

MIXED UP IN THE MAKING:  
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., CESAR CHAVEZ, AND THE IMAGES OF THEIR  
MOVEMENTS

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the Faculty of the Graduate School  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

MIXED UP IN THE MAKING: MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., CESAR  
CHAVEZ AND THE IMAGES OF THEIR MOVEMENTS

Presented by Andrea Shan Johnson

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of History

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBP	Bob Barber Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
BTP	William Taylor Collection. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
DCP	David Cohen Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
FBI	Files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRP	Fred Ross Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
IDP	Irwin DeShetler Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
MGP	Marc Grossman Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
MLK	Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929-1968, The King Center, Atlanta, Georgia.
MLK Speeches	Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929-1968, Speeches Collection, The King Center, Atlanta, Georgia.
NFWA	National Farm Workers Association. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
NFWM	National Farm Worker Ministry Collection. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.
RHC	Ronald Haughton Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan

SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Records, 1954-1970. The King Center, Atlanta, Georgia
SJVF	San Joaquin Valley Farm Labor Collection, 1947-1974, Special Collections Library, Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno, Fresno, California
SMTH	Sydney Smith Papers, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Records, 1959-1972. The King Center, Atlanta, Georgia.
TGNC	Table Grape Growers Negotiating Committee, 1965-1987, Special Collections Library, Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno, Fresno, California
UFW/UFWOC	United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
UFWA	United Farm Workers Administration Department Files. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
UFWC	United Farm Workers Central Files. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
UFWI	United Farm Workers Information and Research Department Files. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
UFWP	United Farm Workers Office of the President Files, Part I, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
UMG	United Farm Workers: Marshall Ganz Files. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
VSP	Reverend Victor P. Salandini Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan
WKP	William Kircher Papers. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan



## ABSTRACT

Although his movement was a labor movement which targeted only a small portion of Mexican Americans, Cesar Chavez has often been compared to Martin Luther King, Jr., and has been portrayed as a civil rights leader on the same level. This dissertation explores the images in four areas (nonviolence, religion, patriotism or ethnic pride, and gender) that both men created to promote and sustain their movements, and explains how and why Chavez often copied or slightly altered King's tactics for the California farm labor union. It is because of these images that many in the public came to see Chavez as King's Mexican heir.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In March of 1965, Rabbi Jacob Pressman flew from Burbank, California, to Montgomery, Alabama, to participate in the last day of the March from Selma. With him were 15 other rabbis and some Christian clergymen. At the Alabama airport, they met with other clergy and were briefed. Pressman and three others decided to find the local synagogue and stash their luggage there. From the synagogue, they continued to a gathering point at a hospital and then marched to the capital. After the march, they were supposed to board busses to the airport. Unfortunately, they could not find the meeting point for the busses. National Guardsmen and policemen would or could not help by giving them directions. They began to hear rumors that the federalized National Guard would be de-federalized in ten minutes and turn into the enemy. Panicking, they hired an African American taxi driver to take them back to the synagogue for their luggage and then hurried on to the airport. One of the party ended up in a cab which was forced into oncoming traffic and narrowly avoided a collision. At the airport, the rabbis boarded a plane back to California, escaping the South. One of Pressman's fellow rabbis later commented to him that "You know, it is easier to read history than to be mixed up in the making of it."<sup>1</sup>

The rabbi's words were more significant than even he meant them to be. For he and the hundreds of other clergy who appeared in Alabama that day were indeed part of

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Pressman, March on Montgomery, 27 March 1965, MLK, Box 21, Folder 12.

the making of history. It was their presence on the line that helped give Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement legitimacy. This use of clergy was merely one of the ways that King and the organization under his direction, created images of the movement which were to serve in its promotion to both African Americans and the general public. They were literally making history.

King was not alone in using such images. Only months after the march from Selma to Montgomery, a Mexican American hero would begin to rise to prominence. This man, Cesar Chavez, would find it expedient to create and use for the farm labor movement many of the same kinds of images and tactics that King had for the civil rights movement. Both men would create images of their movements as nonviolent, religiously oriented, and as patriotic or ethnic causes. Both men would also shape images of gender in their movement in order to promote and sustain the cause.

King was the son of a Baptist minister. He grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1954, he took a position as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. King became president of the Montgomery Improvement Association in 1955, an organization formed to direct the bus boycott response to the arrest of Rosa Parks. This led to his involvement in a series of civil rights causes. In 1957, King helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). He visited India in 1959 to learn more about nonviolence tactics. That same year he and his family moved to Atlanta to be nearer to SCLC headquarters.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A thorough chronology of King's life can be found in Flip Schulke, editor, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Documentary... Montgomery to Memphis* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1976), 19-21.

In the early to mid 1960s, King was a highly visible civil rights leader. During 1961 and 1962, King and the SCLC were active in a civil rights movement in Albany, Georgia. Although considered a failure, Albany helped them better prepare for future demonstrations. In 1963, King helped organize demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, and the March on Washington, both of which grabbed the nation's attention. In 1964, the same year that the Civil Rights Act passed Congress, he won the Nobel Peace Prize. In support of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, King led a march from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery, Alabama. King soon faced growing opposition from more radical African American groups and by 1966 attempted to focus on economic issues that were important to the African American community. When he was assassinated in 1968, King was in Memphis, Tennessee, helping with a garbage workers strike.<sup>3</sup>

While King was most active in the first half of the 1960s, Cesar Chavez was most active in the latter half of the decade. Chavez grew up as the child of immigrant workers. He joined the military during World War II. In 1953, he went to work for the Community Service Organization (CSO). In 1960, he became the CSO's General Director. Through his work with the CSO, Chavez began to appreciate the growing concerns of Mexican Americans about the over abundance of guest workers, the *braceros*, in the fields of California.<sup>4</sup>

In 1962, determined to work toward a solution, Chavez offered to work for the CSO for one year without pay if the organization would help support and establish a

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall ye Reap* (New York: Crowell, 1970), 144-146; Jacques Levy, *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 129-131.

union for farm workers. They refused this offer, and so Chavez resigned.<sup>5</sup> He also decided not to work with the Agriculture Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), a farm labor union, fearing interference from its parent organization, the AFL-CIO.<sup>6</sup> Chavez then moved his family to Delano, California, a farm town where his extended family lived. He began to travel the San Joaquin Valley, trying to create a new union. The union began with these travels in 1962; however, it was not until the end of the *bracero* program in 1964 that Chavez had a chance for success.

That success would begin in 1965. In March 1965, workers in a rose field in McFarland, California, struck for higher wages. McFarland was a small town about 12 miles from Delano. The workers in Chavez's union did not hold out for union recognition but went back to the fields with the promise of a pay raise.<sup>7</sup> This event at least proved that the Chavez could organize and maintain a small strike. In the summer of 1965, the union encouraged a rent strike among nearby immigrant workers renting from the Tulare Country Housing Authority. This gave the union increased publicity.<sup>8</sup> In September, the leader of the AWOC, Filipino Larry Itliong, asked Chavez's organization, the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), to join in striking against the grape growers who were refusing to pay the same wages that they had paid earlier in the year in other parts of the state. Chavez called NFWA members together on

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<sup>5</sup> Levy, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Levy, 179-180; Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Levy, 181.

September 16<sup>th</sup>, Mexican Independence Day, and asked them to vote on joining the strike. The vote passed and California grape strike began.

Both Chavez and King would attempt to maintain the image of their movements as nonviolent. King's vision of a nonviolent movement has been attributed to several sources, both philosophical and practical. Most authors have pointed to Gandhi as the most important influence upon King's choice of nonviolent action. Aldon D. Morris wrote that King has been perceived of as being able to relate to the poor of his race, just as Gandhi did to the poor of India.<sup>9</sup> Cornel West contended that King used Gandhi's methods but that he did so while framing them in American and Christian contexts.<sup>10</sup> George M. Houser claimed that King found Gandhi's nonviolent resistance in South Africa "ideologically appealing."<sup>11</sup> Ira Zepp, Jr., in *The Social Vision of Martin Luther King Jr.*, attributed King's belief in nonviolence to several sources including Thoreau, Reinhold Neibuhr, and Tolstoy, but most of all to Gandhi whom King had no doubt heard about from several sources including his instructors.<sup>12</sup> In *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Apostle of Militant Nonviolence*, James A. Colaiaco said that it was through Gandhi's methods that King became known as the America's most important "apostle of militant

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<sup>9</sup> Aldon D. Morris, "A Man Prepared for the Times: A Sociological Analysis of the Leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.," Edited by Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 57.

<sup>10</sup> Cornel West, "The Religious Foundations of the Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.," Edited by Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990) 128.

<sup>11</sup> George M. Houser, "Freedom's Struggle Crosses Oceans and Mountains: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Liberation Struggles in Africa and America," Edited by Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman, *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990) 189.

<sup>12</sup> Ira G. Zepp Jr., *The Social Vision of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 73-81.

nonviolence.”<sup>13</sup> A. L. Herman similarly argued that King’s ideas were shaped by Gandhi, through whom he found a way to link Christian faith and good works together.<sup>14</sup> Similar opinions can be found in Stephen Oates biography of King, *Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.*<sup>15</sup> These last two works are similar to another work by Mary King for UNESCO. Mary King acknowledged the impact of liberal theologians upon King’s thinking but discusses his nonviolent policies as policies which reflected Gandhi’s methods.<sup>16</sup>

Other authors point to more African American influences upon King’s decision to use nonviolent action. In *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Philosophy of Nonviolence*, Greg Moses wrote that King’s nonviolent ideas were formed in the context of African American intellectuals who came before him such as Frederick Douglass, WEB DuBois, and A. Philip Randolph.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Tom Hastings, in *Meek Ain’t Weak: Nonviolent Power and People of Color*, contended that King’s nonviolence

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<sup>13</sup> James A. Colaiaco, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Apostle of Militant Nonviolence*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 2.

<sup>14</sup> A. L. Herman *Community, Violence, and Peace: Aldo Leopold, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gautama the Buddha in the Twenty-First Century*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 125.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: A Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994), 30-33.

<sup>16</sup> Mary King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action*, (Paris, France: UNESCO Publishing, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Philosophy of Nonviolence*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

came after African Americans had already been prepared for such by other movements such as CORE, who were influenced by Gandhi.<sup>18</sup>

Some authors also acknowledge that King's nonviolence was driven not just by philosophy but by pragmatic reasons as well. Ira Chernus (2004) argued that King's nonviolent philosophy was shaped by both his religious beliefs, and his practical observation that a nonviolent movement could generate a less violent response from the opposition. This was more likely to create a climate for future cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Chernus' argument reflects the arguments made some twenty years earlier by James Hanigan in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Foundations of Nonviolence*. Hanigan asserted that King's faith created his love for nonviolent policies, yet one could not separate the philosophies of nonviolence from its pragmatic uses. To do so, he argued, can obscure the meaning of the policy for the advocate of it.<sup>20</sup> Although he does not label this as a practical use of nonviolence, James A. Colaiaco, who attributed King's influence to Gandhi, also recognizes that it had practical values. It was nonviolent mass action, he explains, which brought out Southern racism which in turn forced the federal government to act to protect the civil rights of African Americans.<sup>21</sup>

Chavez is likewise credited with using nonviolence for both philosophical and practical reasons. Tom Hastings, in *Meek Ain't Weak: Nonviolent Power and People of*

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Hastings, *Meek Ain't Weak: Nonviolent Power and People of Color*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 151.

<sup>19</sup> Ira Chernus, *American Nonviolence: The History of An Idea*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 169-171.

<sup>20</sup> James P. Hanigan, *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Foundations of Nonviolence*, (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1984), 1-18.

<sup>21</sup> Colaiaco, 137-148.



*Color*, wrote that Chavez could not have made it with a policy of violence. Hastings said that whites in the area had tried to organize the same population before, but it was not until Chavez led a nonviolent campaign that there was any success.<sup>22</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard Garcia in *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* asserted that Chavez's belief in nonviolence was inspired by Gandhi and like-minded pacifists, his faith, his mother, and the practicality of such a tactic due to the examples of the civil rights and anti-war movements.<sup>23</sup> Many of those who wrote about Chavez concluded that he too was greatly influenced by Gandhi.<sup>24</sup> Some, like Winthrop Yinger, pointed out that Chavez used Gandhi's tactics such as marches, fasts and boycotts, and had a print of Gandhi in his office.<sup>25</sup> Mark Day claims that Chavez sacrificed as Gandhi had.<sup>26</sup> Chavez's willingness to march for days, fast for weeks, and to live poorly help create an image of him as a man who gave up much for his cause.

The literature on King and Chavez and their use of nonviolence does not include a discussion of how these men created the image of their movements as nonviolent movements in response to Cold War fears about law and order and the spread of

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<sup>22</sup> Hastings, 118-120.

<sup>23</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Day, *Forty Acres: Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 115; Pat Hoffman, *Ministry of the Dispossessed: Learning from the Farm Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: Wallace Press, 1987), 25; Sam Kushner, *The Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 165; Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 112; Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 1970), 294; Alberto Prago, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A History of Mexican-Americans* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1973), 185.

<sup>25</sup> Winthrop Yinger, *Cesar Chavez: The Rhetoric of Nonviolence* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), 22, 25, 34, 59, 60, 76, 114, 115.

<sup>26</sup> Day, 115.

communism. The first chapter of the present work discusses the work of these two men to maintain such images. Both men shored up their claim to nonviolence by claiming that they had been inspired by Gandhi and by using his image. Both men used the image of nonviolence to reassure the rest of American society that their causes were operating within the expected realms of law and order. Nonviolent images also worked to assure Americans that both movements were democratic ones, and not part of the communist threat. Chavez and the farm labor movement also worked to portray Chavez as King's Mexican heir, an image which served to make the labor movement appear to be a nonviolent civil rights cause.

Religious imagery was also very important to these causes. There is scarcely an author who would disagree that King was to at least some degree inspired by his religious faith and that he used the church to further the civil rights cause. David Lewis wrote that King's Christianity and faith in man "directed his philosophical speculations far more than cold realism could have."<sup>27</sup> Adam Fairclough believed that King as a preacher "inherited a theology of freedom that went back to slavery days."<sup>28</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, in *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History*, showed that King talked about the movement in religious terms that African Americans were very familiar with and told African Americans that they could save the nation through redemptive suffering, or nonviolent action.<sup>29</sup> However some have argued that King's ideas are more varied. Richard Lischer, in *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr.*

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<sup>27</sup> David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 86.

<sup>28</sup> Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 57-76.

*and the Word that Moved America*, contended that King had to balance his messages with both African American church traditions and more recent liberal theology. He argued that in using both, King had a “strategy for social and political change.”<sup>30</sup> Keith Miller, author of *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King and Its Sources*, believed that King gained national prominence because he could appeal to both white and African American audiences using both the folk pulpit ways and the ways of popular white preachers, ministers whose influences are most rarely noted.<sup>31</sup> Fredrik Sunnemark explained that King using his rhetoric “positioned himself between different cultures; not only between white and African-American cultures but also between political, social, religious, and academic cultures ...” When King spoke, he appealed to various groups by using the same message.<sup>32</sup> Thus, King’s sermons and speeches, much of which seemed religious, were created to appeal to both African Americans and whites alike.

Chavez was similarly driven by his faith. John Hammerback and Richard Jensen demonstrated that Chavez as many before “translated his religious convictions into secular actions.”<sup>33</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval traced the influence of Catholicism in Chavez’s life and conclude that his 1968 fast was inspired not only by

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and The Word That Moved America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-12.

<sup>31</sup> Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King and Its Sources*, (New York: Free Press, 1992), 1-12.

<sup>32</sup> Fredrik Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom: The Voice of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004) 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 38.

Gandhi's work, but by his Catholic faith which made Gandhi's work attractive.<sup>34</sup>

Frederick Dalton argued that Chavez was a man of faith inspired by Catholic social teachings.<sup>35</sup>

Chavez and King's deep faith reflected much of American society. The literature confirms the existence of a rise in religious participation in the 1950s and 60s. This is typically attributed to the post war atmosphere. Ross Gregory in *Cold War America: 1946-1990*, pointed out that religious participation was patriotic. As a result, churches grew, particularly among denominations such as the Methodists and the Lutherans, groups perceived to place relatively low demands on members.<sup>36</sup> William H. Chafe, in *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, found that these churches also served to bind communities, often suburban ones, together through various activities. While critics often saw this as weakening the faith and turning the church into a consumer product, they recognized that for many the church had become the community.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, the churches could not escape playing a role in the Cold War drama, both in the fight against communism and in the civil rights movement. Dianne Kirby wrote that President Truman had enlisted the aid of religion to fight the war against communism. His speeches were often full of religious rhetoric, and he formed something

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<sup>34</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 141.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 46-59.

<sup>36</sup> Ross Gregory, *Cold War America: 1946-1990*, (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 2003), 222.

<sup>37</sup> William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: American Since World War II*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 120-121.

of alliance with the Catholic Church. The Church, which perceived communism as a godless force, possibly combined with Marshall Plan dollars, stopped the spread of Marxism in Western Europe.<sup>38</sup>

By 1950, claimed Robert Ellwood in *1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life*, Americans perceived that churches were a shelter from communism, and that true patriots were Christians. They also tended to believe that religion was the basis of American democracy.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as James T. Fisher has written, during the 1950s churches became increasingly unified. In addition there was a communitarian spirit that soon connected to the civil rights movement. Fisher stated that Will Herberg's 1955 work *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, proclaimed that Americans had entered a period of interfaith harmony. Fisher pointed out that shortly after Herberg's work was published, the Montgomery bus boycott began. Many of the figures tied into the civil rights movement had been exposed to these unification ideas and groups that supported them such as Christian socialists and the Catholic worker movement. It was no wonder then that they were willing work hand in hand with those of other faiths to support the civil rights movement.<sup>40</sup>

Catholics and Catholicism would play a strong role in the farm labor movement as well as the civil rights movement. James A. Morone showed in *Hellfire Nation: The*

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<sup>38</sup> Diane Kirby, "Harry Truman's Religious Legacy: The Holy Alliance, Containment and the Cold War," in Dianne Kirby, editor, *Religion and the Cold War*, (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 77-102.

<sup>39</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, *1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 1-3, 55.

<sup>40</sup> James T. Fisher, "American Religion Since 1945," in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, editors, *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 49-52.

*Politics of Sin in American History*, that American Social Gospel in the 1960s revolved around the concept that “society takes responsibility for all its people.”<sup>41</sup> Although Morone believed the roots of this were to be found among the Puritans, such social gospel was particularly prevalent in the Catholic liberation theology just coming into fashion among western Catholics. Such ideas were allowed to blossom with the Second Vatican Council. Judith Merkle, in *From the Heart of the Church: Catholic Social Tradition*, wrote that the Second Vatican Council “had a profound effect on social teaching,” and caused the church leaders to begin to consider worldwide issues of social justice.<sup>42</sup> Of course, the rise in communism also helped the spread of Catholic liberation theology. David Tombs asserted in *Latin American Liberation Theology* that it was the Cuban Revolution and Fidel Castro’s measures against the Church that made the church worry about Latin America. After this, the Church sent priest from other parts of the world to Latin America. These priests, Tombs says, became determined to do something about the poverty in their new homes.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Barend A. de Vries contended in *Champions of the Poor: The Economic Consequences of Juedo-Christian Values*, that liberation theology was then used by United States clergy to draw attention to issues of discrimination and poverty in the country.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 444.

<sup>42</sup> Judith A. Merkle, *From the Heart of the Church: Catholic Social Tradition*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 118-122.

<sup>43</sup> David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 73.

<sup>44</sup> Barend A. De Vries, *Champions of the Poor: The Economic Consequences of Judeo-Christian Values*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 192.

Americans of the Jewish faith also became an important support group during the civil rights and farm labor movements, although little to nothing has been written about their role in the farm labor movement. Murray Friedman wrote in *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance*, that despite the contemporary state of interracial relations, there had once been a strong African American-Jewish alliance, imperfect though it was.<sup>45</sup> Later scholars have pointed out more regional differences in Jewish public support of the civil rights movement. Northern Jews, who did not have to live in fear that their synagogues would be burned, were drawn to the civil rights movement more so than the Southern ones according to Marc Dollinger, in “‘Hamans’ and ‘Torquemadas’: Southern and Northern Jewish Responses to the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1965.” Many other essays in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis And Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, by Mark Bauman and Berkley Kalin, the work in which Dollinger’s chapter appears, showed how some Southern rabbis tried in subtle ways to express support for the civil rights movement, although they were often pressured into silence.<sup>46</sup> Clive Webb in *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights*, argued along similar lines, claiming, “Although southern Jews were generally supportive of the Supreme Court decision, many were scared by the massive resistance movement. In a desperate act of self preservation, they also sought to curtail the civil rights activities of their northern coreligionists.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance*, (New York: Free Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>46</sup> Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, editors, *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis And Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), xvi.

Most of the literature on King and Chavez readily illustrates that these men were inspired by their religious faiths. What is not covered thoroughly in the literature is the extent to which both men took advantage of the interfaith harmony of the 1950s and 60s. Chapter Two of this work focuses on the role that religious imagery played in both movements. Both King and Chavez were personally religious. King was a Baptist minister, and Chavez a devoted Catholic. Both men realized that by using their faith, they could attract and sustain a large portion of their base. Their religious promotions worked not only to promote the cause among their base, but also to attract the support of the entire nation, one that was increasingly oriented toward accepting an activist religion. Both groups could also appeal to Jews during this time period, not so much because of the interfaith harmony, but because Jews had traditional values of social justice, and given their memories of the holocaust, they could identify with the plight of blacks and farm workers.

If the 1950s and 60s were a time of intensified religious devotion, they were also a time of increased patriotism and concern that the American way be accessible to all Americans. David Burner, in *Making Peace with the 60s*, argued that the civil rights movement was an effort to “bring black Americans under the Declaration of Independence,” and to destroy the discrimination that held back African Americans.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, William Chafe, in *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, said that the immediate post war years were a time of hope for social activists, particularly

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<sup>48</sup> David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 49.



African Americans who would begin to push for citizenship rights.<sup>49</sup> John Diggins illustrated in *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace* that in the post war era Americans wanted other nations to adopt their political systems.<sup>50</sup> This American idea, claimed Scott Lucas, was to some extent shaped by the United States government with the help of willing participants who contributed to this subtle effort.<sup>51</sup> Of course there was a concern that the civil rights movement might be communist inspired. In *The Culture of the Cold War*, Stephen Whitfield summarized that in the 1950s, the civil rights struggle was seen as communist inspired because simply because the struggle was unpopular. “Communism was loathsome,” he wrote and therefore “anything loathsome was Communism.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Lisle Rose argued that those who were liberal and civil rights advocates would soon come to be labeled communistic was well.<sup>53</sup>

The nation’s pride in their democratic heritage and the wish to be an example to other countries furthered the success of the civil rights movement. Mary Dudziak showed how civil rights activists combined these two sentiments to further their goals in *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. She argued that civil rights reform resulted from negative international attention given to the United

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<sup>49</sup> William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>50</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941-1960*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), xv.

<sup>51</sup> Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s War: The American Crusade against the Soviet Union*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 1-5.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Cutlue of the Cold War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>53</sup>Lisle A. Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950*, (Larwence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 20.

States as a result of civil rights protests. This was something that the protestors recognized and took full advantage of, knowing that the government was worried about its international image and impact on emerging nations.<sup>54</sup> Thomas Borstelmann's work is similar to Dudziak's. In *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, he showed that American leaders tried to promote change, but at a slow pace which would cause the minimum of disruption.<sup>55</sup>

The third chapter of this dissertation discusses the images of patriotism and ethnic pride used by King and Chavez. This chapter adds to the existing literature by showing how that King at least recognized the increased need to appear patriotic and included that in his rhetoric. King needed other Americans and the federal government to recognize that African Americans were Americans who needed their civil rights protected. Thus, for him, it was expedient to portray the cause as an inherently American one, one that all patriotic Americans should support. Chavez needed Americans to recognize that farm workers were not like other Americans, and in fact they were a special group, exempted from regular labor practices by law, and that as such they needed Americans to join the grape boycott. For Chavez, whose cause was economic, such patriotic images made less sense. He would replace the patriotic images that King used with images of racial or ethnic pride to which most Mexican Americans could relate.

King and Chavez had another way to inspire their bases. They used traditional images of gender to promote involvement. Very little has been done on masculinity and

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.

the civil rights movement. There is one new work that is important. *I AM A MAN!* by Steve Estes, published in 2005, tells of the civil rights movement and the role of masculinity from World War II through the rise of the Black Panthers in the late 1960s. Although an excellent work, its focus is on the civil rights movement broadly. The discussion on King and the SCLC is limited primarily to the Memphis sanitation strike. Much of the rest of King's movement goes untouched.<sup>56</sup>

There has been more work done on women and the civil rights movement. Most of this work however centers on individual women as leaders such as Ella Baker. There are several biographies on Baker such as Barbara Ransby's *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*.<sup>57</sup> Other works have analyzed the various roles that women, including Ella Baker, have played in the civil rights movement. These works, such as *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, by Rosetta Ross, and Belinda Robnett's *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* tend to explain, and rightly so, that women served as leaders in subtle ways during the civil rights movement.<sup>58</sup> Their presence and support was priceless in smaller arenas such as specific programs or in local communities, but they were not accepted as leaders on the national level due to old-fashioned chauvinism.

There has been little done on gender and the farm labor movement. Although various historians of the movement will mention Chavez's use of masculinity, they do so

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<sup>56</sup> Steve Estes, *I AM A MAN!*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

only in passing. For example, Joan London and Henry Anderson argued that men would have been attracted to the farm labor movement because it would have promised them a better position as a financial provider.<sup>59</sup> Winthrop Yinger argued that Chavez consistently promoted traditional patriarchy in public appearances.<sup>60</sup> More recently, Ferriss and Sandoval hinted that they recognized that the union might have manipulated definitions of masculinity when they acknowledged that the union at one point printed a picture of Chavez washing dishes.<sup>61</sup> There are also no major works on the roles or images of women in the farm labor movement. Most of those who have attempted to explore this topic have centered their attention on Dolores Huerta, Chavez's second in command. Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia for instance devoted an entire chapter to Huerta and her leadership in their book *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit*. They argued that Huerta was a hidden leader, a woman who "lives in the space between the traditional woman's role and the radical feminist one."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Ferriss and Sandoval described Huerta as a woman who was sometimes shunned by male farm workers even though she was a brilliant lobbyist who had impressed California's politicians.<sup>63</sup>

For both movements, more work is needed on the use of gender images. There needs to be work that discusses how both King and Chavez tried to sell their movements

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<sup>59</sup> London and Anderson, 181.

<sup>60</sup> Yinger, 30, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 59-75.

<sup>63</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 76-77.

to men. It would also be helpful to have writings that further develop the reasons behind the traditional images of women upheld by the civil right movement, and which discuss how the farm labor movement treated women in a similar fashion. The final chapter of this dissertation discusses such images of gender. Neither King nor Chavez challenged traditional gender roles and expectations. These movements did, however, try to mold such roles around the nonviolent cause. In both cases, men were told that nonviolence was the manly way of fighting. King and Chavez were both held up as perfect fathers, family men who were active in the cause. The wives of these leaders, Coretta Scott King and Helen Chavez, were seen as the perfect wives, obedient and submissive, supporting the work of their husbands. Women in the cause who were the most independent and the most active, such as Ella Baker or Dolores Huerta, were the least visible. When these women were given attention, their organizations portrayed their work as forms of traditional women's work.

Many scholars of Chavez have pointed out that his labor movement took on the overtones of a civil rights movement. Some have specifically pointed toward King as a model for the cause. Ferriss and Sandoval argued that Chavez's insistence on nonviolence on the picket lines was inspired by the civil right's movement's success in the South.<sup>64</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia argue that Chavez was actually the only Mexican American with the ability to attract support among Mexican Americans of different socio-economic classes, ages, and geographical areas. They also argue that Chavez's broad support base, which included American liberals, allowed him to be "transformed

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<sup>64</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 93.

into a Mexican-American version of Martin Luther King, Jr.”<sup>65</sup> But no pre-existing work completely discusses what Chavez and the farm labor movement did to ensure that he maintained the image of a civil rights leader for Mexican Americans as a whole rather than as a labor leader for a relatively few farm workers. This work compares the images and tactics used by the two leaders and to show how Chavez and the farm labor movement were greatly influenced by King’s leadership. This work also explains when Chavez altered or modified civil rights tactics so that they were more applicable to a Mexican American farm labor movement. Once one reaches an understanding of how Chavez borrowed and used so many civil rights tactics and images, particularly in the areas of nonviolence, patriotism or ethnic pride, religion, and gender, it is easy to understand why he was seen as the Mexican American King.

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<sup>65</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 143-150.

## 2. TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK: KING, CHAVEZ, AND THE IMAGES AND USES OF NONVIOLENCE

For Americans living during the Cold War era, any movement involved in violent protest was to be viewed suspiciously. It was then very important for both Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez to show Americans that their movements were nonviolent. Although both men were truly influenced by the work of Mohandas Gandhi, they took care to make sure that the public knew this. Both men also used the image of their respective groups as nonviolent so that they might assure Americans that their movements were both orderly and democratic.

In a commencement address at Oberlin College, King spoke out against violence.

He told his audience that:

This is why I say to my people that if we succumb to the temptation of using violence in our struggle, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness. There is another way --- a way as old as the insights of Jesus of Nazareth and as modern as the techniques of Mohandas K. Gandhi. For it is possible to stand up against an unjust system with all of your might, with all of your body, with all of your soul, and yet not stoop to hatred and violence.<sup>1</sup>

These words, spoken in 1965, summed up King's belief in the importance of nonviolent action. Nonviolent action, he believed was the only practical method that African

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." In *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, August 1965, in MLK Speeches, III, Box 9. This was a stock speech and often repeated. See also Martin Luther King, Jr., "Address at Brown Chapel before March," 1 February 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 7.

Americans had to initiate social and political change. It was only through nonviolent action and the maintenance of the image of the movement as a nonviolent movement that they could safely foment for change and to defend their cause as a cause that was consistent with American democracy and with the established practices of law and order. King and the movements under his leadership, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), accomplished this by connecting their movement to Gandhi, by training followers in nonviolent tactics, by creating dramatic instances that brought out the violence of the opposition, and by avoiding the appearance of communist connections.

Similarly, it was important to Chavez and the farm labor union that they maintain their image as a nonviolent group. They did this by associating their cause with Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement. Like King and the civil rights movement, they also relied upon nonviolent training, dramatization of the opposition's violence, and strict avoidance of a communist taint. But although they claimed to be King's Mexican heirs, their real connections to the civil rights movement came through student groups and student leaders who shaped and supported much of the union's policy.

### **Reflections of Gandhi: Nonviolence as a Philosophy**

For both King and Chavez, it was important to cast themselves as the heirs of Gandhi. Although far from being the first advocate of passive resistance or civil disobedience methods, Gandhi was the most famous. Born in 1869, Gandhi developed a worldwide reputation for nonviolent action. He first worked with the Indian population in South Africa. Later he returned to India and became involved in the Indian struggle



for independence. Through tactics such as marches and the home production of salt, Gandhi played a key role in forcing the British to grant India their freedom in 1947. Gandhi was assassinated in 1948, just after he agreed to the formation of Pakistan, a separate Muslim country.

King readily claimed that the movement had been inspired by Gandhi. When he appeared on the show “Press Conference, USA” on July 5, 1963, he was asked to what extent his movement had been so inspired. King replied that even from his first studies of Gandhi, he came to realize that his methods were the best weapon for an oppressed people. Furthermore, he felt that most of the movement’s direct action was influenced by Gandhi’s tactics.<sup>2</sup>

This was not to say that King believed the situations were exactly the same. He argued that there were some differences between the African American and the Indian situation. Gandhi’s Indians had been in a majority in their country, while African Americans were in the minority in America. Also the Indians had been fighting an outsider power, while African Americans were merely trying to get along with their fellow countrymen. This being said, King explained that the freedom struggle was not merely a struggle to free African Americans but to free all American citizens. This he would do with the methods of Gandhi.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that Gandhi’s methods did serve to inspire King to adopt nonviolent resistance tactics for the civil rights movement. King had been exposed to

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on “Press Conference, USA,” 5 July 1963, MLK Speeches, III Box 4B.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on “Press Conference, USA,” 5 July 1963, MLK Speeches, III Box 4B.

Gandhi in 1950 when Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, had spoken about him in a meeting that King attended in Philadelphia. King was so inspired by this talk that he began to study Gandhi. He became interested in Gandhi's nonviolent resistance events such as his Salt March to the Sea and fasts.<sup>4</sup> When asked, King could provide a list of works, which dealt with Gandhi, or nonviolence that he claimed had shaped his methods. These books were Louis Fisher's *A Biography of Gandhi*, Henry David Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, Richard Gregg's *The Power of Nonviolence*, Walter Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, and *Autobiography* by Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>5</sup> King would refer to these same philosophers later in an interview on the "Look Here" program. It was these authors who helped him to frame the Montgomery Bus Boycott in a nonviolent context and to make it a movement that was guided by love and by Gandhi's techniques.<sup>6</sup>

King believed that the Montgomery situation of 1955-1956 paralleled Gandhi's Indian movement. He later wrote in *Stride Toward Freedom*, his book on the Montgomery bus boycott, that once the protests began he thought about both the Gandhi's methods and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.<sup>7</sup> He visited India in early 1959, and upon his return continually referred to it in his speeches and writings. In July 1959, he wrote for *Ebony* that persons in India admired those in Montgomery for their tactics and

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Lawrence M. Byrd, 25 April 1957, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol. IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2000), 183-184.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Martin Agronsky, "Look Here," NBC, 27 October 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Vol. IV*, 292-299.

<sup>7</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 101.

saw it as an indicator that successful work of this kind could be done in the western world.<sup>8</sup>

King's trip to India was prompted by a New York Quaker group. They had talked with Indian Prime Minister Nehru in late 1956 and had found that he had heard of King's movement. The Quakers told Nehru that King might be able to visit India soon.<sup>9</sup> This suggested trip would not occur for over two years.

Much of the cost of King's 1959 trip would be covered by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). In November 1958, they promised to fund \$5000 of a trip for King, his wife Coretta, and a guide in India. The trip was expected to cost an estimated \$5500. The additional \$500 was to be raised by the African American community to show that they supported the trip. The purpose of the trip was defined as the establishment of ties between two nonviolent movements, the Indian independence movement and the American black liberation cause.<sup>10</sup>

Once in India, King visited a variety of sites related to Gandhi or the subsequent movements made possible by his work. The Kings had dinner with the Prime Minister. They visited with a nationalist Muslim who had worked with Gandhi. King met with labor union leaders in Calcutta. The group visited Madras and Gandhigram, a Gandhian community, and went to Bombay from where Gandhi led the Salt March. All told, their trip took the better part of a month. Along the way King gave speeches to local

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," *Ebony*, July 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Homer Alexander Jack to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, 27 December 1956, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955- December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 1997), 497-498.

<sup>10</sup> Stewart Meacham to Martin Luther King, Jr., 11 November 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 531-533.

communities and talked with Indian intellectuals about nonviolence. Coretta Scott King occasionally entertained her audiences with song.<sup>11</sup>

King made full use of Gandhi's image. Pictures taken of the King family at home during a Sunday dinner showed a picture of Gandhi hanging in the dining room, just above King's chair at the head of the table.<sup>12</sup> James Bristol, who served as King's travel guide in India with the AFSC, wrote that during the trip the Kings expressed "an almost fanatical interest in snapshots, pictures and newspaper publicity." These "made for camera moments" meant that on one occasion their flight was delayed so that they could have themselves filmed while boarding the plane. Bristol assumed that the motivation behind the trip was to convey an image of King as a world figure.<sup>13</sup>

It also appears that the motivation for the India trip was to let the world know that King was a leader with the potential to create the same kind of dramatic change that Gandhi had. The SCLC made this clear when they announced in December 1959 that King was moving from Montgomery, Alabama, to Atlanta, Georgia, a move designed so that King, while serving as his father's assistant pastor, could devote more time to the SCLC. In a press release that promised national demonstrations and great things to come,

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<sup>11</sup> Gandhi National Memorial Fund, "With the Kings in India," 1959, MLK, Box 12, Folder 57.

<sup>12</sup> Flip Schulke, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Documentary... Montgomery to Memphis* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1976), 121.

<sup>13</sup> James E. Bristol to Corinne B. Johnson, 10 March 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 137-142.

the SCLC referred to King as an “American Gandhi.”<sup>14</sup> They had set him up as America’s greatest nonviolent leader.

King’s correspondents also appreciated his connections to Gandhi. The Dean of Howard University, William Nelson, who had been involved with Gandhi’s movement in 1946, wrote to tell King that he was awed by the tactics King was using in Montgomery and hoped to visit with him at some point.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Morehouse classmate, Samuel DuBois Cook wrote to King in March 1956, comparing him to greats like Socrates, Gandhi and Thoreau.<sup>16</sup> Some correspondents wanted to purify King’s version of Gandhi’s tactics. Richard Gregg, author of *The Power of Nonviolence*, wrote to King to suggest that he occupy his nonviolence forces with practical work such as a city beautification project, similar to Gandhi’s hand spinning movement.<sup>17</sup> A Crozer alum, J. Martin England wrote to King to suggest that King needed to remember that Gandhi had ended a boycott when the opposition became too violent.<sup>18</sup> All of these correspondents were thrilled to believe that African Americans now had their own Gandhi.

American supporters enjoyed the thought that King’s methods were inspired by Gandhi. The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) published a comic book story about

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<sup>14</sup> SCLC, Press Release, “Dr. King to Leave Montgomery for Atlanta,” 1 December 1959, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2005), 330-331.

<sup>15</sup> William Stuart Nelson to Martin Luther King, Jr., 21 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 182-183.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel DuBois Cook to Martin Luther King, Jr., 23 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 202-203.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Bartlett Gregg to Martin Luther King, Jr., 2 April 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 211-212.

<sup>18</sup> J. Martin England, to Martin Luther King, Jr., 29 April 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 232-233.

King, the Montgomery bus boycott, and his nonviolent methods. FOR was particularly proud of the fact that King's nonviolent movement was inspired by the movement in India. The King character in the comic book tells the story of Gandhi and his struggle with the British. Gandhi, the story said, faced violent opposition from the British. His followers were massacred. Despite this, they stood firm and participated in events such as a march to the sea to make salt. They also indicated a willingness to go to jail for the cause. The King character held the Indians up as an example of how nonviolence could lead to victory.<sup>19</sup>

The real life King also used Gandhi as an example of the success of nonviolence. In an April 1957 sermon to his Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, King told them about the country of Ghana where he had just been to observe change from the colonial government to independence. He described the effort of Kwame Nkrumah, and said that Nkrumah had used Gandhian methods to defeat the British. King claimed that this use of nonviolence would result in a much better relationship with the colonial power. They would not be bitter toward those who forced them out of Ghana.<sup>20</sup> King told a crowd of war resisters that being passive did not mean a failure to act. Instead, true pacifism was nonviolent resistance of evil. This, he said, he had learned from examining the methods of Gandhi.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story" (Nyack, NY: Fellowship of Reconciliation).

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Birth of a New Nation," Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 7 April 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 155-167.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Thirty-Sixth Annual Dinner of the War Resisters League, 2 February 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 120-125.

After he returned from India, King continued to make use of Gandhian references. He had been absent from the Dexter Church for nearly two months when he gave the Palm Sunday sermon in March of 1959. This was King's first sermon following his trip to India. On that Sunday morning, King told of his trip and proclaimed ironically that Gandhi, more than any other, had followed the ways of Jesus. Gandhi's ideas, King claimed, come from works like the *Bible*, Tolstoy, and Thoreau. He then traced Gandhi's history from his time in South Africa, to his actions in India, focusing particularly on the Salt March, his fasting, and his adoption of an untouchable daughter.<sup>22</sup>

Many of Chavez's contemporaries also recognized that he was indeed influenced by Gandhi and Gandhi's method of civil disobedience.<sup>23</sup> This was an easy conclusion to make. Chavez had a picture of Gandhi in his office, just as King had Gandhi's picture in his dining room. He used many of Gandhi's tactics such as marches, vigils, boycotts, and fasts. He also portrayed nonviolence as true bravery.<sup>24</sup> Father Mark Day, the union priest, believed that Chavez was willing to sacrifice just as Gandhi did.<sup>25</sup> Even those who did not believe that Chavez was a pure adherent of Gandhi's ways admitted that he had

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi," 22 March 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 145-157.

<sup>23</sup> Pat Hoffman, *Ministry of the Dispossessed: Learning from the Farm Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: Wallace Press 1987), 25; Sam Kushner, *The Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 165; Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 112; Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 1970), 294; James P. Terzian and Kathryn Cramer, *Mighty Hard Road: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., Inc., 1970), 46; Winthrop Yinger, *Cesar Chavez: The Rhetoric of Nonviolence* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), 25,34; Alberto Prago, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A History of Mexican-Americans* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1973), 185.

<sup>24</sup> Yinger, 22, 59, 60, 76, 114, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Day, *Forty Acres: Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 115.

used some of Gandhi's tactics.<sup>26</sup> Even if he was not Gandhi's most faithful disciple, it was easy for people to believe that Chavez did use Gandhi's philosophies.

Chavez truly believed that the way of Gandhi was the way of legitimate protest for the farm worker. His interpretation of Gandhi was somewhat different than the Mahatma might have wished, but nonetheless, its roots lay in Indian philosophy. Chavez had some exposure to Gandhi early in his life. He said that he had seen a lot about Gandhi on film in 1941 and 1942. Because of this, he had begun to read about Gandhi and to understand how Gandhi had forced the British government to change. Chavez also began to read about labor organizations and to think about how such union movements could work among farm workers. Once King appeared, Chavez could see and appreciate Gandhi's tactics through him. But he still continued to appreciate Gandhi's work in its own right, particularly his boycotts and the salt movement.<sup>27</sup>

Chavez had some connections with Indians who had studied Gandhi and the movements in America. Sugata Dasgupta from the Gandhian Institute of Studies who had visited with Chavez in the United States had been very impressed by the farm worker movement. He wrote that it was "something like an Indian community in America striking work and the American employers importing new workers from India where the rate of wage is naturally low." Dasgupta also recalled that a weakened Chavez after the 1968 fast lay before a big photo of Gandhi. Chavez had asked him for a smaller picture and for literature that taught nonviolent techniques. Dasgupta wrote to Chavez in January

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<sup>26</sup> John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 36; Ralph De Toledano, *Little Cesar* (USA: Anthem Books, 1971), 38.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.



1969 to tell him that he had sent the promised books on the life of Gandhi and the picture of Gandhi that had been requested. Chavez replied the following month to thank Dasgupta for the books in advance and to explain that he would dearly love to meet some of Gandhi's followers and to be able to learn from them in a way that he could not learn from literature.<sup>28</sup>

The claims that Chavez was a Mexican Gandhi were possible because Chavez's actions during the grape strike often mirrored Gandhi's methods. Gandhi believed that strikes were a legitimate form of labor protest but only if certain conditions were met. There had to be a just cause for the strike, union agreement to it, and no violence could accompany it. Also, the strikers had to be willing to give up if too much scab labor was available, be willing to negotiate with an employer before a strike, and have other ways for workers to support themselves during the strike jobs.<sup>29</sup>

Intentionally or not, the grape strike leaders willingly met or attempted to meet these conditions. The union showed just cause when they demonstrated the poor living conditions and substandard wages of the farm workers. The union membership agreed to the strike and agreed on when to end it. Early on, this cost the union a chance at recognition in the rose fields. When rose workers in McFarland, California, agreed to return to their jobs without union recognition in the spring of 1965, after the employer agreed to a pay raise, the union told its members to do as the majority wished and to

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<sup>28</sup> Suguta Dasgupta, "Gandhian Movement in the West: Some Impressions of a Tour Abroad," UFWP, Series III, Box 33, Folder 4; Suguta Dasgupta to Cesar Chavez, 23 January 1969, UFWP, Series III, Box 33, Folder 4; Cesar Chavez to Suguta Dasgupta, 25 February 1969, UFWP, Series III, Box 33, Folder 4.

<sup>29</sup> Gopinath Dhawan, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1946, reprinted 1962), 254-255.

return to work.<sup>30</sup> When the Agriculture Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) asked the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to join their grape strike in September of 1965, Chavez took the matter to union members asking them to vote on the decision to walk out of the fields. The union ensured that the strike would be a nonviolent one, explaining even from that first meeting that members would have to follow a policy of nonviolence. The union also did not use strikes when extra labor was abundant. In fact, Chavez and union leadership knew that chances for success were slim until the *bracero* program, a program which imported cheap labor from Mexico, ended. Their rise to power would coincide only with that.<sup>31</sup> When the union came to believe that growers were using illegal labor to circumvent the impact of the strike, the union switched tactics and began to promote the table grape boycott. The union had also been willing to negotiate with the growers. Before strikes, the union sent letters to the growers calling for negotiations. Most often, they never received a reply to such letters and suspected that many of them remained unopened. Also, the union knew they could not support all of the strikers, nor were all of them needed for the strike effort. So they adopted a Gandhian strategy in which some growers were not picketed in order that the union workers not needed on the picket lines could still earn money in the fields. The union's strike strategy would be reminiscent of Gandhi's rules for legitimate labor strikes.

As they adopted such rules, the union also adopted many of Gandhi's other tactics. These served to further Chavez's image as a Gandhi figure. Among such tactics

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Farm Workers and Agri-Business in California, 1947-1960* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 264-276.

were not only Gandhi's events like marches and fasts, but also his spiritual and moral policies as well. Although of two very different faiths, these men shared several spiritual characteristics. Gandhi, for instance, believed that one could not ask more of his followers than he himself was willing to do.<sup>32</sup> Chavez had a similar reputation, he was known for working long hours, more than many other union members could have. His fast would be the fast of a single individual. He did not ask or demand that others join him in the effort. Gandhi also believed that it was acceptable to use prayers and religious songs or readings in connection to the cause. Many of the meetings of his movement included such things.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the union would often adopt religious images or use Biblical themes in their cause. Crosses and the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe often appeared at union events. Union publications sometimes included religious themes. Chavez and Gandhi shared another belief as well. Both of them believed that the self could be a source of evil.<sup>34</sup> Many times the root of problems lay in an individual's selfish desires. Chavez reminded the farm workers that events such as the march to Sacramento and the fast for nonviolence were events of penitence, designed to address the sins of the workers themselves.

Chavez also reflected Gandhi's moral and religious ideas. In August 1925, Gandhi had written an essay, "Problems of Nonviolence," in which he addressed the issue of true spirituality. He wrote that nonviolence and truth formed "the right angle of

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<sup>32</sup> Andre Trocme, *Jesus and the Non-violent Revolution*, trans. Michael H. Shank and Marlin E. Miller (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973), 160.

<sup>33</sup> Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 162-163; Trocme, 160.

<sup>34</sup> Trocme, 163.

all religions.” Anything which did not mesh with nonviolence and truth needed to be cast aside.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Chavez believed that any form of protest other than nonviolence was not legitimate. The union’s definition of nonviolence may have differed from Gandhi’s though, as they tended to be more accepting of the idea of verbal violence.<sup>36</sup> Chavez also attempted to be honest with union membership. When he called for a strike vote in September of 1965, he told the members that the strike fund was nearly empty. If they agreed to join the cause, they would have to sacrifice.

Similar parallels to Gandhi are obvious in the union’s tactics and planned events. One such event was the 25 day march to Sacramento in March and April of 1966. Following close on the heels of the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery in March of 1965, this march would have many civil rights overtones. Leaving Delano, the marchers stopped at series of agricultural towns between there and Sacramento. The march served to attract new members to the union. At each stop they read the *Plan of Delano*, performed skits, and signed up new union members. But it also reminded the public of Gandhi’s marches. One such march had been Gandhi’s 1947 efforts to rally India’s Hindus during the independence movement. During a seven week trip, Gandhi had visited 47 villages, encouraging them to join the cause.<sup>37</sup> Once the farm labor union began their march to Sacramento, it became easy for the union to compare the two men. Just as Gandhi would dedicate his life and health to the cause, Chavez could be seen

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<sup>35</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, “Problems of Nonviolence,” in Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *The Penguin Gandhi Reader* (Penguin Books, 1993), 108.

<sup>36</sup> Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall ye Reap* (New York: Crowell, 1970), 182.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick John Dalton, *The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 161.

doing so for the farm labor movement. One such picture taken of Chavez during the march showed him marching along, leaning on a cane.<sup>38</sup> Chavez appearance and presence in such a manner demonstrated to the farm workers that his dedication had caused him pain.

Fasting was another method that both Gandhi and Chavez used. Gandhi believed that fasting was to be done only when there was no other alternative.<sup>39</sup> His fasts in 1947 and 1948 were intended to stop the rioting that had occurred in India. Chavez's idea to fast was based upon this tactic which had worked to quell Indian violence.<sup>40</sup> The first and most famous fast occurred in the winter of 1968. It was a fast which was intended to remind the workers of their pledges of nonviolence. Chavez had become worried about an increasing number of incidents which indicated that some farm workers were beginning to accept violent methods. He felt that some workers were beginning to think that killing would be an acceptable protest tactic. Chavez did not want to be called a communist, but he wanted even less to be labeled a violent radical. If his membership became violent, many of them might be jailed and the strike would be crushed. On top of these worries, Chavez had another one. Several sheds had been set on fire and the union was being blamed. Chavez couldn't find the perpetrators, and he worried that these arsonists would spiral out of control. The union later found out that these fires had been

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<sup>38</sup> London and Anderson, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 229; Yinger, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 141; Hammerback and Jensen, 92; Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 189; Terzian and Cramer, 129.

intentionally set by the fire department, but at the time Chavez did not know that and felt he had to do something dramatic.<sup>41</sup>

Feeling he had no other option, he decided to undertake a long complete fast. This fast came at an opportune time. The year of 1968 was a year of violence in America. In the months following Chavez's fast Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy would be assassinated. Inner city riots would follow King's death. Protestors at the Democratic Convention in Chicago would take to the streets, doing battle with police and guardsmen. Nationwide, many of those who had begun to question their nonviolent policies began to abandon them. Had Chavez not went through this fast, there was a possibility that the farm workers too might have come to accept violence as an acceptable protest tactic.

For Chavez, like Gandhi, the fast would be a personal one. Of course the fast could not be too personal. For it to serve its purpose, the farm workers and the public would need to learn about it. The union's statement on the fast explained it as a personal act which called others to join the nonviolent cause. Chavez was engaged in this act of repentance for the sins of the others, particularly those who had turned away from nonviolence.<sup>42</sup> A similar message was found in the March 15, 1968, edition of *El Malcriado* which announced that the fast was one of penance and a call for workers to make sacrifices which would unite them.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>42</sup> "Statement of the Fast," reprinted. in Yinger, 110-111.

<sup>43</sup> "The fast ..." and "10,000 Mass in Gran Fiesta" *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 2.

The suffering Mexican Gandhi image was particularly dramatic at the Mass which concluded the 25 day fast. After 21 days with only water, and an additional four with only liquids, Chavez's body was undoubtedly truly weak. Mass photos strikingly publicized this.<sup>44</sup> In these photos, the honored guest, well-known Catholic politician Robert Kennedy, is shown seated in a metal folding chair. Next to him is Chavez, seated on a cushioned chair. Chavez is bundled up against the cold of the March weather, wrapped in a parka and thick blanket. Chavez appears too weak to lift his hands, and Kennedy has to stretch across Chavez to break the bread. The photos that resulted from this seemed to tell the nation that Chavez and his movement were incapable of violence. Chavez at least would come near death to rein it in. These images not only served to turn farm labor union members away from nonviolence, but to reinforce the image of the cause as a nonviolent one in the public mind.

The media coverage of the 1968 fast helped the union promote their cause as nonviolent. *Time* readers were told that the fast was meant to bring workers back to their nonviolent roots.<sup>45</sup> Readers of the *New York Times* magazine were told that the fast was not just a personal act on Chavez's part, but also impacted those in other movements who might have drifted toward violent activities.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the media was seeking a nonviolent movement to glorify. When the fast occurred, radicals were gaining a foothold in the civil rights movement. King would be killed almost a month after the fast's conclusion.

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<sup>44</sup> Picture in Meister and Loftis, no page.

<sup>45</sup> "Cesar's War," *Time*, 22 March 1968.

<sup>46</sup> Dick Meister, "La Huelga Becomes La Causa," *NY Times Magazine*, 17 November 1968.

Various media outlets also began to compare Chavez to Gandhi, something the union encouraged. Jacques Levy in the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that Chavez was inspired by both his mother and the life of Gandhi.<sup>47</sup> Levy would also serve as Chavez's official biographer. Such comparisons were easily made during Chavez's 1968 fast for nonviolence. The *New York Times Magazine* said that during the fast Chavez had read the works of Gandhi.<sup>48</sup> An article about Chavez also appeared in *Time's* March 1968 edition in which Americans were told that Chavez's fast had actually been four days longer than Gandhi's.<sup>49</sup> If *Time* was to be believed, Chavez had not just become Gandhi, he had superseded him. It was clear that Chavez appreciated and sought out this kind of media attention, as illustrated by his willingness to write an article for the men's magazine, *Playboy*. Even though he was a devout Catholic, and his union an organization with many religious ties, he took the opportunity to legitimize these tactics by telling his audience of men the story of Gandhi's salt boycott and explaining that economic power was often needed to promote political change.<sup>50</sup>

Chavez and King had each been legitimately attracted to Gandhi's methods. They had also found it expedient to use his image for promotional purposes and to create acceptance of their movements. But even Gandhi could not save them from accusations of lawlessness and from red-baiting attacks. For that they would have to develop other tactics and images.

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<sup>47</sup> Jacques Levy, "Cesar Chavez --- Saint or Devil," *LA Times*, 9 September 1973.

<sup>48</sup> Dick Meister, "*La Huelga* Becomes *La Causa*," *NY Times Magazine*, 17 November 1968.

<sup>49</sup> "Cesar's War," *Time*, 22 March 1968.

<sup>50</sup> Cesar Chavez, "Sharing the Wealth," *Playboy*, January 1970.



## **Nonviolence as a Practical Tactic: The Value of Nonviolence in a Cold War World**

During the Cold War, Americans lived in fear of the communist menace. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Americans watched and listened as the nation's politicians determined how best they could combat the spread of communism across the globe. As they listened, they heard tales of the world's peoples who were abused and dictated to by communist governments. As various communist governments rose to power, they soon became associated with violence and disorder.

Americans were particularly concerned for instance, with the Hungarian freedom fighters whose attempted overthrow of the communist government from October 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1956, was a brave failure. In January 1957, *Time* magazine named these rebels Man of the Year. These rebels, according to *Time*, had challenged communist Russia in a way that no other group had. They had also embarrassed Russia and proved to the world that communism was not a humanitarian system. *Time's* article was filled with descriptions of individuals who had participated in the uprising and the violence that they had faced.<sup>51</sup>

Americans of course claimed to dislike violence. But, Chris Hartmire, a minister who worked with Chavez through the California Migrant Ministry, recognized that American attitudes toward violence could be somewhat hypocritical. Americans, he wrote, did not like violence from communists or African Americans, but they did support violence when it served their purposes. The violence of the Hungarian freedom fighters was perfectly justified in American minds; after all they were fighting the communists.

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<sup>51</sup> "Man of the Year," *Time*, 7 January 1957.

Hartmire claimed that Americans also were comfortable with the use of violence by American police forces in suppressing African American rebellions in urban areas. This they justified due to issues of law and order.<sup>52</sup> So in many cases, Americans were okay with violence. They were not okay with violence however as a form of protest. King asked why people were not as concerned with the situation of African Americans in the South as they were with the Hungarian revolt. He used this as an opportunity to remind Americans that unless they dealt with the Southern problem, they could not defeat communism.<sup>53</sup>

Because King seemed to be a potential revolutionary to many, communist or not, the government was concerned about him. Historian David Garrow has found that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigated King in three major areas, his communist connections, his personal life and his stance on Vietnam. They found that although King might have had associates that were or had been communists such as Stanley Levison or Bayard Rustin, he himself was not a communist. The matter would not simply end there however; J. Edgar Hoover seems to have developed a personal animus toward King. The FBI's investigation of King would last the rest of Hoover's life and beyond.<sup>54</sup> Their tactics were highly intrusive and much of the evidence was obtained by wiretapping. Such evidence was put under seal in the National Archives until 2027.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wayne C. Hartmire, "The Church and the Emerging Farm Workers Movement: A Case Study," 22 July 1967, SJVF, Box 1, also in MGP, Box 3, Folder 1.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Desegregation and the Future," 15 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 471-479.

<sup>54</sup> David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).

<sup>55</sup> David J. Garrow, "The Martin Luther King, Jr., FBI File," (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984).

The FBI had been wrong about communist influence before and they did not want to be wrong again. William Sullivan, assistant director of domestic intelligence told Alan Belmont, Assistant to the Director, in August 1963 that he agreed with Hoover who believed that they could not dismiss charges against King easily. After all, FBI authorities had believed that Fidel Castro in Cuba was not communist influenced and time had quickly proven them wrong. Sullivan saw King as the most influential African American leader and believed that they had to “mark him now, if we have not done so before, as the most dangerous Negro of the future in the Nation from the standpoint of communism, the Negro and National security.” Sullivan believed that African Americans were the most attractive racial group in communists’ eyes and as such they bore careful watching.<sup>56</sup>

The FBI wasn’t the only group concerned about King; President Johnson was as well. In a FBI memo from Assistant Director C. D. DeLoach to John Mohr, Hoover’s assistant, in March 1965, the agent described a meeting with a concerned individual who had kept King from receiving an honorary degree at Springfield College in Massachusetts, and who wanted to know if King continued on the same anti-democratic path that the FBI had described to him a year earlier. The individual asked if the President knew about King’s past and communist connections. The FBI agent reported that he had informed the individual that the president was indeed aware of such and that

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<sup>56</sup> W. C. Sullivan to A. H. Belmont, 30 August 1963, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

the President was careful to never meet individually with King or to have a picture taken with him.<sup>57</sup>

But communism was not the only governmental form that symbolized threats to American security. Americans in the 1950s and 60s were living with a recent public memory of WWII. They very well remembered Hitler and the Nazi atrocities in Europe, and they did not want such things ever repeated in America. Any threat to law and order reminded them of a time in the not so distant past where American men had died so that order in the world might be maintained. These fears for public safety and American democracy meant that Americans would be leery of any movement calling for drastic change in society. Any leaders of such movements would be suspect, seen as possible communist or fascists. King in particular had to be very careful about the image of the SCLC and the movement in the public mind. Americans were concerned about King's movement, its possible ties to communism, and its possible violent acts. Nothing illustrates these concerns better than the letters written by hundreds of predominately white Americans to the ultimate G-man, J. Edgar Hoover.

These letters show the overwhelming faith that Americans had in Hoover. Many of them opened or closed their letters with admiration for Hoover's record and a job well-done. One correspondent from Plainview, Minnesota, wrote and congratulated Hoover on his many years in office and said that he was sure that Hoover's agency had been responsible for helping to train and advise English and French forces.<sup>58</sup> Other writers wished him many more years in the business. Even if they worried that Hoover had not

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<sup>57</sup> C. D. DeLoach to Mr. Mohr, 9 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1070.

<sup>58</sup> Plainview, Minnesota, 24 September 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1909.

done enough about the menace of King, the letter writers often expressed faith that Hoover was the only one who could help the county. One author from Waco Texas in 1963 complained that “fuzzy-minded intellectuals are gaining control of more key positions in government each year,” but he felt that all would be well “as long as you are with us I feel that truth will be protected, and pray that God will prepare not only one man to carry on after you retire but a great army of men with your dedication to truth and justice.”<sup>59</sup> They had a distinct lack of faith in either the President or the Department of Justice, particularly in its leader Robert Kennedy. One frustrated Oklahoman wrote in November 1963 to ask if the President was “promoting communism in the US together with Bob Kennedy who I consider one of our most dangerous men not only in Gov. but in US.”<sup>60</sup> A Las Vegas, Nevada, correspondent wrote to ask “Why is President Johnson encouraging these Negro leaders and their followers to break the laws of the states and to cause trouble? Can’t Mr. Johnson be arrested for encouraging all this racial unrest which leads to violence...”<sup>61</sup> Hoover it seemed, was the only man that many Americans believed would save their democratic way.

Most of these letters expressed little to no judgment about King. The authors, the names of whom have been blacked out by the FBI, simply wanted to know if King was a communist or had ties to them. Hoover’s fan from Plainview, Minnesota, had defended King in a letter to the editor published in a local paper, but since then had received a postcard proclaiming King’s communist connections. The author told Hoover that he

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<sup>59</sup> Waco, Texas, 28 May 1963, FBI, 100-106670-130.

<sup>60</sup> Ponca City, Oklahoma, 13 November 1963, FBI, 100-106670-268.

<sup>61</sup> Las Vegas, Nevada, 30 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1157.

realized Hoover did not always agree with King, but that he was sure that justice could be done if Hoover's office would truly determine if King was really the person seen pictured among the communists.<sup>62</sup> What the author had received was one form of the Highlander Folk School picture. King had appeared at Highlander for a brief time to give a speech during its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, held in summer of 1957. While there, a photographer snapped a picture of King waiting in the audience. This picture appeared in various forms and was used to claim that King was or at least met with communists. Letters to the FBI concerning King often contained an enclosure of this photograph.<sup>63</sup>

Other authors expressed confusion about whom or what a communist really was. One wrote to Hoover with questions about King and said that "We want to know if this man is a communist. We don't care to know if he is affiliated with the party or is a card carrying member. We simply want to know if he is a communist."<sup>64</sup> A poorly educated 71 year old from California wrote to tell Hoover "... but as I have Said Several times before. and will Say it many times over and over Martin Luther King is a Communist along with the Ku Klux Klan." (sic) This man had focused on two groups which were noted for their disruptions of the established order and had decided that they must both be communists.<sup>65</sup> Such confusion indicates the ambiguity that many American experienced in attempting to define who or what was a communist. Others expressed disgust for what they saw as witch hunts occurring in their community. One Mississippi author wrote to

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<sup>62</sup> Plainview, Minnesota, 24 September 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1909.

<sup>63</sup> Manchester, New Hampshire, 11 February 1964, FBI, 100-106670-301. This source has an excellent example of the photograph.

<sup>64</sup> Louisville, Kentucky, 28 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1142

<sup>65</sup> Fair Oaks, California, 2 September 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1818.

say that he detested “‘heresy hunts’ and am seeking this information in order that I might help stop one.”<sup>66</sup>

Some authors took a much more strident tone. One letter writer from California demanded ten copies of any information available on King so that it would be passed out to the “Negroes who think Mr. King is pure as the driven snow as far as any communist influence is concerned.”<sup>67</sup> Some authors questioned why King was allowed to have influence in government if he had such communist connections. Others encouraged or demanded that Hoover do something about this menace, comparing King and his movement to the Nazis of World War II. One man asked if the FBI was to “become a Gestapo agency in the United States of America to whip people’s political, social, and economic thinking into line with the political bosses in Washington?” He believed that King was taking advantage of the situation and living well off of contributions given to the movement. He feared that King had too much control in the government and needed to be stopped.<sup>68</sup> Another author, a veteran from WWII and Korea, wrote to Hoover and offered to print any information on King that Hoover cared to release. This author compared King to Hitler and said that King’s tactics were the same as those of both Hitler and the communists.<sup>69</sup> The author lacked a clear understanding of competing ideologies, but he recognized the movement as a threat and was prepared to do his part to help combat it.

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<sup>66</sup> Greenwood, Mississippi, 28 July 1964, FBI, 100-106670-418.

<sup>67</sup> Fullerton, California, 22 July 1964, FBI 100-106670-417.

<sup>68</sup> Columbus, Georgia, 1 April 1964, FBI, 100-106670-345.

<sup>69</sup> Indianapolis, Indiana, 9 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-986.

This strident tone echoed the letter writers' concerns about King's threat to the established law and order. Many times these letters came from well-intentioned people who believed rightly or wrongly that the local African American communities did not want King and the SCLC in town. One woman from Alabama wrote that the African American woman who did her ironing had told her that African Americans in the area just wanted to be left alone.<sup>70</sup> Another Southerner, this time from Georgia, wrote that an African American preacher in town had asked him to help them meet with a Bishop, in order to dissuade him from letting Hosea Williams use the Catholic school for meetings. The author reported that many of the local African Americans did not like the fact that Williams was using children in street protests and that he was not trusted in the African American community.<sup>71</sup> Often authors of these letters included racist comments. For instance, a woman from Tacoma, Washington, wrote to tell Hoover that "all this riot stuff would end," if he would only deport King "back to his kind." She worried that King was a communist influence as well and said that she'd like to handle it "over the sights of a rifle."<sup>72</sup>

The letters focusing on law and order issues increase as the movement changes; a large portion of them began to arrive around the time of the Selma march in 1965. The Selma march was accompanied by violence on the part of some of its apparent participants. Although not a part of the mainstream SCLC groups, this was not clearly explained to the public in the media. Thus, it should be no surprise then that the FBI

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<sup>70</sup> Tusculumbia, Alabama, 30 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1146.

<sup>71</sup> Savannah, Georgia, 8 November 1965, FBI, 100-106670-2068.

<sup>72</sup> Tacoma, Washington, c. March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1031.



began to receive letters that increasingly expressed fears of riots and disorder. Until the Selma march, among the hundreds of letters concerning King, only a handful came from the South. Perhaps the majority of white Southerners had already made up their minds about King and did not need the FBI to confirm that King was a menace, communist or not. They did however want FBI to take steps to protect their security.

Apparently people from Kern County, the area where Chavez would be most active during the grape strike, shared the same mindset. Letters to the FBI came from the area near Bakersfield, California, thirty miles from Delano. They too were concerned about King. In June of 1963, an apparent Lion's Club member from Shafter, California, wrote to Hoover to find out the truth about King. The club had discussed integration and found that they were divided into two camps, one of which praised King for his Christianity, the other members of which believed that King was a communist. Hoover was expected to settle the argument.<sup>73</sup> Two people from Bakersfield sat down on July 8, 1964 to ask about not Chavez but King. Both writers were disturbed at the possibility that King might have been a communist. One wrote because their minister had informed them that proof of King's communism could be obtained by writing to the FBI. The other was concerned that so many churches supported King. Neither writer seemed to have been particular fans of King.<sup>74</sup>

Similar letters came to the FBI about Chavez; however these are not as numerous, in fact only about 10, dated from 1966-1973, are to be found in FBI files. However, the

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<sup>73</sup> Shafter, California, 14 June 1963, FBI, 100-1066070.

