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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Evolution as an Activist

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DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S EVOLUTION AS AN ACTIVIST

History Department Honors Thesis Defense

Abstract

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is well known as the clergyman who advocated for social change and justice by non-violent efforts throughout the Civil Rights Movement. His historic Nobel Peace Prize and famous speeches have long shaped his public persona. Little is known of his prominent role as an activist against the Vietnam War, and poverty across the United States. His fight for all persons of color and the slum conditions in the inner cities was often overlooked.

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Dedication

To my mom Angela May, my dad Kevin May, and sister Bria May for your love and support throughout my life. This thesis is in memory of my late father, as he would be so proud of the topic, thus in his memory I thrive.

“Hard work beats talent when talent doesn’t work hard” Tim Notke

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Introduction	4
King’s Early Works of Activism	10
Racial Injustice	13
Economic Injustice	28
Imperial Injustice.....	38
Conclusion	46
Bibliography	53

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Evolution as an Activist

Introduction

The following research will chronicle Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s evolution as an activist by looking into his level of involvement at events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, The Negro Revolution of 1963, Chicago Freedom Movement, and the Vietnam War, in order to analyze his actions and methods. His views on the morality nonviolence¹ and civil disobedience significantly influenced his strategies and ideals regarding racial, economic, and imperial injustices. As Dr. King became the primary leader and face of the Civil Rights Movement, he learned from his previous mistakes and sought to remove obstacles that impeded African American advancement which impacted how the movement developed. Similarly, certain events led him to change his focus and expand his objectives, which invoked a shift in his image as an activist. Dr. King's continual involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and his involvement in the war in Vietnam can be narrowed down to a limited number of events that are pivotal in King's personal journey toward racial, economic, and political justice. These events helped shape his views, and made them arguably more radical², they also led to a continuation of his already radical nonviolent ideology. While King's message, methods, and ideals stayed consistent the inclusion of varied campaigns led him down a more revolutionary path.

Throughout all of Dr. Martin Luther King's activism, he faced various critics in the form of the media, different individuals, other activist organizations, and the government. The degree to which they criticized King and the intentions for their criticism varied, as some opposed Dr.

¹ Nonviolence is the use of peaceful means, to bring about political, social, and economical change.

² My definition of radicalism is, the opinions and behavior of people who favor extreme changes especially in government.

King because of his race and others disagreed with his message and methods. While the motives behind the criticism varied among the critic, each critic at some point questioned the viability of King's leadership. As Dr. King transferred his attention amongst racial injustice, economic injustice, and imperial injustice, he faced many of the same adversaries. The main entities that opposed King throughout all of his activism was the media³, the White moderates⁴, Black Nationalist organizations⁵, other leaders within the Civil Rights Movement⁶, and the federal government⁷. They either disapproved of his call for extreme political and social change and/or disapproved of the social future he wanted for the United States.

Dr. King's actions and beliefs set him up for constant criticism, but as his quest for change became increasingly radical, he alienated many former allies. Although, many of his critics, such as the media and the FBI, were present throughout his entire career as an activist, he developed new ones. As King moved into different sectors, he left behind individuals and organization that were unwilling to support his actions. While King's methods and ideology were constantly radical, his actions and campaigns varied throughout the 1960's. By the late 1960's King believed that the correlation between racism, poverty, and imperialism was inseparable; therefore, his protest of all three entities was interconnected. Whereas many believed that King's protest against economic and imperial injustice hindered African American advancement, he

³ Thomas Stritch, "The Blurred Image: Some Reflections on the Mass Media in the 1960's," *The Review of Politics* 34, no. 4 (1972): 206, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1405965>.

⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 87-88.

⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 44.

⁶ William M. King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," *The Journal of Negro History* 71, no. 1/4 (1986): 1-22, accessed October 20, 2016; Adam Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," *Phylon (1960-)* 45, no. 1 (1984): 24, doi:10.2307/274976.

⁷ King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," 8.

believed that African Americans would not achieve full equality until poverty and the war in Vietnam were challenged. Whether or not King's increasingly radical beliefs and his evolution as an activist coincide is a dispute that is still unresolved today, as several scholars disagree on this point. While this dispute is largely based on Dr. King's reputation as a polarizing figure, this paper seeks to detangle specific events during King's life and offer a resolution to this dispute.

This paper will utilize primary sources, as to provide the strongest evidence of the evolution of King's message regarding focus and the constancy. These primary documents will include King's speeches, sermons, letters and books. Each of his written and spoken works demonstrates the various ways he has addressed or had planned to address injustice within the United States. The literature reviewed for this paper include: books, letters, speeches, and sermons are largely from the 1960's, as this is primarily when King conveyed the majority of his beliefs on racial inequality, economic reform, and imperial injustice. However, his work throughout the 1950's serve to establish a firm understanding of King's initial message and they inform his message in the 1960's as well as his development as an activist. Books such as, *Why We Can't Wait*, which expresses his perspective on nonviolence and racial segregation, and *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community*, which addressed his views on the economic injustices that impacted America's poor are vitally important to King's identity as an activist. In addition, letters that King wrote, like his April 16, 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," addressed a wide variety of issues from people's rights to protest and how the public interprets and accepts their protest; these topics help to identify King's specific beliefs on various subjects. These sources will allow a glimpse into the messages and knowledge that Dr. King wanted to disseminate to the public.

The historiographic background of this topic is unique in the sense that most of the books written about the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were written by King himself, while constructed and edited by other authors. What this means is that many authors have studied and analyzed his written work and constructed their version of what they believed to have been his actual message. There are countless secondary sources regarding King's message and also his radicalism. In addition to numerous primary sources, many of the authors came to different conclusions on his radicalism. Most scholars, their readers, and the American public lay on a continuum regarding interpretation of the position on topics in which King stood for. Some believed he was a passive activist who believed only in peace, nonviolence, and love. While others believe he was a radical who towards the end of life had become more extreme while marginally leaving his nonviolent message behind.⁸ While others believe that King was somewhere in the middle, suggesting that his beliefs were always a radical, but never an extremist.⁹ This paper will argue that King was always a radical, even when his objectives were predominantly social and regarding political reform within the U.S. This is true even after his objectives shifted to include economic and moral reform within the United States. This debate regarding Dr. King as radical or peaceful is what the majority of this paper will address, by analyzing King's involvement during different significant events and key points of the Civil Rights Movement message.

⁸ King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," 1-22.

⁹ Douglas Sturm, "Martin Luther King, Jr., as Democratic Socialist," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18, no. 2 (1990): 79-105, <http://www.jstor.org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/stable/40015109>; Keith D. Miller, "Composing Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Modern Language Association*, 105.1 (1990): 70-82; Clayborne Carson, "Between Contending Forces: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the African American Freedom Struggle," *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 1 (2005): 17-21, <http://www.jstor.org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/stable/25163736>.

Most of the secondary sources that make up the historiographic framework on this topic are books and articles, which provide a wide variety of background information and arguments on both the Civil Rights Movement and King's involvement with the same. The most influential secondary sources, regarding the type of activist King was, are autobiographies that chronicle his life.¹⁰ They do not focus on one single event, rather, they look at several events that helped shape the public's perception of him. The autobiography that is the most commonly cited and respected for its information regarding King is *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, which is edited by Clayborne Carson.¹¹ This particular autobiography is very insightful, as it is compiled from King's own words, provides his thoughts on various issues and shows his growth as both a man and activist. This book's most significant insights are grounded in the discussion surrounding prominent figures such as Malcolm X and Mahatma Gandhi, whom greatly influenced King's actions and messages. His constant opposition to Malcolm X's message and beliefs, are documented in this book, and allow his audience to understand his continual resistance towards Malcolm X's views. In addition, his discussions regarding Gandhi showed how important and inspirational King felt Gandhi's ideology was to his development as both a man and an activist. This book is relevant and insightful, as it provides an honest observation of King personally and his more radical political and social views.

There are numerous books and articles¹² that are important secondary sources on this topic, because they have been cited as works to analyze when studying King as a man and an

¹⁰ King, Martin Luther, Jr. *The Radical King*. Edited by Dr. Cornel West. Beacon Press, 2015.

¹¹ Although *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, is an autobiography, it was published after his lifetime allowing it to be a secondary source.

