Blacks demanded a share of power and did so through moral means of persuasion and coercion. They demanded a just share of power, not simply power itself. Although African-Americans were expected to take action and face resistance in this endeavor, the eventual cooperation of whites was also expected. King recognized that the movement could no longer count on a government of goodwill after 1965, and that only massive resistance and coercion could force the government to act as he desired, but he still saw government action as the best way to improve the condition of blacks.[73] His ultimate goal was a just society; power was the means to obtain this.

Stokely Carmichael had a different conception of power, in terms of its definition, goals and realization. Carmichael defined power as self-definition.[74] "Black power is...a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations, and to support these organizations".[75] African-Americans had to have this control over their own conceptions and organizations before they could even hope to enter white society on an equal basis. Without internal strength, manifested in self-definition and unity, blacks

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[72]King, WDWGFH, 21,34; "Showdown for Nonviolence", ATOH 65-8.
[73]Richard Lentz. Symbols, The News Magazines, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990) 292.
[74]Carmichael, Black Power, 35-6.
[75]Carmichael, Black Power 44.

would be unable to effectively challenge white oppression. To Carmichael, power was a strictly material tool to improve the economic, political and social position of African-Americans. Morality was not at issue, nor was justice, except in the more general idea that blacks deserved better treatment. The true issue was physical power- the ability to act from a position of strength in social relations, rather than from weakness. Black power meant that blacks could resist domination by whites by drawing upon their own strength rather than relying upon the often fickle support of white liberals. The ability to force equality is at the heart of Carmichael's thinking.

This difference in how power is conceived is evident in how Carmichael hoped to use and obtain it. He desired to even the strength of blacks in all power relationships with whites. To create this strength, unity was essential. This unity in arenas of power would enable African-Americans to develop their own separate strengths apart from white interference. This development of power was therefore not linked to white assistance at either the individual or institutional level. Instead, blacks had to develop their own communities and organizations. Once this was accomplished, they could re-enter the broader society and force whites to treat them as equals on all levels. Whites would only do so if they were forced to by strength and power. From a position of weakness or dependency, blacks could never hope to gain anything.[76]

Carmichael also emphasized the right to self-defense as a vital component to black power. Blacks had to "build a power base so

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[76]Carmichael, Black Power 46, 76.

strong, it would bring America to its knees any time it messed with [blacks]". Only if whites knew that blacks would and could defend themselves would they respect the rights of African-Americans. King objected to any insinuation that blacks should resort to violence, arguing that it was not only immoral but impractical. He recognized the right to self-defense; however, he argued that nonviolent demonstrators must forego this right if they wished to succeed in changing the society. The line between defensive and aggressive violence was thin enough that organizing a protest around the right to self-defense was both provocative and unlikely to generate white support.[77] Carmichael rejected the notion that blacks could be "whipped into power"; he argued that nonviolence was a tactic blacks could not afford and whites did not deserve.[78] This issue presented an enormous gulf between the strategies of the two leaders.

Thus, a vast difference between King and Carmichael exists concerning empowerment. They did not agree on the definition, goals or means to power. King emphasized morality in all of these areas; to Carmichael power was a goal in itself. White cooperation was essential to King's conception of power, while for Carmichael it was a dangerous hindrance. Blacks had to develop their own sources of power if it was to be effective in the struggle for liberation. A more cooperative vision of society drove King's thinking, while Carmichael envisioned confrontation and amoral power relations as the reality. Further differences, as well as some similarities can be seen more

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[77]King, WDWGFH 27.

[78]Carmichael, Black Power 51.

clearly by a closer examination of specific areas of power: economics, politics and social or cultural concerns.