<sup>74</sup> Bakersfield, California, 8 July 1964, FBI, 100-106670-382; Bakersfield, California, 8 July 1964, FBI, 100-106670-380.

letters about Chavez and the farm labor movement express many of the same concerns that the letters about King had. Hoover's correspondents asked about Chavez's connections to communism and expressed concern about issues of law and order. FBI censors in many cases have blacked out both the name and address information of these authors, and so it is difficult to gauge just what parts of the country these authors are from. Most of the authors wanted to know if Chavez was a communist, one in particular asked about specifics concerning Wendy Goepel, Luis Valdez and Larry Itliong. Accusations that these three were communist had long been bandied about by union opposition, and so it was natural that the letter writer would ask. Another correspondent, who apparently felt he was Hoover's eyes and ears in America, and who had a previous history of reporting to the FBI, wrote to inform the director that Chavez and the farm workers wanted to overthrow the American government. This correspondent claimed that he had heard strikers yelling "when we take over, the land will be ours." The correspondent had also seen a flyer which claimed that the growers were "exploiting" the farm workers. This, he informed Hoover, was enough to show him that the movement was the work of communists. He begged Hoover to investigate the organization. Of course by the time this author wrote Hoover in 1969, investigations had been ongoing for the better part of four years.<sup>75</sup>

These letters show the mentality of many Americans during the 1950s and 60s. Although not all Americans would have been so naive as to think that Hoover would just open up the FBI files and tell all, they would have shared some of the same concerns with

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<sup>75</sup> Telegram to J. Edgar Hoover, 23 February 1966, FBI, 100-444762-NR; to J. Edgar Hoover, 14 May 1969, FBI, 105-157123-2; to J. Edgar Hoover, 10 March 1970, FBI, 100-444762-NR, Tipp City, Ohio, 11 June 1971, FBI, 100-444762-19; Cape Coral, Florida, 8 September 1971, FBI, 100-444762-24.

these letter writers. The majority of Americans would have worried about issues such as the spread of communism and communist influence over elected officials. They would also have been worried about the threat to law and order in the nation.

Given the American fears of the 1950s and 60s, any policy other than nonviolence would have led to King and the movement's sudden destruction. As much as King might have liked some of Gandhi's ideas, he also liked the practical expediency of using nonviolent tactics. The use of nonviolence meant that King to a large degree could promise that his movement was not leading to a communist revolution. It also ensured the movement's continued existence, as to destroy it through violent opposition was a public relations disaster for any of his opponents.

Almost from the beginning of the organized bus boycott, King's organization, the MIA, began to define itself as a nonviolent group. When they published a half-page ad in the *Sunday Advertiser* on Christmas 1955, the MIA listed not only its proposals, but also explained that they were a nonviolent group, one that bore malice toward none, and who did not practice intimidation in their methods.<sup>76</sup> A month later, King's home was bombed while he was at a mass meeting. He rushed from the meeting to his house to check on his wife and infant daughter, Yolanda. After assuring himself that they were fine, King addressed the angry crowd gathered outside of his home. He quoted scripture and promised that those who lived by the sword would also perish by it. He reminded his

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<sup>76</sup> Montgomery Improvement Association, "To the Montgomery Public," 25 December 1955, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 89-93.

audience to love their enemies and told the crowd that even if something happened to him, someone else would come to assume leadership of the movement.<sup>77</sup>

King did not believe that violence was a viable protest tactic, particularly as it would result in violent repression of African Americans and serve to divert attention from the real problems of the day. Many times over the years King would warn his audiences that a turn to violence would only mean that “unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and bitter night...” The result of violence would be “chaos.”<sup>78</sup> Even as defensive violence became acceptable to many in the movement, King still found that such organized attempts were unreasonable. A TV show from Los Angeles, “Newsmakers,” asked King in particular about the Deacons for Defense, an organization of African American men who armed themselves and prepared to engage in violent conflicts if it were necessary to protect their community. King responded that the Deacon’s method was not practical because violent campaigns only muddied the issues and took the focus off of segregation. King also believed that such defensive violence was hard to maintain. People trained to be violent in that manner would, he thought, find it all too easy to slip over into aggressive violence. Violence wouldn’t work King said, because realistically

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<sup>77</sup> Joe Azbell, “Blast Rocks Residence of Bus Boycott Leader,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 31 January 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 114-115.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to an MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, 14 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 424-433; Martin Luther King, Jr. to W. A. Gayle, 19 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 483-484; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” 17 November 1967, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 315-324.

the movement could not win through it. The opposition, he knew, would have loved such an opportunity to wipe out many people who might be innocent.<sup>79</sup>

This became a common theme in King's speeches. At the Fiftieth Annual NAACP Convention in July 1959, King encouraged the youth to maintain the nonviolent struggle. He acknowledged that violence would happen and that people would act to protect their property, but he concluded that a public call for action through violence would be "the gravest tragedy that could befall us. It would be most impractical. Many of our oppressors would be more than happy for us to turn to violence. It would give them an opportunity to wipe out many innocent Negroes under the pretence that they were inciting a riot."<sup>80</sup> A few months later, King sent a telegram to Eisenhower complaining about the arrests of peaceful protestors at Alabama State. The police there he said used methods such as tear gas, threats of arrests and the interruption of a religious service. King said that this was a plot to create a riot which could be blamed on the African American protestors, thus giving local police an excuse to intervene.<sup>81</sup> Even at Selma in 1965, he still told his audiences that they had to learn not to be violent because such acts of violence allowed the opposition to focus on issues of violence rather than segregation. Violence he said would also lead to the deaths of innocent people.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Maury Green, Paul Udell, and Saul Holbert, on "Newsmakers" 10 July 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1614; Hamilton Bims, "Deacons for Defense," *Ebony*, September 1965.

<sup>80</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Fiftieth Annual NAACP Convention, 17 July 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 245-250.

<sup>81</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 9 March 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 385-387.

<sup>82</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at Brown Chapel Before March, MLK Speeches, III, Box 7.

King also knew that Americans expected that citizens of any race or nationality would behave within the established realm of law and order. This was never more apparent than when *Ebony* published John F. Kennedy's presidential message on civil rights in September 1963. Kennedy sympathized with the African American situation, and said that if put in their place, most other Americans would be similarly frustrated. The President issued a warning to both groups. He proclaimed that "We have a right to expect the Negro community will be responsible will uphold the law, but they have a right to expect that the law will be fair; that the Constitution will be color blind..."<sup>83</sup>

Fortunately for King and the movement, nonviolence quickly came into fashion among African American writers and intellectuals who in turn promoted it. This was evident in *Ebony* magazine which attempted to praise the nonviolent and to support nonviolence even when others were calling for a different manner of action. The pages of *Ebony* were filled with stories which told of groups who had succeeded through nonviolent means. A photo-editorial in May 1956 told of the gains that African Americans were making in the South, and described the Montgomery Bus Boycott then in progress. The magazine noted that this was not without cost, as Southern whites were becoming more violent.<sup>84</sup> But by July of 1963, *Ebony* noted change. Lerone Bennett Jr., wrote that many African Americans had come to distrust nonviolence, believing that it accomplished very little. He claimed that mainstream civil rights leaders like Wyatt Tee Walker of the SCLC were noting this trend as well.<sup>85</sup> That same month, *Ebony's* photo-

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<sup>83</sup> John. F. Kennedy, "The President's Civil Rights Message," *Ebony*, September 1963.

<sup>84</sup> "No Time for Violence," *Ebony* May 1956.

<sup>85</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., "The Mood of the Negro," *Ebony*, July 1963.

editorial called for the federal government to protect peaceful demonstrators from police violence. They reminded the government that if America was to win the battle against its opposing ideology, they had to truly be the land of liberty and equality.<sup>86</sup> Two years later, in August 1965, *Ebony* magazine devoted an issue to the white problem in America. In this issue they discussed white attitudes, white liberals and white hate groups.<sup>87</sup> They also took care to address the issue of the American image abroad. In an article by Carl Rowan, at the time director of the United States Information Agency, *Ebony* readers found that the image of the United States in the eyes of world improved when the Civil Rights Bill passed Congress. Rowan warned that our nation's future image depended upon our actions today.<sup>88</sup>

*Ebony* authors highlighted the variety of supporters that such nonviolent movements attracted. In November 1963, *Ebony* featured a celebratory article on the March on Washington. They discussed the interracial crowd, one picture caption read that

Down an avenue called Constitution and another called Independence, they went, shuffling shoulder to shoulder, black people and white people, Jews and Gentiles, students and teachers, Old Negroes and New Negroes, organization men and radicals. Hebrews from Brooklyn, sharecroppers from Mississippi, Puritans from New England. At the Lincoln Monument, they heard speeches and songs and became, for one single electrifying moment, one people under God.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "A Time for Federal Action," *Ebony*, July 1963.

<sup>87</sup> For examples see Lerone Bennett Jr., "The White Problem in America," *Ebony*, August 1965; John N. Woodford, "White Hate Groups," *Ebony*, August 1965; and Louis E. Lomax, "The White Liberal," *Ebony*, August 1965.

<sup>88</sup> Carl T. Rowan, "No 'Whitewash' for US Abroad," *Ebony*, August 1965.

<sup>89</sup> "The Biggest Protest March," *Ebony*, November 1963.

The following summer, *Ebony* would describe the Council of Federated Organizations which began work on the Mississippi Summer Project, and which was staffed by mostly white students.<sup>90</sup> The march from Selma to Montgomery also attracted a variety of attendees noted by *Ebony* magazine. The article's author, Simeon Booker, noted that the targets of harassment on the march were often the white religious and youth marchers. The article and accompanying pictures noted the presence of priests, ministers, nuns, college students, beatniks and celebrities like singer Joan Baez and "Bonanza" star Purnell Roberts.<sup>91</sup> Through these articles, *Ebony* was demonstrating that nonviolence would generate public support for the movement.

*Ebony* also assigned King a column called "Advice for Living." In the column, King would answer questions sent in from readers, often times about religious issues. But, many of the questions dealt with nonviolence as well. In November 1957, one reader asked about how love could be used to address the issues of the day. King responded that such love was redemptive love and that such a method resulted in reconciliation rather than bitterness.<sup>92</sup> The following month, King was asked about the use nuclear weapons. He responded that the use and development of such should be banned or the end would be deadly for all.<sup>93</sup> When King was asked again in February

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<sup>90</sup> Alex Poinsett, "Crusade in Mississippi," *Ebony*, September 1964.

<sup>91</sup> Simeon Booker, "50,000 March on Montgomery," *Ebony*, May 1965.

<sup>92</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, November 1957.

<sup>93</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, December 1957.



1958 about the use of violence, he wrote that such only increased the violence present in the world and that someone had to end the cycle.<sup>94</sup>

There were five aspects of nonviolence that King believed his audiences should recognize and that he promoted in his speeches and writings. First he wanted people to realize that it was not a cowardly method, it was resistance and one's mind and emotions were engaged during the process. Passive resistance was not a lack of action; it was merely the absence of physical aggression. Second, those who acted in a nonviolent manner were not trying to defeat the opposition but to broaden his understanding. The result of such action would, King hoped, be the creation of the "beloved community." Third, such attempts were focused on the evil itself not those caught up in the evil. The conflict and tension here was not to be between parties or individuals but between justice and injustice. Fourth, nonviolence allowed those acting to avoid becoming full of hate and bitterness. This was the idea that one should love their enemies and end the cycle of hate. Fifth, King wanted people to realize that those who practiced nonviolence were convinced that justice would ultimately triumph. In some versions of this list, King would exchange the promise of triumph for an emphasis on the nonviolent protestors' willingness to absorb violence unto themselves.<sup>95</sup>

King also tried to show that before movement leaders choose to direct participants in nonviolent actions, they had to consider four questions. They had to ask themselves if

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<sup>94</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, February 1958.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6 February 1957, *Christian Century*, 74 (6 February 1957), 165-167, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 118-121. See also, Martin Luther King, Jr., Remarks in Acceptance of the Forty-second Springarn Medal at the Forty-eighth Annual NAACP Convention, 28 June 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 228-233; King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 101-104.

their cause was just or if there were seeking revenge through disruption. King also believed that nonviolence worked because of the numbers of African Americans in small Southern communities. After all, in several Southern areas, African Americans formed a significant part of the population and could, through the use of nonviolent tactics, be an opposing power.

Second, they had to ask themselves if they had tried other methods of solving the matter such as negotiation. Thirdly, they had to ask if they were prepared to accept the punishments which society might mete out upon them. Last, they had to ask themselves if they had a clear solution to the problem, one which would be just to all concerned. King concluded that direct action made from such decisions helped not only African Americans, but also the rest of Americans who would be freed from wrongs and to live better lives.<sup>96</sup>

King believed that nonviolence worked because it was emotionally active. It increased the self esteem of the African Americans involved in nonviolent activities. They could stand with pride before whites and they could defeat enemies who actually had more power.<sup>97</sup> The activist did not harm their enemy physically, but it did offer a sort of emotional release, one which would hopefully uplift the enemy as well.<sup>98</sup>

Nonviolence also served to free one from the emotion of fear. King believed that once

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<sup>96</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the American Jewish Congress, 20 May 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8. See also *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, in Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: New American Library, 1963, 1964), 78; Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Negro is Part of That Huge Community Who Seek New Freedom in Every Area of Life," *Challenge*, 1 February 1959, pg. 3, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 116-120.

<sup>97</sup> King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 40.

<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," 17 May 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 256-262.

men found a cause they were willing to die for, he would be free from the fear of death. Nonviolence served to free the minds of African Americans from the fear of death and as a result to free their minds and souls.<sup>99</sup>

King believed that it was justifiable to break immoral laws. During a 1960 interview on a local radio show in Atlanta, King was asked why the movement needed to break the law rather than to use more established legal means such as picket lines and boycotts. King pointed out that this was not always practical; sometimes even picketing was against the law. Furthermore, he said, that if a law contradicted a moral law or a higher law, one could disobey it and accept the consequences.<sup>100</sup> The obvious problem with this logic was the question of who was to decide which laws were and were not immoral or unjust. King responded to this by saying that one judged such laws by what the saints, prophets, intellectuals and academics had said. His conclusion was that if a law brought dishonor to a person, it was an unjust law.<sup>101</sup>

King also taught that one had to be willing to accept the consequences of nonviolent action. On September 3, 1958, King had accompanied Ralph Abernathy to the trial of a man who had assaulted Abernathy. While in the courthouse, King had been arrested for loitering. Two days later, King's trial was held, and, as was expected, he was found guilty. He refused to pay the fine levied upon him, saying that he would not pay a fine for something that he was not guilty of and would instead serve the time in jail. In

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<sup>99</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Rally Speech in Gadsden, Alabama, 21 June 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

<sup>100</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Zenas Sears, on "For Your Information" 6 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 544-553.

<sup>101</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., debate with James J. Kilpatrick, on "The Nation's Future," 26 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 556-564.

his statement to Eugene Loe, the judge in the case, King announced he bore no malice toward anyone involved in the case. His decision, he claimed, was made in the context of the American belief in liberty and equality, values that he obviously held dear but which he felt the country was in danger of losing.<sup>102</sup>

Keeping people from engaging in physical violence took some work. This was largely accomplished through training sessions and by using methods which required little direct confrontation by the average participant such as boycotts and marches. FOR's secretary, Robert L. Cannon, observed the first nonviolent training session which the MIA conducted on October 1, 1956. The purpose of the training session was to teach African Americans how to react once they were allowed to integrate Montgomery's bus system. At one point in the meeting, King called on two women to describe how they would react to white riders who were upset. The first one to speak said she could ignore taunts but if she was physically pushed, she would probably push back. King asked the woman what good that would do and after thinking about it and with some encouragement from the audience, she changed her mind.<sup>103</sup> King along with FOR leader Glenn Smiley prepared guidelines for bus integration to be used later. They created "rules" for successful bus integration. Riders were to assume that the bus driver would obey the law, avoid sitting by a white person unless there was no other open seat, use manners, refuse to respond to insults or physical assault in kind, report serious incidents to the driver, and avoid talking much to others, ride in pairs for support, resist defending

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<sup>102</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., statement to Eugene Loe, 5 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 487-490.

<sup>103</sup> Robert L. Cannon to Alfred Hassler and Glenn E. Smiley, 3 October 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 388-391.

others being harassed, and to walk for a while longer if they didn't think they could handle any possible harassment.<sup>104</sup> The movement's training system later became more refined. Recruits at mass meetings in Birmingham for instance were invited to join the action with a religious style call to come forward. The following day these new volunteers would return to the church for processing and training. The training largely included dramas of nonviolence and their commitment to a list of ten nonviolent commandments. This commitment was made by signing a commitment card. The list of ten commandments had obvious religious overtones such as a commitment to prayers and walking in God's love, but the volunteers also promised to refrain from violence and to follow the direction of movement captains.<sup>105</sup>

The SCLC would develop conferences and seminars for nonviolence training. One such conference was held in Petersburg, Virginia. It was sponsored by the SCLC and the Petersburg Improvement Association. Attendees paid a two dollar registration fee and heard talks about nonviolent methods. These talks were led by men such as Wyatt Tee Walker of the SCLC and Glenn Smiley of FOR. Smiley taught one particular session on "Christ, Gandhi and Nonviolence." Similar conferences were held in Georgia. One program from 1960 reveals that sessions explained the basic ideas behind nonviolence, the power of it, and the use of it as a social technique. Walker and King were among the speakers.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., and Glenn Smiley, *Integrated Bus Suggestions*, 19 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 481-483.

<sup>105</sup> King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 62.

<sup>106</sup> Program from the First Statewide Institute on Nonviolence, Petersburg Virginia, SCLC, Box 35, Folder 9; Program from the Second Statewide Institute on Non-Violent Resistance to Segregation, 4-5 August 1960, SCLC, Box 35, Folder 10.

King's organizations often used boycotts as a nonviolent tactic which would win Southern cooperation. The targets of the boycotts were often individual businesses or downtown business districts. Once they felt economic pressure, leaders of the business community would then put pressure on political leaders to give into civil rights demands. King's first and most famous boycott was the Montgomery bus boycott. Although he had not started it, he came to lead the organization which formed to support it, the MIA. He would return to this tactic time and time again, in city after city.

Later, to force compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and to illustrate the need for a Voting Rights Act, King considered a boycott on Alabama products. Companies considering a move to the state were requested not to do so. Individuals and government leaders would be asked to withdraw money from institutions connected to the state. People would be asked to boycott goods. These actions were to force the state to among other things, end police brutality and voter discrimination.<sup>107</sup> This boycott never gained momentum across the nation. Such a wide ranging and nonspecific boycott would have been very hard to organize and maintain. On top of that, they did not and could not gain the support of labor. James Hoffa, the General President of the Teamsters, wrote to King to express sympathy for the idea, but he explained that he could not violate union contracts with carriers as well as risk the chance of costly lawsuits by joining such an endeavor.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Boycott of Alabama by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference Protesting Voter Discrimination in Racial Matters, FBI, 5 April 1965, 100-106670-NR; Martin Luther King, Jr., interview, on "Meet the Press," 28 March 1965, SCLC, Box 4, Folder 42; Martin Luther King, Jr., "After the March: An Open Letter to the American People," 1965, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 14.

<sup>108</sup> James Hoffa to Martin Luther King, Jr., 29 March 1965, MLK, Box 12, Folder 44.

Another tactic which appealed to the movement was marches. These marches gave the movement some of its most dramatic moments. Marches, King told a New York radio news panel, kept the issue before the community. Entire towns could not ignore racial problems when they were faced with such demonstrations.<sup>109</sup> Marches however required a lot of organization, particularly if the organizers wished to reduce direct contact and violent conflicts with opposing forces. Rabbi Jacob Pressman described the last day of the march from Selma to Montgomery, the day in which the marchers were joined by hundreds of supporters. Marchers were given strict instructions. In this case, they could march in rows of six, but women were to be on the inside of the line. Marshals, mostly white ministers, watched over the marchers, ensuring that they stayed in line and obeyed any directions. Pressman's march was six miles long and took him through both white and African American sections of the town. In the white section of the town, they felt isolated, and marchers earlier in the line had been shouted and jeered at.<sup>110</sup>

The biggest march was the March on Washington in 1963. This was also the march that caused the most concern with the least amount of justification. When King and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP appeared on "Meet the Press" to promote the march, they were asked about the wisdom of conducting such an event. The panel of reporters wanted to know if such a march would in fact create most hostility and that such a gathering of militants would possibly result in violence. Wilkins responded that

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<sup>109</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on "The WINS-News Conference," 31 May 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6.

<sup>110</sup> Jacob Pressman, March on Montgomery, unpublished essay, 27 March 1965, MLK, Box 21, Folder 12.

Washington DC had seen crowds of such size before and that the city could handle it. He also promised that the movement had taken every precaution to ensure that the event was nonviolent.<sup>111</sup> When the march was over, the panel of leaders appeared on a Metropolitan Broadcasting Television show to discuss the event. A. Philip Randolph said that the march served as a kind of catharsis for African American frustration and anger. This allowed African Americans to dramatize their problems and concerns in a safe but effective manner.<sup>112</sup>

Apparently King did consider fasting as a viable civil rights tactic. As he and Rustin discussed what role they might take on at the political conventions of 1964, King admitted that he had thought about a fast which would begin with the meeting of the credentials committee and end with the convention. Such a fast could not be classified as civil disobedience, it would be a religious event, and he would appear to be doing something. Rustin liked this idea and pointed out the excellent drama of it all, but reminded King to make it clear that the fast was due to moral concerns over the state of affairs in Mississippi.<sup>113</sup> This fast never occurred, and about the only other references to King and fasting are Abernathy's remarks at King's funeral that King and he always fasted during their first 24 hours in jail.<sup>114</sup> Chavez would make much better use of fasting as a tactic when he chose to do so in 1968.

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<sup>111</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. and Roy Wilkins, interview on "Meet the Press," 25 August 1963, SCLC, Box 27, Folder 29.

<sup>112</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., et al., "March on Washington ... Report by the Leaders," television program on Metropolitan Broadcasting Television, 28 August 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

<sup>113</sup> 6 August 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>114</sup> Funeral Service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 9 April 1968, MLK, Box 11, Folder 4.



King also had to prove that nonviolence worked. One of his stock stories came from an incident in Montgomery. The night that the Supreme Court decreed that the busses must be integrated, the Klan decided to ride through the African American community. Typically, such an event would have been met by a darkened neighborhood. But this time, King said, African Americans decided to treat it like any other parade. People left their lights on and some stayed on the streets. This so unnerved the night riders that they turned their vehicles and left the neighborhood before they had intended.<sup>115</sup>

The movement also needed a charismatic example of a non-violent advocate. This was a role that King fulfilled. He did not begin with this role in mind, but it developed with the Montgomery bus boycott. King claimed that he had not expected much in the way of violence from Montgomery. Yet, in January 1956, he said that he found himself the recipient of some 30 or 40 threats a day through the mail and over the phone. This surprised him, and he said it took him a while to accept it.<sup>116</sup> Evidence of Montgomery's propensity toward violence became readily apparent when on January 30, 1956, a bomb exploded on King's porch while he was attending a mass meeting. Upon hearing of the event, King closed the mass meeting and rushed home to check on his wife and daughter. When he arrived at his home, King found a crowd of African Americans and several whites including the mayor, the police commissioner, members of the police force and reporters. The crowd had become restless and had refused to disperse. King

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<sup>115</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "We Are Still Walking," *Liberation* 1 (December 1956) 6-9, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 445-451.

<sup>116</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview at Bennett College, 11 February 1958, Greensboro, North Carolina, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 363-367; King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 132.

appeared on his porch, calmed the crowd, reminded them of their nonviolent stance, and urged them to go home. King recalled that on that night many of the whites on the scene had feared for their lives, even the reporters had been afraid to leave King's house. This bombing was followed by a dynamite attack on the home of E. D. Nixon, another MIA leader. It was at this point, that King decided to apply for a gun permit so that he could carry a gun in his car. This permit was refused and King decided that it was probably not such a good idea for the leader of what was supposed to be a nonviolent movement to carry a gun even for self-defense. He and Coretta then got rid of the weapon that they did have in their house.<sup>117</sup>

The bombing incident was also immortalized in FOR's comic book story. This book told of King's adherence to love and nonviolence during the Montgomery movement. After the bombing, King, according to the comic book, went home and calmed an angry crowd around his house. He told them to love their enemies and to continue in the path of nonviolence, and promised them that God was with them.<sup>118</sup>

King managed to maintain such an attitude and image even when he was stabbed by Izola Curry at a Harlem book signing in 1958. He expressed no hatred or resentment toward her. In a statement issued from his New York hospital bed, King commented that her actions were representative of the national climate, a climate in which such incidents would occur. But he claimed that the incident had only served to remind him that

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<sup>117</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 135-141.

<sup>118</sup> Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story."

nonviolence was the proper method.<sup>119</sup> King later continued to express sympathy for Curry and said that he accepted the incident as the will of God.<sup>120</sup> Here King served as an example of one who could turn the other cheek, absorbing violence unto himself, without retaliating or becoming bitter.

Of course, the national popularity of nonviolence would not last forever. Radical leaders such as Malcolm X began to get attention. James Bevel noted that more and more African Americans were finding interest in the methods and words of these advocates. He worried that the movement needed to do something to convince the people of how effective nonviolence was and could be.<sup>121</sup> If nonviolence served as a promise to the American public that African Americans would follow the rules of law and order, it also served to protect the civil rights movement from charges that it was a communist organization.

King and the SCLC tried to convince Americans that they were not responsible for violations of disorder in American society. Because of the violence that often followed the civil rights movement, many Americans found it impossible to believe that King and his followers should be labeled as nonviolent. Never mind that the violence was caused by others, violence had accompanied their actions and so many believed the civil rights activists should be held accountable for it.

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<sup>119</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement Issued from Harlem Hospital, 30 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 502.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid; Martin Luther King Jr., to the Montgomery Improvement Association, 6 October 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 505-506.

<sup>121</sup> James Bevel to King, memo, c. 1963, SCLC, Box 3, Folder 14.

King's use of nonviolent tactics received much criticism. In April 1956, King received a letter from James Coleman, Mississippi's governor, asking him not to speak at the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership in Jackson. The Governor asked King not to come to the state, explaining that the racial situation was better than in the past. The governor believed King's appearance would only harm Mississippi's African American population.<sup>122</sup> King responded that he was not actually scheduled to speak at the event but if he were, he would still come and treated the governor to a description of nonviolent Christian philosophy.<sup>123</sup> Walter F. Fischer, the author of one letter which was addressed to King and sent not only to him but to President Johnson, J. Edgar Hoover and Selma's mayor, told King that he did not bring peace but mobs, who, feeling that there was strength in their numbers, behaved violently. He claimed that King had "no concern for the personal and human civil rights of the residents of the communities in which you so boldly intrude."<sup>124</sup>

It was easy for movement critics to confuse African American violence with movement violence. When Dr. William Anderson appeared in King's place on "Meet the Press," the editor of the *Richmond News*, James J. Kilpatrick, read part of an Associated Press report which described African American onlookers who attacked law enforcement following demonstrations. Although the article did not claim that these African Americans were a part of the movement, Kilpatrick used it to argue that the Albany

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<sup>122</sup> James P. Coleman to Martin Luther King, Jr., telegram, 23 April 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. III, 220-221.

<sup>123</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to James P. Coleman, telegram, 24 April 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. III, 221.

<sup>124</sup> Walter F. Fischer to Martin Luther King, Jr., 15 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1017.

movement itself was not nonviolent. Anderson replied that the movement itself had been nonviolent. Kilpatrick then asked if Anderson believed that these protests had provoked the violence. Anderson agreed only that the nonviolent movement expected some violence toward itself.<sup>125</sup>

When he was interviewed in October 1957 on the “Look Here” program, King was asked by the host Martin Agronsky how he could accept federal intervention in Little Rock in light of his belief in nonviolent tactics. King replied that he was not an anarchist like Tolstoy’s believers, and that he acknowledged the need for a police force in the society.<sup>126</sup> King also acknowledged the need for an army. After the church bombings in Birmingham, King called for the presence of troops. One concerned minister wrote to King and said that such troops would contradict King’s nonviolent policy and perhaps result in the deaths of children. King wrote back to the minister and explained that he wished for the troops as a preventative measure.<sup>127</sup>

What these critics feared was that King’s presence or the presence of protests, even nonviolent ones, would set off a storm of outrage and violence in the South. They felt free to ignore the fact that for the most part it wasn’t civil rights activists doing the violence.

King’s response to these kinds of critics varied. King pointed out that Matthew 10:34 recorded Jesus as saying that he brought sword not peace. King said that this

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<sup>125</sup> William G. Anderson, interview on “Meet the Press,” 29 July 1962. MLK, Box 1, Folder 26.

<sup>126</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Martin Agronsky, “Look Here,” 27 October 1957. *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 292-299.

<sup>127</sup> Maurice McCrackin to Martin Luther King, Jr., 29 September 1963, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 14; Martin Luther King, Jr. to Maurice McCrackin, 14 October 1963, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 14.

sword was not physical violence, but it was tension, tension caused from change. A peace which was accompanied by exploitation and segregation was not an acceptable peace.<sup>128</sup> To condemn people asking for freedom for the violence visited upon them by others was he said like condemning Jesus because his actions on earth caused his opposition to crucify him.<sup>129</sup>

Critics had also asked how King could call on the people to disobey the local laws and yet insist that local authorities obey federal laws. King insisted that there was a difference between just and unjust laws and that unjust laws should be disobeyed.<sup>130</sup> Wyatt Tee Walker agreed. While serving as King's Executive Assistant, Walker gave a talk to the Conference on Civil Disobedience and the American Police Executive on March 26, 1963, Walker said that a nonviolent resister had an obligation to disobey immoral and unjust laws, as long as he willingly accepted the penalty for doing so. Immoral laws were to be judged by the Judeo-Christian tradition and were in essence laws placed on the minority but no upon the majority.<sup>131</sup>

It also helped the movement answer such criticism when the opposition was perceived as having instigated violence. This meant that King and the SCLC had to portray their opponents as the violent ones. The general idea was that any violence

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<sup>128</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "When Peace Becomes Obnoxious," 18 March 1956, as transcribed for the Louisville *Defender*, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. III, 207-208.

<sup>129</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Rally Speech in Gadsden, Alabama, 21 June 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

<sup>130</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Rally Speech in Gadsden, Alabama, 21 June 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B; King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail, Why We Can't Wait*, 82.

<sup>131</sup> Wyatt Tee Walker, "The American Dilemma in Miniature," 26 March 1963, SCLC, Box 37, Folder 8.

toward movement members would result in shaming the opposition. King believed that if African Americans refused to fight back their opponents would be

forced to stand before God and the world splattered with the blood and reeking with the stench of his Negro brother. That is the method. That is the way to defeat him. We are defeated if we start with violence. But defeat him with his own method and eventually he will be come ashamed of his own method.<sup>132</sup>

Key to this idea was that the violent would have to stand before the world and that the world would see what they had done and how they had acted toward their earthly brothers. King said that the opposition would be ashamed of the violence they would have to do to stop so many participants.<sup>133</sup>

It was not hard to portray the opposition as violent. Southern local governments and individuals provided plenty of opportunities that the organization could use in their writings and speeches. The SCLC was particularly concerned that they play up the deaths of civil rights workers. When three young men disappeared in Mississippi in 1964, The FBI reported that in August 1964, King and Bayard Rustin discussed how they might “dramatize” the fact that their bodies had been found. Rustin’s response was that King should send messages to the major Protestant, Catholic and Jewish organizations calling for day of repentance and a call for their further dedication to the cause.<sup>134</sup> In a fund raising appeal later that year, King made oblique reference to these deaths when he wrote that the “burning of churches and the brutalization and murder of Negroes and their

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<sup>132</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 1 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 73-89.

<sup>133</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Look to the Future,” 2 September 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 269-276.

<sup>134</sup> 6 August 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

white allies has grown to frightful proportions.”<sup>135</sup> Alabama in 1965 also had its share of violence. The FBI reported that on February 18, 1965, a demonstration in Marion had gone awry. African Americans in Marion had attempted to march from a church rally toward the county jail. They were stopped and within 30 minutes forced back into the church. But during this time, there had been some disturbances. An NBC newsman had been hit on the head and had required hospital care. A state trooper had been hit with a bottle and required stitches. One of the men labeled assailants in the case, Jimmie Jackson, been shot by another trooper. The director of the state troopers, Al Lingo, had announced that charges against Jackson were pending. During the incident there had only been twenty state troopers. Afterward additional back up arrived in the form of 40 more state officers and others associated with the Dallas County sheriff’s office.<sup>136</sup>

The responsibility for maintaining law and order lay on the shoulders of the white community. Most acts of violence concerning the civil rights movement would come from them, and not from the protestors or from bystanders. King acknowledged the role of the white community in maintaining order during the Montgomery bus boycott. As the boycott drew to a close, King applauded the whites of the town for their discipline and sensitivity. He claimed that without that, there would have been far more violence.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, King pressured other local government leaders to maintain law and order. He wrote to James Morgan, Birmingham’s mayor in 1958, to express his

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<sup>135</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to Dear Friend, October 1964, FBI, 100-106670-585.

<sup>136</sup> “Racial Discrimination in Registration and Voting, Perry County, Alabama,” 19 February 1965, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>137</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 3 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. III, 451-463.



concern about the attempted bombing of Fred Shuttlesworth's church. King asked why, in this age of science, the Birmingham authorities had been unable to solve the crime. He complained about the fact that African American residents had been called in and asked to take lie detector tests as if they were bombing suspects. Most importantly, King emphasized the fact that the bombing was just one of the first acts of disorder in the community. Since that incident, a synagogue had been bombed as well. He reminded the mayor that when violence was not stopped, it lead to a break down of law and order.<sup>138</sup>

King also addressed concerns that the movement would disturb law and order by using references to Adolph Hitler and World War II. Americans in the 1950s and 60s were living with a recent public memory of WWII. For them, the horrors of Nazi Germany were very much apart of their lives. For many it was easy to compare the Southern situation with events from that time period. Lerone Bennett Jr., wrote about Jim Crow for *Ebony* and said that only two places in the world were worse than the South: South Africa and Nazi Germany.<sup>139</sup> When Bennett wrote those words in August of 1962, Nazi Germany had been powerless for some 17 years, but for Bennett, and many other Americans, such comparisons completely demonstrated how they felt about the situation in America.

King often made references to World War II in his speeches and writings. In December of 1957, when he spoke before the Second Annual Institute on Non-violence and Social Change, King encouraged his audience to continue to love their enemies,

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<sup>138</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to James W. Morgan, 15 July 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 450-453.

<sup>139</sup> "The Birth of Jim Crow," *Ebony*, August 1962.

promising that “our victory will be a double victory. We will win our freedom, and we will win the individuals who have been the perpetrators of the evil system that existed so long.” Clayborne Carson found that this phrase had been adapted from E. Stanley Jones work on Gandhi.<sup>140</sup> But for King’s audience, the phrase “double victory” brought back memories of the double victory crusade of World War II. During this crusade, African Americans had agitated for their rights at home while involved in the war against fascism in Germany and Japan abroad.

It was also easy to compare the Jewish situation in World War II to the African American situation in the post war era. When King addressed the American Jewish Congress in May 1958, he reminded them that African Americans had joined the war effort against Hitler due in part to his actions toward the Jews and the fear that sooner or later, Hitler’s tactics might impact them directly. When he addressed that same group later in May 1965, King added that had others in Germany participated in nonviolent action in opposition to Hitler’s oppressive laws, the holocaust might not have happened.<sup>141</sup> King went on to say that Hitlers still existed in the modern world and that Jews would soon find that African Americans were being treated similarly.<sup>142</sup> King’s Hitlers of the modern world were the KKK and the Citizens Councils. He pointed out that the KKK was directly and proudly associated with many acts of violence. The Councils claimed to dislike violent tactics, but, King pointed out, through their speeches

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<sup>140</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Some Things We Must Do,” 5 December 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. IV, 328-343.

<sup>141</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the American Jewish Congress, 20 May 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8.

<sup>142</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress, 14 May 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. 4, 406-410.

and publications, they created an atmosphere which made it acceptable. So, for King, the new Hitlers were the white supremacists who “Under the proud banner of white supremacy, they have proved that they will murder little children, deprive men and women of meat and bread, and initiate a reign of terror reminiscent of the Gestapo practices of Adolph Hitler.”<sup>143</sup> References to Hitler and to World War II would become stock phrases used through King’s speeches and writings.<sup>144</sup>

Many Americans had no problem with such analogies. When King was in the Birmingham Jail in Spring of 1963, he received many cards and letters. One particular correspondent from Denver, Colorado, wrote to tell King and the “Negro People,” that he appreciated the efforts they were making on the behalf of the world. After all, he said, “The Hitler-idea manifests itself in different societies in different ways, but no mean people can ever erase what you stand for to each individual American.”<sup>145</sup> When King won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he received a letter from the Friedmans, a Jewish couple. They expressed pride in being Americans and told King that “As Jews who fled Germany in 1938 we are very much aware of the problems, difficulties and uncertainties you are facing.” For this couple, King was merely attempting to extend the democratic benefits of World War II to everyone.<sup>146</sup> During the march from Selma in 1965, one

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<sup>143</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness,” 6 September 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. V, 499-508.

<sup>144</sup> For further examples see Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at a Rally to Support the Freedom Riders, 21 May 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B; Martin Luther King, Jr., statement, 24 June 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6; Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on “The WINS-News Conference,” 31 May 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6; Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with *Playboy*, January 1965, SCLC, Box 27, Folder 49.

<sup>145</sup> E. A. Dioguardi to Negro People, c. April 1963, MLK, Box 4, Folder 29

<sup>146</sup> Max and Ingrid Friedman to Martin Luther King, Jr., 23 October 1964, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 20.

woman carried a sign that read “Gas is Naziism.” She was denouncing the use of tear gas to break up the crowds at protest events because it reminded her of the war that Americans had fought for international freedom.

The movement would face its share of violence. This usually worked to garner the movement some public sympathy. Early on, John Tilley, who was executive director of SCLC for one year, resigning in April 1959, had complained that nonviolence was not the most attention getting of methods. He told King that among these problems was “the lack of dramatic appeal which voting and the philosophy of nonviolence present...”<sup>147</sup> In other words; nonviolence as it was did not provide the drama needed to attract attention to the cause. This would be why it was so important to dramatize the violence of the opposition. That would be news worthy enough to attract media attention. One African American soldier stationed in Germany in 1963 wrote excitedly to the SCLC about the March on Washington on September 16, 1963. But he had also just read of the Sunday morning bombing in Birmingham. This he labeled “a most dastardly act,” but said that it would give African Americans more courage to fight on.<sup>148</sup> King believed that the nonviolent method made whites face the nation’s racial problems, because it played upon their consciences. King held the students in the sit-in movement up as an example. He said that they had maintained a policy of nonviolence but the same could not be said of the white community.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> John Lee Tilley to Martin Luther King, Jr., 13 April 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. V, 182-184.

<sup>148</sup> Sam Cameron to SCLC, 16 September 1963, SCLC, Box 33, Folder 20.

<sup>149</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Revolt Without Violence- the Negroes’ New Strategy,” *US News and World Report*, 21 March 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King Jr.*, vol. V, 392-396.

Such depictions of violence often came in two basic forms, SCLC speeches and publications, and news media coverage. The SCLC often published material on the incidents and it occasionally ended up in King's speeches. One such publication was "St. Augustine, Florida: 400 Years of Bigotry and Hate." This booklet was published by the SCLC, and its cover bore the photography of an African American man lying in a hospital bed, his wrists wrapped in gauze. Inside, the booklet described act after act of violence visited upon activists, including the abduction and beating of four African Americans by the KKK and the use of police dogs and cattle prods against demonstrators. The booklet was intended to embarrass St. Augustine during its 400<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.<sup>150</sup> Another such publication reflected murders of Alabama. This work mapped the location of violent acts in Alabama and then listed and described each, including the death of Jimmie Jackson. The authors pointed out that criminals were more likely to be prosecuted for killing white victims, but even then justice was rarely done.<sup>151</sup>

Even more effective however were the pictures that were published by the news media after such protests. Of course these pictures of events were made possible only through bad law enforcement policies. There were two extreme examples of law enforcement leaders during the civil rights movement. One of these was Laurie Prichett of Albany, Georgia. The other was Bull Connor of Birmingham, Alabama. Of the two, Prichett handled the situation with all the flair of a Southern gentleman and did not create negative publicity for the city. Wyatt Tee Walker analyzed Prichett's actions and decided

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<sup>150</sup> SCLC, "St. Augustine, Florida: 400 Years of Bigotry and Hate," MLK, Box 20, Folder 44.

<sup>151</sup> SCLC, "In a Land Where Murder is Respectable," MLK, Box 1, Folder 7.

that his success as a law enforcement officer stemmed from his decision to meet nonviolent action with nonviolent police work. Walker did not give Prichett any special credit for this; after all, he said, Prichett was using a moral means to continue to uphold an immoral system.<sup>152</sup> This was a thought shared by King which he expressed in the famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* as he reflected on the roles of Prichett and Connor as law enforcement leaders.<sup>153</sup> Prichett was masterful in creating means of dealing with nonviolent protestors. His officers handled the protestors with the best of care, even carrying them off to jail on emergency cots.<sup>154</sup> The result was that no pictures of police brutality from Albany made the nation's front pages in 1962.

The contrast to Prichett was Bull Connor in Birmingham. Connor unfortunately did not adopt Albany's tactics, and so both African Americans and the city of Birmingham paid the price. As Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety, Connor ruled over a town that had a sad history of civil rights crimes. In his book *Why We Can't Wait*, King reported that there were some 17 bombings of church and civil rights leaders home that remained unsolved.<sup>155</sup> The pictures which resulted from Connor's police tactics in 1963 horrified the world. The two most shocking issues revolved around the use of police dogs and fire hoses. In one picture four police dogs and their handlers are seen. In the foreground, one of the dogs is seen attacking an African American man

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<sup>152</sup> Wyatt Tee Walker, "The American Dilemma in Miniature," 26 March 1963, SCLC, Box 37, Folder 8.

<sup>153</sup> King, *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, *Why We Can't Wait*, 94

<sup>154</sup> For a picture of this see Charles Johnson and Bob Adelman, *King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Viking Studio, 2000), 98.

<sup>155</sup> King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 49.

wearing a hat, a long sleeved shirt and slacks. Although the man appears to have been walking away from the dogs, this particular German Shepard had grabbed the man's clothing, tearing his pant leg open from ankle to hip.<sup>156</sup> Similar pictures showed demonstrators in Kelly Ingram Park as they were sprayed with fire hoses. Various photos showed demonstrators as they were knocked to the ground or against buildings by the blast from the water hoses.<sup>157</sup> These hoses were not all normal fire hoses. Two of them had been fitted with special attachments, called monitor guns, which intensified their spray, making them capable of removing the bark from trees.<sup>158</sup> It was not that Connor did not realize that the media was watching, King said that Connor at one point threatened to pull outside press cards; a movement which would result in less national exposure for the town.<sup>159</sup> It was more that Connor wanted the publicity for local political power, after all, he, who'd made a practice of winning local elections by being a staunch segregationist, had just lost the mayoral election to a moderate.<sup>160</sup> Later, the firemen themselves refused to obey Connor's orders to disburse a pray vigil through the use of such hoses.<sup>161</sup> King called this instance the moment when he first felt the "pride and the power" of nonviolence.<sup>162</sup> Of the two styles of law enforcement, Connor's would be more

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<sup>156</sup> Johnson and Adelman, 121; Schulke, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 70.

<sup>157</sup> Johnson and Adelman 122-125; Schulke, *Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 74-77.

<sup>158</sup> William A. Nunnolley, *Bull Connor* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 149.

<sup>159</sup> King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 53.

<sup>160</sup> Nunnolley, 7.

<sup>161</sup> Johnson and Adelman, 132.

<sup>162</sup> King, interview with *Playboy*, January 1965..

popular in the South. Thus the world was often treated to such images, even up through the Selma March in 1965.

King used nonviolence to address the issue of communism in two forms. First, he used nonviolent tactics to shield the movement from red-baiting. The SCLC he said was a nonviolent, Christian movement and therefore could not possibly be a communistic one. Communism was violent in nature and so did not fit in with such philosophies.<sup>163</sup> An SCLC editorial in October 1963 said this even more poetically. Pointing out a trend of labeling movements such as their own as communistic, the author of the editorial wrote that such a philosophy contradicted their basic values. They concluded that

if there is any 'red' in its ranks it is the memory of the red blood of 3,000 lynching victims staining American history; the red blood spilled on the battle field by Negroes in every war in which this nation has engaged and the red trickle from the bullet wounds that have claimed the lives of men like Medgar Evers of Mississippi who symbolized the 'hardiness and valor' for which the red in the American flag stands.<sup>164</sup>

King also fought against the communist label by arguing that nonviolent civil rights activists were just trying to reform their country so that America would be an acceptable example of the benefits of democracy to the rest of the world. America, he claimed, had never been a true democracy; instead, it had practiced a variety of other forms of government such as colonialism, imperialism, and oppression. It was, he argued, the failures of democracy that had lead to the existence of communism.<sup>165</sup> As such, civil

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<sup>163</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement on Atlanta Constitution Story Charging Communist Ties, 25 July 1963, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 19.

<sup>164</sup> "The 'Red' Plague," SCLC *Newsletter*, October 1963, vol. 2, no. 1, SCLC, Box 122, Folder, 23.

<sup>165</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," 17 November 1967, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 315-324.



rights activists were doing their patriotic duty to promote democracy and the American way.

During the movement, King admitted that he had read Marx, but claimed that he found Marx and the communist way to be incomplete. He did not see communism as a way to deal with the country's social ills.<sup>166</sup> In his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, King concluded that he had rejected communism for three reasons, the materialism associated with the movement, the ethical relativism, and the totalitarianism which resulted. But most importantly, his study of communism had lead King to be more concerned with issues of social justice.<sup>167</sup> King's editor at Harper and Brothers, Melvin Arnold, vetted King's book, taking care to tone down any references to communism which could be easily twisted by opponents. Arnold was careful that King did not portray any Marxist or communist ideas in a positive light. King, wisely, took Arnold's advice and altered his script accordingly.<sup>168</sup>

King was cautioned by others to be careful of communist connections. Leonard G. Carr, treasurer of the National Baptist Convention, wrote to tell King of a forthcoming donation from a ministers group, and took the occasion to also warn him against appearing as a speaker at groups that might be classified as subversive. Moreover, Carr recommended that King check out any group issuing him such invitations.<sup>169</sup> Another

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<sup>166</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Martin Agronsky, "Look Here," 27 October 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 292-299.

<sup>167</sup> King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 92-93.

<sup>168</sup> Melvin Arnold to Martin Luther King, Jr., 5 May 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 404-405.

<sup>169</sup> Leonard G. Carr to Martin Luther King, Jr., 5 March 1965, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 156.

correspondent wrote to King in July 1956 to express concern about Rosa Parks' appearance on a radio show whose host might have been a communist. King replied to inform the concerned citizen that the movement tried to avoid communist associations.<sup>170</sup>

One of the possible communist connections that often concerned other people was the presence of several individuals in the civil rights movement who had ties to communist groups. Among these were Jack O'Dell, Stanley Levison, and Bayard Rustin. Rustin was the most interesting example of a person whose previous connections caused comment. One of King's most trusted advisors and the man who would organize the March on Washington, Rustin had a list of issues to which critics of the movement could point. Rustin was a pacifist, homosexual, and at one point had been a communist, although he had dropped that affiliation. King knew how valuable Rustin was and wanted to hire him to do publicity work for the SCLC in October 1959. The agreement was made that he would resign if it later became necessary to do so because of critics.<sup>171</sup> Rustin would be hired and would later be called upon to resign. But he would remain involved with the movement and at times would again work directly for or with the SCLC.<sup>172</sup> The most public moment of Rustin's involvement was in his time as Deputy Director of the March on Washington in 1963. Several leaders considered the risk of Rustin's involvement and so the decision was made to give him the title of deputy rather

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<sup>170</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to Homer Greene, 10 July 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 317-318.

<sup>171</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Recommendations to SCLC Committee on Future Program, 27 October 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 315-318.

<sup>172</sup> Bayard Rustin, interview with Open Hands, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, eds. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 285-286.

than as director. When Roy Wilkins and King appeared on “Meet the Press” on August 25, 1963, they were questioned by the panelists about Rustin’s involvement. King patiently answered that Rustin had foresworn any communist connections and ideology years before. King also down played Rustin’s role, saying that Rustin was just one of the people organizing the march, and that he was not one of the chairs.<sup>173</sup>

The SCLC’s adoption of nonviolent tactics served them well as a defense against charges that they were a communist organization. When J. Edgar Hoover replied positively to a reporter’s question in 1964 that the King had ties to communist organizations, the organization was quick to answer him. King made a statement in which he expressed the hope that such words did not indicate a revival of Joseph McCarthy’s tactics. He claimed it was most amazing that the Communist Party had been so unsuccessful among African Americans who, seeking a way out of their oppression, might easily have turned to it. King claimed that the SCLC did not accept communists into its ranks at any level. He announced that he would not let the accusations distract the SCLC from its main purpose, the advancement of civil rights for African Americans, and reminded the audience that nothing they had done was “inconsistent with our struggle to achieve an America free of discrimination, through non-violent persuasion and direct action.” This served to remind King’s audience that the SCLC had long maintained a policy of nonviolence, actions of which were directed toward purifying

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<sup>173</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. and Roy Wilkins, interview on “Meet the Press,” 25 August 1963, SCLC, Box 27, Folder 29.

American society of its discriminatory ways, and were not intended to lead to the overthrow of the nation.<sup>174</sup>

King also portrayed the civil rights movement as the movement that would save democracy on both a national and international scale. In an article which appeared in the June 1956 edition of the *Socialist Call*, King wrote that democracy and segregation could not both exist within the same society.<sup>175</sup> When he announced the Crusade for Citizenship, a voter registration program, King decreed that one did not truly have citizenship unless they could vote. He added “That the Negro remains a patriotic American while deprived of this sacred right is a tribute to his deep allegiance to his nation, its ideals and its promise of Democracy.”<sup>176</sup> King also promised that African Americans would not be the only ones to benefit from saving democracy. At the launch meeting for the Crusade for Citizenship, King pointed out that poor whites were also harmed by the one party system in the South. They too, he claimed, had little real voice.<sup>177</sup>

When King visited India in 1959, he was asked about leftist views among African Americans. King responded that at most one percent of African Americans had such

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<sup>174</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement in Response to Mr. J. Edgar Hoover’s Charge that Communist had infiltrated the Civil Rights Movement, FBI, 100-106670-NR; King made several similar statements about blacks having miraculously avoided becoming communist. See also Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Thirty-fourth Annual Convention of the National Bar Association, 20 August 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 264-270.

<sup>175</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The New Negro of the South: Behind the Montgomery Story,” *The Socialist Call*, 24 (June 1956), *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 280-286.

<sup>176</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Announcement of the Crusade for Citizenship, 5 Nov 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 307-308.

<sup>177</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Delivered at a Meeting Launching the SCLC Crusade for Citizenship, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 367-371.

views. Most, he argued, preferred to rely upon the system of democracy for a change in wealth distribution patterns.<sup>178</sup> It was, King thought, sad that people accused the African American civil rights movement of being communist inspired. All African Americans wanted, he argued, was to be free. They were smart enough to know when they were being oppressed without having to be so informed by Khrushchev or any other communist figure.<sup>179</sup>

King felt that the African American freedom struggle had international implications in the war against communism. When he addressed the NAACP Convention in June 1956, King told them that African Americans had to continue to battle for freedom. If they did not, countries who were throwing off their colonial rulers and establishing new governments would not find American democracy an attractive form of government on which to model their own.<sup>180</sup> This theme carried over into many of King's speeches and sermons. At a mass meeting of the MIA on November 14, 1956, King told his audience that "America is in a very vulnerable position. And because of our love for democracy and our belief that democracy is the greatest form of government that we have on earth, because of our determination not to allow the world to turn to an evil communistic ideology, we must press on for justice ...."<sup>181</sup> In 1962, King addressed

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<sup>178</sup> Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, Account of Press Conference, 10 February 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 125-129.

<sup>179</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech Made in Savannah, 1 January 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B.

<sup>180</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Montgomery Story," 27 June 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 299-310.

<sup>181</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to an MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, 14 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 424-433.

the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission. There he told the crowd that since World War II much of the world had become neutral, refusing to take a side in the battle between the two competing ideologies. This, he said, was because countries could not see that either side had improved race relations. Emerging countries, King argued, were seeing the problems with human rights, with voting, and with racial conflicts in places such as Little Rock and Albany. Until we could prove our worth, King contended that these nations would continue to be leery of totally accepting our ways.<sup>182</sup> King would return to this message time and time again, each time telling his audiences that American had an obligation to push for social justice at home or face the possibility of losing the admiration of newly emerging African and Asian nations.<sup>183</sup>

Many people believed, as the FBI did, that King was influenced by Communists, or even that he was himself a member of the party. They circulated propaganda to the fact. One particularly interesting piece was the pamphlet “Unmasking the Deceiver,” written by Dr. Billy James Hargis, a popular minister, and published by the *Christian Crusade*, a weekly publication. The pamphlet decreed that it was revealing the real reasons behind King’s “anti-American activities.” King, they claimed, had long been associated with Marxists, something he’d proven by speaking at the Highlander Folk School, associating with pacifist Bayard Rustin and labor organizer A. Philip Randolph, being a member of the NAACP whose African American founder was communist WEB

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<sup>182</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission, 12 September 1962, MLK Speeches, III, Box 3.

<sup>183</sup> For another example see Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations,” 10 April 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 167-179.

DuBois, and being an advisor for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) whose Freedom Riders were interrupted by violence.<sup>184</sup>

Such concerned citizens also protested at events where King spoke. When King gave a commencement address at the June 13, 1965 graduation at Hofstra University, a dozen or so protestors stood outside of the ceremony and yelled at graduates as they marched in, calling up on the graduates to help destroy African American Bolsheviks. Inside the ceremony a man stood up and informed the audience that King had been identified multiple times as a communist and then ran out of the stadium.<sup>185</sup>

Chavez's situation was even more complicated than King's. Nonviolent movements had managed to gain some acceptance by society, especially by the religious, by student movements and by other unions.<sup>186</sup> However, the union was seeking power and support in the late 1960s, a time when the country was becoming increasingly involved in the Vietnam War and civil rights groups had been gaining strength for almost a decade. To complicate the picture, radicals who were comfortable with some levels of violence were gaining influence in the civil rights and student movements. *Ebony* Magazine began to talk about the idea of black power in September 1966, as Stokely Carmichael popularized the term. *Ebony*, in September 1966, claimed that Carmichael believed that African American men should be proactive in protecting their families.

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<sup>184</sup> Billy James Hargis, "Unmasking the Deceiver," pamphlet, *Christian Crusade*, FBI, 100-106670-657.

<sup>185</sup> 13 June 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1478.

<sup>186</sup> David F. Gomez, *Somos Chicanos: Strangers in Our Own Land* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 129; Hoffman, 25-28; Jose G. Perez, *Viva La Huelga!: The Struggle of the Farm Workers* (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1973), 13; Prago, 184.

This implied a level of violence not associated with King.<sup>187</sup> African American leaders such as King and Carl Rowan were quick to come out against violence as a form of protest. King found it necessary to remind *Ebony's* readers that no African Americans had died in actual nonviolent protests, but had instead been killed after they were over. He argued that the most powerful weapon that African Americans had was their ability to organize their people into effective groups.<sup>188</sup> Rowan reminded his African American audience in *Ebony* that black power had only made whites fearful of the cause. They saw it as African American racism and as a result, their support for the civil rights movement declined.<sup>189</sup> Race riots had made headlines all across the country, especially in New York in 1964 and Watts in 1965. But, the advocacy of violence and violent acts of protest would never be accepted by society at large. Therefore, the union had to follow King's path, and the path of California's early student movement which adopted similar nonviolent forms of protest. It was the only form of protest that the American public would support and deem legitimate.

Mexican Americans had no history of nonviolent protest that they could draw on for encouragement.<sup>190</sup> On the contrary, they had both contemporary and historical examples of Mexican or Mexican American groups who had used violence in their attempts to gain power. Mexican American associations with violent protest were rooted in the heroism of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution such as Zapata and Villa. These

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<sup>187</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., "Stokely Carmichael: Architect of Black Power," *Ebony*, September 1966.

<sup>188</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," *Ebony*, October 1966.

<sup>189</sup> Carl T. Rowan, "Crisis in Civil Rights Leadership," *Ebony*, November 1966.

<sup>190</sup> London and Anderson, 183.



were the heroes of young Mexican Americans.<sup>191</sup> Because of their popularity as historical figures, figures that inspired ethnic pride, the union used them in various promotions.

Yet, they had not meant to praise these men's violent tactics.

More recently, Reies Lopez Tijerina had protested the decisions that had stripped Mexican Americans of their land. He established the Alianza Federal de Mercedes Libres in 1963. This group began to complain about the broken promises of land grants. Much of this land had been taken from Mexican Americans turned into national forests. Tijerina and other land reform advocates had raided a courthouse as part of their protest strategy.

Although his tactics were not as radical as Tijerina, Corky Gonzales was also someone Chavez shied away from. Gonzales established the Denver Crusade for Justice in 1966. This group focused on attaining Mexican American civil rights and attracted an urban following. It also attracted those who sought believed in brown power.<sup>192</sup> Chavez turned down an invitation from Gonzalez to speak at a Crusade for Justice meeting for students in 1969, blaming his busy schedule with his work in California. Although Chavez was genuinely busy, it probably did not help that Gonzalez was becoming the activist who a year later would advocate to Hispanic students that Latinos form their own political party.<sup>193</sup> This kind of separation from the political mainstream Chavez could not afford. Because of his policy of non-violence, Chavez did not support such groups. This

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<sup>191</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, 220.

<sup>192</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 58.

<sup>193</sup> Corky Gonzalez to Cesar Chavez, 6 February 1969, UFWP, III, Box 34, Folder 8; Stanford University News Service, press release, 16 April 1970, UFWP, III, Box 34, Folder 8.

might have cost him some Mexican American support.<sup>194</sup> But, it probably ensured that the predominately Anglo-American public continued to back the farm labor union, and it ensured that leaders from the Democratic Party like Robert Kennedy would be comfortable with supporting the movement.

The FBI did investigate Chavez and the union, just as they had investigated King, but they seemed to have come to the conclusion early on that the union was not a communist organization. This conclusion was in part reached as early as 1966. In January of that year, the Los Angeles Bureau drew up a report on the “Communist Infiltration of the National Farm Workers Association.” Although the purpose of the report was to describe possible communist connections, the author focused primarily on the connection that the union had to churches and to the support that the union had received from groups that may or may not have had communist members such as the SDS and the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA). The FBI also cited *El Malcriado*’s reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone referring to the union or those associated with it as communists. Although the FBI was careful not to draw conclusions in this report, the general impression was that there was little to no strong communist presence in the union.<sup>195</sup> In September of 1966, the White House requested that the FBI investigate Chavez in preparation for offering him an unspecified staff position. The FBI duly reported Chavez’s service in the United States

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<sup>194</sup> Gomez, 96; Hammerback and Jensen, 84; Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez and Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez, *Viva La Raza: The Struggle of the Mexican-American People* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., Inc., 1974), 202; Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 113-114.

<sup>195</sup> Communist Infiltration of the National Farm Workers Association, 21 January 1966, FBI, 100-444762-NR.

Navy from 1946-1948 and arrest record which consisted of a possible assault with a deadly weapon charge from January 1944, a strike related arrest in November 1965 which involved the illegal use of a loudspeaker, and a possible arrest in June 1966 in San Diego. They also noted Chavez's association with the Community Service Organization (CSO) and with its leader Saul Alinsky, but they did not seem to see this as evidence of communist ties. They noted that the CSO was an anti-poverty group, rather than a communist group as some would have alleged. The only reference to communism made in this early report was that he had been so labeled at Delano City Council Meetings.<sup>196</sup> Also in September of 1966, W. V. Cleveland of the FBI sent a memo to recommend that the White House be informed that at least one Kern County politician did not want Chavez to be appointed to a federal position. Cleveland admitted that while Chavez had been called a communist in Delano and had been reported to associate with those on the left, bureau sources did not substantiate this.<sup>197</sup> At best, the most the FBI ever found was that some of those associated with the union, such as Wendy Goepel and Luis Valdez, might have had communist ties, and that the Communist Party liked the union and wished they had been significantly involved in its struggle, but they could not say that either Chavez or the farm labor union were communist controlled.<sup>198</sup> Later that fall, in December 1966, the FBI learned of a planned caravan in Texas which would take support to farm workers striking there. But, FBI employees in San Antonio decided that the

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<sup>196</sup> 17 September 1966, FBI, 161-4719-3.

<sup>197</sup> W. V. Cleveland to Mr. Gale, memo, 26 September 1966, FBI, 161-4719-NR.

<sup>198</sup> Source interviews with James H. Dillon, 27 September 1966, FBI, 161-4719-NR; FBI 161-4719-2; Communist Infiltration of the National Farm Workers Association, 9 March 1966, FBI, 100-444762-15; Resolution on the Mexican American People in the Southwest, FBI, 161-4719-NR; J. Martell Bird, "Cesario Estrada Chavez," 11 October 1966, FBI, 161-4719-NR.

activity was not controlled by subversives, a conclusion they had reached in light of the fact that the chair of the Texas Communist Party was against it. They concluded that the caravan was part of a labor protest and as such intended to do nothing.<sup>199</sup>

The FBI was somewhat more concerned with the violations of law and order associated with the union. The Bureau investigated disruptive and violent actions of both union associates and union opponents. In October 1965, about one month after the union had entered the grape strike, the FBI Los Angeles Bureau reported to Washington that pickets in Delano had been arrested and that the town was preparing to be invaded by students, faculty and ministers from the Bay Area and Los Angeles who would join the protest and be arrested. Local law enforcement seemed prepared, but also stated that they could not predict the actual outcome.<sup>200</sup> The FBI also tracked individual demonstrations in support of the union, including one in which the leader of the demonstration supposedly announced that the demonstrators would break the windows of stores who did not comply with their demand to remove grapes, and another event in which a radical Chicano group appeared and disrupted a United Farm Workers (UFW) rally resulting in a riot.<sup>201</sup>

The Bureau took particular note of the source which informed them in late April 1966 that the NFWA intended to damage the reputation of local law enforcement. The

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<sup>199</sup> 16 December 1966, FBI, 100-444762-85.

<sup>200</sup> 22 October 1965, FBI, 100-444762-NR.

<sup>201</sup> Chicago to Director, 23 December 1965, FBI, 100-444762-90; 3 April 1970, FBI, 100-0-40894; for other examples see 23 May 1966, FBI, 100-444762-38; "United Farm Workers Organizing Committee AFL-CIO," 16 August 1968, FBI, 100-444762-156, Director to San Antonio, 25 October 1966, FBI, 100-444762-74; San Antonio to Director, 13 May 1967, FBI, 100-444762-104; San Antonio to Director, 2 June 1967, FBI, 100-444762-117.

FBI recalled that the union had planned events in the past which would put them in conflict with law enforcement officials such as starting the march to Sacramento without a parade permit. Their source now told them that the union was about to complain to the United States Department of Justice and to the state of California about such agencies. The same source said that the union would create conflicts with law enforcement so that they could later turn it into a civil rights matter.<sup>202</sup>

Given this, the Bureau probably approached with skepticism the investigations of violence against the union. In July 1969, the FBI received a request from the Department of Justice to investigate UFW allegations that the Maricopa County Sheriff's Department was harassing the union picketers in the grape fields west of Phoenix, Arizona. Agents duly went and interviewed union members in the region. They reported that the workers recalled several instances in which the sheriffs probably were out of line, including using their vehicles to squeeze the picket line out of place.<sup>203</sup>

Regardless of any FBI skeptics, the union did manage to succeed to creating almost from the beginnings of their movement the image of themselves as a nonviolent labor group. In an interview published in *Observer*, Chavez spent time detailing the union's reasons for adhering to nonviolent policies. Such tactics, he claimed worked when the cause was just. It also served to build respect with the growers. The use of nonviolence also bought the union the support of groups who were interested in the cause

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<sup>202</sup> 25 April 1966, FBI, 100-444762-34.

<sup>203</sup> Richard K. Burke and Philip S. Malinsky to John P. Mull, 18 July 1969, FBI, 44-43005-1; 5 August 1969, FBI, 44-43004-3.

for reasons of conscience.<sup>204</sup> Such groups would have been not only students but religious Americans whose support Chavez needed. Even the somewhat critical reporter from the *Bakersfield Californian*, Dick Snyder, in his one year review of the strike noticed that the union was teaching participants about appropriate boycott and nonviolence tactics.<sup>205</sup>

Nonviolence was not just a sound philosophy for Chavez; it was also a good tactic. This was a public relations tool, one which could have a powerful impact upon public opinion.<sup>206</sup> He admitted that “People don’t like to see a nonviolent movement subjected to violence, and there’s a lot of support across the country for nonviolence. That’s the key point we have going for us. We can turn the world if we can do it nonviolently.”<sup>207</sup> Chris Hartmire of the California Migrant Ministry attempted to explain Chavez’s use of nonviolence in three ways. Nonviolence he said was due first to Chavez’s Catholic faith and sympathy for the people whom he does not want to see hurt or killed. The second reason for the union’s nonviolent policy was that violence only led to more violence on the part of others. Hartmire’s third reason for union nonviolence was that it created change within the democratic system, but was still a militant form of

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<sup>204</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview, “Cesar Chavez: Apostle of Nonviolence,” *Observer*, May 1970.

<sup>205</sup> Dick Snyder, “Delano Huelga is One Year Old,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 10 Sept. 1966; Harry Tocce, “Farm Labor Union Makes Quick Use of Old Sanitarium,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 21 May 1970.

<sup>206</sup> Day, 113; Cesar Chavez, interview with John R. Moyer, *Journal of Current Social Issues*. vol. 9, no. 3 (Nov.-Dec., 1970), *Readings on La Raza: The Twentieth Century*, eds. Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 253; Ronald B. Taylor, 139.

<sup>207</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 47.

protest. The courts could be used to promote change and nonviolence could be used to promote sympathy for the union.<sup>208</sup>

There were two basic nonviolent protest strategies that Chavez used: the strike and the boycott. Striking was a traditional American labor protest. Unionized workers walked out of the fields and set up picket lines. This tactic was of limited value to the union however. Even though the *bracero* program had ended, growers were still hiring cheap labor from Mexico. The growers also developed tactics to limit the exposure that scab workers had to pickets. They would move scab workers away from the edges of the fields into the center, away from shouting strikers and their supporters on the picket lines. Court injunctions also limited the number of pickets that one could have at a site. This meant that the union was not reaching the new workers. So, the workers continued to work in the fields, the grapes continued to appear on grocery store shelves, and the growers continued to resist the union.

Dolores Huerta, union vice-president, said that the shift to the boycott occurred due to two things, the ineffectiveness of strikes, and the violence on the picket lines. Growers simply avoided being impacted by the strike by bringing in Mexican workers. The union was also limited to six people in a field, thus limiting who they could reach. On top of that, strikers and pickets often found themselves as victims of violence or at the very least feared acts of violence while on the lines. Consequently, Chavez decided that

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<sup>208</sup> Wayne C. Hartmire, "The Church and the Emerging Farm Workers Movement: A Case Study," 22 July 1967, SJVF, Box 1, also in MGP, Box 3, Folder 1.

the boycott would be the safer weapon. In other words, the boycott was the most efficient thing that union could do to avoid violence from others.<sup>209</sup>

Besides avoiding violence from others, employing a boycott would hurt the growers financially. Yet the union could not boycott stores that sold grapes that was a secondary boycott, which was illegal. What they could boycott were the grapes themselves. The union sent boycott teams across North America and sit up protest lines in front of grocery stores and to talk to various local groups about the boycott. Liberal Americans loved this tactic. It was reminiscent of the civil rights movement and something that the average American could participate in at little or no real cost to himself.