¹² Herbert H. Haines, "Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights: 1957-1970," *Social Problems* 32, no. 1 (1984): 31-43, accessed October 17, 2016; Joyce A. Ladner, "A New Civil Rights Agenda," *Brooking Review* 18.2 (2000): 26-28, accessed October 20, 2016; Taylor

activist. Some of these sources even bolster the position and views of King that this paper will discuss. Most of the authors and scholars who speak on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. utilizes an abundance of sources that are at their disposal to help build their arguments. This means that constructing a new argument regarding King as an activist will be nearly impossible. However, it also provides a solid foundation that can be both explored and improved upon. Specifically, exploring a restricted period from 1960 through 1968, can offer an in-depth look into King's ideology and actions as a racial, economic, and imperial justice activist. Dr. King's identity and effort as a nonviolent leader and activist was central to all his actions, no matter the cause King was fighting on behalf of. King's approach to the injustices he witnessed was to fight back with civil disobedience rather than violence and lawlessness. Dr. King's overall message during the Civil Rights Movement was rooted in his Christian values and morals that would not allow him turn away people in need of help and his desire to hold true to God's word. In short this paper posits that while Dr. King's ideology and methods were radical in the sense that they advocated for extreme political and social change; his ideology and methods were not violent and disparaging, they were aggressive and fairly extreme.

Dr. King's use of nonviolence was based on his moral and religious beliefs, which highlighted his view that violence is wrong and that it would not resolve America's racial tensions, but only exacerbate racism and the immorality of racism. These same moral and religious principles would eventually lead him down a more radical path as he sought to achieve economic reform and address the United States' imperial motives and actions. Although King's message of nonviolence and civil disobedience were already radical within their own right, due

Branch, *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement* (Simon and Schuster, 2013).

to the dominant culture of violence within the U.S. during the 1950's, his shift in message became even more radical. Dr. King did not become pro-violence and his message, methods, and ideals did not completely alter, however they evolved to fit his changed objectives. King's shifted objective led him to protest against the United States government and the U.S. public on the bases of the immorality of economic inequality that was prevalent within America and his moral opposition to the Vietnam War. Martin Luther King Jr.'s initial message of nonviolence and civil disobedience was already radical; however, throughout the course of the 1960's, King's objectives became more radical, as his focus expanded to include economic and moral injustice, as well as racial injustice. The expansion of his goals and the focus to strive for economic equality for the poor, along with his campaign against imperialism, pushed a shift in his methods, which made his ideals increasingly more radical, therefore, King's evolution as an activist coincided with his changed objectives.

King's Early Works of Activism

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. constructed his ideals, actions, and messages based on his moral and religious beliefs that called for him to use nonviolence and civil disobedience to fight against injustices. As one of the most influential leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement, King's call for nonviolence was very provocative and radical, because of the violent history of American movements and revolutions. King's call for nonviolence and civil disobedience was radical in the sense that he was calling for extreme political and social change within the United States. This call for nonviolent action was met with some hesitancy, backlash, and resistances. However, the history of nonviolence¹³ as a "weapon" and his expanding

¹³ Martin Luther King Jr., looked to the Indian Nationalist Movement and its leader Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi to draw an analogy between the India's Movement and the Civil Rights

reputation within both the African American¹⁴ community and American society led many to join his protests. King's use of nonviolent methods and civil disobedience transformed the American public's view on political, social, and economic protests, as it was both radical and peaceful.

The expansion of King's reputation as an activist began in the early 1950's, as he became a leader in the social, political, and religious sectors of the African American community. As a newly recognized Baptist minister, he held a unique position of power within the African American community, because many African Americans often look to the church for guidance. Historically the Black church has held, "the allegiance of large numbers of African Americans and exerts great influence over their behavior."¹⁵ In addition, the Black church has been historicized as an important facet in the African American community, because it is an, "institutionalized expression of the religious life of a people, as many sociologists generally believe, then the Black church is a powerful institution."¹⁶ In 1954, King became the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Once he earned the platform of pastor, his social and political influence in the Montgomery community expanded.

Movement. King used Gandhi's teachings, methods, and actions as a guide throughout the Civil Rights Movement.

¹⁴ Throughout this paper I will use the terms African American, Black, and Negro in reference to the Black American ethnic group. I will use the terms African American and Black as they are the primary modern terms when referring to individuals who are the descendants of enslaved Africans. I will also use the term Negro because it was the term Martin Luther King, Jr., commonly used in reference to the Black American ethnic group.

¹⁵ Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 3 (1991): 428, accessed January 26, 2017.

¹⁶ Billingsley and Caldwell, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," 428.

As both a leader and pastor in Montgomery, King became an integral part of the Montgomery community and the social justice movement that was taking place there. King's leadership in the Civil Rights Movement took off in 1955, as he was a part of a group of African-Americans who planned and led the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He used his platform to encourage the Black community and its allies to boycott public buses. King's role and leadership in the boycott led to him to become the voice of the Civil Rights Movement. In the late 1950's, King and several other activists organized and established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). It was created to unite Black churches as they pushed for social justice and social reforms. King and the SCLC were involved in several of the main civil rights events that occurred from 1957 and into the 1960's. They used peaceful demonstrations, civil disobedience, nonviolent forms of protest, and other methods to evoke change throughout America.¹⁷

Towards the end of the 1950's Dr. King had established himself and several activist organizations as a force within the United States. As King's reputation grew so did the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. Heading into the 1960's both King and the movement were nationally known for their part in the racial revolution that was taking place within America. Dr. King's actions during the 1950's, led the Federal government and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to take notice of his goals and demands. The American government and many others took notice, because he incited a passion and belief into minorities and their allies across America that allowed them to demand "extreme" social and political change.¹⁸ While King began advocating for political and social justice during the late 1950's, he became an established

¹⁷ Adam Fairclough, "The Preachers and the People: The Origins and Early Years of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1955-1959," *The Journal of Southern History* 52, no. 3 (1986): 404-407, doi:10.2307/2209569.

¹⁸ James A. Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action," *Phylon (1960-)* 47, no. 1 (1986): 16, doi:10.2307/274691.

leader and activist for justice in the 1960's. King's early works as an activist laid the foundation for his future radical campaigns for racial, economic, and imperial justice.

Racial Injustice

As stated previously, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became a nationally known influential activist through his works in the American Civil Rights Movement, which initially and primarily sought to end racial segregation, inequality, and discrimination within the United States. King's leadership and involvement within the Civil Rights Movement and its push for fully realized racial equality spans for the early 1950's until his death in 1968. Primarily during the early 1960's Dr. King and various activist organizations, such as, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), began targeting Southern cities that were extremely resistant to social reforms and the end segregation. Many of these southern cities were on activist organizations radar, due to increasing local resistance towards racial inequality and discrimination. As a response to southern resistance, during the early 1960's several sub-movements began to form in different cities across the United States. Although these movements were under the larger Civil Rights Movement, the local citizens that formed these sub-movements did not have the prestige nor the connections of King and SCLC. Therefore, their lack of status led to the need of nationally known figures, such as, King to step in and give their movement a face. King's work against racial injustice features his intensive involvement in several of these sub-movements that make up parts of the whole African American Civil Rights Movement.

Beginning in 1961 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the SCLC joined the Albany Movement, which took place in Albany Georgia. Similar to other sub-movements of the time, the Albany Movement specifically set out to desegregate the city. As the Albany Movement began to grow, thousands of people mobilized and joined the citizens of Albany in their protest.

Many of the initial protesters answered King's call for nonviolence and used acts of civil disobedience to express their demands. Once King joined the movement in December of 1961, peaceful demonstrations, was the main method of protest the movement used. However, the Albany Movement turned out to be a difficult undertaking due to the protracted nature of the movement, which was caused by the nonviolent counter tactics of Albany's White population, including the police force and the division of several activist groups.¹⁹ Where the Albany police force was united in their stance to use nonviolence to uphold the law of segregation, even in the face of peaceful demonstrations, the Black community became divided. As the Black community of Albany and their allies were predominantly involved in peaceful activism for several months, without out any headway, many militant²⁰ and self-defense advocating activist groups began to gain traction within the both the movement and the community. This division led to the decline of the movement, but had lasting affects within the Black community. Many people were forced to decide between peaceful and militant methods, organizations, and leaders.

As the Albany movement was one of the first sub-movements in which King and the SCLC took the lead, they encountered several setbacks and difficulties, many of which they were unprepared to handle. As the movement became more militant, King was unable to regain control and adequately respond to the militant faction. In addition, the police force and the cities government response to the protestors' civil disobedience, was surprising to King, but also awakening. However, he was mainly unsuccessful in, "Albany for tactical reasons, notably inadequate planning and poor choice of target, rather than over-reliance on "nonviolent

¹⁹ Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action," 21.