Economics

As early as 1963, Martin Luther King began placing great emphasis on economic concerns confronting African-Americans. His *Why We Can't Wait* used economic problems as a key example of why blacks could not wait for change, and also as an example of the structural inequities facing them in their struggle for equality. King first proposed his "Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged" in *Why We Can't Wait*. This program criticized the structural deficiencies of the capitalist system, specifically the manner in which blacks and other lower class groups were often maintained as a ready cheap labor force by the large industries. He urged the federal government to guarantee certain economic rights for all Americans, but specifically the poor, in order to eliminate the contradiction of poverty in the midst of plenty. Among the goals he suggested were a guarantee of full employment so that all those who desired to work could. He also urged an improvement to the social work apparatus to eliminate non-monetary problems, from child care to education to the elimination of a welfare system that bred dependency. To force the government to act on these demands, he urged poor blacks and whites to unite and through coalition work for economic equality.[79]

Where Do We Go From Here (1966) also placed great emphasis on the need for alterations in the economic structure. King heavily criticized the United States' economic structure, which benefited from

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[79]King, <u>WWCW</u>, 157-8.

the economic subordination of some groups into menial low paying jobs. These jobs not only kept their holders in a dependent economic status, but demeaned them psychologically. At the same time, King criticized the government's anti-poverty policies. Instead of lifting people out of poverty, these programs too often held them at the threshold of poverty without ameliorating its symptoms or causes. In order to eradicate poverty, King estimated that $1 trillion would be needed to fund new programs that met the needs of poor people.[80]

At this point in his career as a civil rights leader, King was not focused exclusively on the needs of African-Americans. His calls for change on the economic front argued the need to help all poor people, not just blacks.[81] Although the black community might need a higher level of assistance due to the racism that exacerbated their exploitation, they were not alone in the need for change. This focus led to the development of the planned Poor People's Campaign (PPC), which took place after King's assassination. Organized as a means to dramatize the plight of the nation's poor and to push for new legislation to alleviate their situation, the PPC went far beyond issues of race alone. King planned on using this campaign to force the government to create radical new programs to re-distribute income and respond to the needs of poor people. It included provisions for housing, education and job reform on a coordinated level to ameliorate the problems of poverty. At the same time, it proposed a radical solution to the material needs of poor people: a guaranteed income. This proposal was meant as an alternative to full

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[80]King, WDWGFH, 6, 7.
[81]King, WDWGFH 132.

employment. It was meant to guarantee a decent standard of living in relation to the rest of society, and not merely provide the poor with the bare minimum necessary to survive. Once an end to poverty was achieved, other problems such as housing and crime would most likely also be affected. Although King used some capitalistic arguments to promote his idea, suggesting that a guaranteed income would create more consumers and thus further economic prosperity, his main line of argument was moral. "The curse of poverty has no place in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism....The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty".[82]

Another program instituted by King's SCLC was Operation Breadbasket, which sought to create a greater black economic stake in their own communities. This program urged companies that operated in the ghetto to employ local residents and to utilize black products and services. If companies refused to conform their behavior to what the SCLC thought reasonable, boycotts could result. Another aspect of the program was to create greater investment in the community by companies that profited from ghetto business. As in the employment and product ideas, the goal of Operation Breadbasket was to eliminate or at least reduce the flow of capital out of the black community by forcing companies that profited at black expense to return something to the community. Organizers hoped that this return would not only be in immediate gains such as wages, but in the development of economic strength within the black community. Again, direct action was to play a vital role in developing

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[82]King, WDWGFH, 165-6.

this economic power: boycotts and protests by blacks would not only force businesses to change their policies but would involve poor blacks directly in their own struggle. King claimed that Operation Breadbasket had saved black Chicagoans $7 million in 1966 alone.[83]

These actions and programs show the shifting focus of King's concerns. The issue of poverty in many ways eclipsed race, as evidenced by the Poor People's Campaign, yet at the same time race was a vital component, as demonstrated by Operation Breadbasket. Yet clearly King recognized the need for economic power if blacks were to participate on an equal status in American society. The means of achieving this power required massive government support, but to generate this support blacks needed to coerce an unwilling government through nonviolent direct action. African-Americans needed to participate in their own empowerment, not only by joining the freedom struggle, but also by developing their own economic power. Operation Breadbasket involved direct action and white assistance, but also was designed to create economic power within the black community. This sort of two pronged attack, combining government responsibility with self-help, was an important element in King's answer to black economic powerlessness.