The union believed that the boycott hurt the growers. Huerta reported that in the New York City area, boycott workers had managed to keep grapes out of the stores for approximately ten weeks. Then, she claimed, the growers went to the stores and told them they would sue the stores for engaging in a conspiracy not to buy grapes. The stores, fearing this sort of retribution, went back to buying grapes. The union went back to consumer pickets of grapes. Some stores again stopped buying, and at the very least, the union could say those that were buying were not buying as many grapes as they had in the past. On top of that, the prices of grapes had dropped, hurting the profit margin.<sup>210</sup>

Maintaining a policy of nonviolence took a lot of organization and creativity. Chavez believed that nonviolent action meant a lot of hard work in planning and

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<sup>209</sup> Dolores Huerta, interview, by Stanley Levey and Alex Uhl, "Labor News Conference," Program 32, Series 8, 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

<sup>210</sup> Dolores Huerta, interview by Stanley Levey and Alex Uhl, "Labor News Conference," Program 32, Series 8, 3 December 1968. WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.



organizing. They had to be creative as well, using alternative strategies when the obvious ones would not work. It also required a lot of patience, sacrifice, and self control.<sup>211</sup>

Pickets working with the union were required to take oaths of nonviolence. Those who voted to strike voted to do so knowing that they were required to keep the strike nonviolent. Leaders in the union were required to be examples of nonviolence.<sup>212</sup> Those involved in union events were given strict instructions on how to maintain a nonviolent posture. The instructions for the March to Sacramento in 1966 were quite complete. Those who joined the march were told to follow the directions of march leaders, to meet each morning on time and each night at the end of the day, to march two by two, facing traffic, to avoid commenting to the media, and to ignore hecklers.<sup>213</sup> Boycott picket line instructions were similarly stringent in an effort to ensure that union members and supporters obeyed the law and maintained nonviolence. They were told to keep the picket lines outside of the stores, not to argue with, harass or intimidate customers or store employees, to avoid conversations with outsiders, not to stop deliveries at the stores, to make it clear they were picketing a product and not the store itself, and not to drink, fight, carry weapons, cuss, or be rowdy.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Cesar Chavez, notes for speeches, nonviolence speech, c. 1969, UFWA, Part I, Box 10, Folder 10.

<sup>212</sup> John Gregory Dunne, *Delano* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967, revised 1971), 25,80; Ferriss and Sandoval, 89; Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: The First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, CA: Farm Worker Press, 1966), 26; William Scholes, "The Migrant Worker," Edited by Julian Samora, *La Raza: Forgotten Americans* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 86.

<sup>213</sup> Regulations for all Persons on the Peregrination to Sacramento, c. 1966, SJVF, Box 1.

<sup>214</sup> Picket line instructions, c. 1969, UFWP, Box 48, Folder 3.

Nonviolence was a practical tactic for more than just the positive public relations aspect. As the FBI letters to Hoover had shown, Americans in the 1960s were very concerned about the issues of law and order and the spread of communism. Americans were watching the grape strike to see how both the strikers and local law enforcement behaved. Pastor George M. Wilson had visited Delano as a representative of the California Council of Churches on a fact-finding mission. Wilson wrote to Al Espinoza, then a captain on Delano's police force, and congratulated him for his men's apt handling of aggression toward demonstrators.<sup>215</sup> City officials in Delano, California, were most concerned about the disorder and violence that had suddenly occurred in their small farm town. Less than a year into the strike, Delano had attracted much publicity, not all of it positive. So in May of 1966, Louis Shepard, the city manager of Delano, wrote a document detailing the city's role in the grape strikes. Shepard was particularly concerned about accusations made against the Delano Police Department and other local law enforcement bodies. Shepard addressed specific incidents in which the local police had been accused of unfairly arresting union members or associates, or of failing to arrest growers for their acts of violence. Shepard explained how the law worked and when officers could and could not arrest people for reported crimes. According to Shepard, two of those arrested had been arrested because of complaints that they were publicly intoxicated or had a warrant out for their arrest. In the cases of grower violence, Shepard explained that, in one case, the Delano police had never received a complaint against the offender. In another case, they had issued a warrant for the arrest of a grower. Despite these complaints, Shepard observed that there had been no serious incidents of violence

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<sup>215</sup> George M. Wilson to Alfonso Espinoza, 24 September 1965, NFWM, Part I, Box 13, Folder 9.

during the strike. The blame for the little violence that had occurred, he wrote, belonged to both the union organizers and the farmers.<sup>216</sup>

Shepard also complained about the law and order issues surrounding the March to Sacramento. In March of 1966 the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor represented by Senator Harrison Williams, Senator Robert Kennedy and Senator George Murphy appeared in Delano for the third day of a three day hearing on legislation regarding farm labor. The two bills under consideration would have meant that farm workers were covered by minimum wage laws and that they would gain the right to collective bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act. The day following this event, Chavez and the union began their long walk to Sacramento. Shepard's complaint was that the union did not apply for a parade permit. Furthermore, the police were led to believe that the march would take a route out of town which would not interfere with traffic. When the march began however, it headed right through the heart of the business district, a tactic designed to attract as much attention as possible. Shepard believed that this was planned to "embarrass the City," and that the union "wanted nothing more than publicity, publicity and more publicity. They wanted the sympathy and support of television viewers who would be told only part of the story." Shepard denied union claims that such a parade had been spontaneous, saying that the city later found advance notice of it in *Newsweek* magazine.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Louis Shepard, "The City's Role in a Labor Dispute – The Delano Situation," 18 May 1966, RHC, Box 5, Folder 24.

<sup>217</sup> Louis Shepard, "The City's Role in a Labor Dispute – The Delano Situation," 18 May 1966, RHC, Box 5, Folder 24.

For Chavez, nonviolent tactics were a way to avoid accusations that they were stirring up violence and trouble. Local law enforcement could be expected to rapidly quash any outbreaks of violence by the strikers. Throughout United States history, labor movements had become involved in violence. Thus, it was entirely possible that such violence could erupt in the California fields as well. Moreover, the union believed that the local law enforcement was not a neutral entity, but one that sided with the growers. Conversely, union members had to be above suspicion; there could be no indication that the union or its members as individuals were involved in violent acts. Such acts might bring criminal charges, court injunctions, and negative public relations. Nick Jones, a volunteer with SDS connections claimed that intimidation was not effective. They usually had too few people on a picket line to begin with, and every time that someone on the line did get out of control and yell at customers it backfired. Jones also claimed that, if the movement had ever become really violent, law enforcement would have had a much easier time isolating them and dealing with them just as they had the Black Panthers.<sup>218</sup>

Chavez became the living symbol of nonviolence. The union attempted to convince the public through Chavez's image and actions that the union was a nonviolent organization in the tradition of many other nonviolent groups which had preceded it. In particular, the farm labor union would tie themselves to Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. This was beautifully illustrated in *El Malcriado*, which chose to do a feature article on three big names associated with nonviolent movements. The men they chose were

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<sup>218</sup> Nick Jones, interview with William Taylor, 24 July 1976, BTP, Box 1, unprocessed.

Gandhi, King, and the union's own leader, Chavez.<sup>219</sup> Such an analogy was not entirely false. Chavez had borrowed or adopted tactics popularized by these two men. He fasted, led pilgrimages, and had followers whose potential violence he had to quell. Chavez's version of such tactics was often distinctly Mexican; however they were still mainstream enough that he could, with a supportive press, nurture the image of himself as a leader of nonviolence.

The union's version of nonviolence however was not a perfect one. By June of 1969, boycott organizers began to feel they were having some success. The Long Island boycott group reported that there were no grapes for sale in the Long Island area. This they said they had accomplished by setting up picket lines outside of stores that sold grapes (which had driven off customers). They intended to make sure that their success continued by performing store checks to ensure that the stores did not return grapes to their shelves.<sup>220</sup> But these kinds of tactics angered others. In the same month that the Long Island boycott crew celebrated their success, those associated with the other end of farm work were criticizing them. In a letter to the Producing, Packaging, and Marketing Association, Inc., Robert Carey talked about the boycotts and how supermarket employees had been violently intimidated to go along with the ban. Carey called for a legal ban on boycotts which threatened consumer safety.<sup>221</sup> Similarly, the California Grape and Tree Fruit League ran an ad which attacked the union. They addressed

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<sup>219</sup> "The Discipline of Nonviolence: Three Life Styles," *El Malcriado*, vol. 3, no. 23.

<sup>220</sup> "Justice: Report of the Long Island Committee to Boycott Grapes," June 1969, vol. II, TGNC, Box 5.

<sup>221</sup> Robert Carey to Producing, Packaging, and Marketing Association, Inc., 27 June 1969, TGNC, Box 5.

Americans who had seen far too much propaganda, who had been harassed at stores by pickets, and pressured by activists. The League said that Americans deserved an uninterrupted food supply and the truth about the growers, not a lot of propaganda. They called on the UFW to end the strike in a reasonable manner.<sup>222</sup>

Chavez's union fell prey to accusations that had long been hurled against American unions. Unions, many felt, were not democratic institutions which protect the American "right" of workers to choose for themselves. And so, the union was susceptible to being labeled an undemocratic institution at best, a communistic one at worst. The growers certainly viewed Chavez through this lens. R. Di Giorgio, a grower, wrote to Chavez in 1968 to discuss the labor union. He wrote that he had heard that the union's Schenley contract signed in 1966 did not fairly represent the workers. Di Giorgio felt that Chavez needed to be consistent with the democratic system of American labor. Labor elections should be held by secret ballot. Di Giorgio proposed that if the union won such elections they would enter into collective bargaining. If not, the union would desist from picketing or boycotting Di Giorgio's farms for a year.<sup>223</sup> Another individual who believed Chavez was in the wrong was Reed Larson, the Vice President of the National Right to Work Committee. Larson discouraged growers from talking with Chavez and the union, claiming that such unions took away the worker's right to choose. He predicted that the workers would not join the union unless Chavez somehow forced them to.<sup>224</sup> Similarly, the Consumers' Rights Committee felt that the union's boycott was

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<sup>222</sup> "A Statement to the Public," ad in *Super Market*, 23 June 1969, in TGNC, Box 5.

<sup>223</sup> R. DiGiorgio to Cesar Chavez, 6 April 1968, SJVF, Box 1.

<sup>224</sup> Reed Larson to Heggblade-Marguleas Company, 18 June 1969, TGNC, Box 5.

wrong because it interfered with the right of the American public to access food and other products and the right of the consumer to choose what they wanted to buy. Furthermore, this boycott they believed was particularly evil because it had been accompanied by harassment. The Consumers' Rights Committee figured it had to be inspired by either the right wing or the new left; it surely could not have been inspired by the democratic process.<sup>225</sup>

The union believed that the growers were using right-to-work ideas to destroy the union. Labor correspondent Stanley Levey asked Dolores Huerta in an interview for the "Labor New Conference" program in December 1968 about a man, Jose Mendoza, who claimed to be a former grape worker who was traveling the country denouncing the union and proposing to start a right-to-work organization for farm workers. Huerta responded that Mendoza had been hired by growers in California to travel and criticize the union. He upheld the right-to-work position that the growers promoted. Huerta also pointed out that Mendoza had been charged and convicted with harassing union picket lines with rifles and guns. Huerta announced that the union had sued to stop Mendoza, and the growers who were backing him, from making yet another attempt to discredit the farm workers union. She reminded the audience that the same growers had not allowed union elections so that the workers could truly say whether or not they wanted a union.<sup>226</sup>

For many in the 1960s, there were only of two forms of government in the world, democratic and communistic. If an organization was a threat to democracy, then it must

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<sup>225</sup> Consumers' Rights Committee, "Violence at the Supermarket ... Why the Grape Boycott Must be Ended," June 1967, TGNC, Box 5, Fresno State.

<sup>226</sup> Dolores Huerta, interview, by Stanley Levey and Alex Uhl, "Labor News Conference," Program 32, Series 8, 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

be a communist organization. For many, it was easy to believe that the union must have communist roots. Dr. and Mrs. Joseph D. Sullivan wrote to the Table Grape Growers Negotiating Committee in June of 1969 to warn them against negotiating with the union. Such negotiations they felt would be helping the communist cause, and they predicted that if the grape workers were unionized the rest of agriculture would follow, and the country would “be well on its way to complete Communist control.”<sup>227</sup> The ultra conservative author Gary Allen also saw the union as a communistic threat. In a June 1966 piece for the *American Opinion*, Allen wrote that the union had many ties to communism. Chavez, Allen pointed out, had been associated with Saul Alinsky’s Community Service Organization (CSO). Alinsky was a noted “radical” and community organizer and so Chavez’s work with his organization was enough to lead to his condemnation. Allen also went after Larry Itliong, the AWOC leader. Itliong, he claimed, had been involved in revolutionary activity in the Philippines and had hung out with communists in Seattle and San Francisco. Allen provided no substantive details about these alleged activities, but he claimed that because of them, Philippine immigration services had forbidden Itliong to re-enter the country. Allen also attacked a variety of other labor union leaders as communists, including Luis Valdez, the *Teatro* director who he said had been trained by Marxists and had studied in Cuba and Wendy Goepel, a young white woman who worked with the union and who had supposedly attended the Helsinki Youth Festival. Delano, concluded Allen, was the perfect place for the communist to practice their “united front” strategy, creating alliances between communists and non-communists, between civil rights, the Peace Corps, agrarian reform,

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<sup>227</sup> Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Sullivan to Dear Sirs, 15 June 1969, TGNC, Box 5.



labor, and radicals that represented them like King, Walter Reuther, and Bayard Rustin, that “sex pervert.”<sup>228</sup> Similar accusations could be seen in the work of the Citizens for Facts from Delano, a citizens group, who complained not only about Chavez’s ties to Saul Alinsky, but also to Walter Reuther and groups like the WEB DuBois Club, SDS, SNCC, and CORE.<sup>229</sup>

Chavez knew that such accusations of communist ties were inevitable. He admitted that “If our work is considered communistic by some, there’s nothing we can do about it, but I’m not willing to admit that we Christians are not more willing to fight for social justice.” Such accusations he said made it appear that only the communist cared about the poor. Chavez recognized that, unfortunately, some growers associated all unions with communism. When asked about possible communist infiltration of his group, he replied that as far as he knew not one of his associates was tied to a communist group, but that he, Chavez, did not ask about such personal politics either.<sup>230</sup>

Even though he knew that red-baiting was inevitable, Chavez had to have some way to defend the union from a red taint. The strategy that would work particularly well here would be the policy of nonviolence. After all, if communism was to come through the violent overthrow of the existing system of government, how could a nonviolent group be accused of leading such a revolution?

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<sup>228</sup> Gary Allen, “The Grapes: Communist Wrath in Delano,” *American Opinion*, June 1966, SJVF, Box 1.

<sup>229</sup> Citizens for Facts from Delano, “The Truth,” 1 July 1966, no. 1, RHC, Box 4, Folder 20.

<sup>230</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview in *Central California Register*, 23 May 1968, published also in Gerard E. Sherry, editor, “The Anguish of Delano,” UFWI, Box 46, Folder 14.

One person whose support helped the union escape red-baiting was Robert Kennedy. When he appeared at the Senate hearings in Delano, Kennedy had been very critical of the local sheriff who admitted that he was arresting pickets to protect them from attack. Chavez said that Kennedy's support was what had bought the union widespread public support. Chavez said that he thought

it was a turning point in the vicious campaign on the 'red-baiting' issues and us. He turned it completely around, completely destroyed it, tore it apart. They kept trying for another year, but after that it just didn't – see people just wouldn't believe them any more. Of course we got his statements and just spread it all over the valley, everywhere we know with his picture and everything.<sup>231</sup>

What Kennedy had done that day was to put the union on the side of the Constitution and democracy. When the sheriff had admitted to keeping order by arresting pickets who had been threatened, Kennedy suggested that the sheriff use the break in the proceedings to review the Constitution. When the union began to spread this around, they were arguing that the union was the one on the side of law and order and of traditional democratic American values.

If the union could keep the movement nonviolent and peaceful, they could claim the same high standing that King and the civil rights movement held at the time that union began. This was not as easy as it seemed. The longer the strike went on, the more frustrated farm workers became. Occasionally, individuals committed acts that could be classified as violent. The list of violent acts attributed to farm workers include strikers who threw marbles and ball bearings at scabs, blew up irrigation pumps, made threatening phone calls, set fire to packing boxes, slashed tires on farm vehicles, and set

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<sup>231</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview with Dennis J. O'Brien, 28 January 1970, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, oral history program, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

up road hazards made of nails where the scabs and other farm employees would drive over them. Chavez was also concerned about violence on the picket line. He informed the picketers that knives and guns were forbidden on the line, and at times he would take the weapons from them.<sup>232</sup>

William Kircher, the AFL-CIO's director of the Department of Organization, believed that some of this violence sprang from the position that the farm worker had been placed in due to non-inclusion in the NLRA. Kircher said that this forced these workers to take whatever action necessary and possible to obtain the right to collective bargaining. The worker was then forced "back into the jungle warfare days that preceded the kind of national labor relations policy about which this nation has bragged for so many decades." It was no wonder then that workers participated in economic sanctions like strikes and boycotts, and even worse, various forms of harassment.<sup>233</sup>

The Lowell Schy incident, an incident in which Chavez played a role similar to King's role after his house was bombed in 1956, illustrated how difficult it could be to maintain a nonviolent record. Schy, a salesman, was upset when the truck drivers who were supposed to transport the grapes refused to cross the union lines. He decided to move a truck himself and in the process ran over and crippled a union member, Manuel Rivera. Schy barely escaped unharmed. Angry union members surrounded him in his

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<sup>232</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 84; Dunne, 26, 80, 108; Ferriss and Sandoval, 140; Hoffman, 41; Ruth S. Lamb, *Mexican Americans: Sons of the Southwest* (Claremont, CA: Ocelot Press, 1970), 134; Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *Readings on La Raza: The Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 196; Patrick H. Mooney and Theo Majka, *Farmers and Farm Worker Movements: Social Protest in American Agriculture* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 161; John Steinbacher, *Bitter Harvest* (Orange Tree Press, Inc., 1970), 89; Terzian and Cramer, 128; De Toledano, 41.

<sup>233</sup> William Kircher, interview on "Labor News Conference," 21 March 1967, IDP, Part I, Box 56, Series 3B.

truck. Chavez, who crawled under the truck so that he could stand between the crowd and the truck's cab, convinced the picketers not to harm Schy. He also had to keep an armed striker from going after Schy. Chavez could not prevent all violence however, as a Filipino union member, upset over the incident, ran down three growers in his truck.<sup>234</sup>

Chavez knew union members were not perfect, he admitted that "Anyone who comes in with the idea that farm workers are free of sin and that the growers are all bastards either has never dealt with the situation or is an idealist of the first order."<sup>235</sup> But, despite what individual members of the UFW might have done, Chavez and other union leaders attempted to maintain a nonviolent stance and the image of themselves as a nonviolent organization.

The violence associated with the union was something that growers recognized and attempted to use for their purposes. DiGiorgio employees received a message in May of 1966 which detailed violence in the fields. The grower claimed that Chavez's accusation that Di Giorgio employees beat picketers was false. The company had investigated the claims, they said, and had found that only one person had been booked for assault and battery, and that was a picketer, not a farm employee. The memo further explained that one of the company guards, who had been seen with a gun, was carrying it only for his protection after he had been attacked by a cussing picketer carrying a two by four.<sup>236</sup> The company attempted to use such evidence to get a restraining order against the strikers. But during the June 1966 hearing in the case, Judge Leonard M. Ginsburg

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<sup>234</sup> Peter Matthiessen, *Sal si puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution* (New York, Random House, 1969), 87-90; Ferriss and Sandoval, 139.

<sup>235</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 70.

<sup>236</sup> Message to All Di Giorgio Employees, 6 May 1966, SJVF, Box 1.

found that there were no acts attributed to the defendants, Chavez, et al. The judge did however cite acts of violence on the part of the plaintiff, the Di Giorgio corporation and their agents. Partly due to this, the judge did not call an end to the strike.<sup>237</sup>

Judge Ginsburg had recognized something that the union would take full advantage of, their status as a nonviolent group. In order to maintain this image, they set up contrasting images of themselves and the growers. This tactic had worked well for the civil rights movement. Pictures of civil rights protestors being hauled off to jail, attacked by dogs, or sprayed with fire hoses, had only served to create sympathy for their cause and to paint the opposition as cruel and violent. The union would find it expedient to play up any violence or perceived violence on the part of the growers and their employees. The union paper, *El Malcriado* reported in one of its early editions that Schenley growers had, in the presence of a bishop, tried to make the workers be violent.<sup>238</sup> A letter from Reverend James L. Vizzard praising the union's continual nonviolence in the face of harassment appeared in the following issue. Vizzard told union members that he appreciated their "sound" and "effective" methods.<sup>239</sup> Chavez had similar praise for the union members, when he later remarked upon their ability to maintain a policy of nonviolence in the face of insults and curses.<sup>240</sup> *El Malcriado* later published an article by Dolores Huerta, union vice president, who told of dockworkers with hand trucks who had ran over the legs of female picketers. She was utterly

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<sup>237</sup> *Di Giorgio v Chavez, et al.*, Superior Court, County of Tulare, 63606, (2 June 1966), SJVF, Box 1.

<sup>238</sup> "Money, Food, and Help," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 21.

<sup>239</sup> James L. Vizzard, "Letter From the Church," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 22.

<sup>240</sup> Cesar Chavez, "Letter from Chavez," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 35.

sympathetic not only to these women, but to the men on the line who could not help them for fear of inciting violence such as a riot.<sup>241</sup>

Union publication materials often included such propaganda. A boycott flyer in 1966 asked people not to buy S&W and TreeSweet products. They asked the flyer's recipients to make the Di Giorgio company treat their workers fairly and told of incidents where a woman on the picket line was threatened with death by a company security guard and of another picket whose head was busted open while Tulare County law enforcement watched. The art work on this flyer included a cartoon style sketch of an obese grower representing Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation kicking back and relaxing while smoking a big cigar and wearing shades, drinking wine from a bottle. To contrast the fat cat grower, the artist had put a picture of children in the upper left corner with a caption explaining that these hungry children often had to work in the fields in order to eat.<sup>242</sup> The message to the viewer was that while the growers were enjoying the luxuries of life, farm workers who could not feed their children were being beaten and abused in the fields. This apparent corruption was, the union claimed, being tacitly supported by local law enforcement authorities.

The union had a special way to recognize grower Bruno Dispoto, whom they felt was particularly inclined to run down strikers. To him they dedicated a *calaveras*, one of several published in *El Malcriado*. *Calaveras* were poems, traditionally recited on the Day of the Dead, a day in which Mexican ancestors are revered and remembered. These

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<sup>241</sup> Dolores Huerta, "Violence," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 34.

<sup>242</sup> "Don't Buy - S&W- TreeSweet," flyer, 1966, VSP, Box 5, Folder 9.

particular poems commemorated the heroes and villains of the strike.<sup>243</sup> In doing this, they had been able to portray Dispoto as violent and the union members as the victims. Tactics like this were meant to show the public that it was Dispoto and the other growers who were the violent ones, not the labor union.

The union also compared themselves with other labor groups to demonstrate how nonviolent they were. This comparison worked particularly well when the Teamsters attempted to poach in Chavez's territory in the summer of 1966. The Teamsters had moved to organize some of the Di Giorgio fields and workers, the same workers that Chavez's union had had been attempting to organize for years. The Teamsters union had never seriously made such attempts before. The growers decided to pick a devil they knew rather than one they did not and made contracts with the Teamsters. The union got such contracts overturned and the court ordered a vote to be held, which would be run by the American Arbitration Association. In order to avoiding splitting the vote, the NFWA and the AWOC merged under the new title of the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, and became a branch of the AFL-CIO. These elections were to be held in late August of 1966, and the union scrambled to pull together a campaign strong enough to defeat the Teamsters who were trying to win votes with free barbeques and beer.

One way the farm labor union could defend their cause was to emphasize their record of nonviolence, comparing it to the Teamster's record, which was marred with scandal and crime. In September of 1966, a farm worker in Delano might have received a union flyer which asked them, "Have the Teamsters told you? Crime and violence are a

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<sup>243</sup> Various *calaveras*. *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 48.

way of life in Hoffa-land.”<sup>244</sup> There certainly was much in the way of Teamster crime for the union to talk about. The NFWA and AWOC flyers made reference to James Hoffa and Teamsters corruption and racketeering charges. They implied that Hoffa would run the union from a jail cell and showed that a large chunk of Teamsters union dues were going to Hoffa’s defense and to luxuries like Cadillac cars for union officials. One particularly colorful flyer which emphasized this corruption read “The Teamsters union is like a cow. You feed it the hay (\$6.00 dues) at one end, and the fellas with the fine suits and Cadillacs milk it at the other end.” There was also plenty for the union to say about Teamster violence. One flyer mentioned that two farm workers had been beaten by Teamsters organizers. Another had a sketch of a two-headed Teamster mule. The first head of this mule bragged about how it was the most powerful union in the world. The second head agreed and added that they’d “kick the hell out of you to prove it, too.”<sup>245</sup> Although many were surprised, the UFW, a group which combined both the old NFWA and the AWOC, won these elections.

The Teamsters counter-attacked with similar images. They pointed out problems with the UFW’s law and order and their supposed ties to communism. In a leaflet called “An Unholy Alliance,” they alleged that the NFWA had allied “with elements within our society who seek to destroy rather than to reform and build.” The particular alliance with which they were upset was the alliance with Stokely Carmichael’s SNCC. The students

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<sup>244</sup> “The Farm Vote,” *Newsweek*, 12 Sept. 1966.

<sup>245</sup> “Working Conditions at Di Giorgio; Working Conditions at Schenley,” “Would you want your union headquarters in a prison cell? In a federal penitentiary?”, Two-headed Mule (no title), “Your Union Dues,” “Violence is a way of life with the teamsters!”, “The Great Swindle,” “No Crook! No Commies!”, “Put an End to Teamster Fear and Violence,” “You Pay but you don’t Vote,” all leaflets, UFWP, III, Box 29, Folder 8; see also leaflets, UMG, Box 1, Folder 39.



also showed up in another leaflet. This one bore a drawing of a long haired woman in long boots, a guy with no shoes, and a guy with shaggy hair and a guitar. These characters were having a hot dog roast and hefting a jug of wine. The fire upon which these obviously student radical figures were roasting their hot dogs was fueled by *Huelga* signs. The caption read “This is the first time these signs have done something constructive.” The implication was that these students were the ones driving the strike and that they did not have the workers best interest at heart. Indeed, given the ties with SNCC and the ever present talk about black power, the implication was that the students might turn violent at any moment. The Teamsters also went after the union on the grounds that they were tied to the communists. The most common target of this particular attack was Luis Valdez, who, although rarely named, was often caricatured in Teamsters literature. They portrayed Valdez as jumping from Cuba to the United States with orders not to forget what he had been taught and claimed that he had been trained in Cuba to study communist revolutionary methods. Wendy Goepel and Larry Itliong also came in for their share of criticism as possible communist who were influencing the farm workers union with their communist ideologies.<sup>246</sup>

Chavez would not only use nonviolent tactics which were similar to King’s, but he would also borrow King’s image and King’s his prestige. It was a powerful method, one which would serve Chavez well and infuriate much of the opposition.

### **Chavez: Borrowing the Prestige of a King**

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<sup>246</sup> Leaflet collection, “This is the first time these signs have done something Constructive,” “Don’t Forget What we Have Taught you!!!”, “His New Disguise Doesn’t Even Fool the Sheep,” “An Unholy Alliance,” the Grapes,” all NFWA, III, Box 14, Folder 3.

In July 1968, only months after King's death, Chavez wrote to the SCLC to request a poster sized picture of King for the UFW's Delano office. He wanted to hang the picture up along side of those of Robert Kennedy and Gandhi. Chavez wrote that "To all of these men we owe a great deal --- for they have shown us the way. Here in Delano, as well as through-out the country, we try to guide ourselves by the message of nonviolence given to us by Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi."<sup>247</sup> If comparisons between Chavez and Gandhi were convenient to make, it was even easier to compare Chavez to his contemporary, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the union to the civil rights movement.

The union obviously borrowed tactics from King and the civil rights movement. Since King himself was inspired by Gandhi, it can be difficult to separate the two influences. However, it was King and the civil rights movement whose marches and boycotts had been recently publicized in the nation's media. Chavez's potential supporters might have known little about Gandhi, but they were very familiar with King. The same public which had supported King's movement and his nonviolent tactics could hopefully be persuaded to be equally sympathetic to Chavez's cause. By the time Chavez began to make national news in 1965, the civil rights movement had paved the way, and his tactics would be accepted by the general public.

Chavez saw his union as a movement that was similar to the civil rights movement. Chavez told his audience on the "Labor News Conference Program" in October 1966 that Mexican-Americans were

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<sup>247</sup> Cesar Chavez to SCLC, 26 July 1968, UFWP, IV, Box 69, Folder 11.

a group pretty much like the Negro group. We haven't yet arrived. I think there are a lot of strides being made. A lot of Americans are raising cain, you know, about representation, about being involved in decisions that affect their lives and so forth. And I think that we are just beginning to move.<sup>248</sup>

Mexican Americans in Chavez's movement were beginning to ask for equal treatment in society just as African Americans had. Chavez believed the union was standing on the threshold of a great start.

Other union publications and documents continued to promote the idea that the farm workers union and the civil rights movement were connected. When Chavez wrote a letter announcing plans for the march to Sacramento, he told his audience that it was inspired in part by modern-era demonstration techniques.<sup>249</sup> An article that compared Gandhi, King, and Chavez told of the marches that the three men were involved in. Gandhi had marched to the sea to protest the salt taxes. King had marched from Selma to Montgomery to promote the civil rights. These acts were seen as models for the march to Sacramento which Chavez used to promote the grape strike.<sup>250</sup> In his "Good Friday Letter" to the President of the Grape and Tree Fruit League, Chavez drew upon King's name and begged the president to retract his claims of union violence.<sup>251</sup> After Coretta Scott King's jailhouse visit to Chavez in 1970, *El Malcriado* expressed the hope that African Americans and Mexican Americans could form a coalition of nonviolent

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<sup>248</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview on Labor News Conference radio program 23 October 1966, IDP, Part II, Series IV, Box 9, Folder 18.

<sup>249</sup> Cesar Chavez, Sacramento March Letter, reprinted in Yinger, 106.

<sup>250</sup> "The Discipline of Nonviolence: 3 Life Styles" *El Malcriado* vol. 3, no. 23.

<sup>251</sup> reprinted in Yinger, 112.

movements which could ally with other ethnic groups.<sup>252</sup> So, even if Chavez's tactics did not always come from King, the union wanted the public to believe that the groups were connected and were part of the same struggle for justice.

Chavez also borrowed King's attitude toward law breaking. When asked by the Central California Register about his attitude toward civil disobedience, Chavez replied that

I am perfectly willing to disobey laws that I consider unjust, but in breaking these unjust laws I do not beg for mercy. I want to be punished to the fullest extent of the law. Any person fighting for justice must be prepared to act against unjust legislation. But just as important he must be prepared to accept the consequences of his act, including the willingness to suffer the punishment meted out to lawbreakers.<sup>253</sup>

This attitude toward direct action which violated the law was a mirror of King's. King believed that one had the right to break unjust laws, but that one had to be willing to accept the results of doing so. Chavez's statement was remarkably similar.

The image of the union as a nonviolent civil rights organization allowed those who wrote about the cause to align the two movements. Eugene Nelson saw the union as a civil rights movement. It was easy for him to see the opposition to the movement as somewhat southern; he referred to Kern County as Mississippi West and Tulare County as Alabama West.<sup>254</sup> Other authors compared the two movements, some claiming only that Chavez was driven by his observations of the South and others that he followed

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<sup>252</sup> "Coretta King Visits with Cesar in Jail, Asks Blacks to Boycott Lettuce," *El Malcriado* vol. 4, no. 12.

<sup>253</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview in *Central California Register*, 23 May 1968, published also in Gerard E. Sherry, editor, "The Anguish of Delano," UFWI, Box 46, Folder 14.

<sup>254</sup> Nelson, 65, 96, 99, 103. Delano sits in Kern County, on the northern edge, next to Tulare County.

King's tactics, particularly that of the march, and created his own civil rights movement.<sup>255</sup> Many authors noticed that King had admired and congratulated Chavez for his victories.<sup>256</sup> Some, impressed by these connections, went so far as to claim that Chavez was the new nonviolent leader of the United States, the new King.<sup>257</sup> Comparing Chavez to King came easily for those who were involved in or who supported the cause.

After King's death, union members were quick to connect Chavez to King's cause. On April 5, 1968, just one day after King's assassination, at least one union worker suggested setting up Chavez as the nation's top advocate of nonviolence.<sup>258</sup> Ten days later, the union organ, *El Malcriado*, began to make similar comparisons. Many articles included within their pages compared Chavez to King, and in fact such connections were made more frequently than connections between Gandhi and Chavez. Shortly after King's death in April 1968, the union's paper published a commemorative issue of his life. In this edition, they reproduced telegrams exchanged by Chavez and the Kings. King's telegram to Chavez referred to Gandhi's tactics and praised Chavez for his

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<sup>255</sup> Majka and Majka, 169; Ferriss and Sandoval, 93; Nelson, 75; Fernando Penalosa, "Toward an Operational Definition of the Mexican American," Edited by Rosaldo, Renato, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert, *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 189; Jean Maddern Pitrone, *Chavez: Man of the Migrants* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1971) 114; Armand B. Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1971), 108; Yinger, 98; Dunne, 131; Hammerback and Jensen, 72; Mooney and Majka, 157, Majka and Majka, 176; Terzian and Cramer, 100.

<sup>256</sup> Kushner, 165; Majka and Majka, 184; Terzian and Cramer, 132; Yinger, 60.

<sup>257</sup> London and Anderson, 185; Nelson, 52; De Toledano, 38.

<sup>258</sup> Marion (no last name) to James Drake and Cesar Chavez, 5 April 1968, UFW, Box 3, Folder 11.

nonviolent methods.<sup>259</sup> Chavez's telegram was a message of condolence to Coretta Scott King. It recalled King as a man of nonviolent action.<sup>260</sup> These telegrams served to reinforce the belief that King had recognized Chavez as a leader in the nonviolent tradition. The title of one particular article in this edition asked "Who Killed King?" The author had a ready answer for the readers. They explained that King's murderer was a representative of American violence.<sup>261</sup> The implication was that those who promoted such violence were guilty of killing this innocent man, this man who had inspired and recognized Chavez. *El Malcriado* told the workers that they could continue to pay their debt to King by keeping the labor movement nonviolent.<sup>262</sup>

These comparisons are particularly important when one realizes that the opposition also recognized and occasionally made the same comparisons. As they attempted to halt union progress, the growers and their supporting organizations created a counter image of the union. Their version of the union was the picture of an organization, infiltrated by students and civil rights types, which was bent on destruction and violence. Grower Martin Zaninovich later told an interviewer that the union's beginning success had been due in part to the fact that civil rights groups were very experienced with the press.<sup>263</sup> These growers, who may or may not have appreciated

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<sup>259</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. to Cesar Chavez, telegram, *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 4.

<sup>260</sup> Cesar Chavez to Mrs. King, telegram, *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 4.

<sup>261</sup> "Who Killed King?" *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 4.

<sup>262</sup> "The Man They Killed," *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 4.

<sup>263</sup> Martin Zaninovich, interview with Susan McColgan, 7 July 1976, *Growers of Kern County: Oral History of the Southern San Joaquin Valley Project*, ed. Gerald Stanley, California State University Bakersfield, Farm Labor Project, Local History Room, Beale Memorial Library, Bakersfield, California.

what King had done for African Americans in the South, did not like having a Mexican King on their door steps. In one pamphlet, they complained that Chavez was often portrayed as a “brown” King.<sup>264</sup> The South Central Farmers Committee also claimed that the Sheriff’s department files recorded hundreds of incidents where union members had been involved in instance of property damages and threats. The union they claimed was “terroristic”, and has used such tactics to frighten those who consumed, sold, or worked with grapes.<sup>265</sup> In another pamphlet, the growers complained that what was essentially a labor dispute had become a civil rights movement.<sup>266</sup> Another booklet which told the growers’ story claimed that pickets threw dirt clods at workers still in the fields.<sup>267</sup> Literature like this was distributed to members of pro-grower groups and concerned citizens in the Delano area.

The South Central Farmers Committee, which published the pamphlets, would not be the only organization which directed attacks upon the union’s image. Mothers Against Chavez was another such group. Mothers Against Chavez posted large broadsides around the community of Delano. These posters bore sketches of hungry looking children, and a claim that Chavez was starving America’s young people by interfering in grape production.<sup>268</sup> While such claim obviously exaggerated the threat to the nation’s

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<sup>264</sup> South Central Farmer Committee, “What You’ve Always Needed to Know About the Farm Labor Issue... But Didn’t Know Where to Ask,” 1975, Local History Room, Beale Memorial Library, Bakersfield, California.

<sup>265</sup> South Central Farmer Committee, pamphlet. “What You’ve Always Needed to Know.”

<sup>266</sup> South Central Farmer Committee, “The Delano Grape Story...From the Growers’ View,” c.1968, Local History Room, Beale Memorial Library, Bakersfield, California.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Poster reprinted in Steinbacher, 171.

food supply, it did attack the union's images as a caring nonviolent organization concerned for people's welfare. California State Senator John Schmitz wrote to Mothers Against Chavez praising their efforts in resisting this tyrant Chavez.<sup>269</sup> The American Education Service for Spanish Surnamed Citizens was another group which attacked the union's claims to nonviolence. This organization sent a letter to Ronald Reagan, who served as California's governor at the time. They criticized the UFW's recruitment policies which they believed were acts of harassment and violence.<sup>270</sup>

Through the efforts of groups like these and through their own literature, the growers attempted to publicize acts or alleged acts of violence among union members. The growers also had friends in the local media. Newspapers such as *The Bakersfield Californian* and *The Delano Record* tended to reflect the interests of the local hierarchy in agriculture and law. But, these papers did recognize that the union attempted to be a nonviolent group, and some of their stories reflected the union's success or lack thereof in this area. Dick Snyder, in an article which summarized the first year of the strike, was not entirely unsupportive of the union, but he did take care to detail violence associated with the union cause. UFW vice president Larry Itliong, he said, had been charged after he was suspected of breaking a grower's nose. Snyder detailed other such violations of a pure nonviolent policy such as rock throwing, tire slashing, and threats.<sup>271</sup> An editorial, "Hidden Violence in the Grape Dispute," gave examples of violence on the part of union members, particularly acts of violence which were directed toward those workers who

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<sup>269</sup> John Schmitz, "Sacramento Report," Oct 12 1967 reprinted in Steinbacher, 198.

<sup>270</sup> For letter and resolution see Steinbacher, 190-197.

<sup>271</sup> Snyder, "Delano Huelga is One Year Old," *Bakersfield Californian*, 10 Sept. 1966.



remained in the fields. Just as Snyder had, this piece also detailed threats, tire slashing, road hazards created by nails, and a punctured radiator on a worker transport bus. These things belied the image of the poor put-upon striker, and exposed their violence.<sup>272</sup> The local paper, the *Delano Record*, attempted to appear neutral, but often implicated farm workers or their supporters in acts of violence. One article published described a pro-grower photo exhibit held at New College in San Jose which was designed to discourage students who were considering helping the union. A follow up article described the criminal destruction of that exhibit, which had been accompanied by a threatening phone call to the host university. The blame for this destruction was placed on the shoulders of Mexican Americans.<sup>273</sup> Here the implication was clear. If union members themselves had not destroyed the exhibit, their friends, the students, had. This seemingly proved that the union and those who supported them were capable of violence and destruction. In another article about a Giumarra grape shed fire, the media emphasized the grower perspective. The reporter apparently asked the growers or their representatives what the cause of the fire had been, and the growers replied that they would not speculate.<sup>274</sup> This was actually a wise move on the grower's part. But it was interesting that the paper had asked the grower for the cause and not the fire department or an arson investigator. Given that Giumarra was one of the growers being struck, the implication could remain

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<sup>272</sup> "Hidden Violence in the Grape Dispute" *Bakersfield Californian*, 28 Dec. 1968.

<sup>273</sup> "Delano Exhibit Vandalized Friday," *San Jose College Spartan*. reprinted in *Delano Record*, 4 Mar. 1969; Susan Gale. "Delano Exhibit at New College," *San Jose College Spartan*. reprinted in *Delano Record*, 4 Mar. 1969.

<sup>274</sup> "Giumarra Shed Guttled by Fire," *The Delano Record*, 28 Sept. 1967.

that the fire was an attack upon private property, and perhaps the work of disgruntled union members.

What many of these who resented Chavez's use of King's image were noticing was the presence and activism of students. Students would become fascinated by the promise that the farm labor movement held for the poor. It would be their involvement in the cause that would help to shape it into a movement which appeared to be a civil rights movement.

### **Students**

The use of civil rights movement style nonviolent protest served not only to build up positive publicity and to attract the support of the general public; it also attracted student groups to the cause. These students, many of whom firmly believed in the value of nonviolent protest, were the real ties to the civil rights movement. The union would not develop a public connection with them, but it was indeed the student groups rather than King's SCLC which had the most contact with and provided the most support to Chavez's movement. Their help was invaluable.

But their help was also silent. It was silent because in the mid 1960s, to publicize it could have destroyed the image of the union as a nonviolent group. This was especially true because SNCC was one of the main groups working with Chavez. In 1965, just before the grape strike began, SNCC and the SCLC had butted heads in Selma. Part of their debate had been about tactics and ways in which the movement should protest nonviolently. Chavez could not afford for his organization to be too closely tied to SNCC in the public mind. This would have cost him the public support he so

desperately needed for the boycott. The American public would not have been attracted to a group which had ties to an organization that they considered violent and perhaps racist.

Chavez's concerns about a public alignment with SNCC intensified when in 1966 the organization began to emphasize the idea of black power, predominately through Stokely Carmichael. Most Americans were unclear on the definition of black power, and it was easy to assume that black power was a phrase which means anti-white violence. One correspondent who had donated to the cause in the past wrote to SNCC, explaining that he formerly believed that SNCC was not a racist organization, but that this black power concept worried him and that he believed it would harm SNCC's image. Carmichael responded to him and explained that black power was merely a call for access to political and economic power.<sup>275</sup> But such explanations did not satisfy most white Americans.

Because of SNCC's growing militancy, many in the public began to worry that the days of King's nonviolent leadership were over. When King appeared on "Face the Nation" in May 1966, he was asked by Martin Agronsky about the militant turn of the youth who were taking to battle to the streets. Agronsky asked if King thought that those leaders were gaining more and more power. King responded that he would hate to see the movement divided in such a way and did not think the difference was as great as it

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<sup>275</sup> Robert G. McInerney to SNCC, 7 July 1966, SNCC, Box 4, Folder 2; Stokely Carmichael to Robert G. McInerney, 11 August 1966, SNCC, Box 4, Folder 2.

seemed. But he did say that it remained to be seen if they could turn the militant youth in nonviolent directions.<sup>276</sup>

Because of the militant turn that African American youth in SNCC had taken, Chavez had to be particularly careful in his usage of students, even though most of the SNCC students helping the farm labor movement were white. Even considering the publicity risks, Chavez still needed student support from SNCC and other groups. At one point, the union was forbidden to shout *Huelga!* (Strike!) on the picket lines. They were promised that if they did so, they would be arrested for disturbing the peace. So, one day in October 1965 when Chavez was giving talks at colleges in the Bay Area, Helen Chavez and 44 other picketers tested this rule. They were of course arrested, and Chavez was contacted with the news. He informed his student audience of the arrests and was able to collect a handsome donation from them. Chavez also could appeal directly to student groups such as SNCC for money and food. A Bay Area interoffice memo as early as October 6, 1965 noted that Chavez had asked them again for money, food and help on the picket line. This request was being made less than a month after the union had agreed to join.<sup>277</sup>

Money wasn't the only reason that the union sought student support. These students became workhorses for the movement. Many of them were familiar if not already trained in nonviolent tactics. Some of them had experience in dealing with the media, something that few union members did. These students helped the movement gain national attention, not because of who they were, but because they were willing to travel

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<sup>276</sup> King, interview on "Face the Nation," 29 May 1966, MLK Speeches, III, Box 10.

<sup>277</sup> SNCC, Inter Office Memo, 6 October 1965, SNCC , Box 83, Folder 117.

to parts of the United States and Canada and to live on subsistence wages and to promote the boycott. They were also willing to serve as extra bodies on a picket line. The union badly needed their help. Chavez explained to a SNCC West Coast Staff Meeting that the union had not had the time to build up a large strike fund. Because of that, they developed a rotating picket line, where farm workers worked on farms that were not being picketed for two to three weeks and then spent a week on the picket lines.<sup>278</sup>

Students served to fill the gap left by this tactic. They served as much needed bodies on the picket lines and in marches. The FBI noted that the March to Sacramento was planned with the expectation that college students on Easter break would join the march, adding to the numbers. The FBI also noted the presence of students as leaders on boycott picket lines.<sup>279</sup> The students could demonstrate with style too. At one point they held a tea party in Boston, throwing grapes into Boston Harbor.<sup>280</sup>

Chavez knew that just the threat of student action could be enough to frighten some of the growers. Although by this time he had already been in contact with some of the students through SNCC, Chavez began to dream of what he could accomplish with a summer of student volunteers. The FBI reported in June of 1966 that Chavez had sent information to universities trying to attract students to their summer cause. The FBI's source informed them that Chavez wished to recruit 2000 students for summer activities.

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<sup>278</sup> West Coast Staff Meeting, Fresno, California, James Forman, chair, SNCC, Box 72, Folder 6.

<sup>279</sup> M. A. Jones to Wick, memo, FBI, 100-444762-NR; FBI, 100-444762-102; 12 August 1969, FBI, 100-444762-179;

<sup>280</sup> Perez, 12; Prago, 183; Majka and Majka, 174, 178; Faustina Solis, "Socioeconomic and Cultural Conditions of Migrant Workers," Edited by Margaret M. Mangold, *La Causa Chicana: The Movement for Justice* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1971), 183; Terzian and Cramer, 95.

Although the source did not foresee such participation, they did believe that students might appear in the hundreds.<sup>281</sup> During the March to Sacramento, he used this as an incentive to get Schenley to act. During the March, Schenley had heard rumors of a bar tenders boycott of their products. Wanting to avoid that, they offered to negotiate with Chavez. Chavez and Jim Drake then passed orders to their boycott staff to increase the pressure on Schenley for the duration of the march. They encouraged the boycott staff to do anything which would gain the cause publicity and frustrate the company. These tactics could include tying up the phone lines, participating in hunger strikes, going to jail, and issuing fake press releases. As long as the union would not get sued over it, the union was for it. In particular, it was suggested that the staff send press releases to Schenley in New York announcing that radical students were to flood the city during the summer to, “make it look,” they wrote, “like the Schenley boycott is THE summer project for the student community.”<sup>282</sup> Later it became apparent to the union that students were planning on helping in Delano that summer. The union thought it would be expedient to organize the students and to train them. Assigned to the task of organizing the students for the summer was Gene Boutilier a minister who had been an associate pastor of the First Congregational Church in Fresno.<sup>283</sup>

The first official student summer project was called the Delano Summer Project. It began on June 19, 1966, and lasted through August. The sessions began with a week of training in Del Rey, California. There students were to learn about the union, what

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<sup>281</sup> 15 June 1966, FBI, 100-444762-40.

<sup>282</sup> Jim Drake and Cesar Chavez to boycott staff, c. March 1966, DCP, Box 1, Folder 13.

<sup>283</sup> California Migrant Ministry, *Harvester Newsletter*, June 1966, vol. 1, no. 1, NFWM, Part I, Box 2, Folder 14.

needed to be accomplished, and to meet more experienced others who would work with them for the summer. During the week of training, they learned the basics of labor organizing, agribusiness, nonviolent tactics, mobilization and living on subsistence wages. They also joined early morning picket lines before classes each day. This program was not richly funded. In fact, the union raised money to cover the living expenses for most of the students from within local communities. Most of the students were sent out to work and promote the boycott, others worked at the Mexican border to dissuade Mexican from taking jobs as scabs and others worked in office or did research. This program was successful enough that they repeated it again in 1967 and 1968, only on smaller scales.<sup>284</sup>

The most active of the youth or student groups working with the farm workers was SNCC. Its Bay Area branch was particularly interested in the cause. Field Secretary Terry Cannon did press work for Chavez, and many who had participated in Mississippi's Freedom Summer of 1964 found themselves in Delano in 1965.<sup>285</sup> It was Cannon who talked to Chavez in the summer of 1965 about SNCC involvement in the cause. At first it seemed that they would not be as interested in quickly jumping in to help, as Cannon said they would like to see experienced volunteers on the project and many of those had yet to

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<sup>284</sup> 1967 Summer Project leaflet, DCP, Box 1, Folder 16; Gene Boutilier, Memo to California Boycott Staff and SDS-SNCC Colleagues from Student Summer Project, c 1966, DCP, Box 1, Folder 16; Gene Boutilier, to Summer Volunteer, c. 1966, DCP, Box 1, Folder 16; The Student Summer Project of the National Farm Workers Association Orientation Schedule, c, June 1966, DCP, Box 1, Folder 16; Phil Farmham, Memo: Re- Summer Student Project, c. 1966, DCP, Box 1, Folder 16.

<sup>285</sup> Steinbacher, 83; Ferriss and Sandoval, 102.

return from the South. But by early September this had changed, and Cannon made plans to bring less experienced students and other volunteers to work with Chavez.<sup>286</sup>

Students were attracted to the union cause because it represented the collective idea that many of them valued. Chavez's organization, at first independent of any national labor organization, seemed to them to be another group interested in community organizing. Chavez was not afraid to emphasize this. When speaking to the West Coast staff of SNCC, Chavez said that the NFWA was an organization that was involved in both labor and community organizing.<sup>287</sup> When he was interviewed for the SNCC paper, *The Movement*, Chavez said that the NFWA was trying to "find some cross between being a movement and being a union. The membership must maintain control; the power must not be centered in a few."<sup>288</sup>

Some in SNCC apparently saw farm labor conditions on the West Coast as similar to Southern farming. Mike (probably Mike Miller), a SNCC correspondent in the Bay Area wrote to a SNCC friend in Atlanta in August 1965 to invite her to come West if she needed a break from the office work. There were, he wrote, plenty of opportunities in the west for good workers who had experienced the movement in the South. However, he did not at first see the grape fields as the best place to start organizing. Instead, his focus was on the cotton industry and unorganized African Americans in the Bakersfield,

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<sup>286</sup> Terry Cannon to Cesar Chavez, 3 September 1965, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder 22; Terry Cannon to Cesar Chavez, 8 September 1965, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder 22; Terry Cannon to Cesar Chavez, 11 September 1965, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder 22; Terry Cannon to Cesar Chavez, 22 September 1965, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder 22.

<sup>287</sup> West Coast Staff Meeting, Fresno, California, James Forman, chair, SNCC, Box 72, Folder 6.

<sup>288</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview in *The Movement*, October 1965, vol. 1, no. 10, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 15.



California area.<sup>289</sup> This letter was written almost a month before Chavez and the NFWA, some thirty miles up the road, voted to join the grape strike in September 1965. It would not take much to move Miller toward connections with Chavez's union.

Student members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were among those who helped with the strike. They were leery of the AFL-CIO's AWOC, seeing it as much too corporate to be of real value to the poor farm workers. But, they loved Chavez's organization because it had a co-op, a credit union and a theatrical group. It also provided for its striking workers on the basis of need rather than on the basis of work performed, so that everyone and their family were taken care of. For the SDS students, the union represented the ultimate in community organization. They did note however that sometimes such communities were destroyed because striking workers who could not be used in the strike or the boycott were sent off to work on other farms, leaving the community. To support the strike, SDS members were encouraged to become active on boycott committees, making sure that grapes and Schenley liquor were not sold in stores, and by approaching student groups, unions, and churches and asking their members not to buy grapes. Also SDS members occasionally went into the back rooms of stores to see what label the grapes had been shipped under.<sup>290</sup> For the SDS, the grape strike represented the society that they hoped would come to be. Some of the SDS students paid a visit to Delano in early 1966. They returned and published an article in the SDS Regional Newsletter which told how well the union was doing and how it had stuck to its

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<sup>289</sup> Mike (Miller) to Sister Cyn (Cynthia Washington), 28 August 1965, SNCC, Box 83, Folder correspondence Jan. 1965.

<sup>290</sup> Norm Potter, Preliminary Report on the Grape Strike, 5 January 1966, NFWA, Box 13, Folder 23.

pledge of nonviolence. The students were struck by the intensity of the movement and were interested in joining the summer program for students that Chavez was planning for that following summer. They saw it as a way they could help build up a movement.<sup>291</sup> They also wanted to ensure that Chavez was not just a good liberal, but a true radical and wanted to ensure that they could be involved in radicalizing the strike.<sup>292</sup> These students had ideas about how radical the strike could and should be, and they desired to be involved.

SNCC students felt the same way that SDS student did about the strike. This strike they believed was a grassroots effort of the poor. Here was a case of the poor taking charge of their own lives. The SNCC workers believed that they could serve as a bridge between the poor and the middle class. They could help the middle class to understand the movement and encourage support of it. They also saw the strike as an alternative to riots like Watts. Believing that the farm worker cause was a just one, the national staff of SNCC promised in late 1965 to help the NFWA through SNCC resources, facilities, and educational and political support.<sup>293</sup>

Cannon, Mike Miller, and Marshall Ganz were the most active SNCC supporters of Chavez. In spring of 1966, Cannon sent a notice to the media that he would serve as the Press Secretary for the Sacramento March.<sup>294</sup> Cannon, who had media experience

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<sup>291</sup> "A Visit to Delano," SDS Regional Newsletter, 22 February 1966, vol. 1, no. 7, NFWA, Box 13, Folder 23.

<sup>292</sup> "Regional Meeting Report," SDS Regional Newsletter, no date, NFWA, Box 13, Folder 23.

<sup>293</sup> Mike Miller, memo to SNCC, FOSNCC, Friends and Supporters, "Who Does What in Bay Area SNCC," 9 December 1965, NFWA, Part II, Box 42, Folder 39; Mike Miller, "California" The Golden State in Flux," NFWA, Part II, Box 42, Folder 42.

<sup>294</sup> Terry Cannon to Members of the Press and Media, no date, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

from his tenure as editor of *The Movement*, a publication of the California SNCC groups, was better prepared to do this job than most of the union leadership. Mike Miller played a key role in the formation of the Schenley boycott. In a December 5, 1965, letter to Chris Hartmire of the California Migrant Ministry, a religious group which supported and helped Chavez, Miller described plans for the boycott and the support and organization which would have to take place for an effective effort. He warned Hartmire not to become too anxious, explaining that he still had to check on the legality of a few of the boycott related issues. Miller, who was based in the Bay Area, sent carbon copies of this letter to Cliff Vaughn of the Los Angeles area SNCC, Cynthia Washington in SNCC's Atlanta office, and Chavez himself.<sup>295</sup> Two days later, the local SNCC then sent out an inter office memo announcing that the San Francisco SNCC had been asked by the NFWA to organize a boycott of Delano grapes and Schenley products. They asked for other SNCC groups to make plans to promote boycotts in their areas.<sup>296</sup> By Christmas Eve, SNCC and CORE in New York were sending out letters to friends and associates promoting the Schenley boycott and requesting that interested parties endorse the boycott, attend meetings on boycott action, refrain from buying Schenley products, and to visit liquor stores and ask them to refrain from selling the boycotted products.<sup>297</sup> Two months later, Mike Miller would join Jim Drake as the coordinators of the NFWA boycott effort in sending out order forms for Schenley boycott pledge cards. Recipients

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<sup>295</sup> Terry Cannon to Chris Hartmire, 5 December 1965, SNCC, Box 72, Folder 6.

<sup>296</sup> SNCC Inter Office Memo, 7 December 1965, SNCC, Box 72, Folder 6.

<sup>297</sup> George Wiley and Elizabeth Sutherland, to Friend, 24 December 1965, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

were requested to fill out a three part card promising to adhere to the boycott. They were to mail one part of the card to the NFWA, another part to Schenley and to keep the third part with boycotted products with them for shopping trips.<sup>298</sup> Marshall Ganz served as the coordinator of the March to Sacramento.<sup>299</sup> Although Ganz would not seem as significant in the beginning, it was Ganz, the son of a Jewish rabbi, who would make the union a major part of his life's work. SNCC's headquarters also became interested, Muriel Tillinghast of SNCC's program department in Atlanta wrote to ask Chavez about the work he was doing and asked if he would be willing to meet with representatives from the black belt South. Apparently SNCC had begun to see the possibilities for an interracial alliance with the farm workers.<sup>300</sup>

Many students like these would later come to Delano and, after some training, join the farm workers on the picket lines or at boycott stations. One student named Nick Jones had worked in Chicago with the SDS. When the SDS set up a summer program with the NFWA in 1966, Jones was one of those who volunteered to go. He and 75-80 more volunteers met in Del Rey, California, and underwent training. He experienced some time on the picket lines and then went to Seattle to set up boycott support in that area. While there, he contacted other labor unions for donations and looked for workers for union elections in California. Jones continued to work for the union in various regions for most of the next decade. He estimated that 90% of boycott workers were white, mostly student aged individuals from the New Left. The movement was radical

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<sup>298</sup> Mike Miller and Jim Drake to Friend, 20 February 1966, SNCC, Box 83, Folder 112; Jim Drake and Mike Miller to All Boycott Supporters, memo, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

<sup>299</sup> Mike Miller to Karen Whitman, 13 April 1966, SNCC, Box 83, Folder 112.

<sup>300</sup> Muriel Tillinghast, 25 September 1965, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder 22.

enough to appeal to those whose peers were campus radicals. Jones felt that such Anglo volunteers were invaluable to the movement and that the middle class background of these students was important because they knew how to convince the middle class in urban areas not to buy grapes.<sup>301</sup>

Another such student volunteer was Mary Lou Watson. Watson also joined the Delano movement in the summer of 1966 through the volunteer program. She recalled that volunteers first received some kind of training during which they roomed with a strike family and helped on the picket line. Most of their training however prepared them to go out to set up boycott groups. Others who had skills in areas such as legal and nursing expertise would stay in Delano and work at the union headquarters. Watson spent most of that summer working to generate support for the boycott in Chicago, returning to school that fall. Even though she returned to school, she remained active in the union and joined activities near her Oakland campus.<sup>302</sup>

There was a danger in using student groups. They were outsiders, and even King had been warned against using outsiders. Lillian Smith, who had worked with CORE, warned King as early as the Montgomery Bus Boycott that the thing which would most infuriate Southerners would be the involvement of Northerners. She recommended that he ask Northern activists to work in the North, publicizing and fundraising for the cause.<sup>303</sup> Similarly, Norman Thomas, from the American Socialist Party, sent a letter praising King, and promising whatever help that they could provide, although he

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<sup>301</sup> Nick Jones, interview with William Taylor, 24 July 1976, BTP, Box 1, unprocessed.

<sup>302</sup> Mary Lou Watson, interview with William Taylor, 17 July 1976, BTP, Box 1, unprocessed.

<sup>303</sup> Lillian Eugenia Smith to Martin Luther King, Jr., 10 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 168-170.

admitted that the Northerners in Montgomery might hurt the movement.<sup>304</sup> Chavez had to take the risk that the benefits of using outsiders, of using students, would outweigh the risk of negative publicity. He truly needed their help, much more than King had, because the population of farm workers was nowhere near as large or as stable as the population of Southern African Americans.

The appearance of Delano as a site of conflict occurred at a time when the bloody days of Selma were not far from the public minds. SNCC and other student groups were seen as organizations which could and would create violent opportunities and which would oppose local law enforcement. Chavez told SNCC members that suddenly police and law enforcement behavior had changed for the better. Although he was not sure as to why, he believed that change had occurred after the announcement that CORE and SNCC would be involved in the cause. After this announcement Chavez reported that he had heard a police officer comment that “We don’t want another Selma here.”<sup>305</sup> SNCC during the later half of the 1960s was developing a more radical reputation. MECHA, a Mexican American student organization, had a similar radical reputation. *Produce News* in May 1970 wrote that MECHA students had entered the grape strike and had promised to make sure that no scab grapes made it to market. Although the students did not mention violence, they would not reveal their strategy. This led to questions of their tactics and questions directed toward the union (who was forced to respond that they

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<sup>304</sup> Norman Thomas, to Martin Luther King, Jr., 23 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 206.

<sup>305</sup> “Harassment by Growers, Police,” *The Movement*, October 1965, vol. 1, no. 10, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 15.

would accept help from anyone who practiced a policy of nonviolence).<sup>306</sup> By the late 1960s, the student movement had created enough disturbances on college campuses to be seen as a group with little respect for law and order.

The union's opposition would take full advantage of the negative perception of student activists. The Consumers' Rights Committee announced that the union's strategy, including threats, assaults and vandalism, was patterned after college new left anarchists. The cover of their pamphlet "Violence at the Supermarket ... Why the Grape Boycott Must be Ended," included a drawing of a woman with her little girl standing in front of a group of student picketers who are bearded and scraggly, resembling cavemen in appearance.<sup>307</sup> The visible presence of such students also led some critics to conclude that the strikers had no real issues. These students had often never worked in the fields, and their sudden appearance as picketers caused some to comment that those striking really did not represent the work force. It was easy then to question the legitimacy of the strike and to question why student organizations like SNCC might take radio units out of Mississippi and loan them to the union.<sup>308</sup> It was no wonder then, given such community responses, that the union sought to de-emphasize when possible their connections to the student movement.

Although the union did not publicize the presence and help of the student groups, they were noticed by the media. The media in turn portrayed the farm workers' cause as

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<sup>306</sup> "Mexican-American Students Threaten to Invade Grape Harvest," *Produce News*, 23 May 1970, TGNC, Box 5.

<sup>307</sup> Consumers' Rights Committee, "Violence at the Supermarket ... Why the Grape Boycott Must be Ended," June 1967, TGNC, Box 5.

<sup>308</sup> Gary Allen, "The Grapes: Communist Wrath in Delano," *American Opinion*, June 1966., SJVF, Box 1.

one which was promoted by many groups. Some of this media attention was sympathetic, some was not. Andrew Kopkind wrote an article for *The New Republic* in 1966 in which he claimed that not only had the farm workers movement attracted civil rights and student groups like CORE and SNCC, but that their communication strategies mirrored those of SNCC's Bob Moses.<sup>309</sup> Similarly, *Trans-Action* and the *New York Times Magazine* found that the farm labor movement was comparable to the civil rights one.<sup>310</sup> The latter publication claimed that Chavez would become a Mexican King.<sup>311</sup> *Business Week*, in April 1967, claimed that civil rights groups supported the boycott.<sup>312</sup> A reporter for *The Bakersfield Californian*, Mel Baughman would recall some 10 years after the strike had begun that by the third week of the strike, a third of the picketers were students. He further claimed that Chavez accepted any outside help, even that of the communists.<sup>313</sup> Ron Harley, writing for the *Farm Quarterly*, claimed that union's eventual success was due to the help it had received from outsiders.<sup>314</sup> For those who wanted to see and believe it, the media did recognize that the farm workers union was supported by student and radical groups. But, it was not something of which the union typically chose to remind the public.

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<sup>309</sup> Andrew Kopkind, "The Grape Pickers' Strike: A New Kind of Labor War in California," *New Republic* 29 January 1966.

<sup>310</sup> Meister, "La Huelga Becomes La Causa,"; "California Grape Boycott," *Trans-action*, February 1969.

<sup>311</sup> Meister, "La Huelga Becomes La Causa."

<sup>312</sup> "Unionizing the Farm," *Business Week*, 22 Apr. 1967.

<sup>313</sup> Mel Baughman, "UFW Grew During Chaotic Time in America," *Bakersfield Californian* , 26 Aug. 1975; "Grape Strike had Quiet Start Near Delano" *Bakersfield Californian* , 27 Aug. 1975; "Farm Labor Movement- A Social Revolution" *Bakersfield Californian*, 28 Aug. 1975.

<sup>314</sup> Ron Harley, "Why They Signed with the Union," *Farm Quarterly* September-October 1970.



With his emphasis on nonviolence, Chavez managed to keep his union members nonviolent and to convince the American public that they could support the union. Students and student groups who worked many hours for the union helped it to formulate its nonviolent policies and trained its members. Such images were reported widely in the media, and the grape growers, recognizing their importance, attempted to destroy those images. Their work was for naught however, as many people still recognized the union as a nonviolent organization.

Chavez had modeled his tactics on King's nonviolent strategy. Although both men paid homage to the philosophy of Gandhi, for them nonviolence action was a tactic that really worked. Nonviolence served both men well. It was a practical tactic which saved the movement from destruction from without. It was also the only kind of tactic acceptable in America's Cold War era. Nonviolent tactics also bought them the support of Americans in ways that violence did not. But, nonviolence wasn't the only way to win American support. Both of the men used aspects of American religion to gain support for their movements and to unite their devotees.

### 3. THE GOD OF REVOLUTION: RELIGIOUS IMAGERY

Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez found it useful to promote the notion that their groups were nonviolent groups. The policy of nonviolence had served to attract many white Americans to their causes. But these men knew that nonviolence might not be enough to attract all the support they needed, especially when their nonviolent tactics sometimes resulted in violence from the opposition. Thus, they began to reach out to religious Americans by portraying their causes as religious movements that any moral, God-fearing person could support. The religious imagery was also intended to unite their followers.

Both King and Chavez needed the support of America's churches. As a Southern African American preacher, King knew the power of the churches in African American life. He knew that if the African American churches accepted his organizations and tactics they would back his cause in the African American community and contribute to it financially. Similarly, Cesar Chavez needed the support of the Catholic Church. Since most Mexicans in the United States were Catholic, the blessings of that church would signal to them that the farm labor union was a legitimate organization to be supported. Both men also needed the support of white churches, both Christian and Jewish ones. These organizations could entice their members into supporting the cause whether through contributions, political pressure, or boycott participation. If church-going

Americans could come to believe that these men and their respective groups were operating within the realm of Christianity, their chances of success would be increased.

### **Religious Background**

In his “A Knock at Midnight,” Martin Luther King, Jr., said that the world was at the hour of midnight, a dark era of problems. But during this time, people were becoming increasingly religious. King said the United States population had increased thirty-one percent since 1929, but church membership had increased one hundred percent. In this era of distress, King claimed that people were turning to churches for answers. Just as the neighbor in the *Bible* had knocked on his friend’s door and asked for bread for his tired traveler who had just arrived, Americans were asking the churches to help them have faith in the future, to give them hope for a better life, and to help love and be loved. White churches King said, had often turned away from helping African Americans. Churches that should have been the first to open their doors at midnight had not. All too often white churches had upheld the status quo in matters of racial relations. King did not fail to criticize African American churches as well. Some of them, he said, had been too emotional, others too proud of their class status to be involved in real world events. But, even given these problems with America’s churches, people continued to knock. The church, King said, needed to respond, it needed to guide those who believed that the church had the answers. It needed to tell the people that God would work things

out for their good. The people standing at the church door at midnight needed to be able to believe that dawn would come, bringing justice.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps more than any other piece, “A Knock at Midnight” revealed King’s faith in what the church could do. Although he does not outline specifics for church strategy, King issued a plea to churches to become involved. He asked both African American and white churches to help the cause. King felt that society trusted their churches. This meant that the churches could have an enormous impact upon society and upon government. Help from the churches could make the movement. Just as the sleepy friend in the *Bible* would eventually answer the knock upon his door, King hoped that the churches would answer those knocking upon their doors.