²⁰ My definition of militant is aggressive and confrontational methods in support of a political or social movement, which can include forceful, violent, or combative tactics. Although militancy can include nonviolent forms of protest and still be aggressive and combative.

persuasion.”²¹ King would go on to use the Albany Movement as a source for inspiration and guidance during future decisions. King’s views on the Albany Movement were, “the mistake I made there was to protest against segregation generally rather than against a single and distinct facet of it. Our protest was so vague that we got nothing, and the people were left very depressed and in despair. It would have been much better to have concentrated upon integrating the buses or the lunch counters. One victory of this kind would have been symbolic, would have galvanized support and boosted morale.”²² However, he also stated “I don’t mean that our work in Albany ended in failure. And what we learned from our mistakes in Albany helped our later campaigns in other cities to be more effective. We never since scattered our efforts in a general attack on segregation, but focused upon specific, symbolic objectives.”²³ The views King expressed about the Albany Movement showed that he had doubled down on his stance of nonviolent resistance, which contributed to the growing tension between King and his fellow protesters and the American public that felt some of their methods were too radical.²⁴ Although Dr. King wanted to gain further support from the public, he also altered his plan of attack to include more radical tactics, such as sit-ins and jail-ins; in order to effectively keep the Black community engaged in the movement.²⁵

After the Albany movement concluded in 1962, King and the SCLC joined the Birmingham campaign in April 1963. King felt it was necessary to continue striving for racial

²¹ Adam Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change," *Phylon* (1960-) 47, no. 1 (1986): 5, doi:10.2307/274690.

²² Martin Luther King Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, eds. Clayborn Carson, (Little, Brown, 1999), Chap.16, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/chapter-16-albany-movement>.

²³ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 16.

²⁴ Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change," 5.

²⁵ Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change," 5-6.

equality even though, as he wrote, “the Negro had been an object of sympathy and wore the scars of deep grievances, but the notion had come to count on him as a creature who could quietly endure, silently suffer, and patiently wait.”²⁶ Therefore, the Birmingham campaign, which King referred to as the “Negro Revolution in 1963,” had great value to King’s overall fight for racial justice within the United States. They took many of the lessons they learned from Albany and applied them towards the Birmingham campaign, which meant they were more selective and strategic with their actions. Their strategic planning helped them overcome numerous obstacles such as Bull Connor, the city’s police commissioner, the Birmingham courts, the police department, and local terrorism committed by White citizens, all of whom were holding onto the customs of Jim Crow.²⁷ King focused the Birmingham campaign on specific attainable goals, that would keep the public and the protested engaged. For example, they narrowed the goals of the campaign to exposes the violence Negroes faced in Birmingham, while also contrasting it with the nonviolent resistance of the protesters.²⁸ In addition, they strategically limited their efforts on “a more effective battle (that) could be waged if it was concentrated against one aspect of the evil and intricate system of segregation. We decided, therefore, to center the Birmingham struggle on the business community, for we knew that the Negro population had sufficient buying power.”²⁹ King’s general objective was to identify specific areas of weakness within Birmingham’s powers structure and exploit them to achieve racial justice in the city.

By narrowing the goals of the campaign, King was able to identify various symbols that would have a positive influence over the public, the protesters, and the entire nonviolent

²⁶ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 2.

²⁷ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 41-42.

²⁸ Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action," 21.

²⁹ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 48.

movement. Specific symbols that King identified are jail-ins, the date 1963, songs, and nonviolent resistance as a whole. King used jail-ins as a symbol of nonviolent action and reclaiming what going to jail meant to the Negro community. During the 1960's African Americans understood, that going to jail meant exposing themselves to confinement, beatings, and the uncertainty of the court system.³⁰ Due to their commitment to nonviolent action, African Americans reclaimed going to jail as a symbol of their resistance and their willingness to face violence or injustice for their cause. As King states, "to the Negro, going to jail was no longer a disgrace but a badge of honor."³¹ Additionally, the date of the movement was symbolic and important to King, as 1963 was exactly one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Dr. King saw how government officials "utilized the date to enhance their political image by naming commissions, receiving committees, issuing statements,"³² while ignoring the racial discrimination and injustice African Americans faced daily. To King, Abraham Lincoln as "the Great Emancipator had moved the Negro into the sunlight of physical freedom, but actual conditions had left him behind in the shadow of political, psychological, social, economic and intellectual bondage."³³ King was able to utilize these symbols and others to galvanize a special army to resist racial injustice, whose only weapons were nonviolent direct action.³⁴

King and the special army of the Birmingham campaign, faced different obstacles that included Bull Connor the city police commissioner, the courts, White moderates, and the media. For each different obstacle, the protesters had to respond with patience and unity, while also holding true to their methods of nonviolence. Bull Connor initially, resisted the "Negro

³⁰ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 18.

³¹ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 19.

³² King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 10.

³³ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 11.

³⁴ Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change," 5-7.

Revolution of 1963” by using tactics from the Albany police force that included nonviolence and humane treatment towards the protesters.³⁵ However, as the campaign moved forward he and the police force returned to their methods of police brutality. Their return to violence fulfilled the protesters first goal of exposing the violence Negroes faced daily. The Birmingham courts became directly involved in the Birmingham campaign, “when the city government obtained a court injunction directing us (the protesters) to cease our activities until our right to demonstrate had been argued in court.”³⁶ In the face of this court decision, the movement decided to use methods of civil disobedience by disobeying the court’s order.

The White moderates and the media specifically became obstacles for the movement to overcome, as they became very critical of the different methods King and the movement used. Specifically the media questioned the timing of the movement, as Birmingham had just elected Albert Boutwell as the cities new Mayor. They believed that King and the protesters should wait and give Boutwell a chance to bring change into the community. In King’s eyes it was, “terribly difficult to wage such a battle without the moral support of the national press to counteract the hostility of local editors. The words ‘bad timing’ came to be ghosts haunting our every move in Birmingham. Yet people who used this argument were ignorant of the background of our planning.”³⁷ Moreover, the media spoke out on the movement’s involvement of children and young adults during different acts of civil disobedience, as some held King and the movement responsible for the violence the youth endured. Nevertheless, what they did not understand was that young folk asked to be involved and pushed to end the struggle for themselves.³⁸ The White

³⁵ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 67.

³⁶ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 68.

³⁷ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 63.

³⁸ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 102-105.

moderates, much like the media, questioned the timing and the methods of the movement. They were more devoted to order than justice, to negative peace than positive peace, and often wanted the people facing injustice to wait for a better time. King describes White moderates as those, “who constantly say: ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action’; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a ‘more convenient season.’”³⁹

Although these various organizations, individuals, and outlets criticized and defamed Dr. King, the biggest impediment he faced during this movement was defining his ideology and his methods. During the Albany movement, King and the SCLC were a part of a power struggle between their nonviolent based organization and other more aggressive based organizations and movements, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).⁴⁰ In the book, *Why We Can’t Wait* (1964) King states that, “often opposition comes not only from conservatives, who cling to tradition, but also from the extremist, who favor neither the old nor the new. Many of these extremists misread the significance and intent of nonviolence because they failed to perceive that militancy is also the father of the nonviolent way.”⁴¹ King recognized what many failed to discern: that nonviolent direct action could be used as a weapon and at its core was a radical tactic against injustice. While King defined his nonviolent philosophy, he also tried to bridge the growing division within the Black community. King recognized that rifts within the Black community played into the hands of real opposition, these who wanted to

³⁹ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 87.

⁴⁰ Karen Wells Borden, "Black Rhetoric in the 1960s: Sociohistorical Perspectives," *Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 4 (1973): 428-430, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2783854>.

⁴¹ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 32.

uphold segregation and racial discrimination, goals of dividing the community. He felt that the nonviolence movement could help Negroes across the nation, “to restore to them some of the pride and honor which had been stripped from them over the centuries.”⁴² As King continued to push his nonviolent agenda and radical prospective, numerous members of the Black community continued to support and believe in his philosophy and his leadership.

Whereas, Dr. King faced various obstacles during the Birmingham campaign, he and the movement considered the campaign a success. As they felt they changed the minds of Birmingham’s White public, the Birmingham’s courts, and the believed the revolution changed the face of American. Before the “Revolution of 1968”, many member’s pro-segregation White public and members of the White moderate often fought and resisted the protesters. They would fight alongside the police force, adding to the violence and abuse many protesters endured. However, once the police abandoned their nonviolence tactics and returned to their norms, much of Birmingham’s White public did not support and participate on the side of the police.⁴³ King felt that their neutral stance was, “powerfully symbolic of shifting attitudes in the South that the majority of the White citizens of Birmingham remained neutral through our campaign.”⁴⁴ King believed that the campaign changed the thoughts of the Birmingham courts, as the Judge allowed protesters to appeal their civil-contempt charges.

Although the Birmingham campaign encountered an enormous amount of violent backlash for the efforts, King felt the Black community and American society took a big step toward freedom. The American public began to express empathy towards the movement’s

⁴² King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 31.

⁴³ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 106-107.

⁴⁴ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 106.

struggle, which gradually helped Birmingham's community fulfill their last goal of uplifting the Negro status within the business community of Birmingham. By placing the Birmingham campaign and the larger Civil Rights Movement on a national stage, King was able to uplift the economic status of Negro's across America, as job opportunities opened up slowly. King stated that, "in the larger northern cities, a more significant change in employment patterns took shape. Many firms found themselves under fire, not because they employed Negroes, but because they did not."⁴⁵ The Birmingham campaign helped propel King and the Civil Rights Movement onto a national platform, which would afforded King a certain amount of authority and prestige when fighting against racial injustice and other injustices.