King became even more radical as he neared his death. The PPC demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the existing economic order. He argued against the structures of the capitalist economy, and in *Where Do We Go From Here* even advocated a sort of Christian democratic socialism by rejecting many of the assumptions of capitalism and suggesting that by combining the best elements of capitalism and

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[83]King WDWGFH 145.

socialism the solution to poverty might be found.[84] At the time of his murder, King was in Memphis supporting a strike by sanitation workers. These actions might have foreshadowed a future rejection of capitalism altogether by King, if his line of thought continued in the same vein and if he had not been murdered.

Stokely Carmichael's economic ideas were grounded in different experiences and are not as concrete programatically, yet reflect a similar conception of the economic problems facing blacks and how to resolve them. Before he entered SNCC as a full time field secretary, Carmichael had belonged to a Howard University organization, the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG). The NAG had focused on economic analysis from the start, and so Carmichael was well-grounded in the recognition of the importance of economics even before his experiences in SNCC affirmed this.[85] Black power ideology identified economic factors as the key to white domination and eventual black liberation in America. As long as they were economically dependent, blacks could not develop the political and social power to confront whites on an equal basis.[86]

The experiences of SNCC in the South proved this; especially important for Carmichael personally was the defeat of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) which he founded in rural Alabama. This all-black political party, which used Alabama state law and the new 1965 Voting Rights Act to challenge the supremacy of the white democratic organization, inspired great hope within

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[84]King WDWGFH 186.
[85]Mary King, Freedom Song 313.
[86]Carmichael, Black Power 22-23.

SNCC for the future of black political power. However, the party lost when local black sharecroppers, under the watchful eyes of their white landlords, registered and then voted against the LCFO.[87] Optimism about political gains vanished as the economic subordination of African-Americans, and their resultant powerlessness in other matters, showed Carmichael just how much was left to be done.

In his work, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, Carmichael defined the ideology of Black Power that was shaped by the Lowndes County experience, among others. Carmichael argued that blacks needed first of all to develop economic power so that they could escape white domination. To create economic strength, he encouraged blacks to develop their own community by buying black products, supporting black products and companies, and re-investing in the black community. This in many ways mirrored King's efforts in Operation Breadbasket, but Carmichael differed from King in one very important aspect: while King expected and desired white cooperation, Carmichael expected blacks to develop this strength separate from whites. In so doing, African-Americans would be able to ensure that whites did not use the economic lever against them, because their strength would come completely from within the black community.

Carmichael's ideas were less developed than King's in that he attached no specific programs to his ideology, but rather presented a framework with which blacks could interpret and resist their oppression. This in some ways limited Carmichael's impact, but at the

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[87]Carmichael, <u>Black Power</u> 117, 119.

same time reflected his SNCC-influenced, grass-roots method of organizing. Carmichael desired African-Americans to develop their own sources of power without white interference so that blacks could be free of any white influence. Because King was both an integrationist and desired government assistance, he included whites in his programs. The separatism of Carmichael, and his "let the people decide" attitude meant that in some ways it would be contradictory for him to advocate specific programs to develop power. He instead created an intellectual framework on which to evaluate programs in light of the needs of the black community. This would leave blacks free to act as they saw fit in relation to their specific circumstances, in ways that would be empowering to particular individuals and communities.

Thus, despite differences, some similarities exist between both leaders' ideas. Economic power was an essential component to the liberation of African-Americans from oppression; both saw economic exploitation as the key hindrance to that liberation. In a more specific sense, both recognized the legitimacy of Fanon's colonial analogy, at least to the extent that whites exploited the black community for profit without investing in the development of that community, because that would be counterproductive to the subordinate relationship they desired and required to remain dominant.[88] Black economic strength was the key to breaking this cycle of exploitation, and one means of developing this strength was unity in supporting black workers, companies and products. In this

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[88]For a full discussion of internal colonialism see Robert Blauner, "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt", Social Problems, Spring, 1969, pg 393.

area, King placed a greater emphasis on the role of whites in assisting this development of black capital. Perhaps this was a pragmatic move, but Carmichael rejected it as merely a means for whites to maintain their dominance over black life, and instead advocated black solidarity within their community without white support. For the most part, both leaders emphasized self-help as the key to economic empowerment. By working within their own communities to develop strength, blacks would be able to pull themselves out of poverty. This was a significant area of difference, however, in that King argued that while African-Americans must work actively for their own empowerment, the major responsibility lay with the federal government. Despite this major difference on the issue of the role of whites, the fundamental premise was similar.