African American ministers like King were part of the larger trend of religious activism which bloomed in the 1950s and 60s. In the mid 1950s, Forty-six percent of the United States population was considered to be a part of some kind of religious organization.<sup>2</sup> And, while many of them did not belong to a religious organization or regularly attend church service, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, over ninety-six percent of Americans consistently reported that they believed in God or at least in a universal spirit. Americans also tended to be solidly Protestant, with some seventy percent claiming that faith in 1962. That same year, twenty-three percent of Americans claimed to be Catholic and three percent claimed to be Jewish. Only two percent of Americans

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Knock at Midnight,” 9 August 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6.

<sup>2</sup> William M. Newman and Peter L. Halvorson, *Atlas of American Religion: The Denominational Era, 1776-1990* (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 48.

claimed no faith whatsoever.<sup>3</sup> These numbers reflected a boom in religious participation which followed WWII. Churches of this era, particularly those of the Protestant faith, benefited from the fight against communism, considered a godless form of government. To be involved in a church then was the patriotic and proper thing for an American to do; one could help fight the godless communist in this manner.<sup>4</sup> Also, Americans, who were increasingly likely to live in the suburbs, found themselves forming new kinds of cooperative neighborhoods and religions. Very often the church served to unite these new congregants through activities designed for couples and families.<sup>5</sup>

These religions were also increasingly united. This was something Harry Truman had hoped for during the post war aftermath, when he increasingly turned to religion to save the nation and the world from the spread of communism.<sup>6</sup> Although religions never united on a world wide scale, in the United States, there was increasingly a spirit of interfaith harmony. Protestants now found that they had something in common with Jews and Catholics. Catholics worried about the threat of communism to the church as a whole since many of their congregants were behind the iron curtain. Jews in the United States were becoming more liberal and increasingly integrated into American society. These groups would come to believe that religious faith upheld American democracy, a

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<sup>3</sup> Ross Gregory, *Cold War America: 1946-1990* (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 2003), 223.

<sup>4</sup> Ross Gregory, *Cold War America: 1946-1990*, 222; Robert S. Ellwood, *1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: American Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 120-121.

<sup>6</sup> Diane Kirby, "Harry Truman's Religious Legacy: The Holy Alliance, Containment and the Cold War," *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (New York: Palgrave, 2003) 77-102.

historically sound belief perhaps because so much of America's rhetoric deals with a person's value in God's eyes.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the biggest indicator of this new kind of unity was the formation of the National Council of Churches of Christ in November 1950. This organization began with 29 denominations of Protestant and Orthodox background. It was not a complete unification of American religion, after all most evangelical Protestant groups and very liberal ones were not included, but it did show American religion working together as never before.<sup>8</sup>

Catholics in America were also undergoing a great change. It was in the early 1960s that the Second Vatican Council occurred, which modernized the Catholic Church. In fact, the Second Vatican Council would begin in 1962; the same year that Chavez held his first convention for the National Farm Workers Association. English could now be used in services and the lists of rules of dos and don'ts were replaced by a doctrine which stressed good works and taking care of ones neighbor, including the idea that the worker should be valued by society and that private property should help everyone.<sup>9</sup> This went hand in hand with another Catholic idea rising in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of liberation theology. Liberation theology was the basic idea that God would help those oppressed and that He would liberate them some day. These ideas were popularized in the 1960s, starting with priests who worked with the poor, particularly in South America,

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<sup>7</sup> Ellwood, 3-11, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ellwood, 115-117.

<sup>9</sup> James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 409; Barend A. De Vries, *Champions of the Poor: The Economic Consequences of Judeo-Christian Values*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 198; Judith A. Merkle, *From the Heart of the Church: Catholic Social Tradition*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 121-122.

in places where the poor mistrusted the church, seeing it as connected to the elite. Many of these priests were from the United States and Europe and had volunteered to go to Latin American as missionaries to shore up the church presence. They were astonished at the level of poverty they saw there and looked for a way to ameliorate it. Clergy in the United States inspired by such ideas began to work to improve the lives of the poor in their country. Critics however often claimed that such theology caused the priests to abandon the message of salvation which they should also have been preaching. Other critics worried that that these priests were too often associated with violence such as guerrilla wars in South America.<sup>10</sup> Such connections also lead many to fear that the Catholic adherents to liberation theology were possible communists or subversives. This was particularly ironic since in other parts of the world, Russia and China for instance, the church was fighting oppression and scrambling to maintain a base in countries which were teaching atheism along with their communism. The church's fear of the growth of communism was so great that under Pius XII, those Catholics that became communists risked being excommunicated.<sup>11</sup> Examples of this kind of religious activism in the United States included people such as Dorothy Day, who led the Catholic Worker movement and published the pro-labor and radical *Catholic Worker*.<sup>12</sup> By the 1960s, Mexican Americans would begin to analyze and publicly began to address economic issues concerning them in the United States. The church would have little choice other

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<sup>10</sup> De Vries, 189-195; Brian Moynahan, *The Faith: A History of Christianity* (New York: Double Day, 2002), 708; David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 73.

<sup>11</sup> Moynahan, 694-711.

<sup>12</sup> Ellwood, 126.

than to get involved. If it failed to, the Catholic Church ran the risk of being rejected by Mexican Americans who believed that the church upheld their oppressors.<sup>13</sup>

For American Jews, the 1950s and 60s was the era in which they were coming into their own. Israel had just been created, giving Jews a place internationally. In 1955, Will Herberg published *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* which maintained that Judaism had become the third great, mainstream American religion. Consequently, Jewish culture now became all the rage.<sup>14</sup> Like other religious Americans though, Jews too felt a sense of obligation to their fellow man. In fact their religious ideology that taught values of cheerful giving and more equal distribution of wealth. Along this line, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations began making statements in the 1960s which supported social justice issues like nondiscrimination in housing and government programs attacking poverty.<sup>15</sup> It took a while for United States Jews to get to this point however, because regional differences prevailed. Northern Jews strongly supported the civil rights movement from the start. They seemed to have seen this as a way to show how assimilated they had become. Northern Jews began to have fewer problems with racial discrimination, and they believed that if such barriers were eliminated in the South, African Americans too could have their chance. Southern Jews however did not find comfort in such thoughts. Southern synagogues were still being bombed, partly in response to Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement, and Southern Jews were

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<sup>13</sup> Merkle, 189-190.

<sup>14</sup> Ellwood, 214; James T. Fisher, "American Religion Since 1945," *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 49-52.

<sup>15</sup> De Vries, 179-188.



very leery of challenging the prevailing notions of the society surrounding them.<sup>16</sup> This meant that Southern rabbis who might have spoken out in support of civil rights were reluctant to do so, knowing their congregations could be impacted. One such example was Rabbi Milton L. Grafman of Birmingham. He had preached to his congregation about the problems with the prevailing attitudes that lead to discrimination. He had also worked to make business leaders move toward integrated businesses. But, based upon fear, Grafman was one of the clergy that wrote King an open letter while he was in jail in Birmingham.<sup>17</sup> He was a civil rights advocate but not willing to risk everything for the cause.

Thus, the Jews most noted for their involvement in the cause would be from the North. They served not only as volunteers on the front lines of civil rights action, but also as advisors to King. Stanley Levison, a New York attorney and active in the American Jewish Congress, became one of King's most trusted advisors. Some questioned the wisdom of this, largely because of the United States government's suspicion that Levison had communist leanings, but his advice was valuable to King.<sup>18</sup> Other Jews in the movement included Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) workers Andrew Goodman and Mickey Schwerner, who were killed in Mississippi along side of

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<sup>16</sup> Marc Dollinger, "'Hamans' and 'Torquemadas': Southern and Northern Jewish Responses to the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1965," *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis And Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, eds. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1997), 67-70.

<sup>17</sup> Terry Barr, "Rabbi Grafman and Birmingham's Civil Rights Era," *The Quiet Voices*, eds. Bauman and Kalin, 169-189.

<sup>18</sup> Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong?: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance*, (New York: Free Press, 1995), 162-165.

an African American worker, James Chaney. Similarly, King inspired rabbis to go to the South and march on the front lines. After one such speech, 16 rabbis headed to St. Augustine where they attempted to integrate a restaurant and were arrested.<sup>19</sup> Also, many of the African American activists had some links to a Jewish culture such as James Farmer of CORE and Bob Moses from the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) who as a child had went to a Jewish socialist camp. These men would recruit northern Jews for the cause and keep up such connections.

For their part, African American attitudes toward Jews had varied. Some, in the days of slavery, took interest in the stories they'd heard of God's liberation of the Jews. Others found hope in the Jews and their efforts at assimilation. Some African Americans feared the Jews, associating them with the death of Christ, and considering them white people. However, following WWII and the news of Jewish persecution, African Americans began to expect that Jews would sympathize with their cause. But they had perhaps wrongly calculated the Jewish rate of assimilation. For WWII had proven to the Jews that they still had to be careful.<sup>20</sup> As the civil rights movement grew that lesson would hit home again.

The African American church was inspired by social justice movements within white churches. The hope that they had found in the story of the Biblical Jews had promised freedom. This belief stood them well in the contemporary fight against oppression. These ideas went well with liberation theology which was first promoted by

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<sup>19</sup> Friedman, 177-193.

<sup>20</sup> Clive Webb, 23-42.

Catholics and picked up by Protestants. Thus King could use ideas that had long been held by the African American church to relate to souls of other faiths. Chavez had an even greater advantage. American religions had not only become increasingly interested in social justice involvement through the civil rights movement, but by the mid 1960s, the ideas of liberation theology would be accepted enough that he could take full advantage of this trend among Mexican American Catholics, clergy of many faiths, and America's devout. Thus, both King and Chavez would find religious imagery and appeals to be an essential part of promoting their causes.

King and Chavez were not the only ones who believed that the religious should support worthy causes. African American ministers were also increasingly becoming more active in the world around them. In 1956, just months after the bus boycotts had begun, *Ebony* praised clergy men who were interested in changing their worlds and helping their parishioners outside of the church. The article highlighted the work of several ministers; however the examples used were predominately Northern men, not the Southern ones that would soon be caught up in the civil rights movement.<sup>21</sup> Ministers who figured out ways to help their congregations meet everyday needs were also to be commended. A Philadelphia Baptist preacher, William Bentley, wanted new choir robes for his church. The congregation could not afford them. So he decided to have the church make them. Through his guidance, it became a business which expanded and hired members of the congregation to make choir and academic robes as well as

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<sup>21</sup> "Bright Young Men of God," *Ebony*, March 1956.

communion sets. This was religion at its best. The ministry met the earthly needs of the people. This was religion with a practical value.<sup>22</sup>

King himself believed that ministers should be active in real world concerns of their parishioners. In December 1957, a preacher from Mississippi wrote to King. The minister explained that he did not like the system of segregation and discrimination which was so much a part of Southern life. However, he feared that if he spoke against the system prevalent in his small town that he would be killed or lose his pulpit. King responded that ministers had an obligation to take a stand for what they knew was right, and to suffer for it, as suffering brought redemption.<sup>23</sup> King also believed that one could not separate religious and worldly issues. It was okay for the pulpit to espouse both God and the NAACP. The gospels dealt not just with man's soul, but with his body and his earthly life as well.<sup>24</sup> One could not preach morality but not address the poverty that contributed to immorality. Churches were the defenders of moral values. They had a responsibility then to be the advocates of changing social conditions.<sup>25</sup>

Ministers of African American churches were not the only ones that King expected to be active. Clergy from white organizations needed to be involved as well. King said that often the religious followed God but did not act like Jesus. Such people

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<sup>22</sup> "The Factory that's Run by a Church," *Ebony*, April 1960.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," December 1957.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "Advice for Living," September 1958; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remember Who You Are," 7 July 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Religious Leaders Conference, 11 May 1959, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2005), 197-202.

saw the church as a haven from a world that was increasingly integrated. King believed that the churches should not let this happen. They should be the ones talking about issues of discrimination. They should be the ones standing up for the humane treatment of African Americans.<sup>26</sup>

In his speeches, King often outlined basic roles for the church to play in a time of great change. When speaking before groups of ministers, King told them that the role of the church was to follow the paths of those like Amos, Paul, Jesus, and Martin Luther. These men had taken stands for truth and had suffered for it. Ministers and their churches had to be willing to voice opinions on the issues of the day. Churches needed to help their congregants form a world perspective. They needed to recognize the brotherhood of all mankind and to be concerned for others. In particular, they were to condemn segregation and prejudice. The churches were also to guide people away from beliefs about African Americans that bordered on the paranoid. The church could also serve as an interpreter of African American demands to the world and to help the races talk to each other. It was the church that would be able to convince people that African Americans did not wish to run the country or marry white women, but merely to have a moral society. Churches were to be leaders, first removing the beam in their own eye by integrating their own congregations, then by serving as a bridge between the African American and white communities. King believed that churches should also develop social action programs to address not only segregation, but economic problems as well.

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "The Un-Christian Christian," *Ebony*, August 1965, 77-80.

Finally, the church had to convince both African Americans and whites to embrace the changes of the era and not to become bitter.<sup>27</sup>

King was capable of criticizing churches that did not act. When Oxford, Mississippi exploded in controversy over James Meredith's university admission in 1962, King wrote an article for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) *Newsletter* which criticized local and state leadership for their roles. King asked what had been the role of the clergy in all of this. King wanted to know what had happened to those who most should have been speaking up against the situation. He could not recall having heard one minister speak up and so he was left to ask "What kind of people worship there? Who is their God?"<sup>28</sup> King's question was a relevant one. Two people, a journalist and a bystander, had been killed on a Sunday, during the riots that followed Mississippi governor Ross Barnett's announcement that Meredith would be allowed to register at the school.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever King's opinion, others were slow to mirror his ideas about ministers and discrimination. When asked in a somewhat unscientific TV poll if ministers should be leaders in social and political actions, the vast majority said no. The surveyed group

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," 25 April 1957, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol. IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2000), 184-191, also in *Proceedings of the Conference on Christian Faith and Human Relations* (Black Mountain, NC: Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, 1957) 29-30; similar words appear in Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the United Church of Christ- General Synod, 6 July 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8; Martin Luther King, Jr., Gay Lectures Address for the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 19 April 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Oxford, Mississippi, 1962," SCLC *Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 8, December 1962, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 20.

<sup>29</sup> Flip Schulke, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Documentary...Montgomery to Memphis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 60-61.

was ninety percent white. Some fifty-one percent of those surveyed agreed either entirely or slightly that ministers should not be community leaders as well. Only four percent of the respondents surveyed were African American, but their answers were radically different. Some seventy percent of African Americans believed ministers should be involved. It was therefore more acceptable among African Americans that their clergy be social activists than it was for whites. Americans were even more reluctant to make integration a moral issue. Only about a quarter of Americans, Catholic and Protestant, queried by Gallup believed that practicing racial discrimination would send one to hell.<sup>30</sup>

Some ministers themselves were reluctant to be heavily involved. This frustrated ministers like King. Gil Lloyd wrote to King in 1956, before the Montgomery boycott had concluded, asking if he would be willing to run as president of the National Baptist Convention. Lloyd saw King as a potential religious leader who would lead the African American Baptist churches in reform in ways that the administration of J. H. Jackson had not. King declined the opportunity.<sup>31</sup> But later King would attempt to get a candidate of his choosing into the National Baptist Leadership. He wrote to J. H. Jackson in August of 1958 suggesting Ralph Abernathy as the Chairman of the Social Action Commission. Abernathy he felt was qualified because of his work with the MIA and in the South. It

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<sup>30</sup> “Challenge to Our Churches,” *Ebony*, March 1966; Ellwood also found that blacks were by 1950 increasingly appreciative of churches that were active in the community.

<sup>31</sup> Gil B. Lloyd to Martin Luther King, Jr., 28 November 1956, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955- December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 1997), 443-444; Martin Luther King Jr., to Gil B. Lloyd, 7 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 93.

was too late for such a move however, Jackson had already decided on his appointee.<sup>32</sup>

King would become increasingly frustrated with the National Baptists. In 1959, he made inquiries about joining the American Baptists, generally a Northern group. Two years after he moved to Atlanta to co-pastor at Ebenezer Baptist, that church would make the switch.<sup>33</sup>

The hesitance of organizations to encourage individual clergy men to become involved in such movements stems from the way clergy are viewed in America as an extension of their denomination. What a priest did could and would be taken by many as the Catholic Church's official stance. The danger then of allowing clergy to become involved in social movements was that they might bring reproach upon the church.<sup>34</sup> Because Catholic priests were seen as primarily loyal to the Vatican, involvement in social issues was likely to bring on the accusation that the priest were trying to control America for the church. Similarly, Americans tend to prefer that their clergy stay out of politics, leaving that up to the individual conscience.<sup>35</sup> Somewhat more liberal Christians would be comfortable with clergy being active in social issues, or at least raising awareness of them, as long as they did not demand support for particular groups.<sup>36</sup> So, while the religious activism of the 1960s might have meant taking care of your fellow

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to J. H. Jackson, 7 August 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 462-463.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Reuben E. Nelson, 23 March 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 157-158.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Perkins Ryan, "The Priest as Witness," *America*, 23 April 1966; "Victory in the Vineyards," *Time*, 15 April 1966.

<sup>35</sup> Ryan, "The Priest as Witness,"; "Victory in the Vineyards,".

<sup>36</sup> Ryan, "The Priest as Witness,"; "Victory in the Vineyards,".



man and the community, it did not mean that religious Americans wanted to be given a specific list of how to do so.<sup>37</sup>

This was very much the American mindset during the beginnings of both the civil rights and farm labor movements. Many ministers, African American and white, were increasingly willing to follow King's example and to be involved in social activism. Their congregations and the general American public were not necessarily as enthusiastic. However once convinced to support these groups, the churches could funnel resources to them and lend them an air of respectability needed in an era in which conformity to a traditional way of life was a valued commodity.

It would be essential to the success of the movement to have African American churches and ministers on board. For Southern African Americans, the church was not just a place they attended once a week. It was the center of the community. Jane M. Bond of the SCLC tried to explain this to a New Yorker who was trying to figure out if the SCLC was sectarian or not. Bond responded that it was non-sectarian, but that they used Christian in the title because of the role of the African American church. The movement used the churches to update people. The movement supporters held Christian values which were reflected in the movement itself, particularly in the songs and hymns used in the movement.<sup>38</sup> The church was the center of African American life and the movement had to rely upon it for success. African American churches long had a history of social activism. The church was the one institution that the African American

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<sup>37</sup> Morone, 417,444, says that social gospel of the 1960s is taking responsibility for others.

<sup>38</sup> Jane M. Bond to Norman L. Gingold, 30 January 1963, SCLC, Box 116, Folder 14.

community could count on in times of distress to focus on the improvement of community. But, the church would only do this if it were steady, and had a minister who was interested in such community issues and who could rally the church around him.<sup>39</sup>

Coretta Scott King's Freedom Concerts often brought up this African American Christian heritage. The narration to the concert tells of an America which was founded by Christians who somehow lost sight of the values of Christianity and democracy that made them great as they turned to slavery. The adherence to a system of slavery led to a sense of guilt and the civil war. In the process of time however the slaves had been Christianized and had developed their own spirituals which would help them through slavery, promising a better day with God. And God, as He always did, sent deliverance in the form of a people who were willing to suffer and willing to fight a nonviolent revolution, a people who were willing to be true witnesses and to fight for the cause even to death.<sup>40</sup>

Coretta's religious presentation reflected her husband's attitude. It would be easy to take some reports of King's personal life and to say that he was not religious. However, people often live lives which are inconsistent with the tenants of their religious faith. This does not mean they are not religious. It simply means that they choose aspects of their faith that are most relevant and reject aspects which do not fit their lives. King was one such person. His life and beliefs did not necessarily reflect the church in

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew Billingsley, *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Coretta Scott King, "The Story of the Freedom Movement in Narration, Song and Poetry, Montgomery to Montgomery," Freedom Concert transcript, no date, MLK Box 10, Folder 38.

which he grew up and the values that he preached. He did however firmly believe in God and did believe that God guided his life. One could say that he was occasionally hypocritical; one could not say that he was not religious.

In moments of distress, King turned to his faith in God. Martin Agronsky asked King on NBC's "Look Here" how he handled constant threats and pressure. King replied that he had undergone a religious experience which had helped him believe that he could give his life and will to God.<sup>41</sup> King understood that God had called him into civil rights work. When he moved to Dexter, he said he had done so with no intent of doing anything other than pastoring. Then the Montgomery bus boycott began and King was pulled into that. This led him into national leadership and to a position as the head of a Southern civil rights organization, the SCLC. His calling had changed. No longer was he called only to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, but now to the entire South. With this in mind, King would resign his pastorship at Dexter and take a position as co-pastor with his father in Atlanta.<sup>42</sup>

Although he believed that God guided his life, King's personal beliefs did not reflect traditional Protestant theology. This was not hidden from the world. *Christianity Today* said that King may have believed that men will sin, but he rejected the idea of original sin. The magazine also contended that King rejected the idea of the virgin

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Martin Agronsky for "Look Here," 27 October 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 292-299.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Draft, Resignation from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 29 November 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 328-329; SCLC, press release, "Dr. King Leaves Montgomery for Atlanta," 1 December 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 330-331.

birth.<sup>43</sup> This was not something that he kept quiet. At least one American wrote to J. Edgar Hoover complaining about King's Christianity and calling him a communist who could not be a Christian because he did not believe in the virgin birth.<sup>44</sup> King also rejected the traditional picture of hell. King believed that hell was merely a place without God, a lonely and frustrating place. It was not a pit of fire and brimstone.<sup>45</sup>

Nor did King always appreciate the emotionalism associated with the African American church, although he could preach a sermon in the style. As a college student, King had been reluctant to become a preacher, feeling that he could better shape the world if he chose another career path such as law. He would not choose the ministry until 1947 when the board of Ebenezer Baptist, his father's church in Atlanta, made him a licensed minister.<sup>46</sup> King would always be leery of emotional preaching which was not accompanied by lessons meant to improve life on earth. Donald Ferron, who often took copious notes of MIA meetings, wrote that King appeared to barely conceal his laughter when a local pastor opened a rally with an emotional prayer which involved both shouting and singing.<sup>47</sup> King later told ministers that they needed to learn more than whooping and hollering. They needed to use their safe position within the African

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<sup>43</sup> "The Life and Death of Martin Luther King," *Christianity Today*, 26 April 1968, vol. 12, 37-40.

<sup>44</sup> Newark, New Jersey, 31 January 1965, FBI, 100-106670-798.

<sup>45</sup> "What Happened to Hell," *Ebony*, January 1961.

<sup>46</sup> David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 37-38.

<sup>47</sup> Donald T. Ferron, Notes on MIA Mass Meeting at Hutchinson Street Baptist Church, 1 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 150-151.

American community to improve life.<sup>48</sup> This same criticism of overly emotional faith was evident in “A Knock at Midnight,” where King said that many churches had become all too caught up in providing entertainment for the congregation rather than any real help. Too many people he said had religion in their hands and feet but not in their hearts.<sup>49</sup>

Despite some of his beliefs which did not resemble those of the traditional African American Protestant church, King came across to Americans as a dedicated preacher. Ralph Abernathy wrote that out of the public eye King could be fun, joking and teasing to keep his friends laughing. However, as Abernathy noted, “Martin felt that his public appearances had to reflect the grim realities of the situation. America needed a Jeremiah not another African American comedian. So he became Jeremiah, and continued in that role until the end.”<sup>50</sup> King did not have to do much to create such an image. As a minister and the son of minister, it was a conclusion that others came to almost automatically. The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) published a comic book which illustrated the story of the bus boycott at Montgomery. The comic book traces King’s development from a young man who grew up in religious environment. As a child, King grew up in his father’s Baptist church and in a home where the *Bible* was the main book. His college education included involvement in religious groups and training that was meant to prepare him for his life as a preacher. Obeying the will of God, he

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<sup>48</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Some Things We Must Do,” 5 December 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 328-343.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Knock at Midnight,” 9 August 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (Grand Rapids: Harper and Row, 1989), 468.

returned to the South to take a church. He was soon caught up in the bus boycott but continued to preach love and goodwill toward all men.<sup>51</sup> FOR's image of King as the ever dedicated man of God was reflective of what many believed about King.

The African American church as an institution was extremely important in the lives of Southern African Americans, the group who was most impacted by the early stage of the civil rights movement. This perhaps more than anything else allowed the minister leaders to unite a diverse group of Southern African Americans under one banner. In this same way, Cesar Chavez found that he could use aspects of the Catholic faith to unite the farm workers. Since the majority of those he attempted to organize were Hispanic Catholics, he had a ready made way of reaching out to them, one which had also been used by King with African American Protestants.

The average farm worker in California in the 1960s could have been described as Hispanic, predominately of Mexican origin, and Catholic. Admittedly there were many other groups involved in farm labor, such as Filipinos, African Americans and some Okies, but no group had such a large percentage of their population in farm and rural labor. By the time Chavez began to organize his farm labor union, there were approximately 201,000 rural Hispanics, over fifty percent of which worked in agriculture, forestry, or fisheries.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story" (Nyack, NY: Fellowship of Reconciliation).

<sup>52</sup> Vernon M. Briggs, *Chicanos and Rural Poverty* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 25.

One event which gave hope to farm labor union advocates was the end of the *bracero* program in 1964. Prior to this, union organizers felt that strikes by farm laborers could and would be easily broken by simply importing more workers from Mexico. Chavez and union leaders like Huerta now felt they had a chance to bring the Mexican American workers together into a union. These potential members, regardless of their place of origin, usually shared the same faith. More than ninety percent of the Hispanics in the southwest were Catholic.<sup>53</sup> One method of uniting these workers could be through the church, or through the use of Catholic imagery.

Labor union organization and the controversies that surrounded them were nothing new to Catholics. As the largely Catholic Knights of Labor gained power in the 1800s, their success helped unions gain recognition from the church. Two popes, Leo XIII and Pius XI, supported worker organization. The attitudes of these men were generally upheld by their successors to the papacy.<sup>54</sup> However such approval was not apparent during the Texas pecan shellers' strike in the 1930s. Critical of the strikers, the church reminded the workers to remember Godly values in their work.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick H. McNamara, "Catholicism, Assimilation, and the Chicano Movement: Los Angeles as a Case Study," *Chicanos and Native Americans: The Territorial Minorities* eds. Rudolph O. de la Garza, Z. Anthony Kruszewski, and Tomas Arciniega (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 124.

<sup>54</sup> Mark Day, *Forty Acres: Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 59.

<sup>55</sup> Harold A. Shapiro, "The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio, Texas." *Southwest Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 32 (March, 1952), reprinted in *The Evolution of a People*, eds. Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmani, and Robert A. Calvert (Huntington, NY: Robert F. Krieger Publishing, 1977), 197.

Although they often supported unions, the churches were slow to encourage priests to become involved in labor movements.<sup>56</sup> It was only as the bracero workers began to come to the United States during WWII that this changed. Clergy assigned by various religious organizations to work with the Mexican population began to meet and exchanged ideas. Ministers focused on serving the migrant population, traveled around California with portable altars and attempted to teach the church's labor union beliefs.<sup>57</sup> Although genuinely concerned about social issues, some of the priest involved had no prior training in such activism. Some of them also limited their participation just to issues that had a local impact.<sup>58</sup> This church history led Chavez to believe that the Catholic Church might have a supportive philosophy concerning labor movements, but their support of specific groups would be hard to come by.<sup>59</sup>

As the farm labor union grew, it became obvious to religious observers that Protestant groups were deeply involved with Chavez and the cause. This forced the Catholic Church to look at what they were doing to help a movement whose members

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<sup>56</sup> Francis Downing, *Catholic Contributions to the American Labor Movement*, ed. Joseph N. Moody. *Church and Society: Catholic Social and Political Thought and Movements, 1789-1950* (1953), 855.

<sup>57</sup> Leo Grebler, Joan W. Moore, and Ralph C. Guzman, *The Mexican American People: The Nations Second Largest Minority* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 461-462.

<sup>58</sup> Emory S. Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1970), 64-65; Leo Grebler, Joan W. Moore, and Ralph C. Guzman. "The Urban Mexican-American Parish," *Introduction to Chicano Studies*, eds. Livie Isauro Duran and H. Russell Bernard (New York: Macmillan, Co., 1973), 253, 255, 260; John A. Wagner, "The Role of the Christian Church," *La Raza: Forgotten Americans*, ed. Julian Samora (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 42; Merle Wells, "Twentieth-Century Migrant Farm Labor," *Journal of the West*. (Apr. 1986).

<sup>59</sup> Day, 58.



were predominantly Catholic.<sup>60</sup> Catholic leaders subsequently decided that they too needed to be involved.

Mexican Americans had a long history of devotion to the Catholic Church which came from historical and traditional heritages. During the conquest of Mexico, many Catholic priests replaced the Indian religions with church substitutes. Often these new saints and holy days resembled the old Indian gods and ceremonies.<sup>61</sup> The church rapidly became a part of the new political arrangement of Mexico. In 1824 it became the official religion of the Mexican state.<sup>62</sup> Historian Roberto R. Bacalski-Martinez claimed that Catholicism was the “greatest single cultural force” for Mexican Americans.<sup>63</sup> By the time of the 1960s then, most Mexican Americans had been born into a world where they, their parents, and grand parents had been part of the Catholic Church. Very few would claim any other religion.<sup>64</sup>

Mexican American Catholicism would be unique. The Mexican religious heritage that Mexican Americans had grown up with was not a clear reflection of European Catholic traditions. After the Conquest, very few Catholic priests would be willing to

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<sup>60</sup> Harry Bernstein, “Clergy Samples Grapes of Wrath Amid Strike,” *LA Times*, 9 January 1966; “Victory in the Vineyards.”

<sup>61</sup> Irene I. Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 40; Jack D. Forbes, *Aztecas Del Norte: The Chicanos and Aztlan* (Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1973), 51; Wagner, 28.

<sup>62</sup> Julia Nava, *Viva La Raza!: Readings on Mexican American Culture* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1973), 41.

<sup>63</sup> Roberto R. Bacalski-Martinez “Aspects of Mexican American Cultural Heritage,” editor Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 19.

<sup>64</sup> Irene Blea, *Toward a Chicano Social Science* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 69; Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, 487.

travel to the new world to minister to the Indians, so Catholicism in Mexico developed in its own context.<sup>65</sup> The life styles of the congregants also played a role. Mexicans were heavily involved in migrant labor and so did not always attend church or the same church. Because of this, some European church practices could not be implemented in Mexico.<sup>66</sup> This allowed the church in Mexico to develop a brand of Catholicism which reflected the native ways and gods.<sup>67</sup> In particular, Mexicans adopted the worship of saints, often setting up altars and shrines in their homes dedicated to particular individuals. One saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe would become highly valued and revered in Mexico.<sup>68</sup>

The union would make great use of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who was known in Mexico for both religious and political reasons. A Mexican Mary, the Virgin of Guadalupe was highly similar to an Aztec goddess Tonantzin. The story of the Virgin says that she appeared first in 1521 to Juan Diego, an Indian of Mexico. Following her request, the Indians built a shrine to her in the same place where Tonantzin had been worshiped by the Aztecs. She would later be named the patron saint of New Spain and

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<sup>65</sup> Julian Samora and Patricia Vandell Simon, *A History of the Mexican American People* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, revised 1993), 225.

<sup>66</sup> Bogardus, 63-64.

<sup>67</sup> Blea, *Toward*, 69; June Macklin and Alvina Teniente de Costilla, "La Virgen de Guadalupe and the American Dream: The Melting Pot Bubbles on in Toledo Ohio," editors Stanley West and June Macklin, *The Chicano Experience* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 119; Samora and Simon, 224.

<sup>68</sup> Bacalski-Martinez, 21; Blea, *Toward*, 69; Guillermo Lux and Maurilio Vigil, "Return to Aztlan: The Chicano Rediscovered His Indian Past," editor Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 12; Macklin and Costilla, 122; Brett Williams, "Migrants on the Prairie: Untangling Everyday Life," *The Chicano Experience*, eds. Stanley West and June Macklin, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 102.

the Queen of Wisdom for the Americas.<sup>69</sup> Hispanics appreciated the Virgin because she was a Catholic figure of mixed blood that had appeared first to a poor Indian man. By appearing to him, one of the most oppressed of Mexico, she was gave him importance and status, telling him that he mattered. Mexicans continued to identify with her because it symbolized the hope of a better future.<sup>70</sup> Her imaged would be carried by Mexican revolutionaries in 1810 and 1910 as a call for those of the Catholic faith to rally behind the cause.<sup>71</sup> In adopting her image in the farm labor union cause, the movement was calling to those of Mexican Catholic heritage to support the union in various ways.<sup>72</sup>

Mexican Catholicism would be different in other ways as well. One particularly unique group were the *penitents*. The *penitents* were a religious group. They often served the community as a benevolent organization, fulfilling a function which the

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<sup>69</sup> David F. Gomez, *Somos Chicanos: Strangers in Our Own Land* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 161; Lux and Vigil, 8; Forbes, 51; Alberto Prago, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A History of Mexican-Americans* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1973), 68; Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 1970), 345; Eric R. Wolf, "The Virgin Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol." in Livie Isauro Duran and H. Russell Bernard, eds. *Introduction to Chicano Studies*. New York: Macmillan, Co., 1973. originally in *American Journal of Folklore*. Vol. 71 (1958), 247, 248, 250.

<sup>70</sup> Roberto S. Goizueta, "U. S. Hispanic Popular Catholicism as Theopoetics," in Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Fernando F. Segovia, editors, *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 280-286.

<sup>71</sup> Gomez, 161; Jose E. Limon, "La Llorona, The Third Legend of Greater Mexico: Cultural Symbols, Women, and the Political Unconscious," ed. Ignacio M. Garcia, "Renato Rosaldo Lecture Series Monograph." Vol. 2 Series 1984-85 (Tucson: University of Arizona, Spring 1986), 64, 66, 85; Lux and Vigil, 8; Luis Valdez, "The Tale of the Raza" eds. Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert, *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 55; Luis Valdez, "The Tale of the Raza," editors Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann and Robert A. Calvert, *The Evolution of a People* (Huntington, NY: Robert F. Krieger Publishing, 1977), 295; Wolf, 246.

<sup>72</sup> Pat Hoffman, *Ministry of the Dispossessed: Learning from the Farm Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: Wallace Press 1987), 36.

Church might have otherwise.<sup>73</sup> What they were better known for, however, were their practices of severe religious rituals, particularly during Lent. Members of this group were the ones who went on pilgrimages, and whipped or crucified themselves while commemorating the death of Christ.<sup>74</sup> When Mexican Catholics moved to California, they brought with them a memory of such particular heritages. And, just as the union would adopt the Virgin of Guadalupe, they would adopt some of this heritage as well, in the form of marches and crosses.

While Chavez and leaders of the farm labor movement would have to maintain their Catholic roots in order to promote the union to farm workers, they also decided to use religious appeals to those of other faiths as well. Some workers were not Catholic and thus might be turned off by only Catholic appeals. By mid-century, Mexican Americans were increasingly likely to join Protestant churches.<sup>75</sup> Others in the Mexican American community were leery of the power of the Catholic Church, whom they felt would push them to assimilate.<sup>76</sup> Once they decided to boycott grapes, the union needed

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<sup>73</sup> Bacalski-Martinez, 27; Warren A. Beck, "The Penitentes of New Mexico," eds. Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmani, and Robert A. Calvert. *The Evolution of a People* (Huntington, NY: Robert F. Krieger Publishing, 1977), 137, 138, 143; Jose Amaro Hernandez, *Mutual Aid for Survival: The Case of the Mexican American* (Malabar, FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Co., 1983), 16, 29; Samora and Simon, 226.

<sup>74</sup> Beck, 137-138; John H. Burma, *Spanish-Speaking Groups in the United States* (Duke University Press, 1954), 25; Steiner, *La Raza*, 321.

<sup>75</sup> Bogardus, 63; Samora and Simon, 240; George J Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993), 164-166; Steiner, *La Raza*, 350; Wagner, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Bogardus, 65; Elizabeth Martinez and Ed McCaughan, "Chicanas and Mexicanas Within a Transitional Working Class," editor Adelaida R. Del Castillo, *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History*. (Floricanto Press, 1990), 50; Jorge Lara-Braud, "The Status of Religion Among Mexican Americans," editor Margaret M. Mangold, *La Causa Chicana: The Movement for Justice* (New York: Family Service Association of America, 1971), 87, 88.

the cooperation of Protestant and Jewish consumers to succeed. Because of the mixed religious heritage of both Mexican Americans and the American public, the union had to appeal to a variety of faiths.

Chavez's use of Catholic imagery to build his cause does not mean he was not sincerely devout. He was devout and continued throughout the movement to practice his faith. Chavez regularly attended services at Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Catholic Church in Delano usually patronized by Mexican Americans farm workers, even though the church would not help the union by letting them use their recreation hall for union meetings.<sup>77</sup> Religious faith was part of Chavez's mindset. His religion did not dictate his behavior, but it did give him a world view which influenced what he did and how he acted.<sup>78</sup> Whatever he did, was done with "spiritual mission" in mind, claimed Cardinal Roger Mahoney, who had befriended Chavez during the movement.<sup>79</sup> It was natural then that Chavez would turn to his faith, a faith which he shared with many of the people he was asking to follow him, to promote the union.

## Critics

King and Chavez would face criticism for the religious tones of their movements. Because King's tactics often resulted in violence from opponents or in other disturbances, many felt that they were not the actions of a Christian. The critics would also use

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<sup>77</sup> Jean Maddern Pitrone, *Chavez: Man of the Migrants* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1971), 83.

<sup>78</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>79</sup> "Supporters Remember Chavez as a Man of Faith," *Bakersfield Californian*, 27 April 1994.

theological arguments to justify continued segregation and discrimination and to argue that King was Biblically wrong. Furthermore, those suspicious of King tended to believe accusations that he was a communist. This led to confusion, as they asked themselves how a Christian minister could also be a communist. The farm labor union would largely be criticized for involving ministers in the cause. The opposition felt that these closed-minded ministers were turning a labor dispute into a civil rights protest, and this they did not feel was fair. It was perhaps due to the example of the clergy in King's movement that Chavez's California critics were quick to make the association. It was also perhaps due to the attention paid to ministers in the civil rights movement that the anti-labor groups would be leery of their presence in Delano.

King was occasionally asked how as a minister and a Christian, he could justify using a nonviolent method based on disobedience to authority which brought on violence. A question from a reader sent to King's "Advice for Living" column confronted King with the Apostle Paul's statement to the church at Rome which advocated obeying authority. The reader wanted to know how, given what Paul had said, King could justify the passive resistance movement. King responded saying that scripture had to be taken in context. Christians at the time thought that the world would not be around long. Their focus instead was to be on the life soon to come, rather than in changing the world around them. The modern day mindset was dissimilar and therefore men had the right to change things on earth.<sup>80</sup> King also believed that ministers should be involved in politics. When challenged on this point, King responded that ministers couldn't just preach honesty

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<sup>80</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," October 1957. The verses the writer refers to are found in Romans 13:1-7.

without thinking about the economic conditions that might have led to dishonesty. Both the body and the soul were important.<sup>81</sup>

Some of King's critics were fellow clergymen. In 1963, King was put in jail during the demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. Separated from Ralph Abernathy during that time, he took the opportunity to create a draft of a response to a statement from eight Alabama clergy men who were critical of the disturbances caused in the town. King's reply became known as the *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*. The ministers had written a public letter to King on April 12<sup>th</sup>, which they told him that they realized the pace of progress had been slow. They said that they felt that racial issues could and would be settled in the courts. Meanwhile, they felt there was no need for outsiders to come in and lead demonstrations which were inciting hatred and violence in the community. African Americans of Birmingham should negotiate locally and work with the courts to improve the situation.<sup>82</sup> In response, King used more Biblical allusions and justifications.

King told the eight Alabama clergy men who had written him why he was in Birmingham. He was not an outsider as they had claimed; he had organizational ties to the city. Furthermore, his work was similar to that of those prophets in the *Bible* who, leaving their home towns took God's word to others, and like Paul that great missionary who responded to the call to take the gospel to other parts of the world. The ministers had also criticized the SCLC's methods of civil disobedience. King responded that those

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<sup>81</sup> Willie Mae Lee, Notes on MIA Mass Meeting at First Baptist Church, 30 January 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 113-114.

<sup>82</sup> Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Unwise and Untimely," pamphlet, SCLC, Box 27, Folder 22.

methods were nothing new. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had refused to obey the laws of the King, preferring the moral law of God. Similarly early Christians had faced death rather than to submit to the Roman Empire.<sup>83</sup>

King later said that the *Letter from Birmingham City Jail* had worked to bring in white moderate support in a way that nothing had done before. When King told white churches that their Christianity was lacking the works that should accompany it, many churches took the criticism to heart and passed it on within their organizations. This, he felt, more than anything else brought the movement support from white churches. This support was amply evident at Selma.<sup>84</sup>

Those opposed to the civil rights movement, like the eight Alabama clergy, recognized the importance of the ministers as community leaders and sometimes tried to destroy their unity. This happened as early as the Montgomery bus boycott. Three African American ministers who were not connected with the MIA were invited to the mayor's office for a conference. After the meeting, town officials announced that they had come to an agreement with some of the town's African Americans. The African American community was furious, even though one of the ministers denied knowing why he was called and denied having compromised on the issue. The crowd at an MIA mass

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<sup>83</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (Cambridge: Harper and Row, 1986), 289-302.

<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech to District 65 AFL-CIO, 16 September 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.



meeting following this announcement was furious with these ministers. King had to remind the crowd that nonviolence was the only way to defeat such strategies.<sup>85</sup>

Critics of the movement also tried to attack it through theology. Proponents of the Jim Crow system turned to the *Bible* to defend their cause. A North Carolinian wrote to J. Edgar Hoover predicting the end of the world unless Americans turned from their evil ways and rejected race mixing. This person offered Biblical proof of the rightness of a segregated society through Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and Jeremiah 4 which they said showed that God would pour out his wrath upon them.<sup>86</sup> The passage in Deuteronomy refers to God's command to Israel to force other nations out of their promised land, destroying them, not intermarrying with them, and destroying their gods and religious imagery. Jeremiah 4 refers to God bringing destruction upon those who have forgotten His ways.<sup>87</sup> Those who made such arguments truly believed that God had intended races to be separate in all aspects of life. Integration threatened this as to many it brought a promise of integrated churches, schools, neighborhoods and intermarriage.

King recognized the effectiveness of this tactic in an article he wrote for the *Socialist Call*. He admitted that "There is always the danger that religion and the *Bible* not properly interpreted can be used as forces to crystallize the status-quo."<sup>88</sup> In

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<sup>85</sup> Donald T. Ferron, Notes on MIA Executive Board Meeting, 23 January 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 101-104.

<sup>86</sup> North Carolina, 3 June 1965, 100-106670-1436.

<sup>87</sup> Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and Jeremiah 4 KJV.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "The New Negro of the South: Behind the Montgomery Story," June 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 280-286, first printed in *Socialist Call*, vol. 24 June 1956, 16-19.

attempting to defeat segregation and discrimination, African Americans also used the *Bible*. Since opponents and proponents of the movement alike used the *Bible* to justify segregation, it was natural that Americans had many questions about it. *Ebony*, in July 1962, attempted to assure African American readers that the *Bible* did not promote segregation. Paul had said to take your servant as your brother. He had said that there was neither Jew nor Greek. Old Testament warnings to avoid intermarriage had to do with tribal affiliations, and not racial ones. Considering this, they argued, segregationists' ideas that the mark on Cain and the curse on Noah's son were misinterpretations of the scripture.<sup>89</sup> King claimed that it was blasphemy to validate segregation with the *Bible*.<sup>90</sup> King personally received letters which asked about the Biblical justification for integration. Wilbert Johnson and two other air force sergeants stationed in Alaska wrote King to ask what the *Bible* had to say. King responded with two verses, Acts 17:26, and Galatians 3:28. Both of these are epistles written by the Apostle Paul.<sup>91</sup> The scripture in Galatians was the same referred to by *Ebony* where the Apostle Paul says that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>92</sup> Acts 17:26 reads "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth,

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<sup>89</sup> "What the Bible Really Says about Segregation," *Ebony*, July 1962. Scriptures referred to are Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11; Deut 7:1-5; Genesis 4:15; Genesis 9:22-27.

<sup>90</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 4 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 414-420.

<sup>91</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Wilbert J. Johnson, 24 September 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 378-379.

<sup>92</sup> Galatians 3:28 KJV

and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.”<sup>93</sup>

King’s belief and message to the young soldiers in Alaska was that God preferred no particular race. He recognized all man kind as one, regardless of their nationality. Thus, segregation and the accompanying discrimination were not Biblical and not of God. King and other African American ministers preached and taught that all men were brothers and children of God. To hurt one man was to hurt your brother and God’s child. Segregation was therefore wrong. In segregating your brother, you were denying the togetherness that God had intended humans to experience.<sup>94</sup>

Some people who were suspicious or critical of the movement took their questions not to King but to J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. Perhaps the seeds of the idea that ministers made good communists had been planted during Joseph McCarthy’s heyday. One of his staff members had said that one of the strongest groups advocating communism were certain Protestant clergy. Although Americans protested this statement, the seeds of doubt remained.<sup>95</sup> Hundreds of letters to Hoover came from ministers, largely those from Protestant congregations. Most of these are focused on King’s communism. The writers were often worried about disputes among congregants. One pastor from Illinois wrote to Hoover asking if King was a communist. A woman in his church was convinced that King was. The minister seemed to believe otherwise and wanted the FBI to confirm it. He believed that the woman would trust the word of the

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<sup>93</sup> Acts 17:26 KJV

<sup>94</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Advice for Living,” Oct 1957.

<sup>95</sup> Morone, 393.

FBI and hoped to receive an answer from them as this woman was causing trouble in the congregation.<sup>96</sup> Another writer, identifying himself as the vice chairman of the North Georgia Conference Board of Social Concerns of the Methodist Church wrote to see if the FBI could tell him if King was a communist.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, a minister who had been involved in the Selma March wrote to ask about King's communist connections. This minister had been corresponding with ministers from the South and wanted to know the truth for himself.<sup>98</sup>

Sometimes letters came from critics who were looking for a way to prevent King from speaking at church events or from being presented a certain way in church literature. When King was to speak before the National Luther League, a youth organization for Lutherans, interested individuals wrote to Hoover and asked if King was a communist and whether they or their grandchildren should attend.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, when the Presbyterian General Sessions were held in Montreat, North Carolina in 1965, Hoover received several letters from concerned individuals wishing to know if King, who was scheduled to speak, was a communist. One author promised that proof of communist affiliations would lead to a withdrawal of the invitation to speak.<sup>100</sup> A concerned Methodist from North Carolina wrote Hoover seeking proof that King was a rabble

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<sup>96</sup> Illinois, 25 September 1964, FBI, 100-106670-470.

<sup>97</sup> Forest Park, Georgia, 2 February 1965, FBI, 100-106670-816.

<sup>98</sup> New York, New York, 29 April 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1313.

<sup>99</sup> Miami, Florida, 15 February 1961, 100-106670-9; New York, June 1961, FBI, 100-106670-14.

<sup>100</sup> Richmond, Virginia, 11 July 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1576; Monroe, Louisiana, 8 July 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1584; Sanford, North Carolina, FBI, 100-106670-1519.

rouser. If Hoover would provide him with such evidence, he hoped to convince the Department of Literature of the Methodist Church not to call King a “great Negro leader” in the children’s lessons.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, a Spokane, Washington, Lutheran wrote to express concern that pro-King statements had been included in their literature had caused some controversy. The author feared that if King was a communist, this literature could reflect badly upon the Lutheran church.<sup>102</sup>

Many of the letters to Hoover came from members of churches who wanted to settle church debates about King or to refute their ministers’ comments. One correspondent wrote to Hoover from Hutchinson, Kansas, wanting a copy of Hoover’s comments calling King a liar. He intended to take such a document to the pastor of the First Baptist Church who was apparently a fan of King.<sup>103</sup> Others expressed concern about contributing money through their churches for the cause. A wife from Fremont, California, wrote Hoover in April 1965 explaining to him and she and her husband had been arguing about her involvement in the civil rights cause to which she had given money. Her husband wanted her to stop such involvement because he felt it was supporting a communist cause. She wanted Hoover to give her a definitive word on the matter.<sup>104</sup> Another worried Californian told the FBI Director that their church had been

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<sup>101</sup> Asheboro, North Carolina, 3 November 1965, FBI, 100-106670-2036.

<sup>102</sup> Spokane, Washington, 22 November 1965, FBI, 100-106670-275.

<sup>103</sup> Hutchinson, Kansas, 26 April 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1297.

<sup>104</sup> Fremont, California, 7 April 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1213.

asked to fast and give the cost of the meal to the civil rights marchers. This writer was very concerned that the church was being heavily influenced by leftists.<sup>105</sup>

Such letters reflect Christian America's concerns about the movement. They demonstrate that church goers in American were interested in fighting communism in the institution dearest to them, the church. They also show that churches were increasingly interested in religious activism rather than mere theology. This of course disturbed many of the congregants, especially those who were certain that King was a dangerous figure. To settle church disputes they turned to the government institution they trusted the most, the FBI. The FBI, of course, could not give them the answers that they sought, so they continued to have questions about the movement. Their fears could only be relieved if King and the SCLC avoided the appearance of communist affiliations, continued to adhere to a system of nonviolence, and if church organizations and ministers continued to support the cause.

Whereas King was often personally attacked, labor union critics of the Delano movement focused their religious criticism on the presence of ministers from outside of the community. Louis Shepard, Delano's City Manager, prepared a statement in May 1966 which defended the city and its role in the labor dispute. Shepard was somewhat critical of the ministers involved in the strike. He mentioned the California Migrant Ministry (CMM) as an organization involved in assisting the union much like CORE would assist local civil rights organizations. Shepard disliked the "injecting the civil rights issue into the local labor dispute," through charges of racism. Local ministers,

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<sup>105</sup> Santa Monica, California, 23 March 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1078.

ministers from Delano who knew the community, were having to band together to address charges that Delano was a racist community. He believed that outside ministers, particularly Catholic clergy, who were serving as impartial observers were not impartial but had predetermined their stand on the issue before even visiting the town.<sup>106</sup> Various citizens and farming groups in the Delano area also complained about the role of clergy. The South Central Farmers Committee recalled the help given to the union in promoting the boycott and claimed that it was students and clergy who promoted the grape boycott. They implied that these groups went to extremes, even wearing farm worker costumes.<sup>107</sup> Citizens for Facts, a citizens group from Delano, wrote and published anti-Chavez material. In one such piece, the group explained that they had been founded by a group of concerned women who wanted to make sure that the union's War on Poverty grant was not abused and used for union purposes. Besides their complaints about the media and the various radicals who joined the cause, they criticized the ministers who voiced their opinions in the news and who begged their congregations for food and money for the poor.<sup>108</sup> When the Teamsters entered a contest with Chavez's National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) and the Agricultural Workers Committee (AWOC) to win the union vote in 1966, they acknowledged the participation of ministers in their anti-union leaflets. In one leaflet called "The Hour is Here," the Teamsters implored the farm workers to join their labor union, the world's largest, saying that "It is a union of God-

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<sup>106</sup> Louis Shepard, "The City's Role in a Labor Dispute – the Delano Situation," 18 May 1966, RHC, Box 5, Folder 24, 4, 5, 11.

<sup>107</sup> South Central Farmers Committee, untitled document, section titled "Students and the Clergy: Searching for Relevance," BBP, Box 7, Folder 17.

<sup>108</sup> Citizens for Facts from Delano, "The Truth," 1 July 1966. RHC, Box 4, Folder 20.

loving people. A people who believe 'Give unto Cesar that which is Cesars's and unto the Lord what is the Lord's. Not a union of people who would use their religion to their selfish ends."<sup>109</sup> The Teamsters union would make its own religious appeal, telling the workers that "The Teamsters Union has always considered the worker as an individual first, created under Gods image and not to be regarded as cattle or equipment to be rented out."<sup>110</sup>

### **Organizational Involvement**

Although King's group was predominately a Protestant one and Chavez's Catholic, both men desired the involvement of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in their cause. Perhaps, given the awareness of religious unity at the time, this was a natural outgrowth of those feelings. But, both organizations had sub-groups within the population that they were trying to reach who were not of the majority faith. Also, both needed the wider support and publicity that would come with the involvement of religious groups such as the National Council of Churches. The NCC would have many ties to King's organization. One of its groups, the California Migrant Ministry (CMM) would give Chavez and the farm labor union substantial help. Catholics would become involved in both organizations after the Protestant example pressured them to do so. Both the SCLC and the United Farm Workers (UFW) would reach out the Jewish groups, knowing that Jewish support would give added power to their arguments and boycotts.

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<sup>109</sup> Teamsters, "The Hour is Here," c. 1966, NFWA, Series III, Box 14, Folder 2.

<sup>110</sup> Teamsters, "Dear Friends," c. 1966, NFWA, Series III, Box 14, Folder 3.



As a result, King often portrayed the movement as an interfaith one. Many of his speeches included references to Protestants, Jews and Catholics. Perhaps the most famous of these references came in the speech given at the March on Washington, commonly known as the “I Have a Dream” speech. King’s rousing and patriotic ending called for freedom to ring so that the day would come “when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!’” King often used similar phrasing in his speeches in an attempt to appeal to a variety of faiths.<sup>111</sup>

There was recognition in the African American community that they had many religious backgrounds. *Ebony* magazine, in December 1957, wrote that there were 550,000 African American Catholics, 8 million African American Protestants, and 7 million who claimed Christianity but not a particular church.<sup>112</sup>

*Ebony* magazine occasionally promoted African American Catholics, approximately two-thirds of which were in the South.<sup>113</sup> In November 1954, an article appeared describing the first African American Catholic Bishop, James Augustine Healy who became a bishop in 1875.<sup>114</sup> A month later, *Ebony* reporters followed an African

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<sup>111</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Text of Speech Delivered at Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC, (“I Have a Dream”), 28 August 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B. Similar phrasing was often a part of King’s speeches and can be found in many of them, including, Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech Made in Savannah, 1 January 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B.

<sup>112</sup> “The Catholic Church and the Negro,” *Ebony*, December 1957.

<sup>113</sup> “The Catholic Church and the Negro,” *Ebony*, December 1957.

<sup>114</sup> “First Negro Catholic Bishop,” *Ebony*, November 1954.

American woman named Sylvia Clark who was joining an all African American order of nuns.<sup>115</sup> Of course the Catholic Church made its own efforts to reach out. The Pope granted sainthood to 22 African Martyrs in 1964, something that African Americans world-wide noticed.<sup>116</sup>

Catholics also began to reach out to the movement directly. The Bishop of Martinique wrote to King praising the African Americans of Montgomery for their Biblical strategy and reminding them that Pius XII was similarly sympathetic.<sup>117</sup>

Catholics began to appear at civil rights events such as local protests and the March on Washington. Martin Ahmann, the executive director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice appeared on television with March on Washington leaders in August of 1963. He mentioned the appearance of several Catholic leaders such as Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle and said that it was indicative of the rising Catholic commitment to the cause. This commitment had increased dramatically only in the couple of months preceding the march. Ahmann thought this was due in part to the abilities of the African American leaders in the movement and in part to the Protestants and Jews who had also been involved.<sup>118</sup> In other words, Catholics would be slower than other religious groups to be interested in joining the cause. Only as other religious

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<sup>115</sup> "How to Become a Nun," *Ebony*, December 1954.

<sup>116</sup> Era Bell Thompson, "Pope Confers Sainthood on 22 African Martyrs," *Ebony* January 1965.

<sup>117</sup> Henri Varin de la Bruneliere to Martin Luther King, Jr., 11 May 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol III, 254-255.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Jay Richard Kennedy, "March on Washington ... Report by the Leaders," 28 August 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

groups became active would Catholics feel free to become similarly involved. This pattern would repeat itself in California during the rise of the farm worker's movement.

Eventually, Pope Paul VI agreed to meet with King during a visit to Europe. King wanted to brief the Pope on American racial issues and to encourage him to involve the church in integration efforts. King was particularly interested in how the church could influence Northern urban areas.<sup>119</sup> The FBI apparently worried about such contact. They worried that the resulting publicity would make King a shoo-in for the Nobel Peace Prize. They decided to brief Vatican officials about the potential embarrassment to the Pope should he meet with King, whom they considered a subversive. The Pope decided to ignore such advice and agreed to meet with King anyway. After his meeting with Pope Paul VI, King announced that he believed that the Catholic Church saw segregation as morally wrong. A handwritten note signed H. (Hoover) on a newspaper clipping recording the event kept in FBI files expressed astonishment that "the Pope gave an audience to such a degenerate."<sup>120</sup>

King had good reasons for maintaining contact with the Catholic Church. Its large numbers of adherents could contribute monetarily and politically to the cause. If priests were willing to join the lines of marchers at protest events, it could gain the movement valuable publicity. Once King began to think about moving North, the church

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<sup>119</sup> "Martin Luther King to Meet With Pope Paul," press release, 16 September 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6.

<sup>120</sup> F. J. Baumgardener to W. C. Sullivan, 31 August 1964, FBI, 100-106670-450; W. C. Sullivan to F. J. Baumgardener, 17 September 1964, FBI, 100-106670-479; Legat, Rome, to J. Edgar Hoover, 29 September 1964, FBI, 100-106670-469; Newspaper Clipping with handwritten note, FBI, 100-106670-461.

would be very important. The cooperation of the Catholic Church in the North could make the SCLC's efforts in urban areas much easier.

African Americans recognized the need of attracting white churches to the cause.

*Ebony's* editors wrote in 1963,

So because the white church is afraid to speak out, black churches are bombed and burned. Because the white church is silent, black ministers are jailed and beaten. Because white Christian leaders would rather be popular with their congregations than true to the principles of Jesus Christ, they stand by while the Cross, the sacred symbol of death and resurrection, becomes a fiery-torch of hate in the hands of white-hooded cowards who dance in the glow of its flame; while mothers heap obscenities and fathers hurl profanities upon the heads of those whose skins God chose to make black.<sup>121</sup>

One of the largest white religious groups to help the civil rights movement was the National Council of Churches. They were particularly helpful during the Mississippi Summer. The NCC would also become heavily involved in with the farm labor movement.

The National Council of Churches was perhaps the religious group most concerned with the church's role in society in the 1950s and 60s. The NCC was an umbrella organization which eventually included over thirty Protestant and Orthodox denominations such as the American and National Baptists, the Lutheran Church and the Methodists. They established within their own ranks a Department of Racial and Cultural Relations. The NCC set out to examine not only the world around them, but also their own institutions. From this came several programs. In the early 1960s, they attempted to encourage member churches to adopt fair employment policies. Such discrimination they

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<sup>121</sup> "The Color of God," *Ebony*, January 1963, vol. 18, 82.

believed was contrary to the tenants of Christianity and churches had a need to examine their attitudes and practices in the area.<sup>122</sup> The NCC was also concerned about the role religion could play in racial issues. They set up conferences and committees to discuss such issues. In June of 1962, the NCC's Executive Director, J. Oscar Lee, wrote to King, saying that both the NCC and Rabbi Phil Hiatt from the Synagogue Council of America wished for King to serve on the steering committee of a National Conference on Religion and Race. They also asked that the SCLC to sign on as conference participants.<sup>123</sup>

The NCC believed that a three part crisis existed in American society. The first part of this belief was that the civil rights movement was a challenge to democracy. The second belief was that the religious community had a duty to respect their neighbors. The third belief was that there was a need for the church to do as Christ would have them to do, to be obedient unto Him. Recognizing that Christ died for all men and that all men are brothers, the NCC moved to respond to this crisis in four ways. First they began plans for an interfaith committee involving not only Protestant and Orthodox groups, but also Jewish and Catholic ones. Second, they asked every member of the NCC to cleanse their churches of discrimination. The third action was to encourage corporate witness. For instance, the General Board should become involved in negotiations and direct action. They should unite with Catholics and Jews to come before a congressional committee and testify for civil rights legislation. Religious leaders of all faiths would be

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<sup>122</sup> National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, "Suggestions for Action by Churches Related to Implementation of Fair Employment Policies in Churches and Church-related Insitutions," 24 May 1962, MLK, Box 17, Folder 29.

<sup>123</sup> J. Oscar Lee, to Martin Luther King, Jr., 22 June 1962, MLK, Box 17, Folder 29.

called by the NCC to meet in Washington to demonstrate their unity and the seriousness of the civil rights problem. King would later be asked to give a sermon at such an assembly concerning the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, but would be unable to commit to doing so, as the SCLC was planning its own action for the expected filibuster. The fourth action was to establish a Commission on Religion and Race. King later agreed to serve on this commission.<sup>124</sup> This commission was to mobilize church resources to further the civil rights movement and to cleanse the church of discrimination.<sup>125</sup>

One of the more public events that the NCC's Commission on Religion and Race was involved in was the 1963 March on Washington. Eugene Blake, the vice-chairman of the commission appeared with march leaders on a Metropolitan Broadcasting Television show following the march. Blake explained the role of churches, particularly white churches in the movement. Blake told host Jay Richard Kennedy that for years the churches had said the right thing, but that it was only in 1963 that most churches began to do the right thing. It was only then that many of them became involved through direct action. This had been made possible through the younger generation of saints who were interested in joining the protests and through inter-faith conversations with Catholics and Jews which had not happened before. Blake called upon Americans to meet in inter-religious groups and to organize to push for civil rights legislation.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> R. H. Edwin Espy to Martin Luther King, Jr., 20 June 1963, MLK, Box 17, Folder 31.

<sup>125</sup> National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, "A Report of the President's Temporary Committee of Six on Race," 7 June 1963, MLK, Box 17, Folder 31; Eugene Carson Blake and Robert W. Spike to Martin Luther King Jr., 19 March 1964, MLK, Box 17, Folder 33; Martin Luther King, Jr., to Robert W. Spike, 2 April 1964, MLK, Box 17, Folder 33.

<sup>126</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Jay Richard Kennedy, "March on Washington ... Report by the Leaders," 28 August 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

By the mid-1960s, the NCC was proud of its role in the civil rights movement. In a newsletter sent out from the Office of Finance, the NCC reviewed their 1963 endeavors for their members. In their work in the United States, the NCC was very proud of advances made in outreach to various racial groups. They had sent workers to urban areas to work with Native Americans. They had unified the various faiths in the country and helped them to take a stand on the country's racial problems. The NCC had also expanded their Migrant Ministry, forcing the state and local councils to be more active.<sup>127</sup> This increased local interest in the migrant community would play a role in the CMM's involvement with the farm labor movement. King acknowledged the NCC's contribution to the cause. A little more than a month before the March on Washington, King appeared on "Press Conference, USA." There he said that Protestants, through the NCC, had issued a statement encouraging members to participate in direct action. Moreover, this had led to a similar movement in the Catholic Church and in the Jewish organizations. This gave him confidence that the Church was now taking the stand that it should on the civil rights issue.<sup>128</sup>

In 1964, the NCC organized a demonstration in favor of the passage of the civil rights bill. Some 6500 Christians and Jews met at Georgetown University on April 28<sup>th</sup> to demonstrate their support of this legislation. The NCC saw this as an effort of the churches to make themselves heard. Beginning on April 29<sup>th</sup>, the organizers began a

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<sup>127</sup> National Council of Churches, "1963 Developments of the National Council Program," *Newsworthy*, March 1964, MLK, Box 17, Folder 32.

<sup>128</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., interview on "Press Conference, USA," 5 July 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

series of 43 religious services dedicated to promoting the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Held almost continually throughout the city, they ended only when the vote for cloture was taken some three weeks later. From there, the clergy moved on to working in their local areas to ensure that the legislation which passed was enforced locally. That summer the NCC embraced another civil rights project: the Mississippi Summer Project. The NCC's Commission helped organize and administer training sessions in Ohio for the students headed to Mississippi. They sent chaplains to live with the students in Mississippi and to provide counseling and mediation services. The Commission organized groups of lawyers to advise and defend the students. They also sent ministers to work in a couple of locations as voting registrars. They were proud that their work demonstrated that the church was in the battle with the students.<sup>129</sup>

One of the most well-known white ministers involved in the cause was a Southerner, evangelist Billy Graham, a man whose study of the *Bible* and understanding of international events had led him to believe that segregation in America needed to end. Graham, who had began his rise to fame by preaching youth revivals in the late 1940s, turned to old style revival evangelism in the 1950s, albeit with several modern twists. He was an evangelical preacher, but a new style one. His words were not harsh, and he tended to be willing to overlook differences between his faith and others in ways that evangelicals of the past would not have. Graham was also not above mixing politics with religion, and did so in ways ranging from encouraging President Harry Truman to go beyond mere containment of the communists in Korea to using the Cold War fears in his

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<sup>129</sup> National Council of Churches, "The Commission on Religion and Race Reports," vol 1, no. 1, MLK, Box 17, Folder 33.



sermons.<sup>130</sup> In September 1957, Graham told *Ebony* that American needed a revival that would cause them to repent of discrimination. He insisted that all of his revivals be integrated completely. African Americans could sit anywhere they wanted and serve as ushers. This was shocking to many in the South.<sup>131</sup> Graham and King generally appreciated each other, but did not always appreciate each other's strategies. One of Graham's crusades was held at Madison Square Garden in 1957. He invited King to sit on the platform and deliver an opening prayer. King did so and later wrote to Graham, thanking him for the opportunity and praising Graham for his racial views. King wrote that Graham as a Southern white man could do more about civil rights than most people.<sup>132</sup>

Almost a year later, King would not be as proud of Graham's actions. African American ministers in San Antonio, Texas, had expressed concern to King that Graham was going to be introduced at a religious rally by segregationist Governor Daniel Price. They asked several ministers and public figures to send telegrams to Graham expressing concern. They hoped that in the very least, Graham's team would take more care in selecting with who Graham appeared. These ministers apparently felt that segregationists might use Billy Graham's appearance with the Governor to claim that this well known ministers agreed with segregation.<sup>133</sup> King apparently agreed. Hoping that Graham

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<sup>130</sup> Ellwood, 160, 198-199; Morone, 384.

<sup>131</sup> "No Color Line in Heaven," *Ebony*, September 1957.

<sup>132</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Billy Graham, 31 August 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 264-266.

<sup>133</sup> C. William Black, Jr., to Martin Luther King, Jr., 29 July 1958, SCLC, Box 32, Folder 14.

could avoid such an introduction, King suggested that Graham at least make a clear stand against segregation.<sup>134</sup> Graham did not personally respond to King. Instead, his associate Grady Wilson wrote that Graham did not involve himself in politics. Furthermore, the invitation to the governor had been sent by local ministers, the same ministers that were hosting Graham and his crusade team. Wilson told King that the Graham team loved the governor, even if they thought his position was wrong. Wilson suggested that King, a Christian and a minister, should do likewise.<sup>135</sup> King apparently understood Graham's position as a religious leader. When asked about Graham during an appearance on "Front Page Challenge," a Canadian TV show, King said that Graham insisted that his audiences be integrated. His response lacked the criticism evident in his 1958 letter.<sup>136</sup>

Graham was typical of many white ministers of his time. He might tentatively support the movement. But, it was not his battle to fight. He would take a stand against segregation. But he was not going to do so in a manner that would jeopardize his ministry and the work that he felt he was called to do. Graham had an obligation to minister to everyone, African American and white. To pick sides in such an obvious might potentially isolate thousands of Americans that Graham was trying to reach with the gospel.

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<sup>134</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Billy Graham, 23 July 1958, SCLC, Box 32, Folder, 14, also in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 457-458.

<sup>135</sup> Grady Wilson, to Martin Luther King, Jr., 28 July 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 458.

<sup>136</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on "Front Page Challenge," 28 April, 1959. *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 191-194.