While Dr. King embraced his role as a national figure, he used his new status to spread his radical nonviolent philosophy and continue his crusade for racial equality. On August 28, 1963 during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, King delivered his iconic "I Have A Dream" speech, which further added to his national standing. During this speech, he reiterated his beliefs on the racial discrimination that continued to plague the American society and the path he planned to follow to reach racial justice. He implored the crowd to continue to fight for racial justice and not content themselves with the accomplishment the movement had made. His call for action and freedom was meet with support and unity by many, as it encouraged many brave people across the south to engage in demonstrations and endure imprisonment, violence, and abuse.⁴⁶ Although the speech garnered much support and respect, dissimilar organizations and individuals saw his rhetoric and rise as threatening. King's radical tactics and message

⁴⁵ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 127.

⁴⁶ Aldon D. Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 526, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/223515>.

sparked plenty of backlash and negativity, as he sought to transform the social and political make-up of the United States. Throughout King's struggle for racial justice he continually had to justify and defend his actions, tactics, and message, as many people placed false narratives upon on his objectives.

Specifically, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and its director J. Edgar Hoover repeatedly made false accusation regarding King's actions and motives, as they were concerned with the vast authority King held over the American public.⁴⁷ Hoover's concerns grew, "after the 1963 "March on Washington," (when) Hoover concluded that the civil rights movement was a threat to the established order. King would have to be destroyed and the movement smashed before it irreparably damaged America."⁴⁸ As King continued to develop a radical reputation, the FBI and Hoover increasingly viewed him as a threat to the political and social order of America. The FBI's fear of Dr. Martin Luther King's rise and influence became inflated due to the impact his actions and words were having on Americans, as many united under his call for action and demanded political and social change. For example, the head of the FBI's Domestic Intelligence Division, William Sullivan, stated that, "in light of King's powerful, demagogic speech yesterday, we must mark him now, if we have not done so before, as the most dangerous Negro of the future in this Nation from the standpoint of Communism, the Negro and national security."⁴⁹ Their impression of Dr. King, spoke to the fear they had of communism, a powerful Black man, a united Black community, and the radical philosophy King preached.

⁴⁷ David Chalmers, "The Security State in America: Inside J. Edgar Hoover's FBI," *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 1 (1990): 120, doi:10.2307/2702736.

⁴⁸ Chalmers, "The Security State in America: Inside J. Edgar Hoover's FBI," 120.

⁴⁹ William Sullivan to A. C. Belmont, August 30, 1963, *In FBI's War on King*, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/king/d4.html>.

The Federal government and the FBI began to focus in primarily on Dr. King, after his radical tactics and message gained and kept the nation's attention during the summer of 1963. The attention King garnered was seen as polarizing and led to a divided nation. Many supported his called to end racial segregation and to bring racial equality and justice to the United States. While, others opposed his philosophy and methods, but supported his call to end racial discrimination. Many opposed everything Dr. King stood for and sought to keep the status quo in place; yet, the growth of the Civil Rights Movement and the racial tension in the United States continued to rise. As King continued to hold the nation's attention the federal government had to confront their inability to connect with the struggles of African Americans and to understand what African Americans were protesting, which perpetuated the institutionalized racial discrimination African Americans faced. With the growth of the Civil Rights Movement, the racial tension in the United States continued to rise and demanded a response from the federal government. As the division continued to grow the federal government and the Kennedy Administration became more responsive to civil rights leaders call for protection from police brutality and violent White supremacy groups.⁵⁰ However, as the Kennedy Administration acknowledged the racial injustice that African Americans faced they also simultaneously empowered different FBI tactics that were negatively racially motivated. Such as, their practice of "investigating the political affairs of Black activist thoroughly while treating civil rights investigations as little more than a bothersome and not very important chore."⁵¹ The FBI's

⁵⁰ Kenneth O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years-from the Freedom Riders to Albany," *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 2 (1988): 203, accessed February 9, 2017, doi:10.2307/2209399.

⁵¹ O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years-from the Freedom Riders to Albany," 202.

culture of racial ignorance or in some cases racism greatly influenced how the FBI approached and/or handled the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King, and other civil rights activist.

Beginning in the late 1950's the FBI began monitoring King's actions, but during late 1963 they amplified their investigation of King. With the federal government's authority, the FBI placed King under intense surveillance, in order to find evidence that undermined his success, message, activism, and to prove he was a communist. By October of 1963 Attorney General Robert Kennedy authorized the FBI to begin wiretapping King's home and the SCLC offices.⁵² By taking this step the Kennedys' and the FBI sent the message, "that the government had de facto authority to spy on civil rights activist but had little authority to protect them from the segregationist terrorist."⁵³ These actions highlights the big disconnect King and the Black community had with some within the government and the FBI, as their actions seemingly fought against racial equality. It has been argued that Hoover believed that, "whether or not the Communists were behind them, all Black America, not just Martin Luther King, Jr., was a threat to internal peace and stability."⁵⁴ The governments fear of King's and the Civil Rights Movements influence over American society, dictated their policies and actions. They realized the power King held over the future of America and became another obstacle for him to overcome. Although the Kennedy Administration became an ally of the Civil Rights Movement,

⁵² "Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed February 9, 2017, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_federal_bureau_of_investigation_fbi/.

⁵³ O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years-from the Freedom Riders to Albany," 203.

⁵⁴ Chalmers, "The Security State in America: Inside J. Edgar Hoover's FBI," 120.

the administrations inactions on the side of King and actions on the side of the FBI greatly influenced the racial and political tension of the United States in the early 1960's.

As 1963 came to an end as arguably one of the most influential years during the Civil Rights Movement, due to the multitude of accomplishments and setbacks the movement endured that year. As 1964 approached, Dr. King and the movement were not satisfied with the racial progress the United States had made and sought to continue the "race conversation" within American society. Throughout 1964 King was involved in several sub-movements, including the St. Augustine Movement and the Selma Voting Rights Movement. Dr. King's involvement in the St. Augustine Movement began in March 1964, as he and the SCLC joined Robert B. Hayling and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Hayling and his following were an unconventional group that King supported, because they believed in nonviolent action while being armed for self-defense. This sub-movement, like others was specifically protesting segregation in all public places and they were meet with violence, intimidation, imprisonment, and counter-protest.⁵⁵

The St. Augustine Movement helped push the Civil Rights Act of 1964 through, as the sub-movement concluded soon after. In December 1964 Dr. King and the SCLC united with other nonviolent organizations to begin the Selma Voting Rights Movement. This sub-movement was specifically, aimed at removing certain barriers that prevented African Americans from voting in all government elections. The Selma Voting Rights Movement carried on into March of 1965, with three marches that are known as the Selma to Montgomery marches. The first two

⁵⁵ "St. Augustine Movement," Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, accessed February 9, 2017, http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_st_augustine_movement/.

marches were met with resistance from the courts, police violence, and mob violence. The final attempt was a “success” as the protestors were able to fulfill their march to the state capital.

Arguably the two biggest accomplishments of Dr. King’s campaign for racial equality were the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President John Kennedy presented the bases of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in 1963, after he witnessed the violent attacks the children of the Birmingham campaign suffered. President Lyndon B. Johnson later signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. This bill gave legal protection for all Americans against employment discrimination based on one’s race, religion, national origin, and sex. This bill also ended racial segregation in public places, which was one of the primary goals of King’s racial justice campaign.⁵⁶ The Voting Rights Act of 1965 addressed one aspect of institutionalized racial discrimination, which included legal barriers that prohibited most African Americans in southern states from voting in federal, state, and local government elections.

On August 6, 1965 President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which removed legal barriers that obstructed the African Americans 15th Amendment rights. After this law was passed, African Americans gained the right and ability to influence government elections and public policy in great numbers. Both laws represented the accomplishment of each sub-movements goal, as the overall goal of King’s racial justice campaign was to terminate legal racial segregation and institutionalized racial discrimination and inequality⁵⁷. Although these

⁵⁶ King’s racial justice campaign dates from 1955-1965, as these were years he primarily focused on racial justice in the United States. Although, King was continually in touch and harkened back to consequences of racial discrimination and inequality thought out all his years as an activist. Also King recognized the affects of economic injustice and global injustice, during this time period, but he had yet to fully turn his attention to those inequalities.