Politics

Both leaders also recognized that economic power alone was not sufficient to ensure African-Americans an equal position in society, and thus stressed the importance of meaningful representation in government. Only political strength would ensure that black communities received the services they needed to climb out of their subordinate position, from fair police protection to good schools. Both King and Carmichael agreed that registration and voting would not be enough to create the kind of effective representation African-Americans required, . Too often, black elected officials responded to white party bosses and not to the needs of those they represented. Black officials needed to be responsible to the black community if the political power of blacks was to be effective for change. In order to create this kind of leader, African-Americans

needed to reject the puppets of white politicians and elect truly representative leaders from within their own community. At the same time, African-Americans needed to gain respect from party leaders who expected widespread black support but then did not compensate the black community adequately in projects, services, or improvements.

Carmichael hoped to develop both power and responsible leadership through alternative, separate institutions that would be black dominated rather than through the established parties. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was an early example of this type of parallel institution, in which blacks attempted to usurp certain functions of government which did not represent them, in this case the election of delegates to the 1964 Democratic convention. Although the MFDP did attempt to work with white liberals and through the established party system, it was a lesson in parallel institutions and how effective they can be in mobilizing the community. The defeat of the MFDP in Atlantic City led SNCC to reject working within the party system, not the structure of parallel institutions.

SNCC's next attempt at such an action, the development of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, was broader and more successful than the MFDP, even though the LCFO also failed in its ultimate goal. Using an Alabama state law that allowed for alternative parties, and registering large numbers of blacks through the Voting Rights Act of 1965, SNCC attempted to elect black officials in the 80% black populated county. The LCFO had a convention, developed a platform, and conducted a strong campaign to represent

the needs of blacks that had been ignored under white domination. Although not exclusive in theory, no whites cared to join the party, so it was all black. In the election, white landlords used economic coercion over their tenants to defeat the black candidates, but the movement was successful in generating excitement among blacks and showing the possibilities for the success of alternative institutions. As Carmichael said the night before the election: "We have done what they said we could not do. Colored people have come together tonight. Tonight says that we can come together and we can rock this country from California to New York City".[89]

In Carmichael's thinking, African-Americans needed to develop these alternative institutions in black dominated areas, taking control of the political structure where they were able through their majority. Once they had become politically powerful in these areas, such as Northern cities and the black belt in the South, and had done so with black led parties, they could begin to branch out into areas where blacks were not in the majority. In these places, through coalition with poor and right thinking whites, blacks could gain a share in the national power structure that had so often ignored their rights in the past. Black dominated areas, such as Lowndes county, would provide the power base from which such political action could be launched and then supported.[90]

Martin Luther King was much more integrationist in his ideas for the establishment of effective black political power. In his mind, the only practical method for increased political clout on a national

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[89]Carmichael, Black Power, 235.
[90]Carmichael, Black Power 46.

scale was coalition with white liberals. Later, after he began to become disillusioned with and critical of his liberal supporters, the white poor increased in importance, but even then the need for liberal support was not discounted.[91] Although King emphasized the need for African-American communities to elect effective, responsible officials who answered to their needs, he also recognized that beyond the local level this black unity would not create meaningful change. Only through cooperation with the white majority could blacks hope to gain effective political power. "There is no separate black path to power in this country that do not intersect with whites".[92]

Carmichael rejected this need for coalition. His experiences with the MFDP and their defeat at the hands of supposed allies at the Atlantic City Convention left him unwilling to trust white liberals again. As Cleveland Sellers stated, "After Atlantic City, things could never be the same."[93] Coalition between the powerful and the powerless was impossible, Carmichael argued, because the powerful have no need to respect the interests of the powerless. The only viable coalition Carmichael could imagine would be between blacks and poor whites, yet even this was not possible at the moment due to racism and the unpreparedness of the white community. In fact, whites benefited from the continued exploitation of blacks and therefore would be acting against their best interests to liberate them.[94] In Carmichael's conception of a world driven by power