King and the civil rights movement had another faith in mind, one that was not Catholic or Protestant. The African American community recognized that African Americans had a connection with Judaism. In the late 1950s, *Ebony* reported that there were more than 100,000 African American Jews in the United States. These African American Jews didn't exactly fit within any of the three branches of Judaism, however many of them kept kosher.<sup>137</sup> But the connection to Judaism went beyond a few African American adherents.

Many African Americans believed that they and the Jews shared the same history of persecution. Religious analogies worked to show this. Jews had escaped the slavery of Egypt and wandered in the wilderness until they finally reached the Promised Land. King often compared African Americans to Israel and segregation or discrimination to their personal Egypt. God, King said, wanted men to live as brothers. Therefore He would bring them out of their Egypt to allow them to do so.<sup>138</sup> King saw the Exodus story as the ultimate allegory of good triumphing over evil. Egypt represented evil abuse and oppression. The Israelites represented faith in God. The struggle to be free was a struggle for freedom. It was not an easy struggle, as Pharaoh did not give the Israelites their freedom quickly. But eventually the Israelites had won, and after crossing the sea they looked back to see the bodies of Pharaoh's men dead lying on the shore. Good had

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<sup>137</sup> "American's Black Jews," *Ebony*, May 1957.

<sup>138</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," 17 May 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 256-262; Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, 14 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 424-433.

triumphed. So too would African Americans triumph over the Pharaohs of their time.<sup>139</sup> Coretta Scott King's Freedom Concerts used similar comparisons. She compared the opposition of the Freedom movement to Pharaohs and the leaders of the movement to God's servants who told the Pharaohs like Orval Faubus, Ross Barnett, George Wallace, and Bull Connor to let them go.<sup>140</sup>

King believed that both groups had a common heritage not just in a Biblical sense but also in America. Peter Stuyvesant had tried to rid New Amsterdam of Jewish refugees from Portugal in 1654, but they stayed and became a valued part of the society anyway. This, King said, was comparable to the Little Rock Nine who were determined to integrate Central High School at any cost. These histories had overlapped in WWII when African Americans, seeing how Hitler treated Jews, supported his defeat, not wanting themselves to become similar victims.<sup>141</sup>

Jews often tied their civil rights experiences into the public memory of WWII. Several rabbis were arrested in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1964. From jail, these men wrote an open letter explaining why they were involved in the civil rights movement in St. Augustine. They wrote that they were there to fight injustice and to help heal America. The rabbis went to St. Augustine at King's request. They went as penitence for the times they should have acted and had not. They went as "Jews who remember the

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<sup>139</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Sunday With Martin Luther King," radio show, 10 April 1966, MLK Speeches, III, Box 10.

<sup>140</sup> Coretta Scott King, "The Story of the Freedom Movement in Narration, Song and Poetry, Montgomery to Montgomery," Freedom Concert transcript, MLK, Box 10, Folder 38.

<sup>141</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress, 14 May 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 406-410.

millions of faceless people who stood quietly, watching the smoke rise from Hitler's crematoria. We came because we know that, second only to silence, the greatest danger to man is loss of faith in man's capacity to act." The rabbis were upset to see community members who might have supported the cause but who refused to act.<sup>142</sup>

There was an expectation that Jews who had experienced the desert crossing, and who had been persecuted during WWII, should understand the need to support the civil rights movement. King said that if Germans had understood and practiced nonviolence in Germany during Hitler's time, then the Jews might have lived. If those of the Christian faiths had voluntarily worn the yellow star and had worked along side of the Jews on the streets, then the Nazis might have faced mass resistance. King was particularly proud that the American Jewish Congress in the 1960s had not taken the same route that Christians had during WWII. The American Jews believed African American oppression was something that all Americans regardless of race, religion, or geography had to respond to.<sup>143</sup> Those beliefs were founded in their religious heritage. When he received the Judaism and World Peace Award from the Synagogue Council of America, King told his audience that the Hebrew prophets such as Amos, Micah and Isaiah were an inspiration for everyone. He said that the modern world needed those prophets who had taught that one must speak up fearlessly against injustice, even at great personal cost.

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<sup>142</sup> Eugene Borowitz, et al. "Why We Went: A Joint Letter from the Rabbis Arrested in St. Augustine," 19 June 1964, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 17.

<sup>143</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to The American Jewish Congress, 20 May 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8.

They were to be an example to modern day men who were to carry God's promises to the world.<sup>144</sup>

Rabbis of the faith agreed. Jews, argued Rabbi Richard Hertz, should follow their faith and reach out to their African American neighbors. Those who profited from the African American community should give back to it by supporting causes and hiring African American workers. If Jews were not active in the civil rights movement, then they would be guilty of behaving like the non-Nazis in Germany during WWII.

Christians were examining themselves and making their faith relevant. Jews should do the same.<sup>145</sup> In an article for the *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, James Wax wrote that Southern attitudes toward segregation were similar to the attitudes of the Nazis toward the Jews. Unfortunately Wax said, many Southern born Jews held segregationists views, either because they had grown up with similar attitudes or because they were afraid of what would happen to them if African Americans should gain some rights. Wax believed that Jews needed to be taught that prejudice was wrong and to be asked to remember that six million of them had died because of such prejudices.<sup>146</sup>

Rabbi Joachim Prinz, President of the American Jewish Congress, believed that the 1963 March on Washington was an indication that Jews had finally begun to act upon

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<sup>144</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Synagogue Council of America, 5 December 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

<sup>145</sup> Richard C. Hertz, "Rising-Tide of Negro-Jewish Tensions," *Ebony*, December 1964.

<sup>146</sup> James A. Wax, "Attitude of the Hews in the South Toward Integration," *CCAR Journal*, no. 26 June 1959, MLK, Box 132, Folder 25.

their faith and to do as they had been taught. It was faith beyond the synagogue door.<sup>147</sup> Prinz had earlier asked King to join in calling for President Eisenhower to organize an interracial meeting, one that would define democratic principles for Americans.<sup>148</sup> King had already made such a request of the President. Just as Prinz had, King would use the Atlanta bombing of a Jewish church as the reason.

Church bombings were one of the current events that seemed to illustrate a Jewish-African American connection. When the churches in Montgomery were bombed in 1958, well after the bus boycott was over, King compared it to the Jewish situation. Jewish synagogues were often bombed and had been in that area. King believed that such racial and religious intolerance both came from hate. One might start out hating African Americans and end up hating whites.<sup>149</sup> The hate directed toward Jews in the synagogue bombs was then the same one directed toward African Americans in Southern life. King would publicly advocate investigations into the bombings of synagogues. When bombers targeted a Jewish congregation in Atlanta, King sent a telegram to Dwight Eisenhower complimenting him for his promotion of an FBI investigation into a situation which could rapidly descend into chaos. SCLC leaders knew and understood what such

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<sup>147</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Jay Richard Kennedy, "March on Washington ... Report by the Leaders," 28 August 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4B.

<sup>148</sup> Joachim Prinz to Martin Luther King, Jr., 28 October 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 517-518.

<sup>149</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "Advice for Living," December 1958.

bombings were like, and they felt that the president should call a conference of African American and white leaders to discuss interracial issues.<sup>150</sup>

King and the SCLC first built ties to Protestants and Jews and then began to reach out to the Catholics. Chavez already had the support of one large Protestant organization, the NCC's CMM. This had been established through friendships and personal connections well before the grape strike began. What Chavez needed was the support of the Catholic Church. As the strike commenced, he saw the importance of increasing the public support given to the strike by the Catholic Church.

The farm labor movement wanted Americans to see that the Catholic Church supported them. This was made clear many times throughout Chavez's speeches and publications. Chavez wrote in the *Plan of Delano* which justified the march to Sacramento that "we seek, and have, the support of the Church in what we do." Similarly Chavez told readers of *Playboy* magazine, that the movement needed to command institutions like the Church and force them to be involved in the grape strike.<sup>151</sup> In a 1968 speech, Chavez told supporters that the Delano movement had brought the Church against the growers. Chavez said that many times in the past the growers had worked with the church. This had set up a situation where the elite had become used to the support of the church and wanted to keep it. They did not want the farm labor movement

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<sup>150</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to Dwight D. Eisenhower, telegram, 13 October 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 509.

<sup>151</sup> Cesar Chavez, "Sharing the Wealth," *Playboy*, January. 1970.



to have their own priests, as this would make them too powerful.<sup>152</sup> If the church supported the movement, the Mexican American population would follow.

The biggest indicator to the American public that the church supported the cause was the presence of clergy. Since Americans tended to believe that clerics represented their denomination's view, the presence of a minister would convince them that the organization was behind him whether or not it was true. Catholic clergy had been involved with farm laborers in California for sometime before the movement thanks to the *Bracero* priest, Thomas McCullough. McCullough helped to organize a group which became part of the AFL-CIO's Agriculture Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) in 1959. He later served as an advisor to the AWOC.<sup>153</sup> Father Donald McDonnell, another priest, taught Chavez the Catholic views on labor and organization.<sup>154</sup> The Church was not thrilled with McCullough's involvement and transferred him. His legacy remained however, as his work, combined with the efforts of Father Donald McDonnell, established the roots of the San Joaquin Valley's farm labor movement.<sup>155</sup>

Catholic priests would serve not only to help build the movement, but also to mediate between the growers and the workers. At this time, Catholics in the United States adored their priests, took pride in what individual congregations could supply their

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<sup>152</sup> Cesar Chavez, "The Mexican-American and the Church." Speech, reprinted in *Voices, Readings from El Grito: A Journal in Contemporary American Thought, 1967-1973*, ed. Ignacio Romano-V (Quinto Sol, 1973).

<sup>153</sup> Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 92-94.

<sup>154</sup> Day, 18; Hoffman, 25; Meister and Loftis, 113.

<sup>155</sup> Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall ye Reap* (New York: Crowell, 1970), 97; Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, 463.

priests with, and celebrated their birthdays and ordinations.<sup>156</sup> This meant that the presence and approval of a well known Catholic cleric could bring lay Catholics in to support the cause. In 1970, as the grape boycott concluded, the *Fresno Bee* printed a photograph of Bishop Joseph Donnelly of Hartford, Connecticut looking over a union contract. The Bishop stands between grower John Giumarra, Sr., and Cesar Chavez.<sup>157</sup> The Bishop looks approvingly as the two men prepare to sign the contract that would end the grape strike. The Bishop's appearance legitimized not only this contract, but also the existence of the union in the eyes of many who were not farm workers but who were religious. The picture showed the world that the movement had the blessing of the Church.

The Catholic Church embraced its role as a mediator. In 1968, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops published a pamphlet titled "Statement on Farm Labor." In this document, the bishops, seeing their role as a "servant of justice," stated that they wanted to help bring together the growers and the workers. Admiring the fact that the workers were willing to take action to improve their lots in life, the Church also admitted that growers had their own problems associated with instability. They called for Congress to legislate the problem and to include the farm workers in the NLRA.<sup>158</sup> The following year, the Conference sent a telegram to Al Caplan, the spokesman for the Table Grape Growers Committee explaining that they had talked to the workers who were

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<sup>156</sup> Ellwood, 122.

<sup>157</sup> Meister and Loftis, between 84 and 85.

<sup>158</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Statement on Farm Labor," 13 November 1968, pamphlet, TGNC, Box 5.

willing to bargain and that the bishops had formed a committee to look into the matter. The telegram reflected the growers' demand that President Nixon create an official fact-finding group.<sup>159</sup> The Catholic Bishops had decided to do what the growers were demanding that the government do.

The bishops reflected their times. Catholic clergy were becoming much more inclined to be social active. Chavez believed that Catholic liberation theology changed the Church. Those who worked with Hispanic congregations in the 1960s were increasingly inclined to think of what the church could do and be beyond the church walls.<sup>160</sup> Increasingly they were likely to see how church doctrine could and should be applied to the social issues of the day. Reverend Hugh A. Donohoe, Bishop of Fresno, gave a talk at the Blessed Sacrament Church in early 1970. Referring to Pope Leo, the Catholic Pope most associated with social justice issues, Donohoe claimed that the church's problem was not in teaching their faith, but in acting on it. The church had an obligation to promote their beliefs through such things as the integration of Catholic schools.<sup>161</sup> Once the Catholic Church decided to take a stand on the farm labor issue, they did so in the role of servants of the community. Bishop Joseph Donnelly, chair of a committee of bishops on farm labor, said that the union's position matched the findings

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<sup>159</sup> John Cardinal Dearden, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, to Chairman of the Table Grape Growers, received by Al Caplan, 13 November 1969, TGNC, Box 5.

<sup>160</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>161</sup> Hugh A. Donohoe, "Social Justice and the Christian Conscience," (transcript of recording) 27 April, 1970, SJVC, Box 1.

of the Second Vatican Council, and that the church had to help mediate the problem.<sup>162</sup>

The Church argued that the farm workers had a right to organize, and that Catholic teachings backed such rights. The Los Angeles area priests signed a statement supporting what they considered to be a basic human right, and asked church followers to join in the boycott of nonunion table grapes.<sup>163</sup>

Even more significant than the role of the Catholics was the role of the Protestant clergy. These pastors and ministers would make Catholics question why the Catholic Church was not similarly involved. This, admitted Chris Hartmire from the California Migrant Ministry (CMM), was one of the reasons that Chavez was glad to have their participation.<sup>164</sup> Protestants, through the CMM, began to work with farm workers in the early 1960s. Chavez credited the CMM with being the first group to help him. He also said that it was their involvement that inspired many religious people to support the grape strike.<sup>165</sup> They lead the way for religious groups interested in the cause.

One of the oldest religious groups in California who were concerned with the spiritual and physical conditions, the CMM started in the 1920s as a multi-denominational group. The CMM itself was independent, supported by organizations,

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<sup>162</sup> Auxiliary Bishop Joseph F. Donnelly, interview, prepared by Gerard E. Sherry, no date, UFWA, Part I, Box 5, Folder 10

<sup>163</sup> "Priests Committee to Aid Farmworkers," 1970, UFWA, Part I, Box 4, Folder 40.

<sup>164</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>165</sup> Cesar Chavez, "The Organizer's Tale," editors Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert, *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 62; Hoffman, vii.

rather than by local congregations.<sup>166</sup> Reverend Chris Hartmire was director of the CMM when the grape strikes began in 1965. Hartmire and the CMM had already formed a relationship with Chavez, as Chavez had been invited to CMM staff retreats and had worked with CMM staff, particularly James (Jim) Drake.<sup>167</sup> Hartmire would allow the CMM to help the union, seeing it as a way that they could be involved in social issues of the day.

The CMM's involvement in the grape strike was not without cost to the organization. This cost the group some support from church organizations, as some churches cut off contributions for them.<sup>168</sup> Chris Hartmire, as head of the CMM, often received mail which either questioned the CMM's involvement, or berated the group for stepping beyond the normal role of a clerical group. One letter writer was just confused. He wanted to know how exactly the CMM was supported and exactly what was going on with their involvement in the strike. He needed to understand the connections so that he could explain it to parishioners locally.<sup>169</sup> Most other writers were less open-minded. A Presbyterian deacon, who was also a salesman for a farm, wrote to Hartmire telling him that the CMM should not waste their time with organizing farm labor, but instead train the workers to better themselves in some other kind of work. He resented the presence of

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<sup>166</sup> Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, 501-502.

<sup>167</sup> Hoffman, 18, 27; United Church of Christ Congregational Laymen's Study Group, Information Letter no. 26, February 1966, Sierra Madre, CA.

<sup>168</sup> Day, 56; Hoffman, 23, 26, 101; Ronald Campbell, "Hartmire Recalls Religious Ties of Farm Union," *Bakersfield Californian*, 25 Sept. 1985; "Churches Deny Backing to Picket Line Marchers," *LA Times*, 28 Nov. 1965.

<sup>169</sup> Anonymous to Chris Hartmire, 13 January 1966, NFWM, Part I, Box 11, Folder 4.

Walter Reuther whom he saw as shady.<sup>170</sup> J. Leland Whitaker, a Baptist pastor in Orange Cove, California, wrote to the CMM and Hartmire twice in 1965 directly criticizing the CMM. In November, Whitaker explained that he had talked with many farm workers and believed most were paid fairly. Ministers, he warns, needed to be very careful before picking a side. He threatened to no longer support the CMM should they keep up their work.<sup>171</sup> He apparently received a reply that he did not appreciate, because in December, he wrote Hartmire directly. This time he explained that he had farm workers in his church and supported one Mexican young man who was going to school. He still did not believe that the CMM was working in the best interest of the church. They were he claimed, hurting the little farmers and hurting the churches as the big farmers became angry with them.<sup>172</sup> Roger A. Chute, a Baptist pastor in Clovis, California, had heard Whitaker read Hartmire's original reply at a ministerial meeting. He too was concerned about the CMM's involvement and the lack of support they might soon face. Although kinder than Whitaker, Chute's message was the same, as he said, "I do feel that it would be better if your group lifted the Cross instead of the slogan."<sup>173</sup> The devotion of the CMM to the cause would soon pay off though. The National Council of Churches would endorse the strike in April of 1966.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Richard E. Circle to Chris Hartmire, 11 January 1966, NFWM, Part I, Box 11, Folder 4.

<sup>171</sup> J. Leland Whitaker, to Migrant Ministry, 7 November 1965, NFWM, Part I, Box 14, Folder 10.

<sup>172</sup> J. Leland Whitaker, to Chris Hartmire, 6 December 1965, NFWM, Part I, Box 14, Folder 11.

<sup>173</sup> Roger A. Chute, to Chris Hartmire, 9 December 1965, NFWM, Part I, Box 14, Folder 11.

<sup>174</sup> Day, 57.

Chris Hartmire and James Drake, the two CMM ministers most active in the strike, thought a lot about what the church should do and what the church was expected to do. Hartmire said the decision was made that the CMM should support the workers who wished to organize as long as they did it in a Christian manner. For them, this meant the union had to stick with a policy of nonviolence.<sup>175</sup> The maintenance of nonviolence was one of the main reasons for having clergy present. Clergy walking the picket lines reminded the strikers, the police, and the growers to behave. Should violence occur, the clergy would be there as credible witnesses to the event. Clergy were an ever present symbol of the world's eyes. With the ministers in town, it became hard for the growers to deny that a strike existed.<sup>176</sup> Members of the CMM were also expected to sacrifice to support the cause. After Jim Drake introduced the idea of the worker-priest program, a program in which a priest went through the process as worker, the entire staff had to take only subsistence wages.<sup>177</sup>

The CMM's action, Drake believed, came not from the political ideas to which men like he had been exposed, not from the civil rights groups, but from talk in their seminaries about what a minister should do.<sup>178</sup> Hartmire recalled the CMM's past involvement with farm labor, even when the vast majority of farm laborers were *braceros*. CMM had long seen the need for a union, but had they helped organized one,

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<sup>175</sup> Chris Hartmire, interview with Sydney Smith, 30 October 1979, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 7.

<sup>176</sup> Wayne C. Hartmire Jr., "The Church and the Emerging Farm Worker's Movement: A Case Study," 22 July 1967, MGP, Box 3, Folder 1.

<sup>177</sup> Chris Hartmire, interview with Sydney Smith, 30 October 1979, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 7.

<sup>178</sup> James Drake, interview with Sydney Smith, 1 May 1980, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 4.

they would have lost financial support from the sponsoring churches. When Chavez began to organize the union, they could be involved and help, but it would not cost them all of their support.<sup>179</sup> They were finally able to do what they had long seen a need for.

CMM members justified their involvement not only because it was the right thing to do, but also because it was in the best interest of Christianity in the long term. Their presence in the union in the 1960s and continued involvement meant that they could ensure that the union did not become entirely secular. The CMM, working with the Catholic Church, could ensure that striking families were involved in *Bible* studies, give the opportunity to participate in worship services and religious programs, and received ministerial advice when needed.<sup>180</sup> They could also influence potential dramatic changes in the movement. Hartmire believed that

For those, then, who have grave concerns about the quality of this farm worker movement and all such movements, there is only one answer – involvement. The black power movement exists, the farm workers movement exists. They can't be eliminated or changed by preaching, nor can they be influenced by pious declarations about true brotherhood and non-violence. Such movements when they are discerned to be part of God's great humanizing process can only be influenced by active participation and support. The churches have helped shape the progress and the direction of the humanizing movement among farm workers precisely because they have been willing to be present and to lend concrete assistance.<sup>181</sup>

If the church wanted to avoid union corruption or the union giving up on its non-violent stance and changing into something resembling the black power movement, then they

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<sup>179</sup> Wayne C. Hartmire Jr., "The Church and the Emerging Farm Worker's Movement: A Case Study," 22 July 1967, MGP, Box 3, Folder 1.

<sup>180</sup> "A Proposal for an Expanded Ecumenical Ministry to the Farm Worker's Movement," UFWOC, Box 3, Folder 8.

<sup>181</sup> Wayne C. Hartmire Jr., "The Church and the Emerging Farm Worker's Movement: A Case Study," 22 July 1967, MGP, Box 3, Folder 1.



had to be involved. Church support could hopefully guide the union in a productive, Christian direction.

Hartmire claimed that the CMM managed to support the union without too much interference. They tried to do as the workers wanted rather than demand that the workers do things as they best saw fit.<sup>182</sup> The civil rights movement and various poverty programs had provided the CMM with negative examples of times when the church was interfering and domineering. They did not want to repeat such an example.<sup>183</sup> Their success here was probably due to Chavez's leadership style. He knew the needs of the farm workers and told the CMM what was needed. He did not tell them how to provide for that need.<sup>184</sup> This flexibility gave the CMM the ability to act within a frame work in which they were comfortable.

### **Usefulness of Religion**

King and Chavez found religious connections to their causes very useful. King, in particular, relied upon such connections for financial support. He expected ministers and Christian individuals to support the cause, being good stewards of their money. Both King and Chavez believed that churches and their members could be organized to bring pressure upon the opposition, be it the owners practicing discriminatory employment or the growers refusing to recognize the union. Each man found that religious ties bought

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<sup>182</sup> Chris Hartmire, interview with Sydney Smith, 30 October 1979, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 7.

<sup>183</sup> Chris Hartmire, interview with Sydney Smith, 30 September 1981, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 8.

<sup>184</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

their organization respect. This respect was particularly important as it allowed them to deny communist ties and influence, something about which King's critics had often asked J. Edgar Hoover.

Ministers in the civil rights movement also served several practical purposes. *Look* magazine called them the "Church Relevant." These were the men willing to do whatever was necessary for the cause. No longer were the ministers sitting back comfortably while others did the work. Those who marched from Selma to Montgomery were astonished to see ministers who did the dirty work such as cleaning latrines and campsites, serving food, and sitting up camp. Their presence also served to prevent rioting and to quell tensions between young hostile African Americans and white law enforcement.<sup>185</sup>

White ministers would be involved in the cause. The movement would at times have to keep these ministers happy. In the 1963 March on Washington, movement leaders would convince John Lewis to tone down his planned speech, a speech which clearly expressed the frustrations of the youth. A white bishop, Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle, had refused to appear on the platform if Lewis gave the speech in its early form.<sup>186</sup> Ralph Abernathy said that the Cardinal objected to attacks on John F. Kennedy and to a statement which could be used to argue that Lewis and the civil rights movement was turning to a less nonviolent revolution. In order to keep the Cardinal happy, the other leaders of the march approached Lewis and asked him to change his speech.

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<sup>185</sup> Christopher Wren, "Turning Point for the Church," *Look*, 18 May 1965.

<sup>186</sup> "Masses were March Heroes," *Ebony*, November 1963.

Reluctantly, he agreed.<sup>187</sup> Cardinal Patrick O'Boyle was insisting that the movement keep to a nonviolent course and rhetoric. In order to keep his support, movement leaders agreed and did as he wished.

King needed these ministers not only to serve as a calming presence and a work force at protests, but also to put pressure on the government and on businesses. It was the churches' job to force the government to pull contracts from employers who violated the nondiscrimination clauses.<sup>188</sup> It was also the minister's duty to tell their congregations about such violations and to instruct their congregations in the appropriate response. In October 1962, Atlanta area SCLC members began talks with Kraft Foods and Blue Plate about possible job discrimination. Wyatt Tee Walker announced that the SCLC had filed complaints with the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity about these companies. While seeking government resolutions of these problems, the SCLC also implied that a boycott of these two companies might be possible. King had said that if the companies did not comply with government regulations, the Atlanta area pastors would tell the community how to act.<sup>189</sup> This kind of protest became more formalized with the initiation of SCLC's Operation Breadbasket.

Announced to the public in October 1962, Operation Breadbasket was a program which fought employment discrimination, and not just discrimination in companies with government contracts. Ralph Abernathy, who became the Atlanta chair of Operation

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<sup>187</sup> Abernathy, 278-279.

<sup>188</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Religious Leaders Conference, 11 May 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 197-202.

<sup>189</sup> SCLC, press release, 31 October 1962, SCLC, Box 35, Folder 29.

Breadbasket, expressed concerns about African American workers who were hired only in low skilled jobs and who were often replaced by machines. The SCLC believed that if companies profited from the African American dollar, they should be willing to hire African Americans in more than menial positions. The first public meeting announcing the target of such a selective buying protest was to be held in an AME church, and Abernathy announced that the program depending on clerical support.<sup>190</sup> Their first targets were the commercial bakeries of Atlanta. The Negro Ministers of Atlanta began negotiations with four large baking companies in the area, asking for desegregated facilities and fair hiring policies. As these bakeries agreed, the ministers would announce it to their congregations and call off or cancel any selective buying campaigns launched against that company. Those companies which continued to refuse were targets of what were essentially boycotts.<sup>191</sup> Without church cooperation such boycotts would have been difficult to organize and to sustain.

Ministers lent an aura of respectability to the cause. The media became interested when ministers were seen at protest events, or were arrested or beaten. This increased the publicity given to the cause. King and the leaders of both the MIA and the SCLC knew this. During the Montgomery bus boycotts, the MIA decided to fund a test case dealing with desegregation. King wanted a minister as the plaintiff, feeling that it would create sympathy for the movement. The MIA's attorney, Fred Gray, said that it could not be King since he already received too much publicity, but some of the ministers were

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<sup>190</sup> SCLC, press release, 23 October 1962, SCLC, Box 172, Folder 32.

<sup>191</sup> SCLC, press releases, c. 1963, SCLC, Box 172, Folder 32.

reluctant to volunteer.<sup>192</sup> Those involved recognized that a minister would be the perfect defendant, but this early on few were willing to be that person. As the movement grew and expanded across the South, more men, both African American and white, would be willing to submit their lives to the cause.

One such minister was Reverend James Reeb. Reeb was a white minister from Massachusetts. He went to Selma when the movement had asked for supporters to come. He and a couple of companions stopped to eat in an African American restaurant and were beaten. Two days later he succumbed to his injuries.<sup>193</sup> When he died, people all over the world noticed. The General Secretary of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary wrote King from Budapest to say that they were “deeply astonished” at the death Reeb, and that “his sacrifice has called our attention again to unresolved racial problems.”<sup>194</sup> Even more importantly, the federal government was forced to respond to his death in a way that they had not when a African American teenager named Jimmie Lee Jackson had died earlier in Selma. Clergy across the country began to call upon President Johnson to intervene in Alabama. Johnson subsequently rejected Alabama governor George Wallace’s arguments that the protestors were part of the problem, and went on call for Congressional approval of his voting rights proposal.<sup>195</sup> Reeb’s daughter Anne later came to hate the publicity surrounding her father’s death. She felt that her

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<sup>192</sup> Donald T. Ferron, Notes on MIA Executive Board Meeting, 30 January 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 109-112.

<sup>193</sup> Abernathy, 345.

<sup>194</sup> Erno Ottlyk to Martin Luther King, Jr., 22 March 1965, MLK, Box 21, Folder 12.

<sup>195</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 406-408.

father had been made into an icon because he was white, while the death of Jackson had been ignored. Once, while at a civil rights memorial dedication in Alabama, she apologized to Jackson's family for the lack of attention he had received.<sup>196</sup> But her father's death had spurred the federal government to action. The death of this publicity surrounding the death of this white minister finally forced the president to act.

Ministers also served to funnel money to the cause. Pastors could direct their congregations and organizations to contribute money to the MIA or to the SCLC. Early in the movement, the Baptists were particularly helpful. J. H. Jackson, president of the National Baptist Convention, the African American Baptist organization, sent King two checks in March of 1956, one from the National Baptist Treasury, and another from the church that he pastored.<sup>197</sup> Leonard Carr, who was the treasurer of the National Baptist Convention, promised a similar check that month from the Baptist Ministers Conference in Philadelphia.<sup>198</sup> The National Baptists were beginning to take care of their own, and to be socially and politically active in the style that King expected of ministers.

White ministers and congregations also sent money. Edson T. Lewis, a pastor in New York wrote to King expressing his sorrow that he had not acted to support the movement beforehand, and sending a donation. Lewis intended to rally his congregation

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<sup>196</sup> John Blake, *Children of the Movement* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2004), 217, 225.

<sup>197</sup> J. H. Jackson to Martin Luther King, Jr., 5 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 154-155.

<sup>198</sup> Leonard G. Carr to Martin Luther King, Jr., 5 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 156.

to the cause, but knew that many of them would be opposed, so he asked King for information so that he would be better informed to deal with his congregation.<sup>199</sup>

Ministers were not the only ones expected to give to the cause. Good Christian individuals were to give as well. This use of money fell under the idea of good stewardship. To King, stewardship meant that everything one owned was not his or her own, but God's. Man had the responsibility to care and look out for what he had been blessed with. King complained that more money was spent on things like entertainment, cosmetics, gambling, and drinking, than was spent on churches.<sup>200</sup> King often told of an African American fraternity group that spent an estimated \$500,000 on whiskey during one convention. This was more than had been spent on civil rights the entire year. This was a shame to the African American community.<sup>201</sup>

King used Biblical stories to advocate good stewardship. One such story was the story of a rich man and his treatment of a beggar named Lazarus. Lazarus died and went to heaven. The rich man went to hell and from there begged Abraham in heaven to send Lazarus with just a drop of water to cool his tongue and to send Lazarus to warn his brothers on earth to change their ways. King posed the question of why the rich man went to hell. It was not because of his wealth, after all Abraham had also been exceedingly rich. It was King said because the rich man had ignored Lazarus on earth.

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<sup>199</sup> Edson T. Lewis to Martin Luther King, Jr., 5 September 1963, SCLC, Box 116, Folder 24.

<sup>200</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Things that Are God's," 27 October 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 310-311.

<sup>201</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Some Things We Must Do," 5 December 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 328-343.

He had not been a good steward with his money. He had not used it to help his fellow man.<sup>202</sup>

The belief in good stewardship of one's wealth went hand in hand with another belief: the belief in the capitalist system. Americans saw communists as God-less. One angry correspondent from NY wrote to King complaining that his beliefs were as false as those of the communists and Marxist doctrines which said there was no God.<sup>203</sup> Other people did not just compare King to the communists; they declared that he was a communist. Some struggled with the idea that a Christian preacher could possibly be a communist, but still doubts crept into their minds. A concerned citizen from North Dakota wrote to J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI asking to what extent the communists had infiltrated America's churches. In referring to King, the writer explained that "It is hard for me to believe that a Christian pastor could be a communist and yet this is what so many public speakers and printed publications seem to say."<sup>204</sup> Another Northern writer sent Hoover a clipping of an article that he had written thanking God that King and African American ministers like him existed who would lead the civil rights struggle. However he had seen a picture of King at Highlander and wondered if it was really a communist organization and if King was a communist.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Before the Chicago Sunday Evening Club, March 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8. The story of Lazarus can be found in Luke 16:19-31.

<sup>203</sup> Anonymous to Martin Luther King, Jr., 2 September 1965, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 30.

<sup>204</sup> Park River, North Dakota, 16 September 1963, FBI, 100-106670-222.

<sup>205</sup> Grand Rapids, Michigan, 30 January 1964, FBI, 100-106670-298. For similar letters see, 13 May 1964, FBI, 100-106670-125; Brookville, Ohio, 29 December 1963, FBI, 100-106670-NR.



Because Americans believed all communists were atheists, King and the SCLC could use their connections with religion to escape the pointing fingers that labeled them as communists. They used their religiosity to proclaim that they could not possibly be communists. Those who might bring on such a revolution were not the civil rights protestors; it was those in the South who denied African Americans their rights. King wrote,

The awful fact about the South is that Southerners are making the Marxist analysis of history more accurate than the Christian hope that men can be persuaded through teaching and preaching to live a new and better life. In the South businessmen act much more quickly from economic considerations than do churchmen from moral considerations.<sup>206</sup>

Change in the South, King was arguing was being driven by economic issues already. From there it might not be a long slide into communism.

King preached against turning to communism as a solution to the economic woes of the South. In *Paul's Letter to American Christians*, King pretended to have received a letter from the Apostle Paul which commented on American life. Paul he said, was impressed by the greatness of modern society and the advances they had made. But Paul was critical of the wealth distributions and the equation of income with success. Communism was not the solution, as it was not a method that Christians should tolerate.<sup>207</sup> This was a warning from King to the congregation at Dexter that communism was not an acceptable system for African American Christians.

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<sup>206</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. "The Un-Christian Christian," August 1965, vol. 20, 77-80.

<sup>207</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 4 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 414-420; also in Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to the Christians in America," Opening of the Hawaiian Legislature, 14 February 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 5.

King returned many times to the idea that communism was not a philosophy to which a Christian should subscribe. King said that communism was based on “ethical relativism.” There were no solid truths in communism. The end result, not the method of achievement was what mattered.<sup>208</sup> King, an advocate of nonviolent reform could not afford to subscribe to a philosophy that he believed ignored the importance of the method. The method was important to King. Nonviolence was his method and it did matter. He could not afford for his followers to believe that an integrated society should be accomplished by any other means. They had to believe there were a purpose and a reason for using nonviolence, a strategy that often brought pain upon the practitioner. King also needed Americans to believe that he was not a communist or a fellow traveler. In an era where Americans were concerned about the spread of communism, his movement would have been destroyed. He would not have gained the support of thousands of Americans if they even suspected that he was a communist.

Like King, Chavez would find the religious connection useful in making his cause respectable and attractive to supporters. The arrest of ministers would gain the union’s cause much publicity, just as the arrest and beating of ministers had drawn clerical support for the civil rights cause. Religious connections also helped Chavez and the farm labor movement avoid accusations of communist ties.

The imagery of the Catholic Church would be useful to the union because of the place that the religion had in the lives of the farm workers. The union knew that this association could help them in many ways. Chavez told an interviewer in 1968 that

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<sup>208</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” 17 November 1967, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 315-324.

We don't ask for more cathedrals. We don't ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice and for love of brother. We don't ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don't ask for paternalism. We ask for servant hood.<sup>209</sup>

The celebration of Catholic traditions and the presence of Catholic clergy would draw many workers into the union ranks.<sup>210</sup> The cause would be shrouded in righteousness when priests, nuns and other clergy appeared at union events and in the resulting publicity. If these strategies could be used to mold the farm workers into a cohesive force, they could demand as a group that the Catholic Church help them.<sup>211</sup>

The media inadvertently helped the farm labor union when it publicized the involvement of various religious groups at different points in the strike. These groups ranged from the Jehovah's Witnesses who decided not to serve grapes at their 1969 convention to various Jewish rabbis and groups that supported the cause such as the Jews for Urban Justice.<sup>212</sup> This media coverage was useful for the union, especially when non-Catholic clergy were involved in highly publicized incidents.

Few things would have stirred the heart of Cold War Americans more than believing that any government institution threatened freedom of religion. That was something associated with communists and communism, the God-less ones. It was not

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<sup>209</sup> Gerard E. Sherry, editor, "Farm Labor Problems: The Anguish of Delano," (Delano, CA: 1969) UFWI, Box 46, Folder 14.

<sup>210</sup> Day, 117; Sam Kushner, *The Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 65; Meister and Loftis, 120.

<sup>211</sup> Day, 58, 117; Hoffman, 29.

<sup>212</sup> "The Fox and the Grapes," *LA Times West*, 23 Nov. 1969; Nicolaus C. Mills "Workers on the Farms," 9; "Forbidden Fruit? The Boycott on Grapes is Ripe for Exposure," *Barron's*, 2 Jun. 1969; For other examples see "Forbidden Fruit?"; "Marchers Get Support of National Church Council," *Bakersfield Californian*, 13 Apr. 1966.

supposed to happen in America. But the media showed that it did happen in America. It happened when clergymen decided to support the farm labor union. Because so many of the leaders of the civil rights movement were ministers, it was only to be expected that in their cause ministers would be arrested and the media would record it. Of course the SCLC had taken advantage of such images. But it was Chavez and the farm labor union that could create events in which ministers were arrested full of drama and hardships. Their use of a common civil rights tactic had an almost artistic flair.

On October 19, 1965 the union showed the world that priests did go to jail for exercising their freedoms. Knowing they would be arrested, several strikers agreed to test orders not to yell *Hulega!* (Strike!).<sup>213</sup> Knowing that they would be arrested, Chavez asked Hartmire and a Catholic priest to join them. Hartmire agreed and he and several other clerics joined the pickets. Hartmire admired Chavez's sense of tactics, saying that his "instinct in these things is fantastic; it's hard to separate his strategic sense from his morality. And of course it worked out even better than he hoped."<sup>214</sup> Chavez took full advantage of this opportunity. He hadn't been on the line that day; instead he went to the University of California, Berkeley, to give a speech. There he announced the news of the arrests and collected \$6,700 for the cause.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Day, 54; Ferriss and Sandoval, 107; Hoffman, 32; Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 173; Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: The First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, CA: Farm Worker Press, 1966), 101-102.

<sup>214</sup> Peter Matthiessen, *Sal si puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution* (New York, Random House, 1969), 319.

<sup>215</sup> Matthiessen, 86.

These arrests were publicized by several media outlets. *El Malcriado*, the union's paper, showed a photo of ministers being forced into a paddy wagon.<sup>216</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* and *Time* magazine detailed the role of clergy in this planned test of court orders.<sup>217</sup> *Laymen's*, a religious magazine which discussed the role of ministers, also publicized the grape strike, explaining to their readers that no less than nine ministers had been arrested.<sup>218</sup>

In the summer of 1967 Law enforcement officials also arrested ministers protesting at Di Giorgio's Borrego Springs ranch in Southern California. Chavez had been asked by a group of workers new to the strike if he would help them retrieve their property from ranch housing. Hartmire of the CMM and a Catholic priest, Father Victor Salandini went along to help. These three men were arrested on charges of trespassing. Stories appeared that the arresting authorities had stripped the men and then chained them together as they were hauled off to jail.<sup>219</sup> Farm workers and community members were upset. How, they asked, could the police do that to a priest?<sup>220</sup> Not only had this incident illustrated the role of the clergy, but it also painted the growers and law enforcement as unrighteous.

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<sup>216</sup> "Workers and Ministers Face the Courts this Week," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 23.

<sup>217</sup> Harry Bernstein, "9 Ministers Jailed in Grape Strike," *LA Times*, 20 October 1965; "Grapes of Wrath," *Time*, 10 December 1965.

<sup>218</sup> United Church of Christ, Congregational Laymen's Study Group, Information Letter no. 26, February 1966. Sierra Madre, CA.

<sup>219</sup> Pitrone, 100; Steiner, *La Raza*, 285; Victor Salandini, "Decision at Di Giorgio," *America*, 8 October 1966, 415; James P. Terzian and Kathryn Cramer, *Mighty Hard Road: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., Inc., 1970), 95.

<sup>220</sup> Matthiessen, 319.

The union's apparent religious reverence helped it escape the red taint that such movements were often hounded by.<sup>221</sup> Like King's movement, the farm labor movement could if necessary, use religiosity to prove that they could not be communists. If anything, Chavez was in a harder position than King in this regard. Because it was a labor movement and had taken on the aura of being a civil rights movement, it could be subject to a double red attack. Labor unions had a historical problem of being accused of being communist. Civil rights groups were labeled in the same manner.

Americans did question the loyalty of the farm labor union. Occasionally, these questions were directed not to government officials or to the union itself, but to the ministers involved with the union. Chavez believed that Hartmire himself served to explain the movement to the public at large, particularly when they questioned the movement's adherence to a democratic system.<sup>222</sup> Chris Hartmire, head of the CMM received a letter from Willis Merriman. No stranger to social activism, Merriman was the Director of the Department of Christian Social Relations for the Minnesota Council of Churches. Merriman had been supportive of the strikers and was considering joining the boycott. But Merriman, frightened by an apparent visit from the FBI, was upset to know that a known communist was soliciting donations for the NFWA to be sent to him. Merriman wrote that he knew that civil rights groups were usually labeled communists, and he normally would have ignored such accusations. This contact with the FBI

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<sup>221</sup> John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 32.

<sup>222</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

however inspired him to be more careful. He hoped Hartmire would let him know just how the union was connected to communism if at all.<sup>223</sup>

Chavez and the union continually attempted to show that their group was Christian inspired and not communist driven. A group of Catholic clergy issued a letter of support informing the world that the union was indeed an organization grounded in the Catholic faith and that:

It is our considered judgment, based on intimate knowledge, that the major policy decisions of the National Farm Workers Association are not imposed upon the membership from without but are arrived at by an internal democratic procedure in the best tradition of American trade unionism. We can affirm categorically that there is no serious evidence that members of the Communist Party or the adherence of any other non-democratic organization have any influence in the formation of the major policy decision and procedures of the NFWA.<sup>224</sup>

Chavez told the *Central California Register* in 1968, “If our work is considered communistic by some, there’s nothing we can do about it, but I’m not willing to admit that we Christians are not more willing to fight for social justice.”<sup>225</sup> To an extent, this image building attempt did work. Children from a Catholic school in Chicago wrote to Chavez telling him that he would be protected by the Lady of Guadalupe and that “You are a very good Catholic doing that for poor people. I know God will be very kind to you and give you a very fine place in Heaven.”<sup>226</sup> Rather than seeing Chavez as a union

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<sup>223</sup> Willis J. Merriman to Chris Hartmire, 14 March 1966, NFWM, Part I, Box 14, Folder 13.

<sup>224</sup> Catholic Clergy support letter, c. 1966, UFWP, Series III, Box 25, Folder 11.

<sup>225</sup> Gerard E. Sherry, editor, “Farm Labor Problems: The Anguish of Delano,” (Delano, California: 1969) UFWI, Box 46, Folder 14.

<sup>226</sup> Michael Wozniak to Cesar Chavez, 27 May 1966; Christine Bobek to Cesar Chavez, 27 May 1966, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder School Children, 1966.

leader or a radical, this student saw him as a holy man motivated not by a desire for revolution, but by his faith.

### **Multi-Faith Strategies**

The movements led by King and Chavez made sure they used tactics and planned events that would continue to attract a variety of religious Americans. Both groups sponsored multi-faith events such as prayer pilgrimages. Both groups promoted nonviolence as the moral method, the method of Christ. Both groups used prayer events and religious marches. Each leader portrayed himself as a Christian model of suffering. King had been physically attacked for the cause, and Chavez chose to inflict suffering upon himself through fasting. All of these events portrayed the cause in a particular religious context, suitable primarily for either African American Protestants or Mexican Catholics. These tactics required that movement followers rely upon their faith that God would see justice done for them.

In June 1956, the editors of *Ebony* magazine pointed out that Southern African Americans were not the only ones praying about the civil rights issue. Southern whites were sending their prayers up as well, requesting that the Almighty help them to maintain a segregated land. But African Americans, claimed the authors, were praying not just for themselves, but for whites too. They should not be worried about these contradicting prayers. If God had saved Israel from the pharaoh, the three Hebrew children from the furnace, Daniel from the den of lions, and Jonah from the whale, then



surely he could sort out the just requests from the unjust ones.<sup>227</sup> The ultimate solution to the civil rights problem lay in the hands of a just, faithful, and mighty God. Leaders of the early civil rights movement would turn to their faith in God time and time again. They would encourage their followers to do the same.

King believed that religious groups needed to cooperate for the movement to succeed. His strategies and tactics would sometimes be influenced by the need to maintain the support of a wide variety of Christian and Jewish groups, including white ones. King was critical of those groups caught up in inter-denominational struggles. This narrow vision of truth and salvation meant Protestants were often not good examples for the world. King was even more critical of Catholic groups who because they followed a doctrine of infallibility, were often unwilling to cooperate with other organizations.<sup>228</sup> He felt that this denominational independence was hurting the movement.

The multi-faith strategy had roots in the program "In Friendship." Ella Baker, in 1956, wrote to King inviting him to attend a conference where various leaders would form an organization to support the Southern movement. King was unable to attend, but the resulting organization funneled money to the South. Chaired by A. Philip Randolph, the preeminent African American labor leader, it was also sponsored by various clergy including Catholics, Protestants and Jews.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> "God's Dilemma," *Ebony*, June 1956.

<sup>228</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 4 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 414-420.

<sup>229</sup> Ella J. Baker to Martin Luther King, Jr., 24 February 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 139.

One of the first multi-dimensional religious activities was the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington. Held in the shadow of Lincoln's statue, this was an alliance of the NAACP, labor, and the African American church. It was here that King gained recognition as a leader of national stature.<sup>230</sup> The Call to the pilgrimage, issued by King, Roy Wilkins, and A. Philip Randolph, first addressed the issues of oppression, the defiance of the Brown decision, the banning of the NAACP in some sections of the South, and violence toward civil rights advocates. The leaders then appealed to religious Americans. Americans they concluded, had a historical religious heritage, after all, the Founders had prayed for guidance, and the slaves had prayed for emancipation. Americans who were patriotic and who loved justice and liberty were invited to gather in Washington DC and pray, just as their ancestors had.<sup>231</sup>

King knew that the day might come when civil rights organizing fell solely upon the shoulders of the church. The NAACP was outlawed in parts of the South. In other parts, African Americans feared joining the group because of possible economic pressure. King said that where the NAACP was outlawed the church would have to pick up its function. He did not believe that any Southern state would dare outlaw an African American church of any denomination.<sup>232</sup> King was right. Given the Cold War climate and the fear of communists, no state would have banned a church.

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<sup>230</sup> "Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington," *Ebony*, August 1957.

<sup>231</sup> A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Roy Wilkins, "Call to a Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom," 5 April 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 151-153.

<sup>232</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 1 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 73-89.

The most important group with religious ties was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Founded in 1957, the SCLC served to unite and provide support for various community organizations in the South. Ella Baker, a key member of the trio which envisioned it and one of the early directors, saw the SCLC as a crusade with religious ties. In October 1959, she sent a memo to the Committee on Administration in which she defines the role of the SCLC as a crusade, “a vigorous movement, with high purpose and involving masses of people.” One aspect of this crusade would be to recruit ministers who, with other leaders, would work in their communities for voter registration. The SCLC would also try to push community groups, including religious ones, to open up their buildings for literacy schools.<sup>233</sup> By using the word crusade, Ella Baker framed the SCLC as a religious movement which pushed for dramatic change in the land. The warriors and leaders of this cause were to come from the religious community. They would carry the banner of the movement to the South.

This trend returned when the SCLC set up their program for 1960-61. Phase 4 of their Public Relations Program included plans for a Crusade for Human Dignity. This crusade was to be a “mass attack on segregation” in the South. It would include prayer vigils for forty-eight hours, which would culminate in a Sunday morning service which would include a reading authored by King. The next day, the protests would begin.<sup>234</sup> Here the movement had made plans for battle. First they would seek the Lord’s blessings

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<sup>233</sup> Ella Baker, memo to Committee on Administration, 23 October 1959, SCLC, Box 32, Folder 39.

<sup>234</sup> Public Relations Program, Phase 4, General Program 1960-61, SCLC, Box 37, Folder 4.

and guidance through prayer. They would meet to unify in a religious service. Then they would go forth unto battle in the protests. It was truly to be a crusade.

This multi-faith appeal rarely included Black Muslims. Black Muslims did not have the same commitment to non-violence and integration that the Christian groups and their Jewish supporters did. Such an alliance would have been ideologically impossible. It would also have destroyed mainstream support for civil rights, as Americans would have associated all of the cause with violence and hatred. So, when Elijah Muhammad's congregation asked King to come speak for them in 1958, saying they would be happy to be his first Muslim audience, King declined.<sup>235</sup> King never regarded the Black Muslims as a legitimate religion. At a Los Angeles press conference King was asked by a reporter about his opinion of the Black Muslims. King replied that one had to separate them from the Islamic religion, which he felt was a great faith. The Black Muslims, headed by Muhammad, was not a religion. According to King, Black Muslims borrowed from the Islamic religion, but actually represented a socio-economic movement. Moreover, the country should worry not about Black Muslims, but about the conditions which led to their existence.<sup>236</sup>

Nonviolence was the strategy that kept so many ministers supportive of the movement. King used religion to build support for this strategy not only among these ministers but also in the African American community. Nonviolence was a strategy

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<sup>235</sup> Elijah Muhammad to Martin Luther King, Jr., 19 March 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 385-386; Martin Luther King, Jr., to Elijah Muhammad, 9 April 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 399.

<sup>236</sup> SCLC, press release, 22 June 1962, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 9.

based on love, love for one's brother and sister, and love for one's enemy.<sup>237</sup> FOR explained to supporters that the Montgomery movement had been successful because it employed Godly behavior. In a section of a comic book, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story," targeted to African American readers, they explained how one could be a nonviolent Christian activist. As individuals, they could change their own lives. God expected that of them. God also expected individuals to love their enemies and to see them as a brother, just as God loved them and saw them as one of His children. Stealing the words of Jesus as he hung on the cross, FOR said that loving the enemy might mean saying as the girl in Little Rock did "Father forgive them for they know not that they do." If you could come to love your enemy in this manner and you were prepared to act, FOR told comic book readers, then you could expect God to be with you, just as He told Ralph Abernathy that He would be with him in jail.<sup>238</sup>

Nonviolence was also the way to love as Jesus loved mankind. Jesus had loved his enemies and had loved even His people who had rejected Him. He was to be the example for Christian African Americans to follow. King preached that one had to love their enemy. No one, he said, was entirely good or bad. Each person had elements of both. One merely had to look for the good points to start appreciating the enemy. Christians were also not to deal a crushing blow to the enemy. Men were not entirely evil; it was their systems that were problematic. Therefore, one could still love the

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<sup>237</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "We Are Still Walking," December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 445-451, first in *Liberation*, 1(Dec 1956) 6-9.

<sup>238</sup> Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story" (Nyack, NY: Fellowship of Reconciliation). Jesus' words can be found in Luke 23:34, KJV.

enemy and not defeat him personally. Loving the enemy did not mean liking him. But one could not hate him, because hate perpetuated itself and in the end only ruined the hater.<sup>239</sup>

Jesus had practiced nonviolence; it was the way of Christ. King found plenty of examples where Jesus stopped violence. When Judas betrayed Jesus, the apostle Peter had stepped forward, sword in hand, to halt the captors. Jesus commanded Peter in to put up his sword. African Americans were to do likewise. They did not have to like their enemies, but they did have to love them, just as Jesus loved and showed mercy to His enemies.<sup>240</sup> King admitted that Jesus had said in Matthew 10:34 that he had not come to bring peace but a sword. But, King argued, Jesus did not mean a literal sword. Jesus meant that His coming would not bring peace, but conflict, conflict between the old and the new ways. Like the people of Montgomery, African Americans had to be willing to follow the ways of Jesus, even if it meant their own personal Calvary.<sup>241</sup>

In Savannah in January 1961, King preached that the African American community had no use for violence. There was another method, one which went back to Jesus and Gandhi, it was

...a way as old as Jesus looking into the faces of men and women of his generation saying, 'Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that spitefully use you.' There is another where we see Jesus say, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' There is another way, a way as old as Jesus saying, 'Turn the other cheek.' We

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<sup>239</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," 17 November 1967, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 315-324.

<sup>240</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 1 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 73-89. The verse about Peter is found in John 18:11 KJV.

<sup>241</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," 10 April 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 167-179.

realize that turning the other cheek didn't always mean that you would get along all right in terms of your physical structure. It may mean that you'll get scared up. It may be that your house will get burned, it may mean that you get scarred, you may get stabbed in the process. But Jesus would say to you in substance that it is better to go through life with a scarred up body than a scarred up soul.<sup>242</sup>

His nonviolent stance had led Jesus to the cross. This cross King said was a sign of hope to all of us. It was a reminder of Easter, a reminder of the resurrection. This was a sign to the faithful that change was coming. Easter was to serve as a reminder to African American Americans that God would break through their sufferings. He would not forget them.<sup>243</sup> King reminded his fellow ministers that Easter could not happen until after Good Friday had occurred.<sup>244</sup>

Good Friday was the day of Christ's death upon the cross. It was symbolic of the ultimate suffering. Here Jesus had died for the sins of all mankind, redeeming them. Similarly, the practice of nonviolence sometimes led to suffering true, but it was what King called redemptive suffering. King told NAACP members that through the refusal to fight back, African Americans would force their enemies to see their own sin. At an Emancipation Day rally in January 1957, King said that the oppressor would "be forced to stand before God and the world splattered with the blood and reeking with the stench of his Negro brother. That is the method. That is the way to defeat him. We are defeated if we start with violence. But defeat him with his own method and eventually he

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<sup>242</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., speech Made in Savannah, 1 January 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B.

<sup>243</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Walk Through the Holy Land," 29 March 1959., *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 164-175.

<sup>244</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at Public Meeting of the Southern Christian Ministers Conference of Mississippi, 23 September 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 281-290.

will become ashamed of his own method.”<sup>245</sup> If one was to suffer and to absorb violence without fighting back, one could change their enemy. King gave many examples of this kind of redemption. He told of a man who had called anonymously threatening him. Usually the caller would slam the phone down, but one night because King had always been open to talking with him, the man held a conversation with King, once which ended with the man saying that King might be right. King said that whites as a group were changing too. Before, they had been rude to African Americans, now they treated them respectfully. This respect had been earned because African Americans had suffered while making a stand for justice.<sup>246</sup>

King held the Apostle Paul up as an example of redemptive suffering. In his sermon *Paul’s Letter to American Christians*, King explained that Paul had been persecuted, rejected, and tried for heresy, all as he stood for and preached his beliefs. Christians in the modern era who stood up and fought evil using the Christian method of nonviolence could expect to be treated likewise. They were not to despair however but to realize that this was an inevitable part of the process.<sup>247</sup>

After King was stabbed in Harlem in 1958, he would become an example of one who suffered. Admirers wrote to King seeing his wounds as a form of persecution and

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<sup>245</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 1 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 73-89.

<sup>246</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “We Are Still Walking,” December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 445-451, first in *Liberation*, 1(Dec 1956) 6-9; for more on the concept of redemptive suffering and love see Martin Luther King, Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” 17 November 1967, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 315-324.

<sup>247</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Paul’s Letter to American Christians,” 4 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 414-420; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Paul’s Letter to the Christians in America,” Opening of the Hawaiian Legislature, 14 February 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 5.



not as wounds inflicted merely because of a woman's madness. The Dexter Church wrote to King telling him that God had called him to be a leader and that God would strengthen and help King as he healed. They admonished him to "find consolation in his words, 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'"<sup>248</sup> FOR activist A. J. Muste wrote that God had marked King and that "The marks you bear in your body are, as were those of the Apostle, the marks of the Lord Jesus."<sup>249</sup> In an article for *Christian Century*, King discussed the personal suffering he had endured, the arrests, the bombings, the threats and the stabbing. These he claimed taught him the value of suffering. If it had helped no one else, it had helped to save him from developing bitterness. He borrowed Muste's words, from Galatians 6:17, saying that his body now bore the marks of Jesus.<sup>250</sup>

At services following King's death, speakers would return to the idea of redemptive and Christ-like suffering for the cause. In his eulogy, Benjamin Mays, former Morehouse College President, said that King was called to do the work of God in his time. He compared King to prophets like Isaiah, Amos, and Micah, each who were called of God in their times. Mays called for African Americans and whites to forgive. Borrowing the words of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, Mays said they should pray "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." If the country could do this, King

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<sup>248</sup> Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to Martin Luther King, Jr., 21 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 498-499.

<sup>249</sup> A. J. Muste to Martin Luther King, Jr., 23 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 500-501. The marks of the Apostle probably refer to Paul's reference to the thorn in his side which many believe was some kind of physical ailment.

<sup>250</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Suffering and Faith," 27 April 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 443-444, first in *Christian Century*, 77 (27 April 1960) 510.

would have died a “redemptive death from which all mankind will benefit.”<sup>251</sup> Ralph Abernathy opened the funeral service in a similar manner. In his opening prayers, Abernathy recalled the story of Stephen who asked God not to charge his killers with that sin. He also called King a prophet, comparing him to Moses who came out of the wilderness to challenge pharaoh. Ronald English, the Assistant Pastor at Ebenezer Baptist, compared King to Jesus, saying that King like Jesus had questioned the way things were and so like Jesus, he too had to die. English also saw this as a sacrificial death which he hoped would inspire the audience to continue to work towards true brotherhood.<sup>252</sup>

This kind of suffering and nonviolence often required forgiveness. Student reporters at Bennett College asked King about forgiveness for the Emmet Till murder and the Edward Aaron castration. King acknowledged that forgiveness in cases like these was hard. But when the victims forgave, they were ending the bitterness in their own hearts. It helped the forgiving one as much as the one forgiven.<sup>253</sup>

One particularly religious form of nonviolent protest was prayer. The movement often set up dramatic marches which would end in prayer, and sometimes with the arrests of those praying. The SCLC also encouraged prayer vigils in support of the cause. When the SCLC focused attention on Albany, Georgia, in 1962, they called for nation-wide prayer vigils in support of the cause. King had been jailed twice in July of that year on

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<sup>251</sup> Benjamin E. Mays, Eulogy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 9 April 1968, MLK, Box 11, Folder 4.

<sup>252</sup> Funeral Service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 9 April 1968, MLK, Box 11, Folder 4.

<sup>253</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview at Bennett College, 11 February 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 363-367.

protest related charges. The second arrest had come while they prayed for the city commissioners to begin negotiations with the SCLC. Albany Movement president W. G. Anderson asked those religious leaders calling in concern to hold prayer vigils in their cities. These prayer vigils were to have at least nine people, representing the nine that had been arrested with King. The SCLC reported that thousands had turned out at such meetings and that some clergymen had went so far as to take petitions to the White House demanding that the federal government act. Other ministers promised to hold the prayer vigils every week until the government did act. Anderson said of these vigils that “This is the kind of support we must have all over the nation to dramatize the righteousness of our cause.”<sup>254</sup> Those who organized and led prayer vigils and pilgrimages felt they had a moral voice in their community. The Clergy Committee for the Albany Prayer Pilgrimage tried to reach out to the ministers in Albany. When such a meeting became impossible, the Clergy Committee wrote to the Ministerial Association to express their sorrow that no meeting would occur. They expressed sympathy at the hardships encountered while trying to minister in such times, but reminded them that segregation was a moral and religious issue which needed ministerial input.<sup>255</sup>

Prayer was also an essential part of the Selma movement. This took on a particular importance as some of the ministers who had come to town tried to integrate church services and were turned away. One group of Episcopalians was particularly frustrated by this as their denomination had adopted an integration clause the previous

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<sup>254</sup> SCLC, press release, 1 August 1962, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 10.

<sup>255</sup> Ralph Lloyd Roy to Albany Ministerial Association, 28 August 1962, SCLC, Box 134, Folder 21.

year. So they decided to hold a protest in the form of a prayer service and Holy Communion. When the Alabama bishop refused to let them use the church in question, they decided to hold the service on the street in front of the church. Communion vessels were brought in from an African American Episcopal church in Birmingham. Before the event, the protesters met at Brown's Chapel to receive instructions. There they found a variety of faiths involved, not just Episcopalians, but Catholics and Jews as well. The crowd of 200 left Brown's Chapel and headed for the St. Paul's Episcopal Church in the white part of town. Stopped on the way by Selma's public safety director, the bishops held their service where they were, made a public statement about the purpose of the prayer protest and read prayers of penitence from *The Book of Common Prayer*, asking God to cleanse them from their sins. Then, singing "We Shall Over Come," they returned to Brown's Chapel where the service concluded. Television cameras recorded the event.<sup>256</sup>

Marches represented another form of religious nonviolence. The most famous march was the march between Selma and Montgomery Alabama in 1965. In his speech concluding the march at the state capital, King encouraged his weary audience to march on and address other problems. King found justification for this kind of protest in religious traditions. In the *Bible* after all, Joshua had led a march around Jericho and the walls had fallen down. Citing the words to the old African American spiritual *Joshua fit de Battle of Jericho*, King told his audience that they could fight just as Joshua had, non-violently, the battle was theirs to win. He ended his speech with another song, *The Battle*

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<sup>256</sup> Charles V. Willie, "Reflections on a Saturday in Selma," 28 June 1965, MLK, Box 21, Folder 14.

*Hymn of the Republic*, which proclaims that God's truth is marching on.<sup>257</sup> Marching then was a religious event in itself. It did not necessarily have to be a march ending in prayer to be religious. Just the act of marching alone could be a holy act of request for freedom.

King firmly believed that the African American church should fulfill social and political functions in the community. He expected and trained his members to do this in the churches that he pastored. When King took over the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954, he sent out a list of recommendations that included the formation of a Social Service Committee and a Social and Political Action Committee. The Social Service Committee was to deal with benevolence issues. The Social and Political Action Committee would inform the congregation about domestic and international issues, promote the NAACP within the congregation, and encourage church members to register to vote.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, King subsequently recommended that other churches establish social and political action committees.<sup>259</sup>

Perhaps ironically, the church was the one institution that never truly desegregated. King commented in 1956, that churches were often more segregated than

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<sup>257</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address delivered 25 March 1965 at Montgomery, Alabama, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8.

<sup>258</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Recommendations to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church for the Fiscal Year 1954-1955," 5 September 1954, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol. II: Rediscovering Precious Values, July 1951-November 1955*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 1994), 287-294.

<sup>259</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., speech Made in Savannah, 1 January 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B.

the entertainment industry.<sup>260</sup> In 1958, *Ebony's* staff had been hopeful that the day of integrated churches was coming. Neighborhoods that were increasingly integrated were leading to more integrated churches. Those churches had been successful; whites continued to attend and offerings did not shrink. *Ebony* warned however that African Americans weren't going to just show up at white churches, they had to be encouraged to attend.<sup>261</sup> To address this issue, Catholics, Protestants and Jews met together in a summit conference in the spring of 1963, led by Benjamin Mays, one of King's mentors.<sup>262</sup>

Integrated churches would only be a dream. King was asked twice, once by a reader of *Ebony* magazine who wrote to King's "Advice for Living" column in July of 1958, and in 1960 on "Meet the Press," if the churches he pastored were integrated. Each time he neatly sidestepped the issue. He said that his church was open to those of all races and that they also had many white visitors.<sup>263</sup> Eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, he said, was a shame.<sup>264</sup> No matter how open King was to the idea of white membership; his churches had no white saints. This was part of the problem that churches faced. Many ministers believed that churches served the communities they existed in. An integrated community might possibly have an integrated church; the church would reflect the

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<sup>260</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Paul's Letter to American Christians," 4 November 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 414-420.

<sup>261</sup> "Integration Hits the Churches," *Ebony*, May 1958.

<sup>262</sup> "Summit Conference on Race, Religion," *Ebony*, April 1963.

<sup>263</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, July 1958.

<sup>264</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on "Meet the Press," 17 April, 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 428-435.

community. To push for an integrated church within a segregated community might bring on violence. Many ministers believed that African Americans truly did not want integrated churches; they just wanted to know that they could attend a church of their choice.<sup>265</sup>

Hispanics were much less likely to attend segregated churches. This meant that Chavez could not count on one particular organization to automatically back the farm workers union. He needed a way to convince religious leaders that their cause was the moral one. For Chavez, multi-faith approaches were more important than they were for King. King's boycotts were typically local in scope and relied mostly upon the participation of African Americans. Chavez's boycott was a national one which relied upon the support of the entire grape eating public. The union found it expedient then to combine the religious traditions of many faiths in their protests.

The CMM, the Protestant group most closely allied with Chavez, also tried to work within a community of faith, something Chris Hartmire would have defined as those who practice servant hood.<sup>266</sup> This meant at times working with those of different faiths, even Catholics. Amazingly, the CMM did not see this as a chance for the Protestants to convert traditionally Catholic saints. Susan Drake remembered that from the beginning Chavez wanted the strike to have religious overtones. Most union meeting began with prayer, prayers which served to unite both Catholic and Protestant members

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<sup>265</sup> Henry A. Buchanan and Bob. W. Brown, "Integration: Great Dilemma of the Church," *Ebony*, June 1966.

<sup>266</sup> Wayne C. Hartmire Jr., "The Church and the Emerging Farm Worker's Movement: A Case Study," 22 July 1967, MGP, Box 3, Folder 1.

of the group. Susan Drake's husband, Jim, a Protestant minister, would hold meetings in people's homes accompanied by a Catholic priest. This was something new and different, and she found it a bit frightening.<sup>267</sup> Such multi-denominational events were a rare occurrence in their world.

With both Catholics and Protestants involved, the movement became a legitimate cause, one that many Americans could adopt. Farm labor organization was not just an issue that impacted Mexican American Catholics; it was something Protestants could be involved in as well. It allowed the movement to appeal to both a broader spectrum of workers and to the American public. Early on, Chavez and union leadership recognized the potential impact that the presence of church symbols and clergy had in the public mind. In a Labor News Conference radio program from 1966, Chavez reported that outside help had come from many sources including the clergy whose presence pointed out the moral aspect of the strike.<sup>268</sup> William Kircher, an AFL-CIO official who worked with the union, similarly acknowledged the role of the clergy and major religions.<sup>269</sup> As the union began to promote their boycott, they would start to ask exactly how they could push the Catholic Church to back the boycott along with the strike. Some discussion of the issue led to a memo from Bob McMillen, a union supporter, to Cesar Chavez, Jim Drake, and Gene Boutelier, another minister involved in the union, discussing reasons why the union cause was also the cause of the Church. McMillen pointed out that the

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<sup>267</sup> Susan Drake, interview with Sydney Smith, 28 May 1980, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 5.

<sup>268</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview with Harry W. Flannery on "Labor News Conference," 23 October 1966, IDP, Part II, Series IV, Box 9, Folder 18.

<sup>269</sup> William Kircher, interview with Frank Harden, moderator, on "Labor News Conference," 30 September 1969, IDP, Part II, Series IV, Box 9, Folder 18.



Church did not have to preach that it was a sin not to back the boycott; they merely had to tell adherents that their participation in the boycott was a reformist action, one which matched Catholic traditions from Leo XIII to Pius XII. McMillen also discussed the idea that anti-union clergy in the United States might actually be costing the church support in Latin America. Therefore it would be in the best interest of the Church to support the union.<sup>270</sup> Chavez, carrying on with this line, sent an open letter to boycotters in April 1970, telling them that the Bishops had shown sympathy to the cause and that boycotters should push their local bishops to be active and to promote the cause to others.<sup>271</sup> Chavez also linked religious duty with social causes in speeches. His notes for speeches to religious leaders and at religious meetings reflect the idea that the role of clergy is to help just causes. Chavez expected that more than any other groups, religious groups should share their concern for social justice issues. The clergy had a duty to be involved in the cause, particularly in the boycott, because the union cause was a right and just one.<sup>272</sup>

The union rejoiced that non Catholic clergy, both Protestant and Jewish, were supporting their cause and making appearances with them. In *El Malcriado*, during the second week of the strike, union organizers told supportive readers how clergy of various faiths were serving them. A Catholic bishop had visited and Catholic groups had brought food and money. Ten Protestant ministers had walked the picket line.<sup>273</sup> Just before the

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<sup>270</sup> Bob McMillen to Cesar Chavez, Jim Drake, and Gene Boutelier, memo regarding Grape Boycott, Farm Labor Legislation, 1969, IDP, Part II, Box 8, Folder 23.