⁵⁷ Institutionalized discrimination is the discrimination of a group of individuals within a society by its institutions. This can occur through laws, business practices, and individual actions.

laws were an accomplishment, institutionalized racial discrimination and inequality continued on because, they were just one step towards racial equality. King believed that real racial equality required an overhaul of Americans political and economic systems, as these systems were interconnected.⁵⁸ He also believed that it required pure and honest leaders from all ethnic groups to have a seat at the figurative political table, in order to inspire an open discussion that can stimulate solutions to racial inequality.⁵⁹

Dr. Martin Luther King's activism to end institutionalized racial inequality and discrimination within the United States was relatively successful. He was able to lead several sub-movements that were instrumental in the downfall of racial segregation and voting discrimination. As an inspirational figure, Dr. King was able to unite many Americans around his moral philosophy of nonviolence and his pursuit for racial justice. However, many disagreed with his ideology, actions, and quest, and resisted his efforts. King's use of a radical form of resistance, added to his and the nonviolent section of the Civil Rights Movements polarization. Both Dr. King's actions and his campaign for racial justice were radical, as they sought to change the political and social makeup of the United States. King's experience as a racial activist during the 1960 influenced and shaped his future actions, as he shifted his primary focus to economic injustice from racial injustice.

Similarly, institutionalized inequality refers to societal systems the perpetrate class, race, and sex inequality.

⁵⁸ James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 456, doi:10.2307/1900033.

⁵⁹ Mary Frances Berry, "Vindicating Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Road to a Color-Blind Society," *The Journal of Negro History* 81, no. 1/4 (1996): 139-140, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2717613>.

Economic Injustice

By 1966, Dr. King had already successfully taken on Jim Crow laws and voting rights injustices, which were a big step in addressing and changing racial discrimination in America. Once his racial justice campaign accomplished many of its higher objectives, he looked towards the economic injustice that many Americans faced, because of their race, religion, or sex. King's call for economic reform in conjunction with his continuous use nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience, added to his previously radical philosophy, because he was attempting to further change the economic and political system of the United States. His fight for economic justice overlaps with his fight for racial and imperial justice, as capitalism is intertwined with race and imperialism. Although King's fight for economic reform originated in the late 1950's and continues into the early 1960's, it becomes one of his main focuses in 1966. This shift in his focus led him to be an even more polarizing figure, as many people opposed his beliefs on capitalism and the economic makeup of the United States. However, Dr. King managed to gain the attention of people who fully supported and embraced his call for equal economic opportunities for all Americans. While King's economic justice campaign⁶⁰ was relatively short, due to his untimely death, it was reasonably influential and successful. He was able to reach a broader audience during this campaign, because poverty affected individuals in all ethnic groups, religions, and economic class groups.

Throughout the mid 1950's and the early 1960's Dr. Martin Luther King's views on economic injustice were hidden and overlooked, due to the emergence of his radical nonviolent

⁶⁰ King's economic justice campaign ranges from 1966-1968, as these years mark when economic injustice was one of his primary focuses, although, he spoke, wrote, and protested economic injustice through the 1950's and the early 1960's. During this time, he was still an activist for racial justice and global justice.

ideology and his movement for racial equality. Nevertheless, hidden in his racial justice campaign, King started to lay the building blocks for his economic movement. As early as the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, King and other African American city leaders realized the economic power and leverage the Black community held.⁶¹ They wielded their economic advantage, through boycotts and protests, and began to understand that they could affect government policy by threatening a cities or state's economy. By the Birmingham campaign in 1963, King directly spoke on the parallels of racial inequality to economic inequality. During the campaign Dr. King generally communicated a language and message that he commonly used during the early 1960s. He commonly spoke about hope, lending a helping hand to those in need, and on keeping the faith. Yet in he also spoke on the interconnectedness of economic justice and racial discrimination. Dr. King compared the issues and spoke on the lack of faith among the American public, which felt that God could not deliver them from destruction whether it came in a form of poverty or racism.⁶² By adding these "outside messages" into his speeches and sermons, King was able to set the foundation for his economic justice campaign before he fully established it as his next campaign.

While he was focused on establishing racial equality, he also knew that Negroes "lived within two concentric circles of segregation. One imprisons them on the basis of color, while the other confines them within a separate culture of poverty. The average Negro is born into want and deprivation. His struggle to escape his circumstances is hindered by color discrimination."⁶³ Dr. King understood that the racial discrimination that African Americans faced led to the

⁶¹ Thomas F. Jackson, "'Bread of Freedom': Martin Luther King, Jr. and Human Rights," *OAH Magazine of History* 22, no. 2 (2008): 14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162166>.

⁶² King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 10-14.

⁶³ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 11.

economic hardships American Americans endured for generations. These economic hardships include the absence of a quality education system, lack of job opportunities, and lack of opportunity for economic mobility. According to King, “there were two and one-half times as many jobless Negroes as Whites in 1963, and their median income was half that of the man. Many White Americans of good will have never connected bigotry with economic exploitation. They have deplored prejudice, but tolerated or ignored economic injustice. But the Negro knows that these two evils have malignant kinship.”⁶⁴ As he connected the parallels of the two injustices, it became clearer that the end of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination also meant the beginning of more economic opportunities for African Americans.

As the Dr. King and Civil Rights Movement began to embrace the inclusion of equal economic opportunities to its agenda, the federal government responded by way of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which criminalized employment discrimination based on race. The federal government also launched a “War on Poverty” in 1964, as they looked to respond to the nation’s growing poverty rate. They specifically passed the Economic Opportunity Act, to ensure that future economic policies supported education, health, and employment opportunities for the poor. While these laws intended to help address the absences of job opportunities for African Americans, they did not significantly address equal wages for all races, discriminatory housing practices, and the limited access poor people had to achieve economic mobility. By 1966, Dr. King understood that the act’s congress passed in 1964 and 1965, “came with little financial cost to the nation (But) mass poverty and big city apartheid posed deeper challenges to Black equality and demanded bolder action. Delivering on promises of dignified work, decent wages, income

⁶⁴ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 11-12.

support, and decent housing for all Americans would cost the nation billions of dollars.”⁶⁵ Once King accepted that African Americans struggle for equal civil rights would not end until his people had achieved equal human rights, he became an ally and leader for organizations that supported extreme economic reform.

Dr. King and the SCLC sought out to confront the remaining issues of the Civil Rights Movement, as they proceeded to join and implement their radical perspective on the Chicago Freedom Movement sub-movement. The Chicago Freedom Movement began in mid-1965 and lasted into 1967, it proceed to specifically address the inequities of open housing in Chicago, but also included unequal income, education, tenants’ rights, and a lack of suitable health programs.⁶⁶ The Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO) established the roots of this sub-movement in 1962 to launch a campaign that addressed several consequences of racial segregation that involved employment, housing, and education inequalities. After members SCLC, CCCO, and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) joined forces, the Chicago Freedom Movement took off. King and the SCLC official joined the sub-movement in 1966, for a multitude of reasons, which include spreading the Civil Rights Movement beyond the south and spreading nonviolent action beyond their racial justice campaign.⁶⁷

As Dr. King and the other movement leaders understood the parallels and patterns that intertwined race, economic status, and social advancement, their views and methods became more radical. This understanding led them to narrow their goals for movement to mainly focus on dismantling Chicago’s discriminatory housing practices and removing the cities slums. They

⁶⁵ Jackson, “”Bread of Freedom”: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Human Rights,” 14.

⁶⁶ Jackson, “”Bread of Freedom”: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Human Rights,” 15.

⁶⁷ Enrico Beltramini, "SCLC Operation Breadbasket: From Economic Civil Rights to Black Economic Power," *Fire!!!* 2, no. 2 (2013): 5-47, doi:10.5323/fire.2.2.0005.

initially staged several “experiments” to test and gain evidence for their theory, that real estate companies and banks discriminated against people based on their race, income, and background.⁶⁸ They found that their theory was correct, as there was proof that real estate companies used racial steering and banks discriminatory mortgage policies. In order to address their findings, the leaders of the movement developed a list of demands that required Chicago real estate companies, Banks, and the cities government to cease their discriminatory practices. They felt their demands could challenge a wide range of issues, including the racial apartheid of the city and the education inequities that plagued the cities slums, while also confronting the city’s housing issues.

Initially, the Chicago Freedom Movement accepted Dr. King’s nonviolent philosophy, by using marches, boycotts, and other acts of civil disobedience as their main means of protest. Much like sub-movements in the South, they were met with counter-protest, riots, police brutality, and violent attacks by local citizens. However, midway through the movement riots erupted though out the city. King believed that, “riots grow out of intolerable conditions. Violent revolts are generated by revolting conditions and there is nothing more dangerous that to build a society with a large segment of people who feel they have no stake in it, who feel they have nothing to lose.”⁶⁹ He felt these riots were a reflection of the rioters living conditions, but he sought to regain control of the movement and recapture the attention of slum communities, by marching towards real estate offices located in all-White communities.

⁶⁸ Ronald E Shaw, "A Final Push for National Legislation: The Chicago Freedom Movement," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1998-)* 94, no. 3 (2001): 304-307, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40193506>.

⁶⁹ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 28.