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[91]King, WDWGFH, 52, 17.
[92]King WDWGFH 52.
[93]Sellers, River, 111.
[94]Carmichael, Black Power 67.

relations, this would be unthinkable. Without a moral viewpoint, as espoused by King, it would be impossible to expect the strong to work equally for the needs of the weak. In Carmichael's thinking, only if blacks had power could they exert influence upon the white majority and thus be able to form a coalition that fit the needs of both sides. "Power is the only thing respected in this world, and we must have it at any cost."[95]

King also expressed distrust of both the government and white liberals. Some of the harshest criticism in *Where Do We Go From Here* is directed at white liberals who did not wholeheartedly support the black freedom struggle.[96] Although his economic plans called for massive government support, he was even more critical of federal actions. His disillusionment with the government was centered for the most part around the Vietnam War, which King not only saw as immoral but as wasting precious resources that could be used for the war on poverty. "The war in Vietnam destroys the hopes and dreams for a decent America", he argued. "The bombs dropped in Vietnam explode at home".[97] Another problem King had with the government was its unwillingness to implement the legislation that his movement had fought so hard for. Brown v. Board was over a decade old, but school segregation persisted. The Voting Rights Act, though more closely followed also failed to live up to expectations when civil rights leaders claimed that not enough federal registrars were sent South.[98] Finally, harassment by the FBI further alienated King from

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[95]Lewis, King 325.
[96]King, WDWGFH, 8.
[97]King, WDWGFH 97.
[98]King, WDWGFH 10-11, 34.

the government. Agents tracked his every move and sought to discredit him by linking him to communists or through exposing elements of his personal life. The end result of this poor relationship was that King faced massive opposition from the government, particularly the Executive branch, after 1966.

Culture

During the sixties, black cultural pride became an important issue to the black liberation movements as well. An awareness of black history and culture developed that honored the African tradition that had been ignored or dismissed up to that point. Blacks especially refused to accept the derogatory images of Africa and African-Americans that perpetuated black inferiority. Skin lighteners and hair straighteners went out of style and African clothing and names came into fashion. Knowledge about African culture, and the remnants of that culture among black Americans also increased. African-Americans no longer accepted the negative stereotypes whites used to deride blackness and assert their own superiority. King and Carmichael were both influenced by this cultural awareness and gave it a place in their ideologies as a means of empowering black people.

King started his discussion of cultural empowerment as early as 1963 in *Why We Can't Wait*. The psychological problems created by a racial inferiority complex were just as damaging as outright physical abuses. He went even further in *Where Do We Go From Here?*, in which he focused not only on the accomplishments of the civil rights

movement as a means of race pride, but also on black history and cultural tendencies, not only in the United States, but in Africa. Too often these areas were distorted in perception to preserve the idea that blacks were inferior to whites. King challenged this and argued that blacks must have pride in their heritage if they were ever to push aside the barriers to advancement in the United States. The first step to liberation was the self-liberation of rejecting negative ideas of Africans in general. "The Negro will only be truly free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive self-hood his own emancipation proclamation".[99]

Stokely Carmichael also placed great emphasis on the need to overcome self-hatred. His use of the word "black" rather than Negro was the outward symbol of the rejection of white beliefs concerning black people. He and other black power advocates made a distinction between the "tomming" Negro, unable or unwilling to resist white oppression, and the strong "black" man, who fights for his rights. The influence of Malcolm X was vital to this discussion, both in terms of racial pride in history and the willingness to reject white culture in favor of black culture. Black power totally rejected white values and judgments, and relied on traditional black cultural tendencies to determine the course of the freedom struggle.

Carmichael argued that blacks needed to develop and explore their own culture and history, rather than adopt that of the white man. This was especially true because white culture devalued black life and only served to destroy black people. The racist values of

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[99]King WDWGFH 43.

American society were incompatible with the needs of African-Americans, who must turn to their own heritage in Africa to find the values to sustain them.[100] By affirming their own racial characteristics and culture, African-Americans could begin to empower themselves in the face of white racism.