<sup>271</sup> Cesar Chavez to Boycotters, 29 April 1970, UFWA, Part I, Box 5, Folder 10.

<sup>272</sup> Cesar Chavez, religious meetings notes, 4 November 1969; religious leaders notes, UFWA, Part 1, Box 10, Folder 10.

<sup>273</sup> "Money, Food and Help," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 21.

strike moved to march from Delano to Sacramento, the paper announced that many clergy would march with them, Catholic priests, Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis.<sup>274</sup> The union also used the support of religious groups to call for the cooperation of others. Once the Union of American Hebrew Congregations announced that they would support the boycott, the union asked other churches to do likewise.<sup>275</sup> Similarly, the union announced the support of the NCC and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.<sup>276</sup> The backing of these religious organizations helped the union promote its cause as one in which all religious Americans could be involved.

Chavez hoped that Jewish groups would not only support the boycott, but also bring economic pressure to bear upon the growers. Chavez's connection to Jewish groups went back before the strike. As a Community Service Organization organizer he had made contact with many Jewish people. This helped the movement as it expanded into cities.<sup>277</sup> Chavez made appeals to various Jewish groups throughout the strike and boycott. In December 1966, Chavez wrote to Rabbi John Zucker complaining that the Manischewitz Kosher Wine Company of New York had just sent Kosher wine makers to Perelli-Minetti farms to bless the wine. Chavez argues that this violates the principles behind what it means to produce a Kosher product. He wrote that Kosher wine "has been

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<sup>274</sup> "Farm Workers Begin 300 Mile Pilgrimage," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 31.

<sup>275</sup> "Jewish Congregations Shun Grapes," *El Malcriado*, vol. 3, no. 16.

<sup>276</sup> United Farm Workers, "Boycott Lettuce, Grapes and Gallo Wine Unless You See the UFW Union Label," United Farm Workers Union Report, c. 1975, Beale Local History Room, Kern County Library, Bakersfield, California.; "The Farmworkers: A Cry for Justice from Florida's Fields," booklet, (Keene, California, 1974), Beale Local History Room, Kern County Library, Bakersfield, California.

<sup>277</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

manufactured, with the blessing of your faith, by a firm that is disregarding the most elementary principles of democratic justice and fair play. I have been told that ‘Kosher’ means pure and clean, and I respect that tradition. But how can something be pure and clean when it is scab?’ Chavez asks the Rabbi to contact Perelli-Minetti and ask them to bargain, explaining that

If the company will not listen to this request from one of their valued customers in the name of the principles of social justice your prophets taught us all, then Manischewitz should be asked to choose between its business relationship with an unfair firm and its good will among our supporters who believe in social justice for farm workers.<sup>278</sup>

As the boycott progressed, various rabbis meet with union leaders and later wrote about their opinions. Hartmire said the reformed Jews helped the most because after their visit to Delano, they listed grapes as a non-Kosher item.<sup>279</sup> Thus, American Jews who followed the religious traditions could not eat grapes.

Chavez made a similar appeal to the Catholics. He wrote to Father Eugene Boyle, Chairman of the Commission of Social Justice for the San Francisco Archdiocese explaining that the Benedictine Monks of Assumption Abbey had put their name on Perelli-Minetti brandy. Chavez asked Boyle to contact the monks and explain the labor union’s drive to organize. He hoped that the monks would be willing to make an appeal to Perelli-Minetti. Should such an appeal be ignored, Chavez said he would ask the monks to no longer do business with that grower.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Cesar Chavez to Rabbi John Zucker, 11 December 1966, IDP, Part I, Box 87, Series 3F, Folder UFW Di Giorgio Grape Strike, 1966-1967.

<sup>279</sup> Chris Hartmire and Cesar Chavez, interview with Sydney Smith, 2 May 1982, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>280</sup> Cesar Chavez to Eugene Boyle, 6 December 1966, DCP, Box 1, Folder 13.

Like King, Chavez found that marches molded in religious terms were an excellent promotional event. The largest march in the first stage of the farm labor union's cause was the 1966 *La Peregrinación*, a 300-mile, 25 day march from Delano to Sacramento, California's capital. Not only did this march imitate such civil rights protests as Selma, it also became a religious pilgrimage. For Mexican Americans, marching was part of their religious heritage. The *penitents* had taken on religious pilgrimages usually around the time of Lent. Around the same time of year, other Catholics often followed smaller pilgrimage routes imitating the Stations of the Cross. Mexican children traditionally participated in *Los Posados*, a Christmas celebration which re-enacted Mary and Joseph's search for an inn. All of these traditions Chavez could use to his advantage in promoting the strike and in marching for a cause.<sup>281</sup> Mexican Americans who had lived in California for some period of time also were familiar with an annual procession of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which was often used as a protest march.<sup>282</sup> Because of these traditions, Chavez would make the march an event with Mexican Catholic overtones.

Authors of literature put out by the union discussed the religious aspects of pilgrimages. The Lenten penitential processions, they explained, had long been journeys made to seek forgiveness from and to demonstrate trust in God.<sup>283</sup> Just like the Lenten

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<sup>281</sup> Hoffman, 35; Samora and Simon, 226; Winthrop Yinger, *Cesar Chavez: The Rhetoric of Nonviolence* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), 33.

<sup>282</sup> Hoffman, 34; Hammerback and Jensen, 92; Sanchez, 168-169.

<sup>283</sup> "Farm Workers Begin 300 Mile Pilgrimage," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 31; Cesar Chavez, *Peregrinacion, Penitencia, Revolucion*, statement of theme for pilgrimage, 1966; Chavez, Sacramento March Letter, reprinted in Yinger, 106; "The History of the Pilgrimage," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 33.

proceedings, this march would be a walk for forgiveness. It was to be “one of penance-- public penance for the sins of the strikers, their own personal sins as well as their yielding perhaps to feelings of hatred and revenge in the strike itself,” Chavez told the workers in his announcement of the march theme.<sup>284</sup> For the workers, marching for the cause was an extension of their religious traditions.

The union would also find a use for the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a symbol taken along on the marches and used in union literature. Early in the strike, the union needed food. They wrote to mothers asking their help saying, “For our hope for a better life, and for the love of the Virgin of Guadalupe, please help us.”<sup>285</sup> The union’s use of the Virgin was never more eloquently displayed than it was in the 1966 march. In justifying the march through religious tradition, Chavez talked about shrines that were part of many Mexican homes, many of which were dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>286</sup> Union coverage of the event in *El Malcriado* told of banners imprinted with a picture of Virgin of Guadalupe which workers carried to show their faith.<sup>287</sup> *Teatro* director Luis Valdez bluntly admitted that the presence of the banner was a call to both Catholics and Mexican to lend their approval and help to the strike.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Cesar Chavez, *Peregrinacion, Penitencia, Revolucion*, statement of theme for pilgrimage, 1966.

<sup>285</sup> “An Appeal to Mothers Everywhere.” *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 21.

<sup>286</sup> Yinger, 106.

<sup>287</sup> Arthur Hoppe, “The Valley and the Marchers,” *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 33; “Signs and Symbols of the Peregrinacion,” *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 33; “Thoughts About the Pilgrimage,” *El Malcriado*, vol.1, no. 34.

<sup>288</sup> Luis Valdez, “The Tale of The Raza,” *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 47.

Chavez made sure that both the Sacramento marchers and the American public remembered the religious aspects of the 1966 march as it was occurring. The union had published the *Plan of Delano*, a document which justified the march and was often passed out during it. This document talked about the Catholic heritage of the Mexican American marchers. In an effort to involve the rest of the public, Chavez made a multi-faith appeal to Protestants and Jews, using their religious symbols. A schedule of march events published with the *Plan* included three days of religious celebrations for the Easter weekend. On Friday there were to be Stations of the Cross set up along the way, and a passion play. The Stations of the Cross would have at the most appeal to Catholics, but the passion play would have been something Protestants were familiar with as well. On Saturday there were to be prayer services in Catholic, Protestant and Jewish styles. Sunday, the last day of the march, would include both an Easter Mass and a Protestant service.<sup>289</sup> All religions were covered that weekend. Even Jews, who would normally have found little to attract them to Easter events, could attend a prayer service.

The *Plan of Delano*, not only told of the religious traditions behind the march, but it also justified it and explained the goals that the union wished to achieve. The *Plan* consisted of a series of statements, one of which demonstrated the ways in which the Catholic Church supported the workers and how the workers upheld religious values:

We seek, and have, the support of the Church in what we do. At the head of the pilgrimage we carry LA VIRGEN DE LA GUADALUPE because she is ours, all ours, Patroness of the Mexican people. We also carry the Sacred Cross and the Star of David because we are not sectarians, and because we ask the help and prayers of all religions. All men are brothers, sons of the same God; that is why we say to all of good will, in the words

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<sup>289</sup> "Schedule for the Last Days," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 32.

of Pope Leo XIII, Everyone's first duty is protect the workers from the greed of speculators who use human beings as instruments to provide themselves with money. It is neither just nor human to oppress men with excessive work to the point where their minds become enfeebled and their bodies worn out. GOD SHALL NOT ABANDON US.<sup>290</sup>

This statement told Americans that the workers were on the side of God. They were religious, and were seeking support of religious faiths.

The statement also addressed some internal concerns about the over use of religious imagery. Some union members didn't like the idea of the march as one of penitence. They felt the corporations and growers were the ones that needed to repent, not the workers. Leaders in the union who were not Catholic, including one man who was to be a march captain, were somewhat reluctant to associate their cause with Catholicism. The march captain resigned after the decision to carry a banner of the Virgin passed.<sup>291</sup> Most members of the union had no such qualms about the religious imagery used, but they did face a problem, and they knew it. Many members of the general public and the farm workers who were not Catholic would not be attracted to a movement that sold itself as only Catholic through such heavy symbolism. Catholicism might remain in a dominate position, as so many of the workers were Catholic, but they had to include appeals to other faiths as well.

The ceremonies attached to the march served the purpose of including other faiths. But, the union often used other symbols as well. One such symbol, which would appeal to all Christians, was the cross. For Catholics in particular, the cross had a special

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<sup>290</sup> "The Plan of Delano," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 31.

<sup>291</sup> Matthiessen, 127-128; Ronald Campbell, "Hartmire Recalls Religious Ties of Farm Union," *Bakersfield Californian*, 25 Sept. 1985.

meaning. To Hispanics in the United States, the cross represented liberation. After all, it was upon the cross that Christ died so that all men could be free.<sup>292</sup> The union would publish materials decked with the cross and use replicas of the cross in union events. In bemoaning the status of the impoverished and the farm workers, the union published a litany which was printed on page decorated with various symbols, including a cross.<sup>293</sup> In Chavez's union's first strike, the rose field strike in Spring of 1965, Dolores Huerta had taken a crucifix to the workers and had them swear by it that they would stay with the union.<sup>294</sup> When Chavez fasted for nonviolence in 1968, Forty Acres, the union compound, had a place for religious meetings at the foot of a cross made from telephone poles.<sup>295</sup> Considering the amount of media attention focused on the union at this time period, the cross was not just a private symbol for the workers. For the union, the image of the cross served as a symbol to both unify the workers and to show the country that they were a dedicated and faithful group. They served God and expected His blessing and the support of His followers.

The media often attacked the 1966 March to Sacramento as a protest tactic rather than as a religious ceremony. Of course the union had used the media. Media reports and pictures of the march with its religious symbols such as the cross, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and the like had helped the union appear religious. But these same items also led many to believe this was a dramatically staged event. This thought was not without

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<sup>292</sup> Goizueta," in Isasi-Diaz and Segovia, 271-280.

<sup>293</sup> Bill O'Donnell, "Litany of the Farm Worker," *El Malcriado* vol. 4, no. 3.

<sup>294</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 83.

<sup>295</sup> Steiner, *La Raza*, 323.



some justification, as the Teatro director Luis Valdez called the march “pure guerrilla theater” and said the emotional impact was great.<sup>296</sup> Reporters at the march found plenty of colorful material to include in their articles and stories, and they were sometimes careful to point out that this was an event made for the news. John Steinbacher was critical of the union, referring to the march as a made for TV event, colorful, and ceremonious.<sup>297</sup> Another critic, a reporter from the Bakersfield Californian called the event the “greatest victory of propaganda over fact” that he had seen.<sup>298</sup> Whether they agreed with the union cause or not, the media recognized that religious aspects of the march were attention getting.

Despite some of the disputes surrounding the presence of the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe, most union members seemed to be okay with the march as religious rhetoric. Sometimes they themselves helped create such symbolic drama. During the 1967 Di Giorgio strike, the counts limited the number of pickets that could picket a field. Because they had such a small presence, the union would not reach the large numbers of workers in the fields. This problem was partly solved when some female union members suggested placing an altar near the ranch entrance. Daily prayer services would be held at the altar site. Anyone could attend, including union members who were not on the picket lines. This would increase the union presence at the ranch. Taking their idea,

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<sup>296</sup> Luis Valdez, “Notes on Chicano Theater,” *Conquest and Resistance: The Origins of The Chicano National Minority*, ed. Gilberto Lopez y Rivas (Palo Alto, CA: R & E Research Associates Inc., 1979), 146.

<sup>297</sup> John Steinbacher, *Bitter Harvest*, (Orange Tree Press, Inc., 1970), 82.

<sup>298</sup> Mel Baughman, “Farm Worker Decision Day Near: Chavez a Hero Except in Kern,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 2 Sept. 1975; Ralph De Toledano, *Little Cesar* (USA: Anthem Books, 1971), 61.

Chavez set up a tailgate altar in the back of a station wagon. The union then issued invitations to a daily Mass through flyers and on the radio. When workers showed up for Mass, they met union members who would talk to them about the strike without violating the court injunction.<sup>299</sup> The union explained to everyone that the faithful were praying for the strike, families, and growers.<sup>300</sup> The *Teatro's* Valdez saw this as a form of Chicano theater.<sup>301</sup>

The union's best use of religious imagery came in 1968 with Chavez's 25 day fast for nonviolence. Fasting historically was a part of nonviolent protests, after all Gandhi had fasted, but fasting had other roots as well. Mexican Catholics were familiar with the practice from their beliefs.<sup>302</sup> Catholic laity who were devoted to saints and who participated in rituals such as pilgrimages often would fast as well. American Christians and Jews, both of whom would have been familiar with the Old Testament, were familiar with fasting from many scriptural references found in the *Bible*. These scriptures refer to fasting for repentance, as a petition to God, or as worship to God. The book of Isaiah contained a scripture which would have fit very well with the union's image of farm worker oppression. The prophet Isaiah wrote "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go

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<sup>299</sup> Day, 116; Ferriss and Sandoval, 128; Hammerback and Jensen, 72; Pitrone, 102; Steiner, *La Raza*, 321.

<sup>300</sup> "Altar of the Resada," *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 39.

<sup>301</sup> Valdez in Lopez y Rivas, 143.

<sup>302</sup> Hammerback and Jensen, 92; Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez and Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez, *Viva La Raza: The Struggle of the Mexican-American People* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., Inc., 1974), 28.

free, and that ye break every yoke?”<sup>303</sup> Chavez claimed to be fasting so that the union membership would remain nonviolent. Was this not loosing the bands of wickedness? The union members suffered under a heavy yoke of economic oppression. Was not it worth a fast to break these chains, to free the workers from the yoke? When they announced the fast to the NCC, the union claimed that the fast had a religious basis, with the traditional act of penance and the traditional ties to the Catholic Church.<sup>304</sup>

Worried about the increasing frustration of union members and their seeming readiness to resort to violence, Chavez decided to start a fast for nonviolence. He began this fast on Valentine’s Day, 1968. Although the fast began in secret, Chavez decided to announce his actions and intentions to his staff and strikers, asking them to keep quiet about what was for him a personal decision. If he ever sincerely wished their silence, his wish was not granted.

Members of the union turned the fast into a publicity event. Supporters and faithful followers flocked to Forty Acres where, by the hundreds, they attended masses held by the union priest Father Mark Day and built shrines to Virgin of Guadalupe. In his masses, Day wore vestments that bore the symbol of the union flag and served only union wine.<sup>305</sup> Chavez willingly met with arrivals. The presence of so many Mexican Americans gave the union a chance to increase their organization, especially among

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<sup>303</sup> Isaiah 58.6 KJV.

<sup>304</sup> Both reprinted in Yinger, 108, 110.

<sup>305</sup> Day, 46; Ferriss and Sandoval, 143; Ruth S. Lamb, *Mexican Americans: Sons of the Southwest* (Claremont, CA: Ocelot Press, 1970), 135; Prago, 185; Terzian and Cramer, 131; De Toledano, 70; Yinger, 40-41.

Catholic followers.<sup>306</sup> His secret act of devotion became a picture perfect opportunity to develop the union.

Chavez received more opposition to the promotion of the fast than he had to the religious aspects of the 1966 march. Such imagery so upset one union leader that, although he did not quit the union, he turned his back on Chavez during union meetings while the fast lasted.<sup>307</sup> Many members felt that fasting was sacred and should not be used for such purposes, some even felt that Chavez's attempt at fasting was not sincere, and that he was eating.<sup>308</sup> Some non-Catholics still were not happy about the heavily Catholic religious imagery in the Sacramento march. Many agreed with them, calling for the cause to be a secular one rather than a religious one. Some Catholics also were leery of this event, feeling that once more the Church was being used.<sup>309</sup> However, such protest represented a fairly small proportion of the union membership. Most members were supportive, including three young men who, much to their wives' disgust, vowed to abstain from sex during the fast.<sup>310</sup>

Chavez decided to end the fast after 25 days. The fast concluded with a Mass held in Delano's Memorial Park. Copying from the march strategy, the union adapted a variety of religious symbols to fit into the mass celebration. The Mass itself was

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<sup>306</sup> Mattheisen, 182-183.

<sup>307</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 143.

<sup>308</sup> De Toledano, 71.

<sup>309</sup> Day, 46, Mattheissen, 179-181; Ferriss and Sandoval, 143. Kushner, 166; Ronald Campbell, "Hartmire Recalls Religious Ties of Farm Union," *Bakersfield Californian*, 25 Sept. 1985.

<sup>310</sup> Mattheissen, 182, De Toledano, 40.

obviously a Catholic ritual. A prayer was said in Hebrew, and Chavez's doctor, who was Jewish, did a reading from the Old Testament. Both of these were to appeal to Jewish supporters.<sup>311</sup> The Protestants came in for their share of attention when Reverend James Drake from the CMM read Chavez's statement, a sermonic piece that praised the inclusion of a variety of religious groups. "Perhaps," he said, "in the future we will come together at other times and places to break bread and to renew our courage and to celebrate important victories."<sup>312</sup> These rituals were concluded as a priest blessed semita bread and passed it among the crowd, calling it the "bread of social justice."<sup>313</sup>

The passing of the bread of social justice stemmed from an old Biblical tradition of breaking bread, which is primarily found in the New Testament. The most recognized example comes from the stories of the first communion, found in the Gospels and in I Corinthians. Here Jesus, knowing he would soon be crucified, took bread, a symbol of -- his body, and offered it to the disciples, telling them to eat it in remembrance of him.<sup>314</sup> Other Biblical examples of bread breaking describe it as an event of thanksgiving. When the Apostle Paul was shipwreck on the island now called Malta, he broke bread and ate, thanking God that he had survived and trusting that God would keep him safe.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> "10,000 Mass in Gran Fiesta," *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 2.; Mattheisen, 195; Prago, 185; Ronald B. Taylor, 226; Day, 47.

<sup>312</sup> Statement by Cesar Chavez On The Conclusion Of A 25 Day Fast For Non-violence, read by Rev. James Drake, 10 March 1968, Beale Memorial Library, Local History Room, Bakersfield, California.

<sup>313</sup> Day, 47; Yinger, 42.

<sup>314</sup> Matthew 26.26, Mark 14.22, Luke 22.19, I Corinthians 11.24 KJV.

<sup>315</sup> Acts 27:35 KJV.

The breaking of bread set up one of the union's most famous publicity opportunities. Chavez may have claimed that he wanted to the press to abstain from taking pictures and asking for interviews, but union leader Leroy Chatfield believed the fast was propaganda, as the union had used their resources to reap the reward from the publicity of the event.<sup>316</sup> Attending the Mass was soon to be presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy, who knew he had to win the all important California primary in 1968. Kennedy, who was himself Catholic and popular with racial minorities, decided to attend the fast. His presence alone increased media attention to the event.<sup>317</sup> Seated on the platform by Chavez, Kennedy would appear in many of the fast pictures. In the most famous of these, Kennedy leans over a weak Chavez, sharing with him some of the bread from the Mass. Helen, wearing a veil is nearby. Such pictures and stories added to the idea that the union was a dedicated labor union, but a religious one.

Religious symbols were important in attracting support to the cause. By using Catholic clergy, symbols and traditions, the union attracted Catholics to the cause. These Catholics, if farm workers would have been likely to join the union. If not workers, they would have been likely to support the boycott of grapes. Protestant symbols served the same purpose, although these were more significant in their appeals to the general public rather than to potential union members. If the American people believed that the movement was a religious one, they would be more inclined to participate in union led programs.

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<sup>316</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 143; Matthiessen, 182-185.

<sup>317</sup> De Toledano, 71-72. Ferriss and Sandoval, 145, have a very good example of this picture.

Although Chavez's religious strategies often mimicked King's early ones, by 1966, just as Chavez was in the first stages of the grape strike, King would be guiding the movement in a different direction. But King still believed that Christians could and should be involved in the movement. Christians had an obligation to reach out internationally and to demonstrate the goodness of democracy to the world. These were enormous challenges, but for the American Christian, they were possible, because King believed, "The God of our fathers is a God of revolution."<sup>318</sup> This mix of religious and patriotic rhetoric demonstrated that Americans had more than one reason to support King's cause. Religious Americans, particularly Christians and Jews, could support it because it was morally the right thing to do. Patriotic Americans could support because it was an extension of the American way of life. This was not a new appeal for King, he had long believed that support of the civil rights movement was a patriotic obligation, and he had promoted it as such. Chavez would adopt a similar method; only instead of using patriotic images, he would adopt ones that emphasized ethnic pride.

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<sup>318</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Christian Movement in a Revolutionary Age," Fall 1966, MLK Speeches, III, Box 10.

#### 4. FOLLOWING THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE: PATRIOTISM AND ETHNIC PRIDE

For Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez religious imagery had served to unite their bases and to attract white Americans to the cause. King would also attempt to attract both his base (Southern African Americans) and whites through patriotic rhetoric and symbols. His appeals often called his audience's attention to American history, to its founders, and to its system of democracy. Chavez and the farm labor movement rarely used such appeals to American patriotism. Instead, he and the union focused mainly on unifying their Mexican American base by celebrating Mexican history and culture.

King's patriotic rhetoric served two purposes. First, he and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) could draw upon it to enhance their roles as political activists. By using such patriotic rhetoric, King could call upon the federal government to recognize that African Americans were Americans too, entitled to all rights and privileges of citizenship. He could then demand that the federal government intervene in the Southern situation, through executive action, legislation and court decisions. The second reason behind King's rhetoric was that by referring to a great American past, he could attempt to convince African Americans that they needed to fight for their rights as citizens. He could ask African Americans to join the movement and to demand both equal treatment and rights. King could also call on whites to embrace the



movement and to pressure the federal government to grant the full privileges of citizenship to their fellow Americans. When King did refer to African American history, he did not do so in ways which would be much more common in the later half of the 1960s, the way of Black Nationalism. Rather, King's version of African American history firmly set African Americans in the middle of the traditional American story. He did not create for his cause a separate African American history.

Chavez's rhetoric made the union an extension of the Mexican past. He, like King, was influenced by what he needed from the federal government and from his supporters, the farm workers. But, whereas King had needed the government to recognize that African Americans were ordinary Americans and that they deserved civil and voting rights protections, Chavez needed the government to realize that Mexican Americans, some of whom were citizens and some of whom were not, were a unique group, one which needed the protection of the federal government in order to gain union recognition. Such rhetoric and imagery also served to draw Mexican American farm workers to the cause. This was a history that union members and potential members were familiar with. Even if they considered themselves Mexican American, they still recognized and celebrated their Mexican heritage. Where religious symbolism might occasionally divide them, ethnic symbols would not. Therefore, the union found such images extremely valuable.

### **Government Action**

King rose to national prominence during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Even before the boycott ended, he had become one of America's foremost African American leaders. King's main concern in the first stage of the civil rights movement was that African Americans be able to enjoy the equal rights and privileges of citizens. This meant that he would call upon the government to enforce Supreme Court rulings, pass legislation dealing with civil rights issues, and to protect those African Americans exercising their rights. In order to persuade the government to act, King became a political activist, appealing to Presidents and Congressmen alike to support his cause.

But in order for African Americans to gain equal rights as citizens, King needed the protection of the federal government. This was acknowledged not only by King, but by other prominent African Americans. During the bus boycott in Montgomery, J. H. Jackson, the president of the National Baptist Convention, sent King a contribution and wrote him to say, "And now, may our floating flag wave over you, and the Federal Constitution sustain you, and the laws of justice and fair play protect you; and may the God of heaven smile upon you, breaking every chain, removing every barrier, and giving unto you the life of comfort and of solace, in the darkest hour of your heroic struggles,"<sup>1</sup> Jackson believed that the American justice system, which was founded upon the Constitution, would lead to King's victory.

Shortly after Jackson wrote these encouraging words, King's belief that the movement's salvation lay in the willingness of the courts to protect the cause would be

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Jackson to Martin Luther King, Jr., 5 March 1956, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol III: Birth of a New Age, December 1955- December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 1997), 154-155.

tested. The American dream could only come to pass if legislation and court decisions were enforced in the South.<sup>2</sup> However, the courts could not always be relied upon to rule in ways that protected African American civil rights. On March 22, 1956, King had been found guilty by Judge Eugene Carter of leading an illegal boycott against the bus system. King was fined \$1000, \$500 of which went to cover court costs, or over a year in jail. King posted bond and his attorneys prepared to file appeals. Others who had been similarly accused had their trials delayed until King's case went through the appeals process. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) held a mass meeting that night at the Holt Street Baptist Church attended by three thousand people.<sup>3</sup> There, he told the audience to keep up their faith in the democratic process in the face of what seemed to be unfair rulings from judges, reminding them that the Promised Land only came after the chosen people went through the wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

Even before the Montgomery Bus Boycott was over, public officials began to ask King what changes were needed in American politics. When he appeared before the Democratic National Convention (DNC) Committee on Platform Resolutions, King testified that there were several things the party needed to include in their platform for the 1956 elections. He called on the party to promise to support the civil rights legislation needed to protect African American citizenship. He called for federal protections of the right to vote. He claimed that the executive and the legislative branches also needed to

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Message from Dr. King," c. 1965, SCLC, Box, Folder 15.

<sup>3</sup> David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 73-74.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the MIA Mass Meeting, 22 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 199-201.

move to force the issue of desegregation as the Supreme Court had ruled. King wanted the party to support keeping federal dollars from segregated schools and facilities. Finally he wanted Senate rules changed on cloture so that a simple majority vote could lead to the passage of civil rights legislation.<sup>5</sup> Here King told the Democratic Party directly what they could do to help African Americans.

Voting, civil rights legislation, and implementation of desegregation orders would continue to be a theme with King. In 1959 he and two other Alabama leaders wrote to Eisenhower stating that they were protesting the “continued emasculation of their citizenship rights, defiance of the federal courts and breakdown of law and order as regards to racial justice.” They stated that they were asking Congress and the President for voting protection so that they could vote without fear of becoming the victims of violence.<sup>6</sup> The need for protection from violence became readily apparent following the school integration process in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Montgomery bus boycott had been relatively peaceful. The violence associated with the bus boycott largely revolved around the bombing of a few buildings such as the homes of King and E. D. Nixon. These bombing disturbed King to the extent that he asked Alabama governor James Folsom for state protection.<sup>7</sup> There were also three incidents where busses were shot at,

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Testimony to the Democratic National Convention, Committee on Platform Resolutions, 11 August 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 335-338.

<sup>6</sup> K. L. Buford, Martin Luther King, Jr., and W. C. Patton, telegram to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 25 January 1959, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2005), 111-112.

<sup>7</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 61-62.

but these came after the boycott was over.<sup>8</sup> By and large, the boycott participants in Montgomery had escaped violence during the protest itself. But the children at Central High School in Little Rock faced much worse. At one point, school administrators smuggled the teens out of the building for fear that they would be lynched by an invading mob. These students spent much of their year at Central under guard, sometimes being followed to class by a personal protector.<sup>9</sup> This violent form of mass resistance was only a hint of things to come. From then on, the civil rights leadership would clamor for the federal government to be involved not only in enforcing court orders, but also in saving the lives of civil rights activists. The behavior of Southern mobs during the 1960 sit-ins and the 1961 Freedom Rides would only serve to confirm the necessity for government protection from violence.

Significantly, while the courts could make rulings favoring black civil rights, they could not enforce or implement them. That, as King had told the DNC in 1956, was something left up to the other branches. King often reminded his audiences that the people had to push the federal government to act. In a December 1956 address concerning desegregation before the National Committee for Rural schools, King told his audience that people had to demand that the federal government act. They had to be forced to enforce the law.<sup>10</sup> When he appeared at an Emancipation Day Rally for the NAACP in Atlanta in January 1957, King reminded his audience that to speed up the

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<sup>8</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 114-119, 134-298.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Desegregation and the Future," 15 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 471-479.

process of desegregation and freedom the first thing they had to do was the demand that the federal government use the authority granted it in the Constitution to enforce the law.<sup>11</sup> This was a theme that King would return to many times over.

King would also remind politicians personally that they had a responsibility to uphold the Constitution. King and others at the Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Non-violent Integration in January 1957 sent a telegram to President Eisenhower which recounted for the President the recent violence in Alabama. The men reminded Eisenhower that the maintenance of law and order was a duty of the executive branch, and that he as the executive had the power to help end the crisis. Reminding him of the international image problems created by racial violence, the leaders requested that Eisenhower make a speech in the South, telling Southerners to obey the mandates of the Supreme Court.<sup>12</sup> Similar demands for the president to make a speech in the South would be issued at a press conference the same day. The conference would also call for Vice President Nixon to tour the South and take note of conditions there, just as he had done with Hungarian refugees. Finally, African American leaders wanted to speak with the Department of Justice about what it could do to address the threats of violence toward African Americans in the South.<sup>13</sup> Southern African American leaders apparently

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age:" 1 January 1957, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol. IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2000), 73-89.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., C. K. Steele, F. L. Shuttlesworth, and T. J. Jemison for the Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Non-violent Integration, 11 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 99-101.

<sup>13</sup> Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration, "A Statement to the South and the Nation," 11 Jan 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 103-106.

thought that a presidential speech in the South would free Southern liberals to take a stand for the cause. They continued to demand that Eisenhower make such a speech, promising that if he did not, they would call a prayer pilgrimage to Washington DC.<sup>14</sup> Inevitably, they were forced to act on their promised and the Pray Pilgrimage took place on May 17, 1957. Following the Prayer Pilgrimage, King continued to demand that the executive branch take action. After a meeting with Vice President Richard Nixon on June 13, 1957, King and Ralph Abernathy released a statement of demands for action from Nixon. They wanted Nixon to make a speech in the South, similar to the one they had demanded of Eisenhower, in the hopes that it would inspire southern moderates. They wanted Nixon to talk to Republicans in Congress about the need for a civil rights bill.<sup>15</sup> There was little to no chance that Eisenhower or the executive branch would actually do most of this. In fact about the only thing that the movement did get out of the government that year was the 1957 Civil Rights Act, a weak document which contained provisions for a civil rights commission and permission for the Justice Department to sue in cases of registration discrimination.<sup>16</sup> However almost as soon as the act had cleared Congress, Eisenhower would be forced to get involved as the school desegregation crisis deepened in Little Rock, Arkansas.

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Richard D. Heffner for "The Open Mind," 10 February 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 126-131; Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Negro Leaders Conference to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 14 February 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 132-134.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ralph Abernathy, Statement on Meeting with Richard Nixon, 13 June 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 222-223.

<sup>16</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 98.

The government's intervention in Little Rock gave King hope that he could convince the executive branch to intervene in Southern affairs. King sent a telegram to Eisenhower on September 25, 1957 to commend him on his actions at Central High School. The telegram was in response to Eisenhower's decision to provide the Little Rock Nine with military escorts to school and during school. Most of the South, both African American and white, King explained, was behind the President. It was only a vocal minority that was upset, but in time they too would come to appreciate Eisenhower's actions in light of Christian traditions.<sup>17</sup>

King was also not shy about expressing his opinions to Congressmen. Some of them would even seek him out to find out his opinions on legislative matters. Charles Chamberlain a representative from Michigan wrote to King in 1957 wanting to know his opinion on the proposed policy of withholding federal funds from schools which did not follow the court orders to desegregate. This was known as the Powell amendment and had been attached as a rider to appropriations bills. King responded that he tended to like the idea because there had to be something done to make the South obey the Supreme Court.<sup>18</sup> This fit in line with King's belief that the federal government had to find a way to enforce court orders. Politicians were increasingly willing to listen to King. Whether or not they acted on his advice was another matter.

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Dwight D. Eisenhower, telegram, 25 September 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 278; Beals, 129-137.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Charles E. Chamberlain, 1 May 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 195-196.



After all, what political capital did African Americans have which would force the politicians to act? King told Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity members at their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations that African Americans had to have the ballot. It was only with the ability to vote that the executive and legislative branches could be made to do as the courts had insisted.<sup>19</sup> King also scolded those African Americans who did have access to the ballot box who might not be voting. King later told attendees at a Freedom Rally in St. Louis in April 1957 that those who could vote had no excuse not to, and that they could help African Americans in the South by using the power of the vote, as well by contributing funds.<sup>20</sup>

As the system worked, African Americans in the South were widely disenfranchised. This meant that many politicians would ignore their needs simply because they did not vote and could not be of use or harm to them. This was why King had told the DNC that the federal government needed to protect the right to vote. Federal protection however, had to go hand in hand with increased African American voter registration and participation. Only then could the government be forced to act. So, in 1956, King would begin a campaign to encourage federal protection of voting rights, one which would take nearly a decade.

In August 1956, King and other civil rights leaders wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower and described the situation of African Americans, including problems with

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Birth of a New Age," 11 August 1956, *The Golden Anniversary Story of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, 1906-1956*, ed. Charles Wesley (Chicago: Alpha Phi Alpha, 1956) *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 85-90.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," 10 April 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 167-179.

bombings, voting intimidation, white councils, and effigy hangings. The authors of the letter called upon Eisenhower to launch an investigation of the problems in Alabama. King received a reply from the Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice, Warren Olney, III. Olney asserted that much of what King described broke no federal law, but that the administration did want more information about possible voter intimidation. King responded by sending statistical information about African American voters and a survey of voting practices which told of registration problems. He concluded by once again asking the federal government to intervene.<sup>21</sup>

King and other African American leaders also requested to meet with Eisenhower. They were finally granted the chance in June of 1958. Included in the meeting were King, A. Philip Randolph, Lester B. Granger, and Roy Wilkins. After their meeting, they issued a statement which detailed in violence and corruption of American rights in the country. To remedy the situation, they suggested that the President should, among other things, announce that he would use all of his power to uphold the law, have the Department of Justice to become involved in the Little Rock school case, investigate bombings and work to protect voting rights. They also wanted the President to talk to congress about bipartisan support for implementing Part III of the 1957 civil rights bill, a part which allowed the Attorney General to protect a variety of rights other than voting rights. In short, the President was requested to do all that he could to back the Supreme

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., E. D. Nixon, E. H. Mason, and Rufus Lewis, to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 27 August 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 357-358; Warren Olney, III to Martin Luther King, Jr., 7 September 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 364-365; Martin Luther King, Jr. to Warren Olney, III, 17 September 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 368-369.

Court and to make it impossible for the South to refuse to integrate the public schools. He was also expected to protect voting rights through the Department of Justice.<sup>22</sup>

Voting would be the center of another form of protest, the Prayer Pilgrimage, held in Washington, DC, May 17, 1957. King's speech to the faithful there was titled "Give us the Ballot." King told the audience that despite the Brown decision nearly three years prior, the South had not integrated their schools. In fact, whites had become determined to keep Southern society entrenched in a segregated system. Even worse, Southerners had also kept African Americans from voting. King then called for the ballot and promised that if given the right to vote, African Americans would put good politicians in office, put fair justices in the courts, and righteous governors into the capitals. With the ballot, King promised, African Americans could nonviolently change the South, implement the decisions of the Supreme Court, and protect basic rights.<sup>23</sup>

Following a meeting with Richard Nixon the following month, King expressed the hope that Nixon would build up support among Republican Congressmen for the Civil Rights bill in Congress.<sup>24</sup> That bill became the 1957 Civil Rights Act. As the bill went before President Eisenhower, King wrote to Vice President Nixon and expressed his desire that the President not veto it. King added that this bill was making it possible for his organization to launch a voting drive among Southern African Americans in time for

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<sup>22</sup> A. Philip Randolph et al, "A Statement to the President of the United States," 23 June 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 426-429; see also SCLC, Box 120, Folder 1.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Give Us the Ballot," 17 May 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 208-215.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., and Ralph Abernathy, Statement on Meeting with Richard Nixon, 13 June 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 222-223.

the 1960 election.<sup>25</sup> Nixon responded to King in September of that year, saying that while the Civil Rights bill, which Eisenhower had just signed into law, was not as tough as many desired, its true worth would be tested by its effectiveness. Nixon said that if African Americans voted at higher rates than normal, it would be a huge step forward.<sup>26</sup>

Undoubtedly, Nixon was hoping that those new African American voters would return to the Republican Party. Nixon, who would run against John F. Kennedy for the presidency in 1960, was already trying to calculate how such reforms might work to his advantage. Nixon was not the only one doing this. Earl Mazo, who was writing a book about Nixon, approached King in 1958 to ask his opinion on the Vice President. King responded that one could almost forget that Nixon was the same man who had delivered the phony emotional speech of 1952, the speech which came to be called the Checkers speech. Although he had his reservations about Nixon, King believed Nixon might be a better civil rights president than Eisenhower had been. Plus, Nixon's Quaker faith relieved King's mind somewhat, as he believed that Quakers normally weren't prejudice.<sup>27</sup> King made similar statements about his faith in the Republicans that same year during an interview by Mike Wallace. King told Wallace that it was possible that African Americans would move to the Republican Party for the 1960 election. King felt

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Richard Nixon, 30 August 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 264-266.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Nixon to Martin Luther King, Jr., 17 September 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 277.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Earl Mazo, 2 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 481-483.

this change would depend on how Eisenhower and the Justice Department acted in the two years prior to the election.<sup>28</sup>

The promised campaign to increase African American voter registration came in the form of the Crusade for Citizenship. A person, explained King in a press release announcing the crusade, had no real citizenship unless they had the right to vote. So, the SCLC began a campaign of Southern voter registration designed to ensure that African Americans were granted their American rights.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it soon became expedient to combine the voter registration efforts of various groups. This combination resulted in a decision to focus upon registration drives to urban areas of six states. The NAACP committed the help of a field and regional secretaries.<sup>30</sup> Still, the SCLC continued with its plans for the Crusade for Citizenship on its own. King sent a memo to SCLC leaders in early February 1958 to detail the objectives for the meeting planned for the 12th of that month. The Crusade, he wrote, was to be a Southern movement which would increase two-fold the number of African American voters registered. He reminded the SCLC that this was a nonpartisan effort whose purpose was “to get men and women to realize that voting is a ‘moral’ and ‘political’ duty to God, to the nation, to themselves, and to their children.” King promised that once the vote was gained other changes would occur in society such as desegregation of the busses, increased pay, less police brutality, and fair

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Mike Wallace, 25 June 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 431-441.

<sup>29</sup> Press Release, Announcement of the Crusade for Citizenship, 5 November 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 307-308.

<sup>30</sup> Roy Wilkins to Martin Luther King, Jr., 14 January 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 350-351.

courts. Also, inspired by the ideas of Nixon, King said that this voting drive would make the civil rights bill meaningful.<sup>31</sup>

On February 12, 1958, King spoke at the Greater Bethel AME Church of Miami, Florida, and launched the Crusade for Citizenship. He began his address by telling of the struggle to vote in America, complete with its class, gender, and racial issues. Thus, he put the African American struggle to vote in the context of American history. Such a struggle was a very American one. Poorer men had fought for their right to vote, as had women. The African American struggle was just the latest in a long historical line. Furthermore, the issue of free elections was a modern day one. United States foreign policy was concerned with free elections in Germany. How much more so should the federal government be concerned with those African Americans who were denied the right to vote?<sup>32</sup> So the Crusade began by encouraging African Americans to join in the long fight to win the vote.

Until African Americans in the South could vote however, they had to find another form of political power, preferably one that would help them obtain voting rights. Some African American leaders thought they had found the answer to this problem when they moved to form the SCLC. The impetus for the SCLC came from two Northern men, Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison. Rustin wrote King in December 1956, just as the bus boycott was winding down, promising him a prospectus for a suggested meeting to

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<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., To the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 4 February 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 358-360.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Delivered at a Meeting Launching the SCLC Crusade for Citizenship, 12 February 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 367-371.

organize a Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation. Rustin's idea was that this organization would function just as the Minute Men or the Sons of Liberty. It would organize groups in the community across class lines. And, like these groups supposedly had, the actions of the people would force the enemy to respect them.<sup>33</sup> Rustin saw the organization that he was proposing as a patriotic organization which would serve to protect the rights of the people and to connect them to other groups that shared their goals and values.

The SCLC saw itself as operating within the realm of American tradition. In their constitutional preamble, the SCLC cited the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, federal civil rights laws, and Supreme Court decisions as documents which proved that the government was there to protect everyone's life and freedom. This was a tradition that came from the days when colonial Americans had formed a new government as a protest to the tyranny and oppression of the British. This government, claimed the SCLC, was based on the belief that all men were created equal and had certain rights. The SCLC went on to establish its aims as ones which would help African Americans become full American citizens with all of the rights to which they were so entitled. They would also promote change in the South, hand-in-hand with white Southerners. Together they would honor the democratic foundations upon which the

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<sup>33</sup> Bayard Rustin to Martin Luther King Jr., 23 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 491-494.

country had been founded. The SCLC would also serve to help bring together organize various local protest groups, as well as provide financial help to the cause.<sup>34</sup>

The voting drive and the existence of the SCLC gave African American leaders hope that they could influence the election of 1960. As such, King and others launched a March on the Conventions Movement meant to force both of the parties to consider a strong civil rights platform. Calling for a government that followed through on its promises, the march organizers said that progress in school desegregation had almost stopped and that the 1960 Civil Rights bill put too much of the burden of proof concerning civil rights violations upon the shoulders of African Americans. To express their frustration, they marched at the conventions held in Los Angeles and Chicago. They hoped the parties would then adopt platforms that declared segregation and discrimination unconstitutional and un-American. They hoped the parties would reject those among them who continued to ignore Supreme Court decisions. And, they demanded that presidential candidates answer a list of questions which they would pose to them about their stands on civil rights.<sup>35</sup> Along this line, Congressman Chester Bowles and the Democratic Party Platform Committee received letters with suggestions of what the Democrats should include in their platform statements. These letters called for a backing of the *Brown* decision and a deadline for the completion of school integration. The letters asked that Democrats reject discrimination and segregation as

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<sup>34</sup> Constitution and By-laws of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, GA, booklet, SCLC, Box 32, Folder 4.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., et al, Statement Announcing the March on the Conventions Movement for Freedom Now, 9 June 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 467-469.



unconstitutional, and expel those in Congress who supported such violations. They asked for support of a federal voting registration program in the South, reduction of Congressional power in places where people were kept from exercising their right to vote, and for the approval of sit-ins as a valid protest tactic, like labor strikes. They also wanted the party to reject colonialism in the world in any form, back suits that would shore up the 1957 Civil Rights Bill, and call for an executive order banning discrimination in government and in firms that had contracts with the government. They wanted an effective law against lynching, and a cabinet position held by an African American.<sup>36</sup> At the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, the NAACP held a rally to promote civil rights issues. King spoke there and called for a rejection of the call for moderation, saying that this was really a call to slow down.<sup>37</sup>

When the conventions had met and named their nominees, John F. Kennedy emerged as the Democratic nominee and Richard Nixon as the Republican one. When a local Atlanta radio station interviewed King and asked his opinions of the two men, King replied that he believed either of the two men would do more for civil rights than Eisenhower had. King had talked to both men about civil rights, Kennedy since the nomination and Nixon before, and he reported that he was impressed by both men, although he was not certain which of the two would be more influential. He was

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Chester Bowles, 24 June 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 478-480; L. B. Thompson, Joint Platform Proposals to the 1960 Democratic Party Platform, 7 July 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 5, 482-485.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at NAACP Mass Rally for Civil Rights, 10 July 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 485-487.

however leery of the Democratic Vice Presidential nominee, Lyndon Johnson, but said he had hopes that the man could be persuaded.<sup>38</sup>

King never would endorse Presidential candidates. He believed that the SCLC was to be nonpartisan and as its president he could not make an endorsement. Making such an endorsement would also mean that his influence within the political process would be reduced. As long as he remained neutral he could feel free to criticize either party. However, in the 1960 election King came as close as he could to endorsing Kennedy without actually doing so. On November 1, 1960, just days before the election, King released a statement which announced that although he could not endorse the man, he was very appreciative of Kennedy's concern and willingness to take a stand during the time of King's arrest.<sup>39</sup> King had been arrested and sentenced in October to four months in a Georgia state prison after a judge found that he had violated the terms of his probation from a traffic ticket by being arrested during a sit in protest. The harsh sentence infuriated people. And, upon hearing of it, Kennedy decided to pick up the phone and call Coretta Scott King to offer her solace and any help that he could provide. Kennedy's willingness to do this seemed to be a promise that he might also be willing to be more of an activist president than Eisenhower had been or that Nixon would be.

When the election was over, Kennedy emerged as the victor. Politicians on both sides were determining that what had been a close race had been decided by African American votes in the Northern cities. They had been drawn to Kennedy because of his

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<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Zenas Sears on "For Your Information," 6 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 544-553.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., statement, 1 November 1960, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 3.

actions during King's time in prison. African American intellectuals such as Harold DeWolf, a former teacher of King, could now celebrate the fact that the African American vote did mean something, and that African Americans were now a political force to be reckoned with.<sup>40</sup> Less than a month after the election, LBJ wrote to King and thanked him for his support, saying that he looked forward to the coming years of mutual cooperation.<sup>41</sup>

The 1960 election had proven that with the vote, African Americans could influence American society. It would become increasingly important that they fight to protect their civil rights and to make the federal government enact a better system which protected the franchise. King also found hope that African Americans would ally with white moderates for political progress. He believed that the "oldest democratic institution in America, the secret ballot, has become the secret weapon." This weapon, he said, had been especially effective in the 1962 Georgia governor's race. King reported that happily nearly half of white voters had sided with African American voters to vote against a segregationist candidate. Other electoral results in Georgia reflected such a pattern, and led King to believe that the increased number of African American voters was forcing white moderates to take notice and act accordingly. He believed great change was coming soon.<sup>42</sup> As such, the SCLC would begin to promote their Crusade for the Vote in the mid 1960s by telling readers of their promotional pamphlet made for local

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<sup>40</sup> Harold DeWolf to Martin Luther King, Jr., 15 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 553-554.

<sup>41</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson to Martin Luther King, Jr., 28 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 565.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., to Dear Friend, November 1962, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

organizations to use that “Even the most die-hard segregationist in public office can be made to respect voting power.”<sup>43</sup> The SCLC had seen the promise of the ballot for years, now they had shown the nation proof that it could be effective.

SCLC would become involved in other actions across the South throughout the early 1960s. Their activities took them to such places as Albany, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama. Albany would later be labeled a failure because the movement failed to win any real concessions from the city. However, as a learning tool, this first major drive by the SCLC was invaluable. SCLC leadership had great hope concerning the Albany movement. They saw it as a case where all of the community had joined in the protests to attack segregation in general, rather than one specific instance of segregation. Wyatt Tee Walker served as SCLC Director at the time of the Albany protests, and he informed the SCLC in his Annual Report in 1962, that efforts at Albany had served to free the souls of African Americans in a way the Emancipation Proclamation did not. For Walker, Albany proved that the SCLC could function as a support organization on a nation-wide scale.<sup>44</sup> More importantly, the Albany Movement taught the SCLC that it needed to be careful of alliances with other national organizations, focus on one issue at a time rather than trying to integrate an entire town and register voters, and to concentrate protest efforts on businesses and not on politicians because it was the business men who would make change happen.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Crusade for the Vote,” SCLC pamphlet, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>44</sup> Wyatt Tee Walker, Report of the Director, Annual Report, October-September 1962, SCLC, Box 36, Folder 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (Grand Rapids: Harper and Row, 1989), 224-229.

The Albany movement traced its beginnings from the arrest of five Freedom Riders at a local bus terminal November 1, 1961. These individuals tested the Albany terminal's compliance with the ICC's desegregation policy and were arrested. Their arrest inspired demonstrations in December, but failed to inspire mass protests. It was at this point that the SCLC began to get involved. The Albany Movement announced that they had five reasons behind their protests. They wanted to push for the guarantee of rights and privileges as promised in the Constitution and by the Supreme Court, better job opportunities, dignity for all, and to be able as citizens to help carry out legislation, and to help other civil rights programs. Those celebrating the origins of the movement pointed to the Constitution as justification for their fight against segregation. They claimed that the Constitution guaranteed them equal opportunity to get a good education, to vote, and to climb up the socio-economic ladder. The Constitution also seemed to promise equal protection and a climate conducive to a person working for the betterment of the entire community.<sup>46</sup> Such sentiments were also expressed in the Albany Manifesto, a document produced by the Albany Movement which made it clear that they intended to peacefully protest within the bounds of the rights granted in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Since they realistically expected that they would be arrested, they also declared that they expected speedy trials as granted in the Constitutional amendments.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> "The Albany Movement: 1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Celebration, November 12-16, 1962," SCLC, Box 51, Folder 13.

<sup>47</sup> Albany Movement, "Operation '212,'" c. July 1962, SCLC Papers, Box 134, Folder 21.

After the SCLC subsequently bogged down in Albany, the organization soon turned its attention toward Birmingham, Alabama. There, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights led by SCLC activist Fred Shuttlesworth had begun protests. These activists, too, adopted the patriotic rhetoric and calls for action seen in earlier SCLC action. In their Birmingham Manifesto, the activists wrote that they had attempted to get the city government to change laws regulating segregation and unfair hiring policies. When that had failed, they had filed suits in court. This had become a lengthy process but had resulted in some decisions in their favor. Meanwhile, the city had avoided complying with the court orders in many cases, by simply doing things such as closing the parks. Further complaints in the manifesto dealt with police brutality and the failure of the business class to keep their promises about desegregation. The authors of the manifesto wrote that they believed in American democracy and in the words of Jefferson when he had written that all men were created equal and entitled to certain rights.<sup>48</sup> This rhetoric matched the SCLC line of the time. Jane Bond, SCLC's Research and Information Secretary, wrote to a disgruntled correspondent that SCLC had the "basic aim of achieving full citizenship rights, equality, and the integration of the Negro into all aspects of American life." Economic improvement was important, she wrote, but the SCLC would not simply focus on that and ignore other areas of American life where discrimination occurred.<sup>49</sup> While Bond might have implied that voting rights were needed when she mentioned citizenship rights, neither she nor the authors of the

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<sup>48</sup> Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, "Birmingham Manifesto," SCLC, Box 120, Folder 15.

<sup>49</sup> Jane M. Bond, to Gilbert T. Roos, 28 May, 1963, SCLC, Box 116, Folder 20.

manifesto mention them directly. Instead, they chose to focus the protest efforts on integration and discrimination issues outside of voting. It was as if at Birmingham they had realized they could only address one issue at a time and had to pick between integration and voting rights. In this case, they chose to focus on integration.

Birmingham in 1963 turned gruesome thanks to law enforcement policies of the area. These well publicized acts of violence, combined with the death of President Kennedy, turned America's attention to the civil right's bill. King was given hope of such a bill's passage when Johnson gave his first speech to Congress in November 1963. Johnson called for a civil rights bill to be quickly passed. King congratulated Johnson on such a stance and added that such a bill would be the best way that the nation could honor the work of the recently deceased Kennedy. King hoped that such a bill would be passed before Christmas.<sup>50</sup> That was not to be, but King came to hope that 1964 would be the year in which Americans finally dealt with the problems they had seen in Birmingham. He had great faith in the passage of an effective civil rights bill, but planned a voter registration drive that summer anyway because it would test the civil rights bill if it did pass. King hoped for a strong bill which would address segregation, equal employment opportunities, and a ban on federal funds used in discriminatory projects.<sup>51</sup> What King did not say is that such a bill would not really protect voting rights at all. In the American mind voting rights and desegregation were two separate issues. And indeed, this was how they would be addressed in legislation.

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<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement on President Johnson's Speech, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 4.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Stan Brooks, Jim Gordon, and Tuck Stadler on "The WINS News Conference," 31 May 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6.

If Birmingham in 1963 was about integration, the Mississippi Freedom Summer in which the SCLC was involved was about voting registration. The SCLC's involvement in the citizenship schools dated back to September 1961, when they began to drive bus loads of community leaders to the Dorchester Center in McIntosh, Georgia. There participants underwent a five day training session in which they learned how to teach basic lessons in reading, math, life skills, and government. The intended result of this program was to create communities of informed individuals who understood how they might influence the government.<sup>52</sup> In 1964, the SCLC had joined with many other organizations including Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), to form the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). They planned and set up the Mississippi Freedom Summer, an all out drive to register African American voters in that state. That summer, COFO printed pamphlets which advertised its coming to Mississippi. Through these, they told the people of Mississippi that this movement was for them and asked for help with finding lodging, buildings for Freedom Schools, attendees for those schools, and invitations to community meetings. They promised that the college students who were soon to invade Mississippi would offer classes in Freedom Schools targeting in particularly high school students who needed the help. They also promised that these COFO representatives would help with voter

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<sup>52</sup> "Citizenship Schools in Action," *SCLC Newsletter*, September 1961, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 20.



registration, and at community centers whose target audience was adults who needed help with job training, literacy, health and child care, African American history and more.<sup>53</sup>

COFO realized early on that most of the work to be done in the voter registration drives was to prepare Mississippi African Americans to be able to vote. This meant that they had to increase African Americans' basic literacy level so that African Americans could pass tests which required them to be literate. Septima P. Clark, who worked as the supervisor of teacher training for the Citizenship Education Program, a citizenship program which had been in place in various forms since the early 1960s, noted that she had watched people at the Hattiesburg Citizenship Education School in their late 30s to 70s struggle with this task. She thought that it was wrong that the state required so much of these people who had faced discrimination for so long. Meanwhile, she said, young African American men qualified to fight in Vietnam on the basis of far fewer questions about their ages or reading and writing abilities.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, while SCLC members found such tests unfair, they realized that the state controlled the voter registration process and as such literacy test still had to be passed, or at the very least they would have to be able to show that such exams were unfairly graded. Increased literacy would also serve to help individuals deal with what the SCLC called "community development." To facilitate this, the SCLC developed a series of workbooks modeled on those used by the Highlander Folk School, an institution that promoted interracial community organizing. Although SCLC's name graced the front

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<sup>53</sup> Council of Federated Organizations, "Mississippi Freedom Summer," SCLC, Box 155, Folder 36.

<sup>54</sup> Septima P. Clark to Mr. Louis Martin, SCLC, Box 154, Folder 6.

cover of their “Citizenship Workbook,” they noted that the program was done with the help of the American Missionary Division of the Congregational-Christian Churches. However, there would be little religious content to this workbook, and much of what was religious served to promote the policies of nonviolence. Most of the work book would serve to promote African American history and the movement itself.<sup>55</sup>

In its promotion of voter registration during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, COFO promised that more voters in the state would mean food, jobs, improved schools and houses, and paved sidewalks. The students that were coming would, they said, help the locals organize voter registration drives.<sup>56</sup> Later to promote their programs, COFO organized a Freedom Vote in which anyone who was a citizen of the United States and of Mississippi and over 21 could register and vote. Although the election would have no real political significance, it was designed to demonstrate that African Americans could and would vote if given the chance. They even included a Freedom Registration form that could be returned to a COFO office.<sup>57</sup>

King would get his Civil Rights Act in 1964, but the right to vote was not automatically extended to the people. Many factors stood in the way of full suffrage, including such discriminatory measures as literacy tests. The SCLC had long been frustrated by such processes. James Bevel and Andrew Young had written in paper entitled “One Man, One Vote,” that:

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<sup>55</sup> SCLC, Citizenship Workbook, SCLC, Box 153, Folder 23.

<sup>56</sup> Council of Federated Organizations, “Mississippi Freedom Summer,” SCLC, Box 155, Folder 36.

<sup>57</sup> Council of Federated Organizations, “Freedom Registration,” SCLC, Box 155, Folder 36.

The compromise of Rutherford B. Hayes paved the way for the Grandfather Clause, Poll Tax, Literacy Test, Democratic White Primary, and a system of education designed to keep the Negro politically illiterate. This in effect has been the source of our slavery. It has kept us without a voice in our own defense in every State of this Union, South of the Mason Dixon line. Now we cry, "Give us the Vote," "Unconditionally." You have made us pick cotton six months of the year and then crowded us into shanties called schools. You have given us teachers who were controlled politically by those who would keep us enslaved, so you have no right to demand that we know how to read. The United States fought a war over the right of South Koreans to vote, then they held free elections with the candidates pictures on the ballots so that all Koreans could vote. Why can't the same thing be done in Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana? Medgar Evers fought for Koreans right to vote, yet he was killed in his own home town for trying to secure this same right for his friends and neighbors.<sup>58</sup>

The 1964 Civil Rights Act did not do away with such discriminatory measures.

Nor did it do away with shenanigans designed to reduce the impact of the African American voting bloc. In November of 1964, King took a phone call from a radio station which asked him if he knew that an advertising agency was trying to buy airtime to promote King as a write-in candidate for the presidency. Soon after he hung up, the SCLC Bureau in Washington told King that flyers bearing a similar message were being distributed in their area. King saw this as a way to split the African American vote, and he feared that the many of the new African American voters lacked an understanding of the political process necessary to ignore such tactics. Trying to halt the movement, King announced that he was not running and that voters were not to write his name on the ballot. Although he admitted that they had not had the time to research the origins of such a plot, King felt that no doubt the blame was to fall at the feet of the Republicans,

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<sup>58</sup> James Bevel and Andrew Young, "One Man, One Vote," c. 1961, SCLC, Box 135, Folder 23.

whose candidate, Barry Goldwater, would be the one to benefit.<sup>59</sup> The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) later found that the group that had distributed such flyers and had attempted to buy such advertising was the Committee for Negroes in Government, a group which was connected to several individuals who had been active with the Republican Party.<sup>60</sup>

Given such problems, King and the SCLC came to believe that the country needed legislation that would protect voting rights. King announced after a meeting with the Vice President and the Attorney General that he looked forward to seeing legislation which lived up to Johnson's state of the union proposal to "eliminate every remaining obstacle in the right and opportunity to vote." King felt that such a bill would contain measures which would end the ability of registrars to discriminate during the registration process, would end the use of literacy test, would apply to all levels of elections, would be enforced by Federal Registrars, and would be directed toward the hard core South. On top of such a bill, King wanted the Attorney General to be willing to use his authority to carry out the law.<sup>61</sup>

Demonstrations in Selma, Alabama began as a way to promote passage voting rights legislation. SCLC staffers believed that the movement needed national publicity. The level of publicity that they sought was the kind that would only come if King was arrested. So, the SCLC planned and carried out a demonstration which would be large

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<sup>59</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. King Denounces Write-In Plot, press release, 2 November 1964, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 8.

<sup>60</sup> Committee for Negroes in Government, 4 November 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., statement, c. 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 8.

enough to violate parade ordinances, and King was arrested.<sup>62</sup> This arrest drew nationwide attention to the region. From New York, David Siegal, a union leader among the AFL-CIO affiliated hotel and restaurant workers of New York City telegraphed President Lyndon Johnson to express his disgust that the Civil Rights Act had not alleviated the need for protests. He told Johnson “that Negroes are still unable to register and vote and are denied their basic rights as American citizens is intolerable.”<sup>63</sup>

The problems at Selma also drew the attention of a famous West Coast politician, Governor Edmund “Pat” Brown of California. Brown wrote King in early April 1965 to express his concern over the violence and to declare that he did not think a boycott of Alabama was the answer to the movement’s problems, particularly in light of Congressional work on voting rights legislation which was then in progress. Brown also enclosed a couple of press releases from March in which he had announced his opinion of the police brutality in Alabama. Brown said the protestors were merely acting within their rights in petitioning the government and yet they had suffered brutal treatment at the hands of the state police. Brown sent a telegram to Governor Wallace and asked him to “call off” the state troopers. In mid March Brown announced that he had met the marchers from a sympathy march in California and called for a moment of silence the following week.<sup>64</sup> Ironically, Brown would not exhibit the same sympathy for the movement in his own backyard. When Chavez and the union marched on the state

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<sup>62</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 382.

<sup>63</sup> David Siegal to Lyndon B. Johnson, 5 February 1965, MLK, Box 21, Folder 12.

<sup>64</sup> Governor Edmund G. Brown, press release, 8 March 1965, MLK, Box 1 Folder 13; Governor Edmund G. Brown, press release, 19 March 1965, King Papers, MLK, Box 1, Folder 13.

capital in 1966, Pat Brown did not greet them at the state capital. Instead he went to Palm Springs to visit with singer Frank Sinatra.<sup>65</sup>

The attention surrounding the violence at Selma clearly sent a message to Congress that voting rights legislation was badly needed. Ultimately signed into law in August of 1965, the Voting Rights Act seemed to offer the civil rights movement hope that their years of hard work had resulted in something tangible that they could use to ensure the extension of citizenship rights to all. For the act to be effective, King realized that two things had to happen. The first was that African Americans had to register and vote. Then they had to elect leaders who would address the conditions of “modern slavery,” the unemployment, the segregated housing, and the schools in poor condition. Politicians elected by African American votes had to realize that they were responsible to African American voters. King believed that economic reprisals would not really be an issue, as mass unemployment of African Americans would also hurt white businesses.<sup>66</sup> The SCLC was happy with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, but they realized that it did not solve all of the problems with voter registration. SCLC still kept up its registration drives, and King estimated more than half of new African American voters were registered because of SCLC efforts. Thanks to those new voters, African Americans now had a chance at holding office. African Americans, King said, had been encouraged to register because of the presence of federal registrars who often worked

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 53.

<sup>66</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Draft of Speech on Passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, August 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

away from the traditional seat of registration, the county courthouse. Despite that however, King did notice some problems that remained such as a system of reprisals through loss of employment, eviction, poor registration hours, and slow downs. King's hope for a successful voting registration policy lay in federal government's enforcement of it.<sup>67</sup>

By this time, King and the SCLC were making plans to begin to address Northern racial issues. Signaling a change in his focus, King wrote in his draft of a speech addressing the passage of the civil rights act that the remaining problems, problem such as unemployment and segregated neighborhoods, were not limited to South, but that they were present in all of the nation's cities.<sup>68</sup> This would signify the end of the first stage of the civil rights movement. But, just as King appeared to have triumphed in the South, Cesar Chavez was beginning to lead the farm worker fight in the West.

While King and the SCLC needed the government to recognize that African Americans deserved basic American rights, Chavez and the farm labor union needed the government to recognize that farm workers had deliberately been excluded from having basic labor rights. Farm labor was one group which was left out of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). This meant that they did not have automatic rights of union recognition and protections for their workers. This meant too that the farm workers could not automatically count on the government to grant those rights that they felt all working people should have. Chavez needed the federal government and the courts to recognize

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<sup>67</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Report of the Administrative Committee," SCLC, Box 28, Folder 12.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Draft of Speech on Passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, August 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

this deprivation and to act with fairness, allowing the farm labor union to act as a union, even though it did not have legal protections.

The AFL-CIO recognized farm labor's unique situation. When the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor came to Delano in 1966 for hearings on the conditions of farm workers, Jack Conway, the Executive Director of the Industrial Union Department (IUD) of the AFL-CIO stood in for IUD president Walter Reuther, and gave a statement on the farm labor problem and the position of organized labor. Conway said that the farm labor problem was a civil rights issue because it dealt with a lack of equal protection under the law. He pointed out that farm laborers were not protected by the NLRA, and that they were exempt from minimum wage and overtime laws, most state workman's compensation programs, disability and unemployment programs. Furthermore, he noted that many agricultural workers were minorities, claiming that some thirty-one percent of people in agricultural labor in 1963 were not white.<sup>69</sup> Thus Conway made it clear to the Senators there that day: farm labor was a unique group that needed their help and protection. This help and protection was particularly important because farm labor involved a high percentage of minorities in a time when the country was particularly concerned that minorities had civil rights protections.

When Chavez and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) found it expedient to join with Larry Itliong and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) in order to win a union election over the Teamsters in the summer of 1966, they formed a new union, the United Farm Workers. This union was, as the AWOC had been,

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<sup>69</sup> Jack T. Conway, Statement before the Subcommittee on Migratory Labor of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 16 March 1966, NFWA, Series III, Box 13, Folder 3.



affiliated with the AFL-CIO. So, it was in 1967 that Chavez, attending his first AFL-CIO convention, gave a speech which told of the union's problems with government cooperation. The first problem was that government policies allowed green card workers to be used as scabs. In other words, it was perfectly legal for growers to import the labor that they needed to break the strike in the fields. The union worked to entice those workers to join the strike, but when they did, the union was then stuck footing the bill for their upkeep or transportation elsewhere. But, immigration policy was not the only way in which the government hurt the union. The court system was nearly as bad. Because farm labor unions were not protected by federal law, all of their issues went to the state courts which Chavez believed had judges who were connected to the growers and who more often than not ruled in the growers' favor. This meant that the union would have to go through a series of appeals trying to get simple injunctions overturned. Chavez particularly regretted the lack of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) coverage when the union struck Giumarra Vineyards, the state's largest grape grower. Giumarra workers complained that the grower's demand that the workers leave inferior grapes on the vine meant that they lost time while picking. Since they were paid by piece-rate, they could not pick as many grapes as quickly and therefore made less than they would on other ranches.<sup>70</sup> There, the union felt that if they had been allowed to call a vote under the NLRB guidelines, they would have won, 20 to 1. However, since growers did not have to recognize their demands for union recognition or a union vote, the union was left with no choice but to strike. This strike however was quickly followed by a court injunction

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<sup>70</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 138.

and imported workers who got the harvest in. The union was left with no recourse but to move to a boycott.<sup>71</sup>

Thus the union needed the government's help in several ways. First, it needed immigration policy that disallowed the importation of workers to be used as scab labor. Second, it needed federal protection of the farm workers' rights to organize. Third, it needed fair treatment in the courts, which meant ready access to having their cases brought before federal judges rather than local or state ones. This problem was similar to the one that the civil rights activists had. They had found they could more often rely on federal courts to make a fair judgment. To get the government to act at all, on any level, the union needed government officials and the public to see that they were a unique minority group, one that had been left out of the democratic labor process, and so were worthy of special attention which would remedy the wrongs. Thus, much of Chavez's political or nationalistic imagery and tactics typically were not American references. Instead, such images referred to Mexican culture as a way to recognize the uniqueness of the organization as a whole.