Even though police brutality and other violent attacks became the norm during marches and group meetings, the protesters held true to nonviolent direct action. Dr. King suggested that a, “nonviolent, disciplined, determined force created such a crisis in the city of Chicago that the city had to do something to change conditions.”⁷⁰ While protesters continued their nonviolent marches and boycotts, they gained the attention of the Real Estate Board of the City of Chicago and the cities government. By the end of King’s continual involvement in the Chicago Freedom Movement he felt that the, “nonviolent marches in Chicago of the summer brought about a housing agreement which, if implemented, would have been the strongest step toward open housing taken in any city in the nation.”⁷¹ The general success of the Chicago Movement has been attributed to its role in the creation of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. While this act stood as a symbol of success for the sub-movement, it also represented a long list of unfulfilled promises on behalf of the federal government. The U.S. government continually signed and implemented acts that had the ability to stimulate real change, however many went unenforced for numerous years.

During and after the Chicago Movement Dr. King became critical of the growing division within the Black community and the diverging paths it was leading towards. As a wave of militant Black Nationalism emerged in the United States, the political future of the Black community and King’s nonviolent movement were in question. Dr. King had held of the rise of the Black Nationalist Movement⁷², due to the continual success of mass nonviolent action and

⁷⁰ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 28.

⁷¹ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 28.

⁷² The Black Nationalist Movement or the Black Power Movement arose in the late 1960s, as their main goals were to develop economic self-sufficiency for African American and to inspire pride in the Black community. Another key component of the movement was their belief of self-defense in the face of violence and their call for Black separatism.

his established leadership. However, the results of success were mainly symbolic, since the federal government was reluctant to enforce the laws they had passed. Members of the Black community began to grow weary of the government's unfulfilled promises and turned to the Black Nationalist Movement for quicker results. King recognized that there were some encouraging qualities of the BNM, as they represented a resilient force that wanted to strengthen the African American community political and economically. However he believed that, "beneath all the satisfaction of a gratifying slogan, Black Power is a nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro can't win."⁷³ King abhorred their Black separatist message, maintaining that interracial coalitions and an open relationship with the government was the best path for Black advancement.

Although disagreement within the Black community persisted, King refocused his efforts on extreme economic reform. He began advocating for a social revolution where both the Republican and the Democratic political parties would join together to fight for equal economic opportunities for all Americans. Nevertheless, Dr. King knew that politicians from both parties would need to be provoked in order for them to take action. In November 1967, King and the SCLC began planning campaign to address poverty in the United States. They planned to organize large numbers of poor people regardless of their race and background, into a united economic reform movement. King understood that the U.S. government would not change or undermine the capitalistic status quo unless the government was forced to do so. Dr. King felt "that Congress and the President wouldn't do anything until we developed a movement around which people of goodwill could find a way to put pressure on them, because it really meant

⁷³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 44.

breaking that coalition in Congress.”⁷⁴ His vision of this campaign was that, “the SCLC would lead waves of the nation’s poor and disinherited to Washington D.C., in the spring of 1968 to demand redress of their grievances by the United States government and to secure at least jobs or income for all.”⁷⁵ King began developing ideas of compensation for all poor Americans in 1964 in his book *Why We Can’t Wait*. He suggested a Bill of Rights for all disadvantaged groups, including war veterans, Negroes, and poor Whites, which could potentially transform all of their social, economic, and political futures.⁷⁶ On December 4, 1967, King publicly affirmed the formation and intentions of the Poor People’s Campaign.

Early in 1968 the campaign began to take form, by way of King and the SCLC’s strategic planning, which allowed them organize thousands of poor people across the country for a united cause. They planned for the Poor People’s Campaign to predominantly take place in Washington, D.C., due to the abundance of politicians that resided there, as the campaign wanted to overwhelm the politicians with their demands. The campaign really took off in other states in March, when Dr. King began to travel across the U.S. to increase the conversation on the campaign. Specifically in Memphis, Tennessee, the campaign took a turn as King spoke to striking sanitation workers. On March 28th King lead a march in solidarity with Memphis’s striking sanitation workers. He was inspired by them and felt that “they were demonstrating something there that needed to be demonstrated all over our country. They were demonstrating that we can stick together and they were demonstration that we are all tied in a single garment of destiny.”⁷⁷ Although their unity positively inspired King, it also led the media and their

⁷⁴ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 31.

⁷⁵ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 31.

⁷⁶ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 151-152.

⁷⁷ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 31.

opposition to diminish the objectives and actions of the strikers and the overall campaign. On April 4, 1968 King was assassinated in Memphis, which ultimately led to the demise of the SCLC, the Poor People's Campaign, and the united Black nonviolence movement. King's death cast a large shadow over the SCLC and the Poor People's Campaign and while they continued forward after his death, they could never recover from it. The campaign was able to stimulate some change for the poor, but the general results were underwhelming compared to the initial ambitions of the campaign.

Dr. King's leading objectives for economic reform were ambitious, radical, and somewhat unattainable. King's "convictions regarding God's will to inaugurate a new age of freedom deepened in the last years as he gave himself totally to the struggles for justice and peace in America and the world."⁷⁸ His deep faith in God led him to believe in the eventual good will of the U.S government and the American public. Dr. King's goals were unachievable mainly because they were so ambitious and they were predicated on the end of institutionalized racism, and the American middle class joining the movement.⁷⁹ King believed that American society required, "a radical transformation of the value structure of the society. America needed to be moved from its focus on property and profit to a focus on people."⁸⁰ King underestimated the deep roots of American capitalism and overestimated the goodwill of the American middle class. He believed that the United States should look to Scandinavia's democratic socialism as an economic model, since "both Norway and Sweden, whose economies are literally dwarfed by the size of our affluence and the extent of our technology, they have no unemployment and no

⁷⁸ Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 460.

⁷⁹ Sidney M. Willhelm, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Experience in America," *Journal of Black Studies* 10, no. 1 (1979): 14-17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784048>.

⁸⁰ King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," 6.

slums.”⁸¹ Dr. King assumed that equal opportunity to employment, education, and better housing was a goal of the government and therefore underestimated their commitment to capitalism. While King and the Civil Rights Movement was able to dismantle racial segregation, that achievement did not threaten democracy or capitalism. King’s plan for economic reform would have brought down the United States capitalists system, something that the government and much of American society deeply believed in.

Dr. King and his followers believed that economic reform could lead to the collective advancement of the United States, as their main goal was to achieve equal opportunities for all Americans. King’s economic justice campaign was able to unite poor Americans regardless of their race, religion, and sex. This movement symbolized an interracial collation that was united by its members’ discontent with living in poverty, waiting for government aid, and the inequities that came with being poor. They wanted access to better education opportunities, health care, housing, and living conditions. As they fought for more cultural capital and the possibility of economic mobility they demonstrated the power of unified force. Although, the level of success of the movement was underwhelming, their efforts and intentions were refreshing. They opened the eyes of many Americans to poverty, city slums, and growing class divides. While King continued to fight for economic justice, he was also fighting against the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. Dr. King profusely criticized the Vietnam War as a mission for global imperialism, asserting that it promoted immoral actions for an immoral cause. King’s activism for racial and economic justice derived from his high moral principles that did not allow

⁸¹ King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr.*, chap. 24.

him look past injustice. While the U.S. continued their imperial mission in Vietnam, King decided to take a stand against imperial injustice.

Imperial Injustice

In conjunction with Dr. King's racial justice campaign and his economic reform campaign, King became involved in the 1960's anti-war movement, thus expanding his radical platform. The 1960's anti-war movement arose alongside the Civil Rights Movement, as they both aspired to transform the social and political makeup of American society and the United States government. The anti-war movement was defined as an opposition movement that detested the United States involvement in the Vietnam War, due to their desire for peace. As public support of the Vietnam War began to diminish, the anti-war movement gained traction amongst a diverse range of ethnic groups, professions, and economic classes. They united into a diverse coalition, which generally agreed that involvement in the war was hampering the social progress of the country.

Dr. King and some in the SCLC stood in solidarity with the anti-war movement because of their aligned interest. His position was that the U.S. government should take action against rising poverty, as the actions they were currently taking promoted a continuation of class gaps and a welfare state. It is believed that King knew that by "keeping with his continuing criticisms of the capitalist system and how that system was sustained by, and in turn sustained, racism, poverty, and militarism--that either the War on Poverty or the War in Vietnam would have to be slighted to pay for the other."⁸² In addition, Dr. King believed that U.S. involvement in the war was primarily centered on the government's quest to expand economic and political power of the

⁸² King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," 2.

county, as opposed to their resistance to the social, economic, and political advancement of African Americans, other minority groups, and the poor.