For both leaders, cultural empowerment was an essential element in the freedom struggle. Blacks had to first recognize their own self-worth and the value of their own history and culture before they could resist white oppression. Carmichael was sometimes more strident or bitter in his denunciation of white attempts to destroy black culture and in his desire for black cultural autonomy. He saw little use for any white American values to blacks. In this way he was more influenced by Malcolm X and his strong nationalism, particularly during his earlier days and his strong condemnation of the entire white race.

The Transformation of Values

Through all of these elements, but particularly clearly in the cultural discussion, the idea that the values of white America needed to be changed stands out. In order for blacks to become equal participants in American society, white racism had to end. The entire value system of the United States had to be re-structured. Although these leaders had different ideas about how to restructure values, and what this meant, they agreed that this transformation was essential to the success of their struggle. The road to empowerment involved altering societal virtues and attitudes towards black people.

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[100]Carmichael, Black Power 40.

King argued that "there is a need for a radical restructuring of American society", while Carmichael suggested that America had "little worth winning as it is".[101]

When discussing how values must be transformed, King focused much more on the religious nature of this conversion. The moral way to alter society was through the use of nonviolent direct action and the love ethic of Christ. The fundamental premise of nonviolence; that is, that love is a powerful force for social change, remained unchanged even after the radicalization King underwent during the last three years of his life. Carmichael rejected this explicitly religious appeal, but his ideas nevertheless were tinged with a sense of morality. He desired a change of values, which was necessarily moral at center, and argued that a change in the belief system was needed because the present one was ineffective and morally wrong. This seems to place Carmichael's argument at the moral level; by arguing about values he left the materialistic level that predominates in his discussion of empowerment. While the need for power was not moral, and the power itself was not morally based, the way it would be effectively achieved was fundamentally moral. Black power might force whites to recognize blacks as a force in society, but only a change in values could make them change so that equality would result.

However, Carmichael differed from King in how this change was to be generated. He argued that only through force would white America awaken to the need for change. The way to create this force was for blacks to separate from society and develop their own

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[101]King, WDWGFH 133; Newsweek, Dec. 26, 1966.

sources of power, and then to re-enter the mainstream society with strength to challenge white power. In this way, blacks could force whites to accept African-Americans as equals, at least in the behavioral sense. King, on the other hand, believed that this transformation of society could not occur unless morality guided the development of power in the black community. He argued that blacks could never achieve justice as long as the values of society remained the same. Rather than forcing change by revamping power relationships, King advocated the use of moral suasion buttressed by nonviolent coercion as the best means to bring about an alteration of values. Carmichael wanted blacks to force whites to accept them on their own terms through power relationships: economic and political force. King relied much more on the power of love, morality, and of people on the march.

In some sense, though, both leaders were looking in the same direction to find the solution to black oppression. Although they offered drastically different means of empowering black people and achieving equality, the fundamental recognition that the ultimate solution to racism required a societal transformation of values linked both leaders. This is interesting in that King, generally portrayed as a moderate, was actually suggesting a very radical solution to the problems facing black people. Minor tinkering with programs, or the reformation of an otherwise sound paradigm of values, were not enough. King advocated a fundamental alteration of American society. This is not a moderate goal. At the same time, Carmichael, who for the most part argued from a materialistic position of amoral power relationships, came to a fundamentally moral conclusion as a

solution. A change of values is in some sense not strictly moral: he could simply be advocating a rejection of all elements of white society outright. Still, the moral element was apparent in his arguments for how change must occur. In the end, he realized that only a change in the spirit of white America could bring true equality for blacks, even if blacks developed their own sources of power as he suggests.

Nineteen sixty-eight saw both King and Carmichael leave the African-American freedom struggle. James Earl Ray murdered King in Memphis on April 4, ending his leadership of the movement but not his influence. Stokely Carmichael, after a brief relationship with the Black Panther Party, left the United States for exile in Ghana later that year. Both leaders had fought for the rights of black people. Their ideas had changed over the course of the sixties in response to experiences and each other. In the end, despite differences over method, both men sought the same goal. Although differing on specifics, both Martin Luther King, Jr. and Stokely Carmichael agreed that the best means to achieve racial equality was to empower black people. Black power was not simply a slogan; it identified an ideology that drove the civil rights movement of the late sixties to challenge the very foundations of American society.

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