## **Tactics**

While King's tactics would be grounded in American culture, and Chavez's in Mexican American culture, both men used these tactics to appeal to and strengthen their support bases. King's tactics sometimes served the dual purpose of selling the movement to white American as well. This was necessary because while Chavez might have needed

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<sup>71</sup> Cesar Chavez, Cesar's speech before AFL-CIO Convention, 1967, UFWP, Box 71, Folder 9.

public support in his boycott, King needed the public to feel that his cause was theirs too. Then, they would be responsible for pressuring the federal government to act accordingly. More than he needed government intervention, Chavez needed the growers to be willing to negotiate with his union. No amount of public pressure would do that unless it was accompanied by economic pressure. So, for Chavez it was less important that such images call to mind the American story. It was more important that he unify the group from within so that they would continue to strike and to work the boycott.

There was a general recognition that African Americans of the 1950s and 60s were beginning to realize that they deserved and could demand the rights of citizenship. Television host Richard D. Heffner of "The Open Mind," interviewed King in February 1957. He asked King exactly what was the "new Negro." King replied that he was "a person with a new sense of dignity and destiny with a new self-respect; along with that is this lack of fear which once characterized the Negro," Another guest on the show, Judge Waties Waring, who had written a minority opinion in a case in which the majority had upheld school segregation, agreed with King and said that African Americans were realizing that they too were citizens and that they did have rights.<sup>72</sup>

This recognition that African Americans deserved equal treatment and access to facilities was not however complete, even among the African American population. *Ebony* reporter Alex Poinsett told of workers during the Mississippi Summer project who approached an 81 year old African American man and asked him to register to vote. He informed them that he already had two of the voter registration forms. The workers

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<sup>72</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Richard D. Heffner for "The Open Mind," 10 February 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 126-131.

asked him why he had not filled one out; didn't he think he was a citizen? The man replied, "No, Lord! I ain't no citizen! I sho ain't no citizen!" The workers finally perked his interest in registering when they told him that his street might be paved if he voted.<sup>73</sup> King told a story of going into the bathroom at the Atlanta airport. There he encountered an African American janitor who tried to persuade King to use the segregated facilities. Meanwhile, the white men in the bathroom did not voice any displeasure in King's presence. King said that African Americans like this janitor who grew up under a segregated system, had to realize that they were somebody, made in the image of God and that they had to feel and act like they belonged.<sup>74</sup> The janitor represented one of the two common African American attitudes toward social progress described by King in his Mike Wallace interview of 1958. King said that some African Americans had become apathetic. They had given up hope in changing the system and had given in. This was where the janitor fit. The other group King said didn't like the social conditions, but were afraid to fight them due to their position in the community as professionals who might be fired or as business owners who profited from segregated business.<sup>75</sup>

White and media recognition of African American citizenship issues varied. One curious Californian wrote to King to ask exactly what Constitution rights were African Americans being denied. Furthermore, the author wanted to know why such missing

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<sup>73</sup> Alex Poinsett, "Crusade in Mississippi," *Ebony*, September 1964.

<sup>74</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Some Things We Must Do," 5 December 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 328-343.

<sup>75</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Mike Wallace, 25 June 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 431-441.

rights could not be secured through the laws that were already on the books.<sup>76</sup> King's correspondent just did not understand that for such laws to be effective, they would have to be enforced at a higher level. Sometimes however whites, particularly those in the media and labor organizations, did recognize that African Americans deserved equal treatment and access as well as the rights of citizens. When such individuals expressed their concern or sympathy with King's movement, they often did so in ways which indicated that they recognized this struggle as an effort to obtain basic American rights.

The media, for instance, portrayed this cause as an extension of the American Revolution and the cause of democracy. ABC's Edward P. Morgan and the News sarcastically congratulated the police department of Albany, Georgia, in December 1961 for arresting 267 young African Americans, saying that "nothing since the Emancipation Proclamation has so advanced the cause of first-class citizenship for the Negro in this deep section of the South..." and concluding that "... if anybody in the United States today is fighting the battle of the American revolutionary ideal it is the Negro who, risking his very life, protests with action when democratic principles do not apply, as intended, to everybody."<sup>77</sup> WDAS in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, broadcast editorials the following July which also addressed the situation in Albany. WDAS offered free mourning buttons or ribbons to listeners who would wear them in sympathy with their fellow Americans. These symbols of mourning for the deaths of justice, democracy, and truth were to be worn until the justice system freed King, Abernathy and others who had

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<sup>76</sup> Jim Hamilton to Martin Luther King, Jr., 15 May 1964, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 16.

<sup>77</sup> Edward P. Morgan, "Edward P. Morgan and The News," 13 December 1961, MLK, Box 1, Folder 24.

chosen to do time in jail rather than to pay fines they considered unjust. Two days after the first editorial, King and Abernathy had been released, but the station asked listeners to continue to wear the black ribbons and buttons, to write letters to Albany's mayor and police chief and to sign petitions that informed city officials that they should "drop their un-American attitude and grant every individual equal rights as guaranteed under the law." A handwritten note scrawled across the transcript of the first editorial informed the reader that they had give out 50,000 of the mourning symbols.<sup>78</sup>

The SCLC also had a version of this ribbon program which attracted much attention. Johnny Carr, President of the Deboneers (sic) Social Club of Atlanta wrote to the SCLC wanting to support the Albany cause in some way, believing that people were being deprived of their constitutional rights which had been given to them by God. He asked for eight arm bands to protest the Albany situation and segregation what he called public utilities. Further more, he felt that all African Americans should purchase and wear such arm bands.<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, the SCLC was out of such ribbons, but they suggested that he buy two-inch black ribbon and make his own.<sup>80</sup>

Black ribbons might not have been patriotic, but some of the movement music was. The movement often used freedom songs at rallies and at protest events. Music had long been important in African American culture. Among African Americans, music had been tied to liberation from the days of slavery where songs often served as coded

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<sup>78</sup> WDAS editorial, 11 July 1962 and 13 July 1962, MLK, Box 1 Folder 25.

<sup>79</sup> Johnny L. Carr to SCLC, 23 July 1962, SCLC, Box 33, Folder 12.

<sup>80</sup> Edwina Smith to Johnny L. Carr, 26 July 1962, SCLC, Box 33, Folder 12.

messages. Frederick Douglass wrote that the songs represented the sorrows of the heart for slaves. It was the only way slaves could express how they really felt without angering white overseers or masters.<sup>81</sup> Slaves also used the songs to sing of their hopes for liberty. These songs tended to use religious words to tell the story of escape through the underground railroad. Songs were also an important part of African American religion, and many of the songs adopted by the civil rights movement were adaptations of religious music. Religious studies scholar Lewis Baldwin believed that King often used lyrics from slave spirituals in his speeches both because of the inspiration they provided to the freedom struggle and because they demonstrated the highs and lows typical of African American life. Baldwin points out that singing was very much apart of King's religious experience, and it was in light of this that King spoke in his "I Have a Dream" speech about all types of people being able "join hands and sing."<sup>82</sup>

The songs used by the movement and King fell into two categories: patriotic and religious. King often referred to songs that were patriotic American standards. One such example was the song "America." After he quoted the lyrics which begin "my county tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing," before the audience at the First Annual Institute of Nonviolence and Social Change, King went on to say that we had to let freedom ring, until the day came when every, every son of God could sing together.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>82</sup> Lewis V. Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr., The Black Church, and the Black Messianic Vision," in David J. Garrow, editor, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator*, vol. 1. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 1-16.

<sup>83</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 3 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 451-463; Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Realistic Look at the Question of

Another song suggested for King's group was a patriotic song, "We Are Americans Too," developed for African American singers. King occasionally received samples of music written just for the cause of African American liberation. In July 1956, he wrote to Lovie Rainbow and mentioned that her cousin, blues composer W. C. Handy, had sent them some 100 copies of his song "We Are Americans Too," to be used for fundraising purposes.<sup>84</sup> In 1962, Eubie Blake, one of the composers of the piece, wrote to King and sent him a copy of the same song, telling King that he had heard that music was inspiring the movement in the South. There were two versions of the sheet music for this song. One had a cover with a well dressed African American man walking in front of the Capital. The other had a parade of African American men in historical military uniforms marching along. The words of the song expressed the love that African Americans had for the country that they had helped build and die for. The chorus of the song announced that,

By the record we've made and the part that we've played, we are Americans too, by the pick and the plow and the sweat of our brow, we are Americans too, we have given up our blood and bone, helped to lay the nation's corner stone, none have loved old glory more than we or have shown a greater loyalty, bunker hill to the Rhine, we've been right there in line, serving the red white and blue, all our future is here, everything we hold dear, we are Americans too.<sup>85</sup>

It's unclear if the SCLC ever used this piece, however, it does show the high acceptance of the use of music in the cause among the African American community. It also shows

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Progress in the Area of Race Relations," 10 April, 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 167-179; Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech Made in Savannah, 1 January 1961, MLK Speeches, III, Box 2B.

<sup>84</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Lovie M. Rainbow, 10 July 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 317.

<sup>85</sup> Eubie Blake to Martin Luther King, Jr., 21 August 1962, SCLC, Box 3, Folder 17.



that many African Americans identified with the American past and wanted to place themselves solidly within the context of the American story.<sup>86</sup>

Other songs adopted by the movement had religious overtones. One such movement song which had been adapted from a religious work was “We Shall Over Come.” King told the graduates of Oberlin College in 1965 that in singing it, African Americans were not advocating racial supremacy, but expressing the hope of a better future.<sup>87</sup> One SCLC promoted version of “We Shall Overcome” had six very simple verses. The first verse, which was also repeated as the sixth simply said that, “We shall over come, We shall overcome, We shall overcome some day, Deep in my heart, I do believe We shall overcome some day.” In the remaining verses the activists could sing that “We are not afraid today,” that “The truth will make us free,” that “We’ll Walk hand in hand,” and that “The Lord will see us through.”<sup>88</sup> Other such songs with religious themes included “Oh Freedom,” “Woke Up This Morning,” “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,” “Wade in the Water,” “Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel,” “Done Made my Vow to be Free,” and “We are Soldiers in the Army.” These were all either religious pieces or based off of religious works. Many of them referred to religious figures such as Paul and Silas who were singing or shouting when the doors opened during an earthquake, Mary

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<sup>86</sup> For another example of a song sent to King, see Ed Riddick to Martin Luther King, Jr., 28 July 1964, SCLC, Box 51, Folder 19. Riddick, the Illinois Rally for Civil Rights Director, sent to King a copy of a song called “Stride Toward Freedom,” composed by Nona D. Mills, who, according to her letter which Riddick enclosed, apparently wanted her song played and popularized at rallies so that she could sell sheet music and donate the proceeds to the SCLC.

<sup>87</sup> King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, August 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

<sup>88</sup> SCLC, Citizenship Workbook, SCLC, Box 153, Folder 23, 31.

and her son Jesus, Peter, the disciple, Daniel who had been in the lion's den, Jonah, who'd been in the whale, and the three Hebrew children who'd been in the fiery furnace.<sup>89</sup> With the exception of Mary who had to watch her son die on the cross, all of these figures are known for either dying or being threatened with violent deaths in their attempts to spread the gospel. Paul was many times jailed and scheduled for execution until he was finally killed. Legend has it that Peter was crucified upside down. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions to be eaten because jealous princes, political rivals, had schemed and tricked the king into signing a law which outlawed Daniel's prayers. Jonah, because of his disobedience, was on a ship which headed into a terrible storm. He was tossed overboard and spent three days living in a whale's stomach until he repented and was vomited back up. The three Hebrew children refused to bow down in worship before an image and were taken up and cast into a furnace which was so hot that their executioners died from the heat. Some of these figures such as Daniel, Jonah, and the three Hebrew children had been miraculously saved, others were not. But the songs about them served as an inspiration to the singers that there were causes worth dying for and that there were brave men before them who had been willing to give their lives and who had sometimes been spared by miracles.

If songs about freedom and making the ultimate sacrifice for worthy causes were not enough, King also showed the civil rights movement as an extension of the American Revolution. One of the stories that King would tell about the Revolution had its roots in American literature. Borrowing from the tale of Washington Irving, King told the story

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<sup>89</sup> SCLC, Citizenship Workbook, SCLC, Box 153, Folder 23, 31-32.

of Rip Van Wrinkle. When Van Wrinkle had begun his journey he had left an inn with a picture of the ruling monarch, King George III. When he returned some twenty years later, that inn had a picture of George Washington. He had missed all the changes, the entire American Revolution. By using this story, King was encouraging his audience at a Morehouse graduation ceremony to look at the needs of others and to keep society's moral and spiritual philosophies on pace with the technological development.<sup>90</sup> What King wanted of his young audience was that they move beyond their self-centered views and the concerns in their daily lives and to work to improve the world. When this speech was given in 1959, King was still trying to prepare and inspire African Americans to get involved in the civil rights movement in whatever ways they could. Morehouse represented some of the best and brightest of America's African American youth. King hoped he could count on their participation.

The Rip Van Wrinkle story became one that King often used in his speeches, particularly at college commencement ceremonies. So much so, that this simple but effective plea for action was noted by the FBI in King's file. On May 29, 1964, King had given a speech at California Western University in San Diego. The FBI received a report that he had told the story of Rip Van Wrinkle, this time addressing it to his white audience, too many of whom he said were sleeping through the Revolution. That day King had also talked about the American heritage and the way that it had been twisted so

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<sup>90</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," 2 June 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 219-226.

that many were denied its freedoms because of racial issues.<sup>91</sup> Springfield College students in Massachusetts apparently heard the same story. Their school chaplain, Robert Parsonage, wrote to students in July of 1964 to encourage them to be inspired by King's speech about the Washington Irving tale and to go out and to find a cause for which to volunteer that summer. Although the chaplain did not tell the students exactly what to do, he did suggest that they consider a voter registration project or tutoring of some kind.<sup>92</sup> The FBI was informed about this speech and letter when a concerned aunt of a student passed Parsonage's letter on to them.<sup>93</sup>

The founders and American presidents were used by King to illustrate that advocating and fighting for freedom was a very American thing to do. The signers of the Declaration of Independence said King, were men who risked their lives to take the first steps in forming a new society. Those who took the same stand, particularly students and those who supported them, were doing just as the founders had. They were protesting and acting in ways which might ensure an early death, but like the founders, they were doing what had long been required of Americans.<sup>94</sup> In his speech before the Highlander

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<sup>91</sup> Talks by Reverenced Martin Luther King, Jr., at San Diego State College and California Western University, San Diego, California, on May 29, 1964, 6 June 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR; FBI Files of Martin Luther King, Jr., Talks by Reverenced Martin Luther King, Jr. At San Diego State College and California Western University, San Diego, California, on May 29, 1964, 11 June 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR; Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, August 1965 in MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

<sup>92</sup> Robert R. Parsonage to Springfield College Student, 8 July 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>93</sup> Pompano Beach, Florida, August 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Burning Truth in the South," May 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 447-451, first printed in *The Progressive*, 24 (May 1960) 8-10; for additional references to the founders, see also Martin Luther King Jr., debate with James J. Kilpatrick, on "The Nation's Future," 26 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 556-564.

Folk School, King talked of American leaders who'd had the foresight to be racially progressive. His examples on this occasion were former presidents Lincoln and Jefferson. Lincoln he credited with realizing that a half slave nation could not continue to exist. Jefferson King credited with standing up and saying that all men were created equal even while he lived in a slave society.<sup>95</sup> Although neither man meant exactly what King had implied they did, they stood out as important and imposing American figures that King could point to as examples of historical American aversion to discrimination and inequality.

The SCLC promised African Americans that they could "secure these rights to ourselves and our posterity" by registering to vote. They told of the low numbers of African American adults registered, the forms of resistance on the parts of registrars, and the intimidation that kept African Americans from being able to register. The promise of 1776, "government by the consent of the governed" was yet to become an actuality.<sup>96</sup> But this difficulty was nothing new, King told his audience. America had always contradicted itself on racial issues. Thomas Jefferson, who had seen slavery as a "fire bell in the night" had seen his Declaration revised by a Continental Congress which did not want to criticize King George for the slave trade because it might offend Southerners. That Jefferson himself was a Southern slave holder seemed to have escaped King's notice. He instead focused on the Southern habit of opposing the rest of the country through their support of the British during the American Revolution, their hindrance of

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<sup>95</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Look to the Future," 2 September 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 269-276.

<sup>96</sup> SCLC "Crusade for the Vote," pamphlet, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

westward expansion through their insistence of the expansion of the slave system, and their veto power over the rest of the country.<sup>97</sup>

King also liked to quote from famous American documents. King taught that American's importance in world history could rest in two documents alone, the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation. No tyranny, he said, could disguise the truth that was found in these two documents. The Declaration told man that no society could exist if it kept men from freedom.<sup>98</sup> After quoting the Declaration of Independence which declares that all men are created equal and that they have the natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, King told a North Carolina audience of the NAACP that these words were the American dream, but that Americans sometimes acted in ways that were contrary to it. Americans needed to make democracy a reality; they needed to make the dream come to pass. African Americans could do this by using the freedoms that they did have and suffering and sacrificing to gain more freedom, including the right to vote.<sup>99</sup>

The other document that King admired as a great piece of American legal history was the Emancipation Proclamation. The Emancipation Proclamation was an American document which had special significance for the African American population of the South, as this was the document that began the process of ending the slave system. Not

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<sup>97</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission, New York City, 12 September 1962, MLK Speeches, III, Box 3; Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Delivered at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of District 65, 23 October 1963, MLK Speeches, III Box 5.

<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission, New York City, 12 September 1962, MLK Speeches, III, Box 3.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Negro and the American Dream," 25 September 1960, Charlotte, North Carolina, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 508-511.

only that, 1963 heralded the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that proclamation's enactment, a fact of which African Americans were well aware. King told a New York commission celebrating the civil war that the Emancipation Proclamation was "the offspring of the Declaration of Independence using the forces of law to uproot a social order which sought to separate liberty from a segment of humanity." This was our nation's belief in equality being ensured and passed on through war.<sup>100</sup> For King, the value of the Emancipation Proclamation was not just that it ended the slave system, but its value lay in that the executive branch had the authority to promote change, that it allowed African Americans to help liberate themselves by leaving the plantation and joining the Union Army, and that it reassured the nation of its founding in equality. Lincoln had faced a lot of criticism for issuing this order, but had decided to preserve freedom by doing so. King said that "No President can be great, or even fit for office, if he attempts to accommodate to injustice to maintain his political balance."<sup>101</sup> For King then, this document was a valuable example of what could be achieved if the nation's executive was willing to take decisive action.

Participants in the movement also adopted King's patriotic strategy. One other way in which the civil rights activists made it clear that they were true Americans was by carrying flags when they marched. This tactic came in to play particularly during the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. Marchers trooped along Jefferson Highway

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<sup>100</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission, New York City, 12 September 1962, MLK Speeches, III, Box 3.

<sup>101</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission, New York City, 12 September 1962, MLK Speeches, III, Box 3; Martin Luther King, Jr., Address Delivered at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of District 65, 23 October 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 5.

carrying the American flag. As they came closer to the capital, more marchers joined and more flags were seen. By the time King reached the speaker's platform in front of the state house, American flags were waving not only behind the platform, but in the audience as well.<sup>102</sup> These flags served as a reminder to the nation that this was essentially an American movement. It was a movement in which American citizens were asking for the protections of their rights as citizens. The contrast with the states rights advocates was particularly remarkable. They and their cars bore not the United States flag, but the rebel one.<sup>103</sup> This was noted by Rabbi Jacob Pressman who had come from California to join the march to Montgomery. Pressman, who wrote of his experience in the march and of fleeing the city afterward, found it ironic that the Alabama state capital did not fly the United States flag. Instead, Alabamians choose to honor at their capital the state flag and the confederate one, as if they could not acknowledge that they had lost the Civil War.<sup>104</sup>

Figures in the movement also supported petition drives. The American tradition of petitioning went back to the Declaration of Independence where the founders complained that their petitions had been ignored by King George III. Also, the first article in the Bill of Rights read that the citizens had the right to petition the government for the redress of grievances. Over time, the concept of petitioning became more formal and Americans printed forms and collected signatures to promote various causes. Two

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Johnson and Bob Adelman, *King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Viking Studio, 2000), 190-201; Flip Schulke, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Documentary... Montgomery to Memphis* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1976), 150-151.

<sup>103</sup> Johnson and Adelman, 195.

<sup>104</sup> Jacob Pressman, March on Montgomery, 27 March 1965, MLK, Box 21, Folder 12.



such petitions from the 1960s were addressed to President John F. Kennedy and George Wallace, governor of Alabama. The petition to Kennedy was approved of and signed by movement leaders such as King, Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, and Wyatt Tee Walker. The petitioners asked Kennedy to issue an executive order banning segregation. The authors of the petition drew upon the American heritage to support the cause. They cited Lincoln's executive order, the Emancipation Proclamation which ended slavery, and the Fourteenth Amendment as historical justification for such an action.<sup>105</sup> There were two petitions related to George Wallace. One addressed Wallace and the Alabama State Legislature, and another addressed Wallace alone. The first petition acknowledged that 1954 Brown decision and the 1964 Civil Rights Act had been all but ignored by Alabama. This petition, which must have been drafted before the 1965 Voting Rights Act, also requested that Wallace move to register all citizens and conduct fair elections.<sup>106</sup> The second petition appeared after events at Selma and mentioned the deaths of Jimmie Lee Jackson and Reverend James Reeb. The language of this petition borrowed liberally from American culture and history. They wanted to contribute to making American truly a "Great Society," a copy of Johnson's economic program. From the Declaration they borrowed the phrase "when the course of human events..." And, they appealed to Wallace to "declare your faith in the American creed; to declare your belief in the words of the Declaration of Independence, that 'All men are created equal.'" Using this language, they asked Wallace to end police brutality and the violence in the

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<sup>105</sup> A Petition to John F. Kennedy, SCLC, Box 34, Folder 23.

<sup>106</sup> A Petition to George C. Wallace, SCLC, Box 148, Folder 4.

South which they felt he was influencing through his rhetoric, and most importantly, to put in place fair voting procedures through such measures as ending poll taxes, having convenient registration hours, getting country clerks to comply with the order of the day, and appointing African Americans to influential positions at the state level.<sup>107</sup>

Where King and the SCLC used tactics which emphasized the American aspects of the movement, Chavez emphasized Mexican culture. As he began to organize, Chavez noted that the farm worker population was a diverse one. Not only were the workers from a variety of racial and national groups, but they also had different reasons for being in the occupation. A frustrated Chavez wrote to his friend Fred Ross in July 1962 complain about people who did not want a union because they were just working for extra spending money or because a union would prevent their kids from working. He told Ross that figuring out who the real farm worker was as “about as hard as it once was to isolate the atom.”<sup>108</sup> By August, Chavez would classify the farm workers into four groups, the true worker, the industrial worker who was adding to his unemployment check by working in the fields, the casual worker who was working for spending money, and the foreign worker. Chavez wanted what he considered the true workers, those who depending on farm work to make a living.<sup>109</sup> He and the union would have to find someone way attract and unionize such workers. Since a large percentage of them were of Mexican heritage, they would use Mexican cultural and historical appeals to generate

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<sup>107</sup> Petition to George C. Wallace, SCLC, Box 147, Folder 10.

<sup>108</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 11 July 1962, FRP, Folder 8.

<sup>109</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 7 August 1962, FRP, Folder 9.

worker support. These appeals and symbols primarily included a flag based on various Mexican symbols, theater and music with Hispanic roots, and the images of past revolutions and revolutionaries. All of these images and symbols were used in attempts to confirm the movement as a legitimate Mexican American one.

The union's use of Mexican images did not preclude its use of more traditional patriotic American imagery. It did on occasion use such imagery. One such event was the Farm Workers Liberation Bell and March. In April of 1970, farm workers decided they had to send a loud message to President Nixon, one that would convince him and the Department of Defense to stop buying grapes for use by the military. So, they announced plans to undertake a three day march from New York, taking with them a chained bell. The march began with a prayer vigil at St. Gregory's Church in New York, which was complete with talks on the strike, the boycott, the march, and a reading of a statement from Chavez. The bell was then silenced, taken on the march, and later displayed at the AFL-CIO headquarters, still chained, to remain there until the farm workers had found justice.<sup>110</sup> This bell was obvious play on the Liberty Bell and a play on the concept of letting freedom ring.

This example aside, such American imagery was rare. Because the union was trying to promote their group as a unique one, and because of the need to unify the group, they settled into a pattern of using mostly images and symbols from Mexican American culture. Early on, the union had learned that potential members needed to feel that the

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<sup>110</sup> Pilgrimage to Washington poster, VSP, Series III, Box 2, Folder 1; Program for Prayer Vigil for Silent Farm Workers, Liberty Bell, 20 April 1970, VSP, Series III, Box 2, Folder 2; Projection for Display and Publicity of the Farm Workers Liberation Bell, VSP, Series III, Box 2, Folder 2.

farm labor fight was their own. During the Mt. Arbor rose strike in the spring of 1965, a strike which shortly preceded the grape strike, the union found out that some of those on strike were planning to return to work, thus breaking the strike. Dolores Huerta and Helen Chavez went to visit the men, insulting them by calling them women and cowards. The men seemingly shrugged off such comments by agreeing and informing the women that since they were not citizens, this was not their fight.<sup>111</sup> Herein lay a problem for the union. In a time of conformity and pride in the American way, the union could not depend upon its base being American citizens. Nor could they depend on such workers being non-citizens. They had to find some way to appeal to workers regardless of citizenship. They would turn to a strategy of nationalistic appeals and imagery, imagery which was based on Mexican history or culture. This imagery would attract not just workers from Mexico like those who had been newly imported, or who intended on returning, but it was also meant to attract those who, regardless of citizenship status, considered themselves American residents and workers. Those workers were often aware of their Mexican heritage, and they too would be attracted to the cultural and historical displays.

The union also acknowledged that not all farm workers were of Mexican heritage. Once they unified with the AWOC, a good portion of the union would be Filipino, and their leader, Larry Itliong, would become a union vice president. However, Chavez and the union still continued to pump out images which were connected to a Mexican past. One reason for this may have been that the union had learned early on the dangers and

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<sup>111</sup> From Jim (Drake) to Walter and Chris, 6 May 1965, NFWM, Box 13, Folder 9 .

realities of trying to organize a multi-racial union. Chavez had tried to promote the union among various racial groups. When he began his organizing in 1962, he attempted to include Filipinos, African Americans, and whites. His letters to Fred Ross document his progress and frustration in doing so. Chavez started in late April 1962 experiencing frustration not over the lack of racial harmony among the field workers, but over the conditions of his location. He wondered if Delano was truly the place to start since they paid comparatively high piece rates. Those higher rates had apparently attracted a variety of farm workers which included Okies, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans and Mex-Tex. Still, Chavez concluded that “the migrant is still at the lowest rung of the ladder.”<sup>112</sup> In May, Chavez felt that he might have some success among African American farm workers. He had a couple of younger African American men working to help him organize, and he had run into one African American man who’d expressed sympathy and offered Chavez some money, which he turned down. There was no similar success with Filipinos. They seemed to mistrust the union, and an informational meeting attended to attract a Filipino audience was poorly attended, except by AWOC leaders like Larry Itliong who were leery of the presence of another labor organization in their area.<sup>113</sup> By June Chavez would become discouraged. Although he still had some African Americans working to organize under him, he reported to Fred Ross that the union had failed in the organizing

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<sup>112</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 26 April 1962, FRP, Folder 5.

<sup>113</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 10 May 1962, FRP, Folder 6; Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 22 May 1962, FRP, Folder 6; Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 16 May 1962, FRP, Folder 6; Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 28 May 1962, FRP, Folder 6.

attempts among African Americans, partly due to time constraints.<sup>114</sup> As for poor whites, Chavez mentioned some Okies from McFarland who were willing to help, but, he told Ross, that he intended to avoid organizing among citrus workers nearby due to a lack of Okie contacts in that arena.<sup>115</sup>

Also, the union believed that the growers had worked to make Filipinos and Mexicans enemies in the fields. Wendy Goepel who worked with the farm labor movement reported to SNCC's New York office that Filipinos could be assured of five cents per hour more than Mexican workers due to grower perceptions that they were shorter and had broader shoulders and were therefore built for the work in ways that Mexicans were not. This competition no doubt worsened when the growers tried to break the grape strike in its infancy by replacing striking Filipinos with imported Mexican labor.<sup>116</sup>

By the time of the 1966 March to Sacramento, Chavez's union would be mostly Mexican. The day following the Senate subcommittee hearings, the NFWA began a march from Delano to Sacramento. Observers from the FBI reported the participation of about 100 people, about seventy-five percent of which were Mexican and Filipino participants. The rest were mostly Anglo; there were only two or three African Americans. The crowd was apparently fairly peaceful, carrying benign NFWA flags and *Huelga* signs. Dutifully, the Bureau informed various law enforcement agencies on down

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<sup>114</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 5 June 1962, FRP, Folder 7; Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 13 June 1962, FRP, Folder 7.

<sup>115</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 5 June 1962, FRP, Folder 7.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes, Report on the Delano Farm Workers Strike given by Wendy Goepel, 6 December 1965, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

the line that the marchers were headed their way.<sup>117</sup> So, by 1966 it was clear to both the union and the federal government that the farm labor movement's base had become a predominately Hispanic and Filipino one. Once Chavez's union combined with the AWOC, Chavez would become and president and remain the leader of the Mexicans, while Larry Itliong would become a union vice president and the recognized leader of the Filipinos.

The farm labor union in its various forms used images designed to inspire ethnic pride in the Mexican American community whom they wished to attract to the cause. Because such Mexican nationalism existed among California's farm workers, Chavez could focus his organizational efforts on them as a group.<sup>118</sup> This was something Chavez did even from the beginnings of the movement.<sup>119</sup> He did this in many ways. He spoke to workers in their own language, used symbols like the Aztec eagle and the Virgin of Guadalupe, sang songs in Spanish, referred to the Mexican Revolution, and used Mexican religious traditions at union events.<sup>120</sup> Some who saw this appeal to ethnic and

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<sup>117</sup> Los Angeles to Director, 17 March 1966, FBI, 100-444762.

<sup>118</sup> Rodolfo Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), 269.

<sup>119</sup> Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert. *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 4; Linda C. Majka and Theo J. Majka, *Farm Workers, Agribusiness and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 168; Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 1970), 316; Luis Valdez, "The Tale of the Raza," Edited by Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert. *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 54, 55.

<sup>120</sup> Steiner, *La Raza*, 298; Jose G. Perez, *Viva La Huelga!: The Struggle of the Farm Workers* (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1973), 9; David Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and The Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 196; Stan Steiner, "The Cultural Schizophrenia of Luis Valdez," *Vogue*, 15 Mar. 1969; John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 39; Dorothy Hoobler and Thomas Hoobler, *The Mexican American Family Album* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 103.

national pride came to believe that Chavez was attempting not just to build a union, but to build political power for Mexican Americans.<sup>121</sup> For many then, the farm labor union came to be a civil rights movement, although in reality it was a labor movement that targeted only a limited population of Mexican Americans. In truth, Chavez was not a national leader of Mexican Americans. However many people chose to make the United Farm Workers (UFW), at least in their own minds, what they wanted it to be.<sup>122</sup> Americans that wanted to see Chavez as a Mexican leader and therefore a source of ethnic pride for Hispanics did so. Others who did not want to envision him as the leader of *la raza* could simply remind themselves that Chavez was leader of a movement which was successful predominately in California.

Regardless of the limited scope of his leadership, Chavez was recognized by friend and foe alike as a leader of Mexican Americans in the 1960s. Martin Zaninovich, a grower whom Chavez opposed, told an interviewer that he believed Chavez was driven not just to build a union but to help Mexican Americans increase their political power.<sup>123</sup> Such an attitude may have been helpful to Zaninovich as a grower. It may have allowed him to ignore the protests of the workers that his ranch employed. But such remarks do indicate that even Chavez's opponents saw and realized the importance of the union's use

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<sup>121</sup> Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 107.

<sup>122</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 152.

<sup>123</sup> Martin Zaninovich, interview with Susan McColgan. 7 July 1976, *Growers of Kern County: Oral History of the Southern San Joaquin Valley Project*, ed. Gerald Stanley, California State University, Bakersfield, Farm Labor Project, 11-12.



of ethnic images. They also realized that the movement at least had the potential to strengthen the Mexican American role in American politics.

There were others that also recognized that the union's success was due at least in part to their ability to unify the workers through a common background. *Trans-Action* magazine wrote that the union's power came because of its members' background. Luis Valdez, the union's *Teatro* director, thought that the union's success was made possible through such appeals. He claimed that the farm workers were descended from Cuauhtémoc, an Aztec emperor.<sup>124</sup> In *El Malcriado*, the union's paper, Valdez explained that the union's success was due to the "triple magnetism of the *raza*, *patria*, and the Virgin of Guadalupe which organized the Mexican American farm worker in Delano."<sup>125</sup>

As they began to organize, the union recognized that they needed an image that people would readily identify with them. They decided to create a union flag. This flag adapted traditional Mexican ethnic images to the union cause. The flag is predominately red, with a white circle in the center. Within that white circle is a black eagle, which appears to be almost a shadow, a simple form with squared-off edges. Other versions of the flag do not have the white circle, only the black eagle on the red background. The union later used this black eagle on various other union promotional products like bumper stickers, shirts, buttons, and bandannas.

The flag was primarily the creation two men, Cesar Chavez's brother, Richard, and Andy Zermeno known for Don Sotaco, a cartoon figure that appeared in *El*

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<sup>124</sup> Luis Valdez, "The Tale of the Raza" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 47; Steiner, "The Cultural Schizophrenia".

<sup>125</sup> Luis Valdez "The Tale of the Raza" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 47.

*Malcriado*. The colors were chosen by Chavez, either because they had been used historically by Mexican strikers, or because Chavez had discovered that the Egyptians had liked those colors because they easily attracted attention.<sup>126</sup> The eagle was chosen in part because it called to mind the legendary beginnings of Mexico. The story of Mexico's founding tells a tale of Montezuma's people who were to march south, stopping to settle only when they saw an eagle with a snake clutched in its talons perched on a cactus. There they were to stop and to build their nation. This became Mexico City. To this day, the Mexican flag bears the picture of an eagle with a snake, sitting on a cactus. So when the union adopted the eagle flag, they created an obviously Mexican symbol. By giving the eagle squared-off edges, the union accomplished two things. Such edges made the eagle easy to draw. Anyone who needed such a symbol could quickly and cheaply make a copy.<sup>127</sup> Also the style of the eagle brought to mind Aztec art forms and architecture, as it bore something of a resemblance to an upside down pyramid.<sup>128</sup> But, the eagle also had been inspired by another source, a very American one. Chavez wrote

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<sup>126</sup> Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 122; and Livie Isauro Duran and H. Russell Bernard, eds., *Introduction to Chicano Studies* (New York: Macmillan, Co., 1973), 548 make the argument about the Egyptian colors and Hammerback and Jensen, 65 argue that the colors were used in previous strikes.

<sup>127</sup> Mark Day, *Forty Acres: Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 81; Duran and Bernard, 548; Ferriss and Sandoval, 72.

<sup>128</sup> Guillermo Lux and Maurilio Vigil, "Return to Aztlan: The Chicano Rediscovered His Indian Past," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 9; Carlos G. Velez-I, "Ourselves Through the Eyes of an Anthropologist," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 39; Ferriss and Sandoval, 73; Cesar Chavez, "The Organizer's Tale," Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert. *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 60; Day, 81; Alberto Prago, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A History of Mexican-Americans* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1973), 178;

to Fred Ross in 1963 and said, “Before I forget, doesn’t our bird resemble the NRA (new deal) bird of yesteryear – this is where the idea comes from or part of it. I was sure you would recognize it in Fresno, but had completely forgotten to ask you.”<sup>129</sup> So the eagle was on one hand, very Mexican, but on the other very American, a perfect blend of two cultures.

The success of the flag as a symbol of ethnic pride was not immediately obvious. Although union leadership viewed this flag as a Mexican symbol, union membership did not quickly make such connections. The flag was first revealed at the 1962 founding convention by Manuel Chavez. Manuel Chavez rose up at the meeting on September 30<sup>th</sup>, and presented the flag, explaining its symbolism. The eagle, he called a thunderbird or Indian Eagle. The color black, the color of the eagle, was to represent the darkness of the farm labor situation. The white of the white circle was to symbolize hope for a better employment situation. The red of the flag was to symbolize the sacrifices to come, sacrifices that the union would have to make so that the workers could have justice.<sup>130</sup> Members found it confusing, asked what it meant, and some walked out. Many of these members viewed it as a political symbol. It did not help that the flag itself was red. Some of the workers would associate it with communism or the Nazi movement. Others failed to see it as a separate symbol and thought it was mocking Gallo’s Thunderbird wine.<sup>131</sup> The flag would gain acceptance only after a few union victories and its

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<sup>129</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 11 March 1963, FRP, Folder 11.

<sup>130</sup> Minutes of 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting, Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>, 1962, NFWA, Series III, Box 5, Folder 15.

<sup>131</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 73.

appearance at community events. It would eventually become to many a symbol of not only the union struggle but of Mexican American power.

The flag might have been slow to gain acceptance, but the union's theater troupe, *Teatro Campesino* had no such problems. In Mexican culture, plays had often been used by those who wished to convince others to support their cause or beliefs. In the 1500s plays and comedies had been performed for Aztec soldiers and farmers and Indians near the Rio Grande.<sup>132</sup> Since this tactic had been used by Christian missionaries from Europe to convince natives to convert, the plays often had religious meanings, predominantly focusing on the life of Christ.<sup>133</sup> As Mexican American theater developed, it relied upon similar stories for productions.<sup>134</sup> The union merely adapted such customs for its own purposes and promotion.

The *Teatro* put on performances which were largely works of improvisational theater. The director of it was Luis Valdez, later known for the play *Zoot Suit* (1981) and the movie *La Bamba* (1987). Valdez used theatrical techniques that fit with traditional Aztec theater such as typecasting and the clear portrayal of right verses wrong.<sup>135</sup> He also believed that knowledge of Mexican American history was important and he complemented his work by teaching classes on Mexican American history at the union's

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<sup>132</sup> Steiner, *La Raza*, 330-331; Steiner, "The Cultural Schizophrenia".

<sup>133</sup> T. M. Pearce, "The New Mexican Shepherds' Play," Edited by Juan R. Garcia, *Perspectives in Mexican American Studies*, vol. 1 (Tucson: Mexican American Studies and Research Center, University of Arizona, 1988), 17; Roberto R. Bacalski-Martinez "Aspects of Mexican American Cultural Heritage," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 33.

<sup>134</sup> Nicolas Kanellos, "Folklore in Chicano Theater and Chicano Theater as Folklore," Edited by Stanley West and June Macklin, *The Chicano Experience* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 166.

<sup>135</sup> Hoobler, 102; Steiner, "The Cultural Schizophrenia".

Del Rey headquarters.<sup>136</sup> But Valdez believed that his plays did more than entertain farm workers and union volunteers; he believed that the plays could be used to force social change.<sup>137</sup> In particular, he wanted to convince farm workers to join and continue to support the union. His plays were normally short skits that glorified the heroic past and social change. He was willing to direct such plays almost anywhere including at rallies, on picket lines, and at grocery stores during the boycott. The *Teatro* was both an eye catching and Mexican way to attract and hold the interest of farm workers.

Music was another entertainment form which had roots in Mexican culture. Christian missionaries had attempted to convert the natives of Mexico through the use of music, just as they had used theater.<sup>138</sup> Mexicans also developed musical forms of their own, particularly the *corridos*. *Corridos* are basically ballads which detail the lives and trials of the Mexican people.<sup>139</sup> Thus it was highly appropriate that the union use such music to tell the story of the union's rise and struggles.

The union found several opportunities to use music to promote their goals. In the 1966 march to Sacramento and later at the blessing of Forty Acres, the union compound outside of Delano, the union played traditional Mexican music with guitars, accordions

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<sup>136</sup> Kanellos, 167; Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 152; and Steiner, "The Cultural Schizophrenia"; Max Benavidez, "Cesar Chavez Nurtured Seeds of Art," *LA Times*, 28 Apr.1993.

<sup>137</sup> Bacalski-Martinez, 34; Luis Valdez, "Notes on Chicano Theater" Edited by Gilberto Lopez y Rivas, *Conquest and Resistance: The Origins of The Chicano National Minority* (Palo Alto, CA: R & E Research Associates Inc., 1979), 145; Kanellos, 167.

<sup>138</sup> Warren A. Beck, "The Penitentes of New Mexico." in Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmani, and Robert A. Calvert. *The Evolution of a People* (Huntington, NY: Robert F. Krieger Publishing, 1977), 143.

<sup>139</sup> Emory S. Bogardus, *The Mexican in the United States* (New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1970), 66.

and mariachi bands.<sup>140</sup> Union members also often found themselves singing *corridos* and traditional Mexican songs. One of these was “De Colores,” a folk song often sang by Mexican Catholics. This song was often sang during Teatro intermissions, and Father Mark Day recalled when a weakened Chavez had to go to court during his fast for non-violence, farm workers joined him at the courthouse and while on their knees prayed and sang “De Colores.”<sup>141</sup> Another song sang by union members was the “Corrido de Cesar.” This song glorified Chavez and told of how he followed the great revolutionary heroes Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. The song also claimed that Chavez was guided by the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico’s patron saint.<sup>142</sup> One particular verse of the song, one obviously designed to commemorate the march to Sacramento, exclaims “Now we reach Stockton. The mariachis sing to us: Long live Cesar Chavez, And the Virgin who guides him.”<sup>143</sup> The union made songs associated with them such as “De Colores” and “Corrido de Cesar” available to the public through record sales which they advertised in *El Malcriado*. These 33RPM records could be purchased for \$4.25.<sup>144</sup> These songs served to connect the farm labor union to Mexican history. Traditional music and music forms like “De Colores,” or the mariachis identified the cause as a Mexican one. Newly created songs such as the “Corrido de Cesar,” extended this belief, and sent the message that

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<sup>140</sup> Steiner, *La Raza*, 298; Jean Maddern Pitrone, *Chavez: Man of the Migrants* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1971), 94.

<sup>141</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 112; Day, 46-47.

<sup>142</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 73; Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 153.

<sup>143</sup> Steiner, *La Raza*, 315.

<sup>144</sup> Record ad. *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 45.

Chavez was bound to be a part Mexican American history, a part of which farm workers could be proud. This song also made Chavez an ethnic hero.

### **Race Heroes**

Both movements glorified their share of national or racial heroes. In his speeches and publication, King did glorify some African American heroes. However, these heroes tended to have played a part in the greater American story. Some of them were race heroes, like Booker T. Washington, but they were distinctly American and they were heroes who had enjoyed or perpetuated the system of American democracy, or who had used the system as it was to advance their cause. They were not fire breathing radicals who called for the over throw of the established system. This fit nicely with King's message that African Americans were citizens deserving of such rights and recognitions as given to any American.

King's choice of heroes reflected the common trends in African American history and African American targeted advertising at the time. *Ebony* magazine in the 1950s and 60s was filled with the kinds of African American heroes that King would later adopt in the cause. One way this was done was to magnify the connections that African Americans had to the founders. In November 1954, one such article, which might have been shocking to many in the mid-1950s, claimed that many African Americans who were descended from Sally Hemmings were also the descendants of Thomas Jefferson, a fact which they did not always broadcast.<sup>145</sup> Another article from September 1955

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<sup>145</sup> "Thomas Jefferson's Negro Grandchildren," *Ebony*, November 1954.

described upper class Northern African Americans and said that many of them were descended from the American forefathers.<sup>146</sup> A third article in September 1961 informed *Ebony* readers that African non-slaves had come to America in 1619, an event which preceded the coming of the pilgrims on the Mayflower.<sup>147</sup> The most common way to connect African Americans to the American founders was by telling the story of Crispus Attucks. Attucks was the one of the men killed during the Boston Massacre. A fugitive slave who became part of the crowd antagonizing the British soldiers, Attucks was often featured in *Ebony* discussions. This allowed the magazine to emphasize African American roles in the fight for American freedoms, as well as allow the authors to discuss other roles that African Americans played in the war.<sup>148</sup>

There were also articles about historical figures from the African American community who merited recognition not because of whom they were descended from or because of their connection to colonial America, but because of what they had done. One of the ways this was done was through the *Ebony* Hall of Fame. The magazine picked out ten deceased African Americans to begin the honor in November 1955, and announced that elections for a new member would be held in 1956. The first ten members included three women, educator Mary McLeod Bethune, underground railroad pioneer Harriet Tubman, and freedom advocate Sojourner Truth. Others included scientist George Washington Carver, NAACP leader Walter Francis White, educator and

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<sup>146</sup> "Negro Blue Bloods," *Ebony*, September 1955.

<sup>147</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., "Before the Mayflower," *Ebony*, September 1961.

<sup>148</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., "The Negro in the American Revolution," *Ebony*, November 1961; "Ten Most Dramatic Events in Negro History," *Ebony*, September 1963.



leader Booker T. Washington, doctor Daniel Hale Williams, astronomer and city planner Benjamin Bannaker, Revolutionary hero and fugitive slave Crispus Attucks, and Frederick Douglass, whom they described as an orator, statesman, editor, and emancipation advocate. Interestingly, they failed to mention Douglass ever having been a slave.<sup>149</sup> In February 1956, *Ebony* announced that its readers had elected another to the Hall of Fame. The eleventh member became Madame CJ Walker, the business woman known for her hair care company. Walker received sixty percent of the vote.<sup>150</sup>

The Hall of Fame heroes and heroines were mostly people who worked with the established government to obtain their goals, or who had some economic success. But, starting in 1962, articles about African American history or heroes tended to focus on more radical figures and events. In February 1962, Lerone Bennett, Jr., wrote about slave revolts and highlighted such events including the Denmark Vessey and Nat Turner rebellions.<sup>151</sup> In May, Bennett wrote about abolitionists and the anti-slavery fight. The heroes of this story were men like Frederick Douglass, David Walker, Garnet Redmon, and William Lloyd Garrison.<sup>152</sup> This article was followed by several that Bennett wrote about African American roles and problems during the Civil War and Reconstruction.<sup>153</sup> By the end of the year, Bennett would write an article discussing African American

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<sup>149</sup> “*Ebony* Hall of Fame,” *Ebony*, November 1955.

<sup>150</sup> “*Ebony* Hall of Fame,” *Ebony*, February 1956.

<sup>151</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Slave Revolts and Insurrections,” *Ebony*, February 1962.

<sup>152</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Generation of Crisis,” *Ebony*, May 1962.

<sup>153</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., “The Negro and the Civil War,” *Ebony*, June 1962; Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Black Power in Dixie,” *Ebony*, July 1962; Lerone Bennett, Jr., “The Birth of Jim Crow,” *Ebony*, August 1962.

history from the post Civil War era to the present, starting with Booker T. Washington, (whom he saw as an ironic figure that did not live with the restrictions that he expected most Southern African Americans to tolerate). He also discussed the more radical WEB Dubois, Adam Powell, the NAACP, Marcus Garvey, A. Philip Randolph, and finally King, whom he said had taken the battle to the people.<sup>154</sup>

The inclusion of King in Bennett's history was indicative of another trend: the inclusion of articles which featured racial activists as heroes. An early example of such an *Ebony* article appeared in an August 1955 article about Southern African Americans. The writers praised those who stayed in the South, and who, led by regional African American professionals, had dug in and insisted on became part of the Southern life. Included in this article were pictures and names of those who had already died in the Southern cause.<sup>155</sup> It was not until the mid 1960s however, that such articles became more frequent. The inspiration for this was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1963. In an issue devoted to celebrating the event in September 1963, *Ebony* listed what they considered the ten most important events in African American history. Included on this list were three civil rights events, the Brown decision of May 1954, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the school desegregation crisis of Little Rock.<sup>156</sup> Also in September of 1963, they listed the names of King and other civil rights activists connected to the SCLC such as Ralph Abernathy and Fred

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<sup>154</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., "From Booker T. to Martin L.," *Ebony*, November 1962.

<sup>155</sup> "The New Fighting South," *Ebony*, August 1955.

<sup>156</sup> "Ten Most Dramatic Events in Negro History," *Ebony*, September 1963.

Shuttlesworth as some of the most influential living African Americans.<sup>157</sup> Later, *Ebony* published articles which described various civil rights groups such as the SCLC, SNCC, CORE, the Deacons, and the black power movement.<sup>158</sup> These articles came out mostly in the latter half of 1965, in the aftermath of the Selma movement, the event which gained national and international attention and forced the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Another feature in *Ebony's* pages were a series of ads put out by Schenley liquors, the same group which would later be boycotted by Chavez. These ads, focusing on what Schenley called "Great Names of the Ages," would highlight African American heroes in attempts to sell liquor. In November 1954, one such ad told about Frederick Douglass, the former slave and attention-getting orator. In that ad, Schenley also included an offer for a free African American history calendar. Similar ads included heroes like George Washington Carver who invented a multitude of uses for the peanut, and crop rotation methods, Booker T. Washington, who like Douglass was an orator, and who founded Tuskegee and promoted industrial education, Benjamin Banneker, who came in for his share of praise in the ads, thanks to his abilities in science and architecture, and Blanche K. Bruce who was noted for his role as a senator from Mississippi. Probably the most radical figure in these ads which appeared in the mid to late 1950s was Toussaint L'Ouverture, who fought for the end of slavery, but who was not American.<sup>159</sup> The

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<sup>157</sup> "America's 100 Most Influential Negroes," *Ebony*, September 1963.

<sup>158</sup> See *Ebony* June 1965 to December 1965.

<sup>159</sup> Schenley ad, *Ebony*, November 1954; Schenley ad, *Ebony*, January 1955; Schenley ad, *Ebony*, March 1955; Schenley ad, *Ebony*, May 1955; Schenley ad, *Ebony*, June 1955; Schenley ad, *Ebony*, July 1955.

African American men featured in these ads were establishment types. They had become part of the established American system and had used it to succeed.

King and the SCLC leadership felt that African Americans needed to know and be connected with their heritage. In his “Advice for Living” column in *Ebony* magazine in January 1958, King wrote that the African American middle class in particular needed to make sure their children knew of their heritage. Citing a work that contained these ideas, King said that the African American middle class lacked connections with either the African American masses or the white middle class. This left middle class African Americans with no sense of belonging or love of self.<sup>160</sup> Some seven years later, the SCLC still believed that the knowledge of such a heritage was important. This time they made it clear that their version of African American history was essentially American. The January 27, 1965, press release which announced that a one dollar African American history calendar was now for sale also cited King as saying that the calendar would allow African Americans to have a sense of their ancestors’ importance in American history. This version of the calendar was to include famous figures such as Frederick Douglass, important but not famous African Americans such as inventor Granville T. Woods, and milestones in the recent civil rights movement such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott.<sup>161</sup>

Typically King’s speeches and SCLC publications included as race heroes more established African Americans similar to those promoted in *Ebony’s* Hall of Fame. He held up for African Americans a list of African American figures whom he counted as

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<sup>160</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “Advice for Living,” *Ebony*, January 1958.

<sup>161</sup> SCLC Press Release, 27 January 1965, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 9.

people who had made a stand for their beliefs and who were successes even during a time of oppression. This list included Booker T. Washington, Roland, Hayes, Marion Anderson, George Washington Carver, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ralph Bunche, Joe Louis, Jessie Owens, and Jackie Robinson. King often compared them to greats from other countries and cultures such as Handel and Einstein. Washington King noted because of his leadership and efforts in Tuskegee. Hayes, the child of an illiterate mother became a famous singer who had an audience of royalty. Marion Anderson too had become a great singer, one of rare talent. Carver was known for his advances in science. Bethune King noted for her female leadership, and Ralph Bunche whose grandfather had been a slave, was noted for his work as a diplomat.<sup>162</sup> Louis, Owens and Robinson, who were more commonly left off the list, were athletes in boxing, track, and baseball respectively, all of whom had performed in integrated circumstances.

King also wanted African Americans to know that their history went beyond that of founders. King would point out as *Ebony* had, that Africans had been in America prior the pilgrims, the writing of the Declaration of Independence, and the composition of the “Star Spangled Banner.” Unlike the authors of *Ebony*, King believed the 1619 arrivals were slaves who had no choice in the matter. For some 200 years then, African Americans had served as slaves and built up the country. But now, they could not be ignored because their freedom defined the nation’s freedom and the nation’s progress

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<sup>162</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at Public Meeting of the Southern Christian Ministers Conference of Mississippi, 23 September 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 281-290; Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Fourth Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change at Bethel Baptist Church, 3 December 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 333-343; Martin Luther King, Jr., Address to the Hungry Club of Atlanta, 15 December 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

would be determined by the ability of African Americans to rise up and be as industrious as those without their history. The nation had to offer freedom to all or none.<sup>163</sup>

King also developed a particular version of American history as told from a racial perspective. In “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” which appeared in *Christian Century*, King detailed African American history from the moment that Africans arrived in America in 1619 (before the Pilgrims) to the Dred Scott decision which declared that slaves were property and not citizens, to the time of emancipation due to the Civil War, and then to the 1896 Plessy decision which justified separate but equal status.<sup>164</sup> Later King would date the stages of African American history by Supreme Court decisions. The Dred Scott and Plessy cases marked two of the eras, but the third, the era that marked the entrance into the Promised Land, was defined by the 1954 Brown decision which overturned Plessy.<sup>165</sup>

This version of African American history also appeared in the workbooks and lessons associated with the freedom and citizenship schools. SCLC citizenship workbook included practice readings on African American heroes. For instance, Crispus Attucks emerged as a freedom fighter that became part of the American colonial movement for representation. The authors of the booklet compared this to the Southern situation. After

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<sup>163</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at Mississippi Freedom Party, Concerning Southern Civil Rights, 23 July 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6; Martin Luther King, Jr., An Address to the Members of the Hungry Club, 15 December 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, August 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

<sup>164</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” 6 February 1957, in *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 165-167, first in *Christian Century*, 74 (6 February 1957).

<sup>165</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Look to the Future,” 2 September 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 269-276; Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the the Thirty-fourth Annual convention of the National Bar Association, 20 August 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 264-270.

all, African Americans in the south were denied their right to vote but were taxed. Somewhat ironically, their story of Attucks calling for people, armed with sticks and snowballs, to attack the guards was on a page following a story which promoted nonviolence. Apparently this did not strike the authors as particularly strange. Instead, rather than seeing Attucks as a violent rebel, he was an American hero who died to make the country free.<sup>166</sup> King himself also told the story of Crispus Attucks. His version of Attucks' story was much like the workbook version. In an address to attendees at the Fourth Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change in December 1959, King said that Attucks' death was just the start of a line of African Americans who gave their lives for the country. Others had joined the Navy during both World Wars, and fought in France, Germany, Italy and Japan for the same cause of freedom.<sup>167</sup> In these presentations, Attucks' violence is somewhat justified in the defense of his homeland.

The rest of the Heroes of the Past from the citizenship workbook were somewhat less likely to send mixed messages. The list of these brave individuals included Sojourner Truth, Benjamin Banneker, Harriet Tubman, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Truth and Tubman were portrayed as activists in the African American community around the time of the Civil War. Both of them were shown as heroines for the roles they had played in the liberation of the slaves. Truth was a Northern woman born a slave who decided after her liberation to travel and speak about abolition and women's rights. She also served as a community activist who helped former slaves find work during the Civil

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<sup>166</sup> SCLC, "Citizenship Workbook," SCLC, Box 153, Folder 23, 23-24.

<sup>167</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Fourth Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change, 3 December 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 333-343.

War era. Tubman was noted for her work as a conductor on the underground rail road. The authors said that she had pulled a gun on some of the slaves she helped liberate to ensure their continued cooperation, but this act was shown as being practically nonviolent in the face of the fear that the slaves had of being retrieved and beaten as punishment. Banneker and Bethune were noted for their determination to educate themselves. Banneker came into praise because this former slave and brilliant man of science had learned by reading what “any man with a university degree would be proud to know...” Similarly, Bethune was noted for her determination as a child to learn to read and to be educated, as well as her work as an adult in promoting education.<sup>168</sup>

The Mississippi Freedom Summer program also included Freedom Schools which targeted high school age students. The suggested African American history curriculum for the schools was developed partly by Barbara Jones from SNCC’s New York branch. The curriculum began by introducing the students to African American history through the story of the July 1839 Amistad mutiny. This story was deemed the best introduction that the teen students could have, as SNCC had found in previous cases that the kids would later recall the story in detail and would be inspired to learn more. This tale would serve to enable the teacher to branch out to other common themes in African American history from slave revolts and resistance, to abolition, to significant court decisions, to Reconstruction and to the discrimination which followed it. The Amistad story in particular served to prepare students for protest, the authors of the curriculum wrote that “It is most important that the students understand that protest is nothing new for Negroes

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<sup>168</sup> SCLC, “Citizenship Workbook,” SCLC, Box 153, Folder 23, 25-28.



and this study clearly illustrates that point.” The lesson on the courts was to also include a discussion of United States presidential attitudes toward African Americans which would allow “for much reflection later in the curriculum on the present freedom struggle and the President’s role.” While on the surface this project gave African American youth an understanding of the history of their ancestors, it also served to prepare them to accept and perhaps join in movement protests and to join the call for the federal government to act.

King’s rhetoric most often placed the movement in the context of United States history, but he did on occasion put changes in America in the context of the global situation. As early as 1956, he told attendees at an American Baptist conference that the current struggle had been born as African Americans were exposed to more of the world through war, travel, and education. This had led to more confidence in their self-worth, and a desire for freedom, just as many people all over the world were taking their freedom.<sup>169</sup> King seems to have seen African freedom fighters as examples not just for African Americans, but as symbols of hope for oppressed peoples everywhere. Talk of liberation often included not only African causes but also uprisings in Asia.<sup>170</sup> King felt that in the future, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century would come to be seen as a time when the common man sought political or economic freedom. Asian peoples had either won their freedom or were on the verge of it. That same feeling had caught on in Africa. The African

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<sup>169</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Non-Aggression Procedures to Interracial Harmony,” 23 July 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 321-328.

<sup>170</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 3 December 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 451-463; Martin Luther King, Jr., “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 1 January 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 73-89.

American struggle was just a part of this international cry for freedom.<sup>171</sup> African Americans, he said, were aware that Africans and the poor of India were voting in their relatively new countries, but in the United States many African Americans did not have the power to vote.<sup>172</sup> According to King, this international situation required that we as individuals keep a world wide perspective. After all, we had “inherited a big house, a great world house in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, Moselm and Hindu.”<sup>173</sup>

King was particularly aware of the African situation. In fact, he visited Ghana during the change in government in 1957. During a sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, King told of the history of the Gold Coast of Africa through years of colonization which had led to a series of rebellions led by African chiefs. But finally, Kwame Nkrumah had returned after receiving a Western education, and had become prime minister, eventually leading the people of Ghana to freedom. Ghana, he told the congregation, was to be an example to those of the South that they would have to fight for their freedom.<sup>174</sup> While in Ghana for the independence celebrations, King was interviewed on the radio by a local reporter Etta Moten Barnett. He told the audience listening in that day that their independence was an event which would inspire oppressed

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<sup>171</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Remarks for Negro Press Week, 10 February 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 362-363.

<sup>172</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Burning Truth in the South,” May 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 447-451, first printed in *The Progressive*, 24 (May 1960) 8-10.

<sup>173</sup> King, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, August 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

<sup>174</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Birth of a New Nation,” 7 April 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 155-167.

people everywhere.<sup>175</sup> For King, the liberation of the Gold Coast was not the result of some trend among African people, but rather a world wide trend of those oppressed.

King would remember his time in Ghana later and use it in his speeches. When speaking to the Mississippi Freedom Party in 1964, during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, King told them of an hour, almost midnight, in 1957 that he had stood with his wife, Congressman Powell and Ralph Bunche and watched the flag of the colonial ruler fall and the flag of freedom and independence rising. For Ghana at midnight had come the beginning of a new order. King looked over and saw on the platform leaders of the new cabinet and parliament. They had on caps which looked out of place, so King asked about them and found that those were prison caps. For these men freedom had come through prison. Ghana was to be an inspiration to those in Mississippi who might have or who might soon find themselves in jail for the cause.<sup>176</sup>

King was also concerned with the situation in South Africa. He served as the United States Vice Chair of the International Sponsoring Committee of the Declaration of Conscience on South Africa and Day of Protest in 1957. As vice chair, King along with the United States Chairman James A. Pike, called for support of the South African oppressed in a rally which was held in the Manhattan Center and featured a variety of speakers including Eleanor Roosevelt and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP.<sup>177</sup> King would

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<sup>175</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Etta Moten Barnett, 6 March 1957, Accra, Ghana, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 145-148.

<sup>176</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at Mississippi Freedom Party, Concerning Southern Civil Rights, 23 July 1964, MLK Speeches, III, Box 6.

<sup>177</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., and James A. Pike to Chester Bowles, 8 November 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Vol. IV, 311-314; Oliver Tambo to Martin Luther King, Jr., 18 November 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 325.

later receive thanks for his recognition of South Africa's problems. Among such grateful correspondents was Herbert W. Vilakazi. Vilakazi wrote to tell King how much he had enjoyed *Stride Toward Freedom*, King's book. He told King that he was a fifteen-year-old South African living in the United States because of his father's work. He asked King to keep remembering those struggling in South Africa, explaining that few realized how bad the situation really was.<sup>178</sup>

King did not see the move to liberation as a pan-African one, but a global one. King acknowledged that about seventy-five percent of the world was classified as colored but said those people could not treat whites the way they had been treated. He said that African Americans "must not become victimized with a philosophy of black supremacy."<sup>179</sup> And, when asked about African American migration to Africa, King replied that such a migration would be avoiding the problem. African Americans were American citizens and as such they were entitled to the rights of all Americans. They simply had to keep believing that this would happen.<sup>180</sup> Thus, his historical and heroic references continued to focus primarily upon African American heroes and events.

The focus on American heroes and African American heroes within an American context made sense in light of the goals that King and the SCLC had. They wanted the government and the people of the United States to acknowledge that African Americans

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<sup>178</sup> Herbert W. Vilakazi to Martin Luther King, Jr., 25 October 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 517-518.

<sup>179</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Give Us the Ballot," 17 May 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 208-215.

<sup>180</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Edward H. Page, 12 June 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 219-220.

were Americans. With this acknowledgement would come the recognition that African Americans were entitled to the rights of citizens and the government's protection of those rights. If King and the SCLC had come across as separatists or black power advocates, they could have easily lost the recognition of their inherently American qualities, thus costing them potential victories.

Since Chavez and the union were not asking for constitutional of citizenship rights, such American heroes were not as important to them. They felt free to use Mexican heroes as symbols, and they did, primarily choosing those who called to mind Mexico's revolutions. Although the movement was a nonviolent one, it very often used figures from the Mexican Revolutions to promote itself. It made good strategic sense to appeal to Mexican Americans in this manner. Whereas the labor movement in the United States was developing in the context of the civil rights movement and so took on the form of civil resistance, labor movements in Mexico had arisen out of revolutions.<sup>181</sup> Thus, Mexican Americans could easily see a labor movement as a revolution, something they could take pride in, if given the right symbols to put it in a cultural context.

When the "Corrido de Cesar" praised Chavez's efforts in the 1966 March to Sacramento, it was also praising the union's attempts to extend the Mexican and American revolutions and their benefits to the poor.<sup>182</sup> One of the revolutionary issues for the poor was land reform. Land reform was a revolutionary issue which the union

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<sup>181</sup> Ernesto Galarza, interview with Gabrielle Morris and Timothy Bears for Anne Loftis, 7 May 1974, Bancroft Library Oral Histories, oral history collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs.

<sup>182</sup> Pat Hoffman, *Ministry of the Dispossessed: Learning from the Farm Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: Wallace Press 1987), 34-35; "Farm Workers Begin 300 Mile Pilgrimage" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 31; "Strikers Walk 300 Miles" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 32.

found paralleled its own cause. The demand for land reform had often been a motivating factor in Mexico's revolutions, particularly the revolution of 1910. Chavez knew this and would use it in his April 23, 1969, "Good Friday Letter" to the President of the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, E. L. Barr. He wrote about social revolutions and the poor who gained the land.<sup>183</sup> Chavez was not advocating land redistribution but he was promoting the long held idea that those who work the land should profit from it. By claiming that the farm workers were seeking such justice, Chavez had neatly connected them to the Mexican peasants who some 50 years prior had joined the 1910 uprising, an uprising that was still regarded fondly by many farm workers. The grape strike had become an extension of that revolution.

In the same fashion, the 1966 March to Sacramento became a revolutionary act. Chavez, in his statement on the purpose of the march, said that marches were extensions of Spanish culture. Marches were part of the Hispanic religious tradition through forms such as pilgrimages and Lenten processions. But they were also a part of the Mexican revolutionary past, a time when the poor had went seeking food. The contemporary Mexican American was a child of this revolution.<sup>184</sup> Now Mexican American farm workers who were seeking better pay and working conditions could push for change just as Mexicans had in the days of the revolution. Chavez's use of such rhetoric made the 1966 March appear to be a revolutionary act, one which all Mexican Americans should take pride in.

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<sup>183</sup> Letter from Cesar Chavez to E.L. Barr, April 23, 1969, reprinted in Winthrop Yinger, *Cesar Chavez: The Rhetoric of Nonviolence* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), 144.

<sup>184</sup> Cesar Chavez, Sacramento March Letter, March 1966, reprinted in Yinger, 106-107.

Father Miguel Hidalgo was the one of the oldest and one of the first revolutionary heroes with whom the union connected itself. A parish priest in Guanajuto, Hidalgo had supported the Indians in the face of Spanish colonial rules in the 1810 revolution. It was Hidalgo who rang the church bells in September of that year in a cry for independence. He died the following year in an uprising, but the revolution triumphed in 1820, as Mexico won independence. The union's adoption of Hidalgo's image came as early as the September 16, 1965, grape strike vote. When the mostly Filipino Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) began the strike in 1965, they asked for the support of the mostly Mexican American NFWA, Chavez's group. Chavez told them that he would have to call his membership together for a strike vote. The meeting was held on the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hidalgo's call for independence, the day celebrated as Mexican Independence day. Chavez used the opportunity to remind his audience of Hidalgo's fight for independence and the subsequent success of the people of Mexico.<sup>185</sup> There is no doubt that the historical importance of the day gave the union membership added incentive to join the strike, and although Chavez also warned them that a strike would require sacrifices, the NFWA membership decided to join the AWOC on the picket lines.

Hidalgo however was just one of many Mexican patriots whom the union could use to promote their cause. Two others, both active in the 1910 revolution, would also become an important part of the union story. These two, Pancho Villa and Emiliano

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<sup>185</sup> Ferris and Sandoval, 88; Hammerback and Jensen, 68; Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: The First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, CA: Farm Worker Press, 1966), 26; Steiner, *La Raza*, 283.

Zapata, had been used by other Mexican American movements to promote their cause and to unite their followers.<sup>186</sup> The stories of heroes such as these men were familiar to Mexican Americans. Even if a family had been in the United States for some time, they were usually familiar with such grand tales.<sup>187</sup> And, even if both men were actually regional leaders and not national ones, the men had become nationalistic symbols.<sup>188</sup> Mexican Americans who wanted such cultural heroes readily found them in these men, particularly Zapata, whom they came to believe was a man who had stood for fair land distribution and for the rights of the people.<sup>189</sup> So, when the union chose to tie themselves to these men, they were using historical figures known to the majority of farm laborers.