While Dr. King may have personally opposed the Vietnam War throughout early to mid-1960, his responsibility and devotion to the African American Civil Rights Movement kept him quiet on the matter.⁸³ His relationship with the federal government was detrimental to the continuance and progression of the movement, as many of his personal connection networks often kept discussions going. The open dialogue he experience with the President and some members of congress was previously key to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Dr. King felt that by publicly opposing the war, his relationship with President Johnson and congress would be damaged.⁸⁴ Also, King still maintained a deep faith that the American public would recognize the consequences of racism and poverty. However, as the racial tension in the United States continued to grow, he realized that the growing divide between the “White moderates” and the inhabitants of the slums and ghettos was not improving. It has been emphasized that one of King’s “great disappointment was with the failure of the majority of White moderates in the North and South (in government, labor, church, business, and even the civil rights movement) to support the goal of genuine equality for Blacks and poor people.”⁸⁵

This insight led Dr. King to reexamine the “forward progress” the movement had achieved and identify that the government was reluctant to address the lingering consequences of racism. The lingering consequences of racism, were not just affecting African Americans and

⁸³ Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," 24.

⁸⁴ Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," 22-24.

⁸⁵ Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 461.

other people of color in the U.S., it was affecting “the other” throughout the world. King’s evaluation of the domestic racism in the U.S. allowed him to link racism, poverty, and imperialism. He began to ask, ““why are there forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence?” Why has our nation placed itself in the position of being God’s military agent on earth, and intervened recklessly in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic? Why have we substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order?”⁸⁶ The United States foreign affairs policies were directly connected to many domestic policies, which perpetuated malicious hierarchy systems that kept different nations, communities, and individuals subjugated. The subjugated groups were given very little economic and social resources keeping them in poverty and at the mercy of the powerful nations. While the dominant groups were able to continually exploit the labor, the land, and the culture of the subjugated groups.

Dr. King’s awakening to the implications of global racism and its effects on the social progress of the African American community, led him to accept the anti-war movement and the ensuing shift in his relationship with the federal government. By the mid-1965 King made his first public statement regarding the war. He began to openly express his beliefs on “the interrelationship of racism, poverty, and militarism in the policies of the United States government.”⁸⁷ However, not until the late 1966’s did King totally release his misgivings about the impact his opposition to the war would have on the Civil Rights Movement. By 1967 he fully embraced the anti-war movement, because he could no longer ignore the interrelation of the United States foreign policy and the United States domestic policy. On his opposition to the war

⁸⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 133.

⁸⁷ Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 456.

King stated, “there is... a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed that there was a real promise of hope for the poor, for both Black and Whites through the Poverty Program. There were experiments, hopes, and new beginnings. Then came the build-up in Vietnam. And I watched the program broken as if it was some ideal political plaything of a society gone mad on war.”⁸⁸ King understood that as the federal government became preoccupied with the Vietnam War, the possibility of the political, social, and economic regression for the African American community amplified.

The war in Vietnam and the state of the poor prompted Dr. Martin Luther King’s opposition to some of the United States governments policies, “the escalation of the war in Vietnam by the United States, along with a de-escalation of the War on Poverty, and American indifference towards massive poverty in the Third World motivated King to become one of the severest critics of the domestic and foreign policies of his government during the second half of the 1960s.”⁸⁹ By openly criticizing the United States foreign affairs Dr. King received backlash from individuals and organizations he once called allies. Both White and Black leaders within the Civil Rights Movement directly stood against his global justice campaign⁹⁰, believing that it went beyond the mission and responsibility of the movement. These former allies either had yet to grasp that domestic racism and poverty were connected to imperialism or they did not want to

⁸⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., “Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam” (sermon, Riverside Church, New York, August 6, 1967), UC Berkeley <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificviet/riversidetranscript.html>.

⁸⁹ Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 463.

⁹⁰ King’s global justice campaign ranges from mid-1965 through 1968, as this is when he fully embraced his opposition to the Vietnam War and became outspoken on global racism and imperialism. During this time period, King was still an activist for racial justice and economic justice, as they are intertwined with global justice and his main concern was the social and economic progression of African Americans.

end the movement's relationship and dialogue with the federal government. King affirmed that, "many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. At the heart of their concerns, this query has often loomed large and loud: "Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent?" "Peace and Civil Rights don't mix," they say. "Aren't you hurting the cause of your people?" they ask."⁹¹ But Dr. King had to hold true to what he believed was right and overlook the concerns of others. King's global justice campaign placed him in a different and uncomfortable position, as some began to view him as an outsider to the Civil Rights Movement, due to his increasingly radical position.

Once Dr. Martin Luther King embraced his polarizing stance on the war he became a member and a leader within the anti-war movement. His significance and authority as an activist brought more media attention, followers, and influence to the anti-war movement. But it also brought more negative attention and criticism to the movement, as it was placed onto a bigger national and international stage. Dr. King applied his nonviolent methods and philosophy to the movement, which had previously been embraced by the leaders and followers of the anti-war movement. As a movement that prided and defined itself on its desires for peace, their main methods of protest were marches, boycotts, and other acts of civil disobedience. King's opposition to global racism and imperialism went along with the anti-war movements' opposition to the militaristic efforts of the United States. On March 24, 1967 Dr. King led his first anti-war rally in Chicago, as a member of the anti-war movement. During this rally he tried to gather support for the anti-war movement, by communicating the shared struggles of international victims of colonialism and the African American community. This rally took place

⁹¹ Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam" (speech, New York, N.Y., April 4, 1967), King Institute, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>.

towards the end of the Chicago Freedom Movement and symbolized the commencement of King's global justice campaign.

While the rally was one of his first acts as a leader within the anti-war movement, Dr. King wanted to keep his association with the anti-war movement and his association with the Civil Rights Movement and the SCLC separate. It was understood that many, "civil rights groups like the NAACP and the Urban League regarded themselves as single-issue organizations, pressure groups for the cause of racial justice. They experienced enough opposition within their own sphere of concern; to engage in debates over foreign policy would be an insupportable burden."⁹² King knew that many within the Civil Rights Movement disagreed with his public opposition to the war in Vietnam and he did not want his anti-war efforts to affect the movement or the SCLC. Dr. King delivered a speech titled "Beyond Vietnam" on April 4, 1967, which was a plea to both the United States government and the public to end their support of the Vietnam War. Within the opening of the speech King asserted that, "the truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war."⁹³ Dr. King understood the struggle of that President Johnson and congress faced as the war continued; going to war was not an easy or light decision.⁹⁴ He also understood that many Americans were fighting in the war and he did not want to diminish or disrespect their efforts. However, his conscience and his morals prevailed against his fear.

⁹² Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," 25.

⁹³ King, "Beyond Vietnam."

⁹⁴ King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," 1.

This speech was particularly consistent with his radical goals during the latter half of the 1960's, as he stated his disapproval of economic injustice, the Vietnam War and its imperialistic objectives. During this speech Dr. King spoke regarding his struggle in convincing racial minorities and people in poverty in the North that social change could be achieved through nonviolent actions, because they were well aware of the Vietnam War and the U.S. governments stated "purpose" for being involved in the war. Dr. King surmised that "perhaps a more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home... We were taking the Black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem."⁹⁵ Many African Americans and poor folk had noted and confronted the hypocrisy of King's message in the face of his own inaction towards the war in Vietnam; King stated that he could no longer turn a blind eye to the war.

He went on to state his support of the Vietnamese people, as they pushed forward to liberate themselves and attain freedom. In his support of the Vietnamese people Dr. King re-affirmed, "these are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wounds of the frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. We in the West must support these revolutions."⁹⁶ Dr. King believed that he was one of the many voices for the American voiceless enemy, for they were often portrayed in an inhuman light to garner

⁹⁵ King, "Beyond Vietnam."

⁹⁶ King, "Beyond Vietnam."

American support for the war. King went on to reiterate that his opposition to the war was also due to his concern for American soldiers that were being “required” to fight an immoral and unjustifiable war. In this speech, Dr. King gave many powerful and unwavering statements that condemned the U.S. government and uplifted American troops and the Vietnamese people. King was a strong ally of the Vietnamese people, as he fought for their cause and freedom against a dominating United States.

Dr. Martin Luther King continued his radical crusade against the war in Vietnam throughout the late 1960’s. He considered his fight against imperialism as important as his fight against racial inequality and economic injustice. His fight for economic reform and the war in Vietnam were particularly interconnected, as both were dependent and affected by the United States foreign policy. King knew that there would be no economic reform while the war in Vietnam continued. While many viewed his openly stated position on the war as a negative for the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King viewed it as an essential aspect to the progression and success of the movement. King believed he was helping the advancement of African Americans and the poor by supporting the end of the war, which was endeavor that reinforced the continuation of racism and poverty.⁹⁷ The end of global poverty and racism was arguably the most ambitious goals of all King’s campaigns, because would imply the termination of colonialism. Many western nations relied upon colonialism, due to the exploitative nature of imperialism and the resources they gained from their colonies.

Dr. King’s stance against the war in Vietnam was intensely radical as he took on two main fixtures of the United States identity in capitalism and militarism. While his philosophy of

⁹⁷ King, “The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968,” 6.

nonviolence was inherently anti-war, when he opposed the war it would be viewed by some as anti-American and anti-veterans. While King had long been “a proponent of peace, as early as 1953 he decided that all war was futile, especially in the light of weapons of mass destruction.”⁹⁸ Dr. King knew his opposition to the war would be twisted to fit a negative narrative formed by the media and the federal government. King began his public protest of the Vietnam War in 1965, based on his moral principles that would not allow him to support the war. Many of his allies could understand his moral opposition to the war, because of the constancy of his nonviolent ideology and the relation of his ideology to his faith in God. However, by 1966 King began to allude that his opposition to the war was based on his moral beliefs and the economic implications of the war. Once he suggested that the war was not about the freedom and liberation of the Vietnamese people and was partially based on advancing the economic interest of the United States, many began to resist him. King faced great criticism, once he embraced his beliefs for economic reform and global justice, was due to the supposed boundaries and barriers he crossed with his unrelenting activism.

Conclusion

The issues addressed in this paper highlight the conflicting dialogues regarding Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s activism and King’s level of radicalism. The debate on King’s evolution as an activist is split between three factions of people that have developed strong opinions on how they view Dr. King. All three groups acknowledge his moral position on nonviolence and activism through civil disobedience, however this is where they divide. One group believe that his advocacy of nonviolence actions was not radical, because they confuse radicalism with

⁹⁸ King, “The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968,” 2.

extremisms⁹⁹, which has a stronger negative connotation. The second fraction acknowledges that Dr. King was a radical American activist, but they overlook that he held true to messages and methods of nonviolence, even as he was confronted with the growing Black Power Movement and increasing violence as focus shifted. This group tends to ignore the continuity of King's messages, even though it was rooted in his protest of economic injustice and imperialism. The final group viewed King as a radical throughout his many years as an activist, regardless of his method and message. The debate on King's radicalism is very complicated and a clearer view of King's tactics and message is needed to demonstrate how King's evolution as an activist increased his radicalism.

This paper's main argument differs from the other groups because it contends that the shifts in Dr. King's focus caused him to become even more radical as he went up against two powerful American social structures. King embodied many different social positions and forms of activism, and to ignore any of them is to overlook his growth. Dr. King dedicated his life to helping others and to standing up against injustice, which allowed him to lead a radical overhaul of multiple American social structures. He took on many American institutions, such as systematic racism, capitalism, and imperialism to transform the United States into a nation that holds true to its founding principles of freedom and equality for all. While King addressed each of these institutions individually, his general campaign for justice represented the interrelatedness of racism, poverty, and imperialism. He believed that racial inequality, economic reform, and American imperialism were all barriers to the social progress of the United States and to justice and equality for African Americans.

⁹⁹ My definition of extremism is, the belief in or support for ideas that are very far from what most people consider correct or reasonable.

While King addressed many different issues and barriers that impede African American progress, he stayed relatively constant on whom he was advocating for and how he protested. King constantly stated that his campaigns for racial equality, economic reform, and the end of the war in Vietnam were to ensure the advancement of African Americans. The end of legal institutionalized racial segregation and racial inequality with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, helped remove different social, economic, and political barriers for African Americans. For example, more job opportunities became available to African Americans, because it was no longer legal for employers to discriminate based on race.¹⁰⁰ In addition, African Americans “gained” and/or reserved the ability to vote in federal, state, and local elections. The ability to vote in mass numbers required politicians and policy makers to heed the necessities and requests of the Black community. King’s racial justice campaign began in the 1950’s, but arguably lasted until his death, as his primary motivation throughout all of his campaigns was to attain justice for African Americans.

King’s economic reform campaign provided attention to the nuances and connections between race and poverty. During the 1900’s the Black community experienced high rates of unemployment and poverty that continued into the 1960’s.¹⁰¹ African Americans had little access to social capital, which meant they endured inferior schooling, housing, employment, and health care.¹⁰² African Americans that were weary and angry at their living conditions, the lack of attention they received, and discrimination they faced generally inhabited American ghettos and slums.¹⁰³ During his economic justice campaign, Dr. King was able to unite and inspire a diverse

¹⁰⁰ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 127.

¹⁰¹ Stewart E. Tolnay, "The African American "Great Migration" and Beyond," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 212-213, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036966>.

¹⁰² Borden, "Black Rhetoric in the 1960s: Sociohistorical Perspectives," 428.

¹⁰³ Borden, "Black Rhetoric in the 1960s: Sociohistorical Perspectives," 427-429.

range of people across the nation support the poor and push the government towards economic reform. Though Dr. King's primary objective was to ensure equally rights and opportunities for African Americans, his economic reform campaign engaged people of all races. King's call for economic reform pursued human rights for all Americans, as the United States government and American society had essentially disregarded poor African Americans, Whites, and other racial minorities.

Dr. King's advocacy against the war in Vietnam was a stand against imperial injustice and a stand for African Americans and impoverished individuals. Just as King understood that racism and poverty were interconnected, he also knew that racism, poverty, and imperialism were interrelated. His opposition to the Vietnam War was a part of his campaign for global justice, as King viewed himself as a civil rights and human rights leader.¹⁰⁴ However, Dr. King's opposition to the war was also due to the effects the U.S. foreign policy was having over its domestic policy. The resources and attention that the Vietnam War demanded from the government and American society was abundant, which led to continued negligence from the government in regards to racial minorities and poor people.¹⁰⁵ King's moral opposition to the war and imperialism and his obligation to African Americans and poor people, led to him to denounce the war and criticize the United States government.

Based on his beliefs and methods Dr. King was a radical activist. Throughout his racial justice campaign, he recognized the need for radical methods to bring down legal institutionalized racism and discrimination. King suffered extreme attacks, yet he stood his

¹⁰⁴ King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," 8.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Why I Am Opposed to the War in Vietnam," sermon, August 6, 1967.

ground and continued to protest. His bravery became a testament to his commitment to the African American community and helped him become the face and leader of the African American Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King's nonviolent philosophy gave African Americans confidence and inspired self-respect, as they now had control over their own fate. They understood that they would suffer violence, hatred, and imprisonment, yet they were in control of their own actions and sometimes the predictable actions of law enforcement and the United States legal system. King's proven leadership and authority encouraged African Americans to fight for social and political equality, which led to one of the biggest revolutions in American history.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. understood his nonviolent ideology and methods were radical. Within his books, letters, articles, speeches, and sermons King illustrated what he thought and felt about various events and social structures. He directly offers insight and background into his radical beliefs, seeing as in them he explains his actions and/or inactions during different incidents and obstacles. King accepted that his nonviolent tactics were radically coercive and that as he addressed different issues he would be advocating for further extreme change.¹⁰⁶ Through the language within Dr. King's various outlets of self-expression, readers can determine that he recognized that his actions and beliefs were radical on the basis that they placed pressure on individuals, states, and the federal government to implement change.¹⁰⁷ Although, he used nonviolent direct action in order to protest for extreme political, social, and economic change his actions and philosophy were innately radical. While nonviolence action and civil disobedience included certain passive forms of protest, self-endangering forms of protest were very common.

¹⁰⁶ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 32-33.

¹⁰⁷ Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action," 18.

During marches, sit-ins, boycotts, integrated bus rides, and ordinary forms of nonviolent protest, civil rights activist faced violence, imprisonment, and economic loss. King's radical methods, message, and the daily danger he faced fashioned King into a radical activist.

As King identified the connections between racism, poverty, and imperialism he was motivated to shift his primary focus. The connection between those injustices and the change in his focus coincided and led to his increasing radicalism. Although, his racial justice campaign pursued social and political reform in the United States, his economic justice campaign and his global justice campaign attacked two American staples of capitalism and militarism. King's protest against capitalism, imperialism, and militarism molded King into an even further radical activist as he was after social, political, and economic reform on a larger scale. As King's goals and focuses continued to broaden so did his methods, which became increasingly more radical as he continued to strive for equality and justice in America. King was able to evolve as an activist, as he felt his message could and should be extended to address poverty within the United States and global imperialism.

The broadening of Dr. Martin Luther King's focus did not happen overnight, as many of his early works faintly touched on America's need for economic reform. Throughout all of his activism, he acknowledged that there was work to be done in many different sectors, yet he predominantly focused on racial equality, voting rights, and the end of racial segregation during his early years as an activist. But by the mid to late 1960's, King mainly spoke on his more radical beliefs, when he called for an overhaul of the United States economic system of capitalism. Not only did he call for economic reform, he also sought to apply his beliefs on nonviolent action to the whole nation during wartime. As he branched out, King held true to initial methods of peaceful protest and his message of nonviolence, but he became inherently

more radical as he tried to bring down imperialism and reform capitalism. The patience and fortitude King exemplified throughout his life allowed him to expand his reach, because he was able to focus primarily on one problem, city, or event at a time. Dr. King's ability to shift his focus across different issues that affected the African American community is what allowed him to evolve as a radical activist.

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