Pancho Villa was a hero of Northern Mexico from the early 1900s. He had killed his sister's attacker and had to hide from authorities. It was then that he took on the name of a legendary bandit. Although considered lawless, he was also known as an advocate for the poor, a man who encouraged a labor rebellion against ranch owners. Villa built up his own army which was fairly successful during the 1910 revolution. He was also noted for some activity within the United States, such as his raid on Columbus, New Mexico in 1916. An assassin ended Villa's life in 1923, a fact which only made his

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<sup>186</sup> David F. Gomez, *Somos Chicanos: Strangers in Our Own Land* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 156.

<sup>187</sup> Carmen Tafolla, *To Split A Human: Mitos, Machos Y La Mujer Chicana* (Mexican American Cultural Center, 1985), 25.

<sup>188</sup> Julian Samora and Patricia Vandel Simon, *A History of the Mexican American People* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977, revised 1993), 124.

<sup>189</sup> Armand B. Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1971), 108-111.



actions seem even more heroic and significant. Daniel De Los Reyes wrote about Villa for the union organ, *El Malcriado*. This article highlighted several military leaders who had impacted Mexican history such as Cortez who conquered all of Mexico and Villa who conquered the federal army. The young people who joined the farm labor movement and Chavez himself were also fighters; they were there to conquer the growers.<sup>190</sup> Two later articles told Villa's life story and hinted that the farm workers should admire Villa for his fight for justice.<sup>191</sup> *El Malcriado* authors wanted union members to believe that the union cause was a fight for justice and that Chavez was a leader that Mexican Americans could follow, just as their ancestors had followed Villa.

While Villa was active in Northern Mexico, Emiliano Zapata was active in the South. Zapata, too, protested the land distribution problems in rural Mexico, and was willing to fight a corrupt Mexican government. Zapata was best known for his *Plan De Ayala*, a statement which called for elections and land distribution reform. Like Villa, Zapata was assassinated in 1919 when he went to meet with federal troops. And, like Villa, he became known as a martyr for the cause of the poor. Because of this, the union could use Zapata to urge their members to continue the fight and to be strong just as their Mexican forefather had had.<sup>192</sup> The grape strikers admired Zapata as much as they did Villa. Father Mark Day noticed one student helping in the Coachella strike who not only wore a shirt with Zapata's picture, but he had also grown a Zapata-like mustache to

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<sup>190</sup> Daniel De Los Reyes, "Young Farm Worker Leaders Who Help Chavez in His Struggle for Social Justice," *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 50.

<sup>191</sup> "Exploits of Pancho Villa" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 52; "A Friend of Villa" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no 53.

<sup>192</sup> "Emiliano Zapata" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 29.

complement it.<sup>193</sup> Following the example of Zapata and reformers like him, the union decided to announce the goals of the strike and to name it after the town where it was first read.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, when the union wanted to explain the march to Sacramento to the nation, they wrote the *Plan of Delano*, which was read first in Delano, and then at every stop along the way. This *Plan* explained that the march was a revolutionary one, one for justice, but also explained that the strikers were to maintain a policy of nonviolence.<sup>195</sup> The union also managed to portray Chavez as a leader in the style of Zapata. Some noticed Chavez's associations with land and land reform and drew this analogy.<sup>196</sup> For others, Chavez's use of Zapata's words, image, and tactics made him seem like a modern day revolutionary.<sup>197</sup>

The images of these revolutionary heroes served to unite and encourage the farm laborers. As many Mexican American families would, Chavez and his family found Hidalgo, Villa, and Zapata to be important historical figures. Father Mark Day, the union priest noticed pictures of both Hidalgo and Zapata in Chavez's office.<sup>198</sup> Helen Chavez's father had been a colonel in Villa's personal army. So, it was perhaps natural that the union would promote their strike with images of Villa and Zapata. They offered for sale buttons and posters bearing the images of Villa and Zapata which promoted the strike and

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<sup>193</sup> Day, 83-83.

<sup>194</sup> Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall ye Reap* (New York: Crowell, 1970), 154.

<sup>195</sup> "The Plan of Delano" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 31.

<sup>196</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 180-181.

<sup>197</sup> Steiner, *La Raza*, 288,296; Majka and Majka, 176; Hammerback and Jensen, 39; Griswold del Castillo and Garcia 52; Prago, 197; London and Anderson, 154; Ferriss and Sandoval, 119.

<sup>198</sup> Day, 19.

the boycott.<sup>199</sup> To encourage the recognition among Mexican Americans with union ties, the California Migrant Ministry (CMM) taught children's classes on Mexican history and leaders like Villa and Zapata.<sup>200</sup> Ramiro Mendez, a union member, liked such symbols. They stirred within him pride in his Mexican heritage and he connected the union to Villa and Zapata's noble goals.<sup>201</sup>

Union writings and publications also told the tales of the revolutions and their heroes. The union paper, *El Malcriado*, was particularly eager to publish such articles. The very name of the paper itself was the nickname of the Mexican paper *Revolucion*.<sup>202</sup> Chavez explained that the paper's name meant ill-bred, but was also a label applied to children who sassed their parents. This name had been used by a paper during the revolution and had been adopted by other papers since, including a paper in Los Angeles in the 1920s. Chavez believed that the "name is really the best we could find for the paper. It means many more things for the people." Apparently it was a good name; in the first six months the paper grew from 1000 to 3000 copies an edition.<sup>203</sup> It would continue the tradition of promoting revolutionary action. Through *El Malcriado*, the union told members suffering for the cause to be inspired by the revolutionaries from

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<sup>199</sup> United Farm Workers, "Chavez! Huelga! Non-Violence!" order catalog, 1971. Personal collection of Alicia Ortiz.

<sup>200</sup> "A New Type of Summer School," *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 9.

<sup>201</sup> Ramiro Mendez, Letter to the Editor, *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 49.

<sup>202</sup> Ferris and Sandoval, 80.

<sup>203</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 23 March 1963, FRP, Folder 12.

Mexico who had faced long struggles, seemingly without hope, and yet who had won.<sup>204</sup>

The paper told its readers that the Mexican flag carried on the union's march to Sacramento had been taken as a memorial to Hidalgo, Villa, and Zapata.<sup>205</sup> Like its nickname suggested, the paper would continue to sass those in authority, the growers.

These images of revolutionaries and the use of Mexican cultural traditions were intended primarily to further the cause among Mexican American farm laborers. Of course, other Mexican Americans who were not in the farm labor movement would also be inspired to support the union and union members among them. The symbol of the flag was a new image with historical ties with which Mexican Americans could come to identify. The theatrical group, the Teatro, and the traditional songs and music forms were entertaining and culturally relevant opportunities for the union to promote the cause in the Mexican American community. As the union promoted itself as an extension of the Mexican revolutionary tradition, it gave them political power. Through such images, they could promise to win victories over the growers just as Mexican rebels had won victories over the Spanish and Mexican governments.

Of course, most Americans who would later be asked to support the grape boycotts would have little to no interest in Mexican culture, history, or heroes. These images were tailored for the Mexican American population and did not serve to attract

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<sup>204</sup> "What Can One Man Do?" *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 18; "We are Winning" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 22.

<sup>205</sup> "What Can One Man Do?" *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 18; "We are Winning" *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 22.

the attention of outsiders. Instead these images served to confirm that the farm laborers were a group with a special history. The method was intended both to unify the cause and to promote the group as one that needed government help because of their special history. To attract other Americans, the union relied upon its nonviolent record and of use of religious imagery. The organizations under King's leadership had also used their nonviolent tactics and religious imagery to draw many to the cause, but they had also used patriotic appeals to stir the consciences of the American public and the federal government in ways that Chavez's group had not cared to. Both groups though would share another method of attracting and unifying their support base. Both King and Chavez would take care to control and mold presentations of gender associated with their causes.

## 5. SUFFERING FOR OTHERS: IMAGES OF GENDER

Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez had used patriotic or ethnic appeals to unite their supporters. Both men would similarly try to unite their supporters by carefully building and shaping the images of men and women involved in their movements. Both King and Chavez would attempt to convince men that true masculinity was to be found in a willingness to act nonviolently for the cause. Both would try to inspire women involved in the movements to act in ways which appeared to conform to traditional gender roles. Furthermore, both groups indicated concern for children but were more than willing to use them in propaganda.

Gendered roles would be very important in the civil rights movement. King would need both men and women to volunteer for the cause. Women did much of the ground work, such as providing the impetus for the bus boycott in Montgomery. The Women's Political Council of Montgomery had argued for improved treatment of African Americans on city busses. They, in fact organized the bus boycott after hearing of Rosa Park's arrest. Their initiative and community contacts gave birth to the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA).<sup>1</sup> But African American men were

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<sup>1</sup> Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 55-62; Mary Fair Burks, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, *Black Women in United States History*, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc, 1990) 71-83.

coming into their own. Increasingly, they were demanding a place at the table of American democracy.

Discontent with the Jim Crow system came to a head after WWII. During this war, African Americans increasingly demanded more rights, fair practices and pay in labor, and, toward the end of the war, a desegregated military. Moreover, when the African American men who served in the armed forces returned, they were not content to go back to the society they had left before the war. Having seen the horrors of a racist Nazi government, they realize the pattern could be repeated in the United States. Many African American men gained confidence during the war. They would not want to go back to a society which did not live up to its rhetoric of democracy for all. It was in part the fervency of these men that would drive a demand for change in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

It was also an expectation and desire on the parts of some women that these men take up leadership roles. Fanny Lou Hamer told *Ebony* in August 1966 that women often left the movement for the traditional motherly reasons. She said that “We were just carrying on until the men could get a chance, and this year they will. But as women, we feel we have done many things to open the doors for our men and to show them what when they get their chance, we will be there to back them up all the way.”<sup>3</sup> Many other women involved in civil rights movements felt this way as well. Some believed that for African Americans to be taken seriously, African American men would have to have

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<sup>2</sup> Steve Estes, *I AM A MAN: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Phyl Garland, “Builders of a New South,” *Ebony*, August 1966.

more power. The African American community would have to reflect white society.<sup>4</sup> Demanding full equality in American life, much of what African American men would demand would be reflective of white gender norms. There would also be a set of behavior expectations placed upon them. Largely, this meant no violence. No violence not only for practical reasons of strategy and Christian philosophy, but also no violence because for far too long African American men had been stereotyped as being nearly monstrous.

African American women were needed not only because of the work they did, but because they lent an aura of respectability to the cause. African American women's heroes became beautiful moderate women, not radical ones. Coretta Scott King, the poised preacher's wife was held up as an example of what African American women should be as wives and mothers. Although more radical women such as Ella Baker, Septima Clark and Diane Nash were involved in Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) movements, their roles were rarely highlighted by the SCLC unless it fit the appropriate picture.

Cesar Chavez and the farm labor union needed the cooperation and participation of both men and women just as the civil rights movement had. Similar to African American leadership, the Mexican American leaders recognized the cultural norms of patriarchy. They believed that men, as leaders of the Mexican American family, were the people who make the ultimate decision on whether or not a family would join the union. This was especially important for the union, as often entire families would work in the

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<sup>4</sup> Robnett, *How Long*, 42.



same fields, husbands, wives, and children. The father's decision could multiply union membership.

The farm labor movement had to draw in large numbers of men. They could not afford for these men to become violent, as this would destroy their image in the public mind and cost them cooperation with the grape boycott. The presence of women was designed to decrease the chances that violence would occur.<sup>5</sup> After all, Mexican culture proscribed certain behaviors for Mexican American women. She was to be a gentle, quiet creature who took care of the home and followed her husband's leadership. Her presence, it was thought, would mean that men were less likely to engage in violent behavior to which women should not be exposed.

The farm labor union also needed the cooperation of the women. Wives, such as Helen Chavez or single women such as Dolores Huerta, the union's vice president, could be a silent support that determined the union's success. These women had very different roles. Helen was the typical husband's helpmate. Rarely drawing attention to herself or her work, she did a large portion of the work that helped the union in its early years. She became the union's example of the perfect supportive wife and mother, much as Coretta was the SCLC's model wife. Huerta was much less silent than Helen was. Huerta recruited members, gave speeches, raised funds, and negotiated for the union. She eventually served as the union's vice-president. Because this single mother played such an important role, one which was outside of the cultural norm, she would have to be very careful with her image.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Garcia, "Dolores Huerta: Woman, Organizer, and Symbol," *California History* (Spring 1993), 56-71.

The union's challenge then was to become an institution in which both men and women could be active. Men would join, bringing their families with them into the union, strengthening its bargaining power by sheer numbers. Women would provide, they hoped, a calming presence as well as necessary workers for union duties. So the union needed the cooperation of women, but the union could not afford to offend men by destroying the cultural norms of gender behavior. They would preserve these norms by changing what it meant to be a Mexican American male, maintaining the image of union women within traditional roles, and by defining radical women in traditional terms.

Both movements called for strong families and made use of children in their causes. In the SCLC, the children would join adults on the picket lines and in protesting, often being arrested just as adults had been. It made great publicity. Similarly, the farm labor union often used children in union rhetoric. Both groups received some criticism for their treatment of children. But largely, they seem to have regarded the use of children as justified in making the world better for future generations.

### **Men in the Movements**

In September 1960, *Ebony* magazine bemoaned what it meant to be an African American man. African American men, they wrote, went through seven life stages. In infancy, he entered a world where he was less likely to survive childhood and had a shorter life expectancy. If he survived, his childhood would introduce him to prejudice as old white friends began to avoid him. In the lover stage, he would find himself whipped without understanding why for giving affection to a white girl. As a young adult, he'd be faced with decisions about entering college, the work force, or the sad alternative of street

gangs. He would spend his middle age subordinate to others, and late maturity with no respect as he was still seen as a boy by whites, couldn't vote, and lived in a segregated world. In senescence he would be left only with his faith in God.<sup>6</sup> It was a dreary picture that *Ebony* painted of African American manhood nearly five years after the Montgomery movement began.

King and the SCLC were careful in their portrayals of men and masculinity. African American men faced a history of oppression. As a result, women had become the dominate figure in the African American family. Many African American children could recall times when their fathers bit their tongues, saying nothing, knowing that to speak up, even to defend one's self or one's wife, may mean punishment or even death. Melba Beals, one of the Little Rock Nine, remembered a time when her mother was harassed by the white milk man. Her father, much to his frustration, could do nothing out of fear for his life.<sup>7</sup> Coretta Scott King would later recall that death could be the result of an African American man asserting his masculinity; therefore it was hard for them to lead the family.<sup>8</sup>

African American men also were denied the same role that white men played within the home and with family. While white men typically brought home wages which would provide the lion's share of the family's needs, African American men often found it hard to get and keep good jobs. Thus their wives, who often found steady work as

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<sup>6</sup> "The Seven Stages of Negro Man," *Ebony*, September 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 91.

domestics, became the head of the house. African American men, who lived in a world that told them the man was to rule the home because he provided for the family, found it very hard to live as the society told him he should. This, claimed *Ebony's* editorial staff, created problems for both the men and the women, as it was so far out of the American norm. Furthermore, young boys went off to school and were told stories of white families with perfect vacations and meals. Realizing that African American men faced discrimination which made such life styles nearly impossible, the boys were not inspired to even try to obtain this kind of life, and the system was perpetuated.<sup>9</sup> Lerone Bennet Jr., a reporter for *Ebony* wrote that “Unfortunately for the self-esteem of Negro males, female domination of the family continued after Emancipation.”<sup>10</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, who also wrote for *Ebony* agreed. He wrote that even though the women had done much in the way of race uplift, “...it has been done at the expense of the psychological health of the Negro male who had frequently been forced by circumstances into the position of a drone.”<sup>11</sup> *Ebony's* editors, felt this needed to be changed. Women were to stay home, not work for extras, definitely not put the marriage at risk by making more than the man, and establish “a strong family unit in which the father is the dominant person and the children are brought up to respect not only their parents but the rights of others.”<sup>12</sup>

Images of what it meant to be a man occurred quite often in *Ebony* magazine. In November 1954, only months after the Brown decision, *Ebony* would print an article

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<sup>9</sup> “A Man Around the House,” *Ebony*, January 1966.

<sup>10</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., “The Negro Woman,” *Ebony*, September 1963.

<sup>11</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, “A Look Beyond Matriarchy,” *Ebony*, August 1966.

<sup>12</sup> “For a Better Future,” *Ebony*, August 1966, 150.

about a woman who had lived as a man for fifteen years, fooling the entire community. When asked how she got away with it, the community members simply explained that she had acted like a man, she bragged, talked about girls dated, and at least once got into a fight.<sup>13</sup> She was accepted as a man because she had done exactly what was expected of men, and no one questioned her masculinity.

A man could prove his masculinity by fighting. African American men were often denied the chance to do this as other men could. Any perceived aggression on their part would result in harsh punishment or even death at the hands of a lynch mob. The challenge for King and the SCLC was to figure out how to use this new call for strong manhood without unleashing a potential furor and waves of violence. How could they draw the average man to the movement in a way that would be constructive and not destructive? What kind of rhetoric would they present that reaffirmed the masculinity of men who for so long had felt oppressed? And further more, how would they do it within a woman centered culture?

King and the civil rights movement began to develop strategies to appeal to African American men in the South. They developed a responsible rhetoric which sold a new order to African American men. They held up King as an example of what a proper African American man was and did. And, they defended the African American man against the old accusations that he was a beast lusting after and preying upon white women. The rhetoric espoused by King and the organizations involved with him promised African American men a life that they had never had before. It glorified

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<sup>13</sup> "The Woman Who Lived as a Man for 15 Years," *Ebony*, November 1954.

fatherhood, told men that joining the movement would give them a chance to defend their women and children as never before, and told them that joining the movement would improve their lives and their positions within the family and society.

There was no doubt that King and the SCLC believed in male centered models of leadership. Coretta reported that her husband always made her “feel like a real woman because he was a real man in every respect. After we were married he said, ‘I want my wife to respect me as the head of the family. I am the head of the family.’”<sup>14</sup> Around 1965, King and the SCLC in the Alabama Project attempted to create a nonviolent political weekend training session for young men, naming it after both King and Frederick Douglass. Saying that there needed to be more male leadership on the local level, the SCLC staff planned to recruit high school and college aged males and teach them nonviolent tactics, philosophy. They also intended to provide them with political training including lessons in African American history. This session would include training for jail conditions.<sup>15</sup> This trend toward male centered leadership was further celebrated in December 1965 when the SCLC released a statement celebrating the advancement of male leaders in Southern African American communities, something that they attributed to the Citizenship Education Department and similar civil rights programs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 91.

<sup>15</sup> “Martin Luther King- Frederick Douglass Non-Violent Political Institute,” SCLC, Box 148, Folder 8.

<sup>16</sup> New Generation of Negroes Becoming Less Woman-led, SCLC Department Concludes, newsrelease, 15 December 1965. SCLC, Box 121, Folder 19.

The civil rights movement was for men an opportunity to do what society said all men were supposed to do: protect and defend their women. Usually such protection is associated with violence, something the African American community was very familiar with due to the long history of lynching being justified as a defense of white womanhood. The SCLC knew African American men wanted to chance to defend African American women, but couldn't afford to have them do so in ways which were violent. They could not mirror white culture. Therefore they had to create other mechanisms by which this could be done.

There was a real danger that African American men would choose other methods of asserting masculinity. A rise in more radical groups began in the mid 1960s. Along with the increasingly attractive Nation of Islam were other, more mainstream groups. One particular group which began in the South was the Deacons for Defense and Justice, a group which would often be a thorn in the side of the SCLC, particularly during the Meredith March in Mississippi in 1966.<sup>17</sup>

The Deacons began in Louisiana in 1964, and in two years boasted of 7000 members in that state alone, with other branches in both the South and the North. Known for being armed, they claimed that just the knowledge that African American men in the South had weapons had ended some of the terror associated with the KKK. Their assertions were legitimate. Jonesboro, Louisiana, had been the scene of much African American harassment from the KKK, including one parade through the African American part of town reportedly led by a police car. Feeling that they were no longer able to rely

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<sup>17</sup> David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 485.

on law enforcement for protection, a group of African American veterans met and began to catalog the African American owned fire arms in the town. They then decided to protect their neighborhoods with weapons if necessary. In Jonesboro at least, it reduced Klan harassment. The problem was that method could quickly bring destruction upon African Americans. As the Deacons started to expand in Chicago, one police commander told *Newsweek* that “When the Deacons start shooting, that will be the end of the Deacons.”<sup>18</sup> Defensive violence might have been a way to stand up and prove one’s manhood, but in the long run, it was perhaps the most dangerous way of doing so.

One way men could defend their women was by going to jail. For instance, in 1965 as Selma heated up, King made a short statement criticizing Sheriff Clark for his treatment of the protestors. King began by complementing the African Americans of Dallas County for “standing up even if it meant standing up for Sheriff Clark and going to jail instead of accepting segregation.” King then went on to describe Clark’s actions toward a respected woman whom he apparently pushed and shoved. King does not specify or describe any Clark’s other actions, just his treatment of a woman.<sup>19</sup> The connection was clear. Those who went to jail were taking a stand against the brutal treatment of a woman. This was one way an African American man could send a message to the white community. He could protest and put his body on the line by being willing to go to jail in the face of abusive law enforcement.

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<sup>18</sup> “The Deacons Go North,” *Newsweek*, 2 May 1966; Roy Reed, “The Deacons, Too, Ride by Night,” *New York Times Magazine*, 15 August 1965.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “King Speaks out Against Sheriff Clark,” 20 January 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 7.



Leadership of the civil rights movement claimed that one of their successes was the ability of African American men to stand tall as men. SCLC's Newsletter of November-December 1963 contained an article by a white young man who had been involved at the SCLC's annual convention. He talked about being impressed by the men of the movement and was impressed when an African American man told him that it didn't matter that he "suffered" in prison, all that mattered was that he could be inspiring others to rise up. This kind of movement explained the young white man, was freeing African American men from their slave psychology.<sup>20</sup> Thus, even Albany, considered by most to be a failure, had some redeeming power. While King admitted to *Playboy* magazine in 1965 that it was a mistake to try to end all of segregation in Albany rather than to attack it piece by piece, he still said that the movement was a success because "The Negro people there straightened up their bent backs; you can't ride a man's back unless it's bent."<sup>21</sup> King further extended this form of masculinity to participation in the movement and in nonviolence. He said "When the Negro finds the courage to be free, he faces dogs and guns and clubs and fire hoses totally unafraid, and the white men with those dogs, guns, clubs and fire hoses see that the Negro they have traditionally called 'boy' has become a man."<sup>22</sup> Masculinity then was not the ability or willingness to fight back, but the ability to stand up and to take abuses upon ones self without fear.

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<sup>20</sup> John Newman, "A White Youth Speaks of Freedom," SCLC *Newsletter*, November-December 1963, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 23.

<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with *Playboy*, January 1965, SCLC, Box 27, Folder 49.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with *Playboy*, January 1965, SCLC, Box 27, Folder 49.

One way for men to assert their manhood nonviolently was in the voting booth. Handmade posters found in SCLC's files told men that they were truly men if they were involved in the electoral process. Once such poster showed a man in coveralls standing at the ballot box, laying at his feet were broken shackles, the caption read "Your Vote is the Voice of a Free Man." The backside of this poster shows a hammer labeled vote, smashing part chains holding together the wrists of a man. Similar posters implied that your vote put you in charge, in charge of the government, the sheriff, and the governor. Government could, the poster argued, run over you and your family, or you could run it, but you had to act, you had to vote. A final flyer gave directions on how to gain your voice as a voter.<sup>23</sup> A man could be in charge of his life and of his family, but he had to be willing to take this step of becoming involved in the process.

In many ways, Operation Breadbasket, the SCLC's economic equality program, was about improving the lots of African American men. A proposal for the program highlighted the problems of Southern African American men, saying that they have had a hard time earning enough to educate their children as they should, support their community's charitable groups, provide housing and health care for their families, and support their churches. Moreover, since Southern African American men often have had to work two jobs just to squeak by, they often are not there to give proper guidance to their wives and children. Sadly, young men saw these problems, concluded there was no reason for continuing their education, and the cycle perpetuated itself. Operation Breadbasket asserted that these things could be changed through the simple expedient of

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<sup>23</sup> Flyers in SCLC, Box 148, Folder 9.

negotiating with and sometimes boycotting major employers who did not hire African Americans in good positions.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of hopelessness being linked with a lack of economic opportunity was a continual theme for King. In his speech on families at the University of Chicago on January 27, 1966, King argued that men who were frustrated by a lack of opportunity often become hopeless, and sometimes turned on their wives and children, beating them, which lead to more violence.<sup>25</sup> Operation Breadbasket was designed alleviate such problems and to help African American men become strong leaders of their homes by increasing salaries and therefore their authority within the family.

King would become an example in picture and deed for what African American men should be like. MIA historian Lawrence Reddick wanted his friend King to be more of a crusader, giving up the church, and living on the donations of people for the cause. King, he felt, would never do this; Reddick said of King that “He will continue to be a crusader in a gray flannel suit.”<sup>26</sup> This 1950s standard man image served the cause well. In many ways it would have been impossible for King to quit his job and live off of the donations of others and yet still be the example that he wanted to be for African American men. If King was preaching self-improvement and race uplift to African American men, he himself had to maintain a job and continue to be an outstanding citizen. King set himself up as the head of his house, providing for his family. In a May

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<sup>24</sup> Proposed Program: Operation Breadbasket, SCLC, Box 172, Folder 33.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “The Negro Family,” 27 January 1966, SCLC, Box 28, Folder 22.

<sup>26</sup> Notes by Lawrence Dunbar Reddick on SCLC Administrative Committee Meetings, 2 April and 3 April 1959, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2005), 177-179.

12, 1963, Mother's Day sermon, he described sitting down to devotionals with his children and telling them that he would "work hard and try to make a living enough to send you to college, and send you on up as high as you can go..."<sup>27</sup> A good man then, provided for his children and attempted to ensure their future well-being.

King also appeared to be the loving father in front of the news media. In a piece done for *Look* magazine in 1963, King is pictured several times playing and interacting with his family. One picture shows King, in the typical white shirt and tie, sitting at the kitchen table, while Yolanda, in a jumper, hair done neatly in two big bows, stands by him looking at a plate of cookies. In another shot, King walks with his family in his backyard. Toddler Dexter walks between King and a very pregnant Coretta, holding on to their hands, while Yolanda and Martin III walk on King's other side. The article itself says little about the family, other than to mention that they "cram loving, rough-and-tumble play into those treasured hours their father can spend at home."<sup>28</sup>

Some followers apparently took King's admonitions to heart. More than once, King received letters from men asking him to use his influence to help them find jobs. One African American Texan in 1965 wrote to King that he was 38 years old, with a job that was inadequate in providing for his six kids. He asked King how he could get a job at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). He was told to write Hoover.<sup>29</sup> At King's death he would also be remembered as a family man. A female student at Patterson

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "What a Mother Should Tell Her Child," 12 May 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4A.

<sup>28</sup> "A Visit With Martin Luther King," *Look*, 12 February 1963.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Moore to Martin Luther King, Jr., 20 August 1965, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 32.

Elementary School in Washington DC wrote that “It was a shame for him to die. He had three children and a wife and he had to leave them and so that is the end of our King.”<sup>30</sup>

Both of these admirers felt that fatherhood and male leadership was important to King, just as it was to them.

King was the ultimate African American father figure in another way. He put his body on the line in protest and went to jail to better the life of him and his family. Time and time again, the movement told the story of Yolanda and Martin III and Funtown. The Kings’ oldest children had seen advertisements on TV for an Atlanta amusement park, Funtown. Like typical children, they wanted to go. The problem for the Kings was that Funtown was not an integrated institution. Finally, the Kings had to explain this to their children. Yolanda was particularly upset and decided that if African American people couldn’t go to Funtown, then she simply would not be African American. Knowing the impossibility of that, the King’s tried to tell their daughter that the Funtown issue was related to what their father was fighting for.<sup>31</sup> Later King told *Look* when he was in jail in Albany, Yolanda was upset until her mother told her that her father was in jail so that all people could go where they wished. King said that Yolanda told her mother to tell him to stay in jail until she could go to Funtown.<sup>32</sup> King’s children understood the sacrifice, and the message was to African American men that their families would understand it too.

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<sup>30</sup> “A Children’s Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr,” *Negro History Bulletin*, May 1968, Vol 31 No. 5. Actually King had four children at this point.

<sup>31</sup> For one of the many references to this see Coretta Scott King, “My Dream for My Children,” *Good Housekeeping*, June 1964.

<sup>32</sup> “A Visit With Martin Luther King,” *Look*, 12 February 1963.

King also kept up the image of a loyal husband, King's friends worried about the effect of women upon him and upon African American leadership. Largely they worried that the wrong women would lead them astray. J. Pius Barbour wrote to King in October of 1957 shortly after a contested National Baptist convention. Barbour complained about the women at the convention who were practically camped out at the minister's conferences and who would not go to their own meetings instead. Barbour feels these women had undue influence in church affairs and implies their behavior toward the ministers is inappropriate.<sup>33</sup> In a more direct manner, Raymond Henderson wrote to King the following year to warn him about possible methods of destroying his reputation in the South. Along with cautions about being careful on his recording keeping for tax purposes, Henderson also advised King to watch out for women, warning that:

One of the most damning influences is that of women. They themselves too often delight in the satisfaction they get out of affairs with men of unusual prominence. Enemies are not above using them to a man's detriment. White women can be lures. You must exercise more than care. You must be vigilant indeed. You must never allow yourself to be called out to a home where you are not acquainted. If so, take Coretta with you.<sup>34</sup>

If Abernathy is to be believed, white women would never be a real problem for King. He would write that King never had any interest in white women sexually and did not have affairs with them.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> J. Pius Barbour to Martin Luther King, Jr., 3 October 1957, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Vol. IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley: UC California Press, 2000), 281-283.

<sup>34</sup> J. Raymond Henderson, to Martin Luther King, Jr., 17 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 496-498.

<sup>35</sup> Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 472.

As with any movement, the civil rights movement was a product of its society. Therefore questions about leadership's sexuality were not uncommon. King was often the target of such pointed questions or slurs. A concerned citizen wrote to the FBI from Freeport, NY in 1965 asking about King's sexual life. It was vague as to what the reader wanted to know, but they were concerned about the preacher's alleged moral failings.<sup>36</sup> Although Ralph David Abernathy thought that King wasn't overly concerned about the chances of his reputation being damaged in this manner, Abernathy himself did worry about it. He wrote in his autobiography that at one point King had become involved with a woman, something the ever present press seemed to have picked up on. Abernathy also worried about materials that the FBI allegedly circulated detailing King's affairs. He attempted only one in-depth conversation with King about the problem however. At one point when the two men were in jail Abernathy tried to warn King about the potential for exposure through either the media or the FBI. King didn't seem worried however and Abernathy tried to excuse King's behavior, saying that "I was disappointed in his reaction, but I think I understood it. At that particular time, he was bearing the lion's share of the burden, and he felt he couldn't do so without this source of strength."<sup>37</sup> King's attitude aside, the problem remained. Should King fall into an affair, and it become known to the world, his public reputation as a family man would be destroyed.

Ralph Abernathy came in for his share of criticism as a leader of the movement. One particular story made great fodder for an ever present critical press. The *Austell*

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<sup>36</sup> Freeport, New York to J. Edgar Hoover, 19 May 1965, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

<sup>37</sup> Abernathy, 473-475.

*Enterprise* called him evil. They described an attack by a vengeful husband upon Abernathy and said that “Since then Abernathy has been a bit more careful in his playing around, but he still has the morals of a jackass in heat.”<sup>38</sup> Readers of an anti-movement piece must have been fascinated with the story about Ralph Abernathy. Here, the author attempts not only to detail the supposedly degenerate sexual habits of an African American man, but to point out the hypocrisy of his life as a minister. Abernathy had been attacked by a man who accused him of sleeping with his wife. The man was later put on trial for attempted murder. The booklet included court transcript of the African American woman’s testimony for the readers to see for themselves what this leader was like. The questions largely centered on when, where and how she and Abernathy had been involved. She is asked several times if she and Abernathy had both normal and abnormal sex. She replies both, and when asked what she meant by abnormal sex, the reader is treated to a salacious description of oral sex. The author contends that Abernathy’s personal life would really be none of our business, but since he is representing himself as the leader of a Christian movement, we do have a right to know about his morals. Ironically, this piece includes commentary not only on Abernathy but also on Bayard Rustin. Neither man could win with the critics. One was not enough of a man and the other too much of one.<sup>39</sup>

One cannot talk about men in the movement without acknowledging the issue of homosexuality. Bayard Rustin, one of King’s advisors and sometime SCLC employee,

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<sup>38</sup> “Abernathy’s Whole Life is Evil,” *Austell Enterprise*, SCLC, Box 179, Folder 15.

<sup>39</sup> Albert C. Persons, *Selma: The True Story*, (Birmingham: Esco Publishers, 1965).



was an admitted homosexual. This was something that more than occasionally attracted public attention. A newspaper in Canada even went so far as to write J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI and to ask about King's personal life and his Executive Secretary's homosexuality.<sup>40</sup> Critics of the movement at Selma pointed out in their anti-movement propaganda that Rustin, a former communist as well as proven homosexual, was the man who had made King what he was. It was, they claimed, all very well for Rustin to have the sex life he wanted, but it should stay private. Rustin had not been able to do this, they claimed, showing the police report as evidence that he had been arrested for solicitation of two men for sex in California.<sup>41</sup> Rustin's sexual orientation was of public concern because of his vast influence upon King and the organization.

Reaction within the movement to Rustin's personal life varied, but most people were content to leave well enough alone. This is not to say the movement was pro-homosexual. King, in an "Advice for Living" column received a question from a young man who found himself struggling with homosexual feelings. King advised him that his feelings were not all that extraordinary, but that he would be wise to visit a psychiatrist and to deal with whatever it was that was creating such feelings.<sup>42</sup> So while King's movement was not hateful toward gay men, they were not encouraging the behavior as accepted male behavior either.

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<sup>40</sup> Canada to J. Edgar Hoover, 24 November 1965, FBI, 100-106670-2112.

<sup>41</sup> Albert C. Persons, *Selma: The True Story*.

<sup>42</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, January 1958.

This was something later confirmed by Rustin. In a 1987 interview with Open Hands, Rustin said among civil rights activists homosexuals were accepted as long as they were not open about it. In another interview that same year, Rustin told interviewer George Chauncey Jr., that most people who wanted him to be less publicly involved in the civil rights movement claimed that their concern was that it would bring the cause bad publicity. Rustin felt this was merely a cover for their fears of homosexuality, since he had not hidden any of his past from the public and therefore, they should not be shocked by any such revelations in the press. Chauncey asked Rustin what King's attitude toward homosexuality was. Rustin responded that a sheltered King might have wanted to understand the problems of homosexuals, but that he had too many of his own problems and feared the press too much to develop any really understanding.<sup>43</sup>

As well as the practical and religious reasons for a policy of non-violence, there were some American mindsets that made this policy expedient for a movement trying to revitalize African American manhood. Although many African American men were often afraid of even speaking up for themselves and their families or contradicting a white person for fear of their lives, African American men were stereotyped as having done the opposite. The idea was that the African American man was an over-sexed creature to be feared, especially by white women.

Fears about race mixing were and would continue to be a concern in mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century American society. J. Edgar Hoover would receive letters from citizens concerned

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<sup>43</sup> Bayard Rustin, interview with Open Hands, "Black and Gay in the Civil Rights Movement," 1987, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, eds. Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003), 281-291; Bayard Rustin, interview with George Chauncey, Jr., "Time on Two Crosses," 1987, *Time on Two Crosses*, eds. Carbado and Weise, 299-303.

about intermarriage and race mixing. One particular letter preached to the Hoover that the end of the world would be near unless the people repented of their evil ways and turned from their race mixing sins. Claiming that King was to blame for all the civil rights killings, this North Carolina correspondent begged Hoover to stop King.<sup>44</sup> King received a letter in 1964 from a Californian who had seen an article published in *Life* magazine, authored by King. The reader had a list of questions for King, the last of which asked if King and Malcolm X were in agreement that integration meant intermarriage.<sup>45</sup>

King had always felt the worries about race mixing were something of an irony. Nearly ten years before the civil rights movement started, King wrote a letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* pointing out that race mixing nearly always came up when equality was mentioned, but that most of the race mixing in America was not due to African American men but to the same white men who were the ones complaining the most about it. African American men, King argued then, just wanted their own women left alone by white men.<sup>46</sup> King would make similar arguments for much of the rest of his career. When Mike Wallace interviewed King in June 1958, he tried to force King to admit that equality would lead to race mixing by pointing out that it would be a natural result of seeing one human just as another. King argued no, what African American

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<sup>44</sup> North Carolina to J. Edgar Hoover, 3 June 1965, FBI, 100-106670-1436.

<sup>45</sup> Jim Hamilton to Martin Luther King Jr., 15 May 1964, SCLC, Box 1, Folder 16. King replies on May 22, 1964, but the answer is vague and mostly directs the man to read *Stride Toward Freedom* to find the answers to his questions.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter to the editor, 6 August 1946, in *Atlanta Constitution*, from *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Vol I: Called To Serve, January 1929-June 1951*, ed. Clayborne Carson, (Berkeley: UC California Press, 1992), 121.

people really wanted was not to marry whites, but to live in an integrated society with them. Besides King argued, marriage was a personal choice between individuals; the choice to marry someone of another race was therefore an individual choice made by both parties, not a marriage between races. He pointed out that in more integrated societies there still was not a lot of intermarriage. Wallace continued to harp on the subject, with King replying that those who complained the most about race mixing were actually the ones largely responsible for it.<sup>47</sup> King would face similar questions about race mixing and intermarriage on the Meet the Press program and when publicly debating James Kilpatrick, both in 1960.<sup>48</sup> Race mixing and concerns about African American men desiring white women was on the minds of Americans in the 1950s and 1960.

Regardless of the legitimacy of this stereotype, the SCLC leaders realized African American men paid a price for it. In Montgomery, Alabama, in 1958, the African American residents had marched to the state capital on Easter Sunday, protesting the electric chair death of Jeremiah Reeves, a young African American man sentenced to die for rape. In a speech to march participants, King pointed out that issue at hand was not the guilt or innocence of this man, but the fact that a white man would not be similarly punished for raping an African American female. King appealed to whites to address this brand of unjust treatment under the law.<sup>49</sup> In 1964, a concerned citizen from Kansas

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Mike Wallace, 25 June 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 431-441.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on "Meet the Press," 17 April 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 428-435; Martin Luther King, Jr., debate with James J. Kilpatrick on "The Nation's Future," 26 November 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 556-564.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. Statement Delivered at the Prayer Pilgrimage Protesting the Electrocutation of Jeremiah Reeves, 6 April 1958. *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 396-398.

wrote to Vice President elect Hubert Humphrey complaining that King should try to convince African American men to accept this place in society

rather than appeal to his animal-like nature to demonstrate and cause violence. Rev. King should also try to create within his Negro followers a desire to help themselves. The Negro should receive instructions on limiting his families so that he will not continue to be a large burden on the people who are willing to work hard enough to take care of their own responsibilities.<sup>50</sup>

African American men, according to the author, were violent sexual animals who needed to be stopped.

The movement as a whole also paid the price because of the stereotypes associated with African American men. Enemies of the movement attempted to use this in creating propaganda that charged the movement at times was one big orgy. Nowhere was this more evident than after the Selma demonstrations, when Alabama Congressman William L. Dickinson led a charge in asserting that the behavior of the activists in Alabama had been scandalous. Albert Persons, a journalist from Birmingham, had been investigating the Selma movement at the direction of Dickinson. He later wrote a series of articles which were published in a booklet form, called *Selma: The True Story*.

In its titillating and riveting stories, *Selma: The True Story* highlighted supposed indiscretions of the movement and movement participants in Selma. These articles were especially critical of African American men in the movement. The booklet opens with a picture of a crowd of predominantly male protestors, both African American and white, standing in a trashy street. The caption explains that these people stood in front of the

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous to Hubert Humphrey, 23 November 1964, FBI, 100-106670-561.

Montgomery capital building. If they left the demonstration, they could not return. This apparently left them with a problem of toilet facilities. The booklet alleges that James Forman of the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC) told the crowd to stand up and pee in the street. Most people did, and a few men were arrested for exposure.<sup>51</sup> These men had taken it too far, they, implied the author, had no respect for human decency.

*Selma: The True Story* continued by regaling the reader with stories of interracial sex. In “Sex and Civil Rights,” the reader was treated to descriptions of a minister who was called by the courts to pick up his daughter who had been found unclothed in bushes with several African American youths. Cots in SNCC offices were set up in the back room and used often by couples for sex. SNCC executive secretary James Forman was supposedly seen having sex on such cots with a white girl. A white man, pretending to be a priest, hired an African American girl to have sex with him in the same back room for twelve dollars. A policewoman reported seeing couples making out on the lawn of a hospital, at least one of these couples was a African American man and a white woman who had progressed far beyond the making-out stage. This same police woman is sited in an affidavit printed later in the booklet as having seen other similar incidents. Other affidavits reported similar stories of interracial couples having sex in public, everywhere from standing in the street to on the floor of a church. Most of the couples described as doing so were not only interracial, but the particular combination of African American

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<sup>51</sup> Albert C. Persons, *Selma: The True Story*.

men with white women. Similarly, the affidavits also complained about simple marching in mixed pairs, which they felt was meant to incite trouble.<sup>52</sup>

The civil rights proponents attempted to address the accusations at Selma with great fervor. Hans J. Massaquoi pointed out in *Ebony* in August 1965, that the rumors about Selma were not true and that actually those rumors reflected the fears of those who feared race mixing. Massaquoi even points out to the reader that African American men can't marry white women without their permission; it isn't just the man's choice.<sup>53</sup> The movement itself responded by releasing statements of people involved in the protest which denied its supposed immorality. One such statement was signed by a nun and various clergy who had been in Selma. They claimed that the accusations made about the movement were "irresponsible" and that they had seen during the preparation process "only evidence of conduct in keeping with the Judeo-Christian ethic."<sup>54</sup> A similar release included a statement by nuns involved in the march and addressed Dickinson's allegations in the Congressional Record. In this, the movement had to deny a long string of accusations, defending themselves from vague allegations of immoral behavior by the marchers, from accusations that they had held a burlesque show each evening for marchers, and point out that pictures of a contraceptive device actually could have been taken anywhere and is no example of march behavior.<sup>55</sup> Incredible as such accusations

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<sup>52</sup> Albert C. Persons, *Selma: The True Story*.

<sup>53</sup> Hans J. Massaquoi, "Would You Want Your Daughter to Marry One?" *Ebony*, August 1965.

<sup>54</sup> Statement on Morality in Selma Crisis, 28 April 1965, press release, MLK, Box 21, Folder 13.

<sup>55</sup> Statement on Selma-Montgomery March of March 21-26, 26 April 1965, press release, MLK, Box 21, Folder 13.

must have seemed to those involved in the Selma event, the movement leadership had to refute them or find themselves continually branded as an immoral movement.

The movement also used the compare and contrast method to show that African American men were no viler than white ones, and to illustrate the failures of white masculinity. In reference to the Montgomery movement, they made sure that their audience knew that middle aged respectable Rosa Parks had been asked to give up her seat to a white man. She wasn't in the white section, King told an NAACP audience, but in the unreserved section. Had she moved, it would have been so that a white man could have an entire row to himself.<sup>56</sup>

To further combat this idea of African American men as the vilest of creatures, the movement also made much of the death of Viola Liuzzo. Here was a white woman, from Detroit to be sure, but a visitor to the South who was killed there. Who was the threat to this white woman's life? Not the African American men of the community, but the white men. Those accused of her death were members of the KKK. The irony of this incident was that the African American man, whose presence in Liuzzo's car had so infuriated the whites, lived to testify about the incident, although he could not identify them. They had killed the sheltered flower and let the mythical beast go. The movement made sure the public knew and saw this.

This connection between the oppression of African Americans and white women was actually nothing new. It had happened as far back as Reconstruction when feminists found themselves increasingly divided over the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment and the question of

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Montgomery Story," *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 299-310.



accepting the right of African American men to vote without also pushing for women's suffrage. It was also a connection made in the 1950s. *Ebony* magazine wrote in the late 50s about the white southern woman. They looked at the problems of African Americans in the South and talked about how white women were also denied their civil rights. The poll tax also disenfranchised white women. If a low income household had only enough money for one member of the house to vote that member would be the male. The woman who might be legally eligible to vote would not be able to. *Ebony* said that some Southern white women were actively working to end lynching, and were increasingly frustrated that they were used as the excuse for it. Lynching they decreed, did not serve the supposed purpose of protecting white womanhood, very few of those lynched were even accused of crimes involving white women.<sup>57</sup> In the mid 1960s, Alvin Poussaint, a Tufts University Medical College instructor, would report to the American Psychiatric Association that white women activists in the South would be resented and questioned by all of Southern society, whites who saw them as not white enough, and African Americans who didn't trust them or saw them as forbidden fruit. She would be, regardless of her actions, be thought to have an extraordinary interest in sex with African American men.<sup>58</sup> Viola Liuzzo was a white woman caught in just such a position.

Viola Liuzzo was a white woman, mother of five children, from Detroit, married to a Teamster's official. A woman out of her time, she had been married three times, and was enrolled at Wayne State when she decided somewhat at the last minute to go to

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<sup>57</sup> "The Plight of Southern White Women," *Ebony*, November 1957.

<sup>58</sup> "When White Girls Go South as Civil-Rights Workers," *US News and World Report*, 30 May 1966.

Selma. After she arrived, she helped to transport marchers from Montgomery back to Selma at the end of the march. She and a young African American man, Leroy Moton, were headed from Montgomery back to Selma to help more marchers return when a car full of whites saw the pair and decided to shoot at the car. Liuzzo, shot in the head, was killed.<sup>59</sup>

In “After the March: An Open Letter to the American People,” King mentioned the death of Liuzzo and asked if they would kill a white woman for standing up for the right to vote, what would they do to African Americans who tried to register. He referred to her murder as “bestial” and talked about the lack of media attention that it had received in comparison to other movements. Pictures included in this published letter showed a portrait of Liuzzo, a smiling, pretty white woman.<sup>60</sup>

Even the main stream media picked up her story. *Life* magazine recapped the march in a short newflash but pointed out to the reader that a white civil rights worker who was transporting a car load of marchers was killed by a car load of white men with a rifle. The next day President Johnson announced that KKK members had been arrested and charged in the case.<sup>61</sup> *Newsweek* detailed the results of the trial of the first defendant in the case, Collie Leroy Wilkins, who was only 21 at the time. An FBI informant in the case testified that the men in the KKK car had noticed Liuzzo’s and decided that the white woman and African American male in the car must be headed some place to ‘park.’

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<sup>59</sup> John Blake, *Children of the Movement* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2004), 195-200.

<sup>60</sup> “After the March: An Open Letter to the American People,” SCLC, Box 121, Folder, 14.

<sup>61</sup> “Freedom March Ends in a Murder,” *Life*, 2 April 1965.

They chased them at speeds reading 100 mph, finally catching up with them and shooting at the car. The jury could not come to a decision, but they came out of the room with 10 in favor of conviction after a prosecutor in his closing arguments told them to forget the civil rights issues involved and to think about the murder of a defenseless woman by a boy. This near conviction was something the KKK would never have imagined. *Newsweek* also printed the summation of the defense counsel who was a KKK officer, showing his obsession with race mixing and his disrespect of a white woman who was merely in the same car as an African American man.<sup>62</sup> African American men it seemed were no more violent and bestial than these white ones.

Mexican American men did not have the same history of oppression that African American men had endured. Union leadership didn't have the same need to build up manhood. Their challenge would be to direct Mexican American men to express their machismo in constructive ways that would benefit the union.

Mexican Americans highly valued male leadership. Many historians, including western historian Richard White, have documented the trend toward male leadership among Mexican Americans, both in home life and in organizations.<sup>63</sup> Women might actually be in charge of organizations, particularly in civil rights and Chicano groups, but the groups did not want to put out such an appearance. Female Chicano student leaders in San Diego had invited Corky Gonzalez, founder of the Mexican American civil rights

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<sup>62</sup> "Hung Jury," and "'My-Kountry'-Klonse's Kreed," *Newsweek*, 17 May 1965; "The Trial," *Time*, 14 May 1965.

<sup>63</sup> Richard White, "Race Relations in the American West" *American Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3. (1986), 406.

group the Denver Crusade for Justice, to speak for their organization. But out of fear of embarrassing Gonzalez, the group had men to act in leadership roles for the duration of Gonzalez's visit.<sup>64</sup>

This trend toward male dominance in Mexican American culture can be called *machismo*. Debates over what exactly *machismo* is and if it even exists are nearly endless. Ester Gallegos y Chavez argues that it does exist but that it is partly a creation of women who use it to escape responsibility.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Reyes Ramos argues that *machismo* has been over emphasized in scholarship of Mexican Americans. He claims that the role of the woman is a strong but not a public one.<sup>66</sup> Others, including Alfredo Mirande claim that a focus on *machismo* has distracted scholars from looking at problems caused in Hispanic society that are a creation of the broader society. Women are oppressed everywhere, so oppression of women within Hispanic culture is nothing extraordinary.<sup>67</sup> The existence of *machismo*, most scholars would agree, has been somewhat exaggerated although it does exist, at least as part of a larger patriarchal culture.

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<sup>64</sup> Carlos Munoz Jr., *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso Press, 1989); Ramon A. Gutierrez, "Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality" *American Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1. (Mar. 1993), 47-48.

<sup>65</sup> Ester Gallegos y Chavez, "The Northern New Mexican Woman: A Changing Silhouette," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 75.

<sup>66</sup> Reyes Ramos and Martha Ramos, "The Mexican American: Am I Who They Say I Am?" Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 61.

<sup>67</sup> Mirande, Alfredo and Evangelina Enriquez. *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 242.

The United Farm Workers (UFW) leadership however definitely believed that *machismo* existed and was an active force among their members and potential members. Chavez, like others who would attempt to define machismo, would claim that *machismo* meant manliness, a manliness that was tied into the control and support of the family. This might include the reputation of a man as individualistic, honorable, reliable, and willing to fight to protect what was his<sup>68</sup> Ironically, while men held to these values, they were beginning to share more and more of the decisions making responsibilities with their wives, who were now more likely to work a job away from home and to have fewer children.<sup>69</sup> This remaining belief in *machismo* would mean that Mexican American women would not be used to their full potential in the 1960s movements.<sup>70</sup>

The farm labor movement was then stuck with a system of patriarchy which could be detrimental to their cause. Unlike the King movement in which men were happily moving toward a more patriarchal culture, Chavez and the farm labor leaders knew they needed to move away from it. They knew that they needed women involved in the cause and that those women could be leaders. But they also knew that they could not afford to

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<sup>68</sup> Gallegos y Chavez, 75; Leo Grebler, Joan W. Moore, and Ralph C. Guzman, *The Mexican American People: The Nations Second Largest Minority* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 363; Donald Sheldon, "Community Participation and the Emerging Middle Class," Edited by Julian Samora, *La Raza: Forgotten Americans* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 145; Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969, 1970), 386; Winthrop Yinger, *Cesar Chavez: The Rhetoric of Nonviolence* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975), 76.

<sup>69</sup> Mirande, 116-117; Martinez and McCaughan, 46; Fernando Penalosa in "Toward an Operational Definition of the Mexican American," Edited by Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert, *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 20; Gallegos y Chavez, 75.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Martinez and Ed McCaughan, "Chicanas and Mexicanas Within a Transitional Working Class," Edited by Adelaida R. Del Castillo, *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History*. (Floricanto Press, 1990), 52.

isolate Mexican men. The movement could not be seen as a threat to *machismo*.

Therefore the movement would have to sell themselves as a group that allowed men to be even manlier. They would have to sell themselves as the ultimate supporters of *machismo*.

In supporting *machismo*, or Mexican American patriarchy, the union knew they had to use the capable women but promote the image of male leadership. It was hard enough to find men who could lead the farm labor movement. Susan Drake wrote that the “union pressures are extreme on the men and the men have few waking hours with the wives and children. This is due to a lack of good leadership in quantity.”<sup>71</sup> In 1966 Jim Drake and Mike Miller sent a memo to the boycott coordinators with instructions and updates on boycott progress and procedures. In telling the coordinators that leaflets put out needed to emphasize that Schenley workers were paid by piece rates, Drake and Miller argued that “in the case of superman, it is possible that he might make \$200/hour. But the average could not be near that, and in face the men who stuck did so because they were making too little when working at inhuman speeds.”<sup>72</sup> Men in farm labor were at the mercy of the weather, of the labor contractor, and of the grower in their work. Work was something the average farm labor had little to no control over. They would not want to also lose control over their wives and families. Mexican American men in field work, who struggled to support a family, would be drawn to the movement which promised to

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<sup>71</sup> Susan Drake to Mrs. Artie Stokes, 7 April 1968, NFWM, Box 2, Folder 3.

<sup>72</sup> Jim Drake and Mike Miller to Boycott Centers, 28 January 1966. SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

improve their financial position.<sup>73</sup> The role of the union then was to convince the men that their support of the union would improve their wages. Yet the union had to also convince the men that their support of the union could best be done without at least one aspect of *machismo*, the willingness to fight. Fighting would threaten the plans that Chavez had for this to be a nonviolent labor movement, a movement that reflected the civil rights movements that had bloomed in the decade prior. Nonviolence then had to become the manly thing to do. In many ways, Chavez and his union did a much better job at convincing men to do this than King did.

This meant changes for Chavez personally. He had to make the same adjustments to a new type of *machismo* that he was asking his followers to make. This did not mean that he abandoned his beliefs in patriarchy, he did not. His union and public appearances often demonstrated this.<sup>74</sup> For instance, men were selected to represent their families on the March to Sacramento in 1966, while their wives were expected to stay home. Chavez did, however, put aside some of his expectations about male behavior and leadership and discouraged machismo.<sup>75</sup> As well as disapproving of violence, he even allowed photographers to take and publish a picture of him doing dishes.<sup>76</sup>

The farm labor movement was a place where men could stand up and be men. Often the growers referred to the workers in derogatory terms. Jerry Cohen union

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<sup>73</sup> Joan London and Henry Anderson, *So Shall ye Reap* (New York: Crowell, 1970), 181.

<sup>74</sup> Yinger, 30, 43.

<sup>75</sup> George Horwitz, *La Causa: The California Grape Strike* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970), 105.

<sup>76</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 101, 142.

attorney met with some peach growers and heard them make comments like “My boys don’t’ want a union to represent them.” Dolores Huerta told one similar group of grape growers to stop speaking of the workers as if they owned them.<sup>77</sup> In a National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) pamphlet called *The Union and the Strike*, the union said that “This strike is all the farm workers standing up together and saying FROM THIS DAY WE DEMAND TO BE TREATED LIKE THE MEN WE ARE! We are not slaves and we are not animals. And we are not alone.” The strike was also about telling the growers that they would no longer work for poor wages, see their children grow hungry, wear poor clothes and see their wives work while the growers wives and children led good lives.<sup>78</sup>

The farm labor union would still give men a chance to fight, confront their enemy, the growers and contractors who threatened their families through poor wages and working conditions. They would simply have to have these confrontations in a nonviolent way. In the first strike that Chavez was involved in, a rose workers strike, Helen Chavez and Dolores Huerta attempted to convince men to cooperate by appealing to their masculinity. These two women, apparently frustrated in their attempts to get a group of workers from Mexico to stay out of the fields, pulled out their most potent weapon. They went to the men’s’ dormitory and “called them women, cowards, and traitors. The men agreed; they were women, cowards and traitors, and that they were going back to work

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<sup>77</sup> “Racism in Stockton,” *El Aguila Negra*, 24 February 1969, UFWP, Series 3, Box 46, Folder 12.

<sup>78</sup> “NFWA, *The Union and the Strike*,” pamphlet, UFWOC, Box 2, Folder 2.



tomorrow.”<sup>79</sup> Such appeals did not always work, but the men recognized the appeal of *machismo* that the women had put forward. Later in the grape strike, a group of farm workers from Arvin would be celebrated because they had confronted both grower Robert Di Giorgio and California Governor Brown in person. At first they had presented a petition to Governor Brown at his home in the Los Angeles area. Brown sent the petitioners letters complimenting them on their concern for the movement and suggesting they take their grievances to Di Giorgio personally. So the following week, with much fanfare, the Arvin strikers appeared at the San Francisco headquarters of Di Giorgio. There they were met by supporting picketers and the *Teatro* who performed skits promoting the cause on a flat bed truck.<sup>80</sup> Here the strikers had a chance to meet man to man with their opposition and to present their complaints in an effective but nonviolent way.

Chavez would personally glorify nonviolence. He would use his 1968 fast to challenge the idea that Mexican American manhood was proved by fighting.<sup>81</sup> Chavez tied his fasting into the concept of sacrificial suffering. Chavez announced in a statement read for him at the end of his 25 day fast that “To be a man is to suffer for others. God help us to men.”<sup>82</sup> Here Chavez showed men how he meant for them to suffer, not from injuries obtained in a physical fight, but from self-inflicted suffering. This phrase caught

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<sup>79</sup> From Jim (probably Drake) to Walter and Chris, 6 May 1965, NFWM, Box 13, Folder 9.

<sup>80</sup> Delano *Newsletter*, Vol 1, No. 3, no date, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

<sup>81</sup> London and Anderson, 184; Jean Maddern Pitrone, *Chavez: Man of the Migrants* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1971), 122-123.

<sup>82</sup> Cesar Chavez, “Statement By Cesar Chavez On The Conclusion Of A 25 Day Fast For Non-violence,” read by Rev. James Drake, 10 March 1968, Delano, CA.

on and appears many times in union publications and promotions. The idea of manliness as proven by nonviolent suffering was rhetoric that Chavez would repeat later in his “Good Friday Letter” to E. L. Barr. In this open letter, similar to King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Chavez would tell Barr that farm workers were men, men who fought for justice in a nonviolent fashion, not animals, tools, or slaves.<sup>83</sup> In notes for a speech intended for a religious meeting in November 1969, Chavez said that the farm labor movement meant making sacrifices like having no pay check or being away from home, seeing women arrested and children without milk.<sup>84</sup> The union was telling Mexican American men that their manhood was proved not by their fighting, but by their willingness to suffer for the cause they believed in.

The union also praised men who suffered. Among these was Manuel Rivera. Rivera was a farm worker in his 50s who was run over by a truck full of grapes. Rivera, father of seven with one on the way, had been on the picket line on October 15, 1966, in front of a cold storage plant. Two of the truck drivers refused to cross the picket lines. Frustrated by their refusal, a shipper-broker jumped in the truck and drove through the picket line. As the picketers scrambled to get out of the way, Rivera fell and was run over. The union would report that this man who had lead his family in the strike since 1964 had injuries which would leave him in traction and perhaps in the hospital for at

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<sup>83</sup> Cesar Chavez to E. L. Barr, “Good Friday Letter,” 23 April 1969, reprinted in Yinger, 113.

<sup>84</sup> Religious Meeting speech, 4 November 1969, UFWA, Part 1, Box 10, Folder 10.

least two months.<sup>85</sup> Rivera was a symbol of a father who put his body on the line in the hope that his and his family's lives would improve.

Men in the cause proved their manliness not only by being willing to suffer, but by leading their families into the movement. This was one aspect of traditional machismo that could be retained. Chavez and union leadership believed that the union needed men who were willing to bring their families into the cause.<sup>86</sup> Even as early as 1962, when the NFWA held an organizational meeting, they announced that the meeting was not just for men only, but that the families of delegates and committee members were welcome too.<sup>87</sup> When cartoonist Andy Zermeno, the creator of Don SoTaco agreed to join the movement, Chavez sent him a letter thanking him for doing so and telling Zermeno how glad he was that Zermeno's wife was joining him in the decision.<sup>88</sup> When Make and Carolina Vasquez married in 1969, the union told the story of this couple. Both of them had walked off of struck ranches and met during the farm worker march. They planned to marry but the wedding was pushed forward time and time again as they pursued union goals, until they finally decided to marry even though the strike was not over. Carolina, who had been stationed on the boycott committee in Philadelphia, was

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<sup>85</sup> Delano *Newsletter*, Special Bulletin, no date, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14; Delano *Newsletter*, vol 1, no. 3, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

<sup>86</sup> Mark Day, *Forty Acres: Cesar Chavez and the Farm Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 154.

<sup>87</sup> Notice of Meeting, 30 September 1962, NFWA, Series III, Box 5 Folder 16.

<sup>88</sup> Cesar Chavez to Andy Zermeno, 27 May 1970, UFWP, Series III, Box 58, Folder 17.

joining her husband in Connecticut were he too worked on the boycott. The union got to keep both of them in the cause.<sup>89</sup>

The Chavez marriage was to be an example of this trend. In the beginning stages of the union, Chavez had traveled the valley, often knocking on doors, attempting to build membership. The union was not able to support anyone full time, although Chavez needed to work full time to build it up. So, Helen supported the family. On the surface, this may seem to violate some of the tenants of machismo, here was the wife providing for the family. However, Helen was still the one doing the secondary work. Chavez was the one building the union, doing the higher status work. As the union grew, Helen's role would change. She would join Chavez in his work, continuing to do tasks which supported the union and her husband's goals such as office work, picketing, and running the credit union. Even in death, Chavez would be remembered for being a man who brought his family into the cause. Cardinal Roger Mahoney, who was also a friend of Chavez, talked about how Chavez had directed his entire life toward his cause, including his family. Mahoney remembered at Chavez's funeral that Chavez had integrated "all his life – the work with the labor movement, his family, his faith."<sup>90</sup> Even if his wife had helped, Chavez was still the leader.

The Chavez family was the ultimate union family. Men, being the leaders of the house, were to lead the family in supporting the union. The wife was to follow and support her husband in this direction. Union rules for staff reflected this. Married men

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<sup>89</sup> Hope Lopez to Dear Friend, 12 November 1969, UFWOC, Box 5, Folder 5.

<sup>90</sup> "Supporters Remember Chavez as a Man of Faith," *Bakersfield Californian*, 27 April, 1994.

were not sent out on boycott missions unless their wives approved. The family was to participate as a group, not as individuals. If the wife did not approve of her husband's involvement, it would be difficult for the husband to commit the time and energy that he would be required to commit to the union.<sup>91</sup> Susan Drake, wife of a minister involved with the union, admitted that not all women wanted to be involved to the extent that their husbands were. She described her last move with her husband to New York. Her kids did not want to move, especially since they felt their dad was working much of the time and didn't see them. Although her marriage was almost over, Susan followed her husband one last time. Some women she says were in similar positions, staying with their husbands in Delano, but largely for their children's sake rather than out of love for the cause.<sup>92</sup>

Women who truly supported their husbands were praised in union rhetoric and promotions. *El Malcriado*, the union organ, often ran material which glorified such wives. In the beginning stages of the strike, the newspaper had an article which begged its readers for donations of food to be given to families which were participating in the strike. This article praised the mothers who might have no way to feed their children and husbands, but who support their husbands in striking anyway.<sup>93</sup> A short time later, an article appeared which talked about the women who let their husbands join the march to Sacramento. Those women stayed behind, missing the glorious chance to march, so that

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<sup>91</sup> Dolores Huerta, interview with Barbara L. Baer and Glenna Matthews, "You Find a Way: The Women of the Boycott," *Nation*, 23 February. 1974.

<sup>92</sup> Susan Drake, interview with Sydney Smith, 28 May 1980, SMTH, Box 2 Folder 5.

<sup>93</sup> "An Appeal to Mothers Everywhere" *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 21.

the union would have someone on the picket lines.<sup>94</sup> Here men represented the family, they were the ones seen in the imagery surrounding the march, and thus, because of the resulting publicity, the strike. Men then were seen as the leaders and the ones putting their bodies and finances on the line. They were the decision makers. Women might have been sacrificing, but their sacrifices were to be done quietly. By the time the farm labor movement added boycotts to their protests, women felt obligated to follow their men. A prime example was Maria-Luisa Rangel, who, with her husband, had a home and part ownership of a store, something she did not want to give up. However, she felt obligated to follow her husband wherever the union sent him to promote the boycott.<sup>95</sup> Traditional gender roles meant that Mexican American women would support their men and thus the union.

Men who did not get the high profile jobs within the union were often encouraged to go to work on farms which were not being struck by the union. Even if the woman was not working alongside of him as she might normally have, there was at least some income coming in. With these men working, the women became important to the union. They could be on the picket lines, as proof to the media, the growers, and the government that a strike was really occurring. This also meant that there were some leadership spots for women.<sup>96</sup> Chavez and union leadership agreed with this, they knew that women had to be involved. More so than men, women were willing to join unions, and they were not

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<sup>94</sup> “The History of the Pilgrimage,” *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 33.

<sup>95</sup> Huerta, Interview with Baer and Matthews.

<sup>96</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 101.

as in a hurry to see results.<sup>97</sup> However, many men still struggled with Mexican women in leadership roles.<sup>98</sup>

Men involved in the civil rights and farm labor movements were told many things in common. Both groups of men were told that their participation in the cause would better their positions in the family. To join the civil rights movement would help men in the future have access to better jobs. To join the farm labor movement would mean better pay and the ability to provide for one's family. Both movements also offered men the chance to protect their women and children. This protection was not a physical fight, but the manly willingness to put ones body on the line and to suffer by taking abuse upon ones self or by being willing to go to jail. Nonviolence as a masculine action would thus be praised by both groups. King and Chavez would be held up as examples to their respective followers as the ultimate men, men who loved their families, provided for them, and lead their families in supporting their cause.

### **Women in the Movements**

Despite their prejudices, the SCLC realized that they needed women in the movement. Women were well-connected in their communities. In their procedure kits for local organizations interested in sponsoring rallies with King as the speaker, the SCLC suggested that women be used to get the word out and to get sponsors as the “live-

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<sup>97</sup> Dorothy Hoobler and Thomas Hoobler, *The Mexican American Family Album* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 101; John C. Hammerback and Richard J. Jensen, *The Rhetorical Career of Cesar Chavez* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 64; Julian Nava, *Viva La Raza!: Readings on Mexican American Culture* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1973), 206.

<sup>98</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 101; Hoobler and Hoobler, 102.

wire woman in the community is the best bet here. She has all the contacts and knows the right people.”<sup>99</sup> In 1959, two women served on the SCLC’s executive board. Katie Whickham was the first woman to attend on of the meetings in December of 1958. She was president of the National Beauty Culturist’s League, Inc. The SCLC advertised her attendance at this event and announced her goal of having every one of the members of her organization registered to vote.<sup>100</sup> Whickham was a woman who was well connected in an important African American based industry. She was a prime example of the type of woman SCLC needed involved in their cause.

African American women had two demands placed on them in the era of civil rights. The first demand was that they become less white. The second demand was that they become more so. By the mid 1960s, African American women began to see fashion advice that encouraged and promoted African American fashions, particularly that of natural hair. So when it came to their physical representation, African American women were asked to be blacker. But when it came to their social relations with African American men, African American women were asked to be whiter. From many of those same sources that said it was okay for African American women to have natural hair came the message that African American matriarchy was over. African American women were expected to step aside for their men, lose their aggression, and mimic the family and relationship patterns of white society. Thus African American women, who may have wanted their men to have more power, were expected to step aside so that the

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<sup>99</sup> Southern Christian Leadership Conference Procedure Kit, SCLC, Box 50, Folder 15.

<sup>100</sup> “News Briefs,” *The Crusader*, February 1959, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 19.



men could gain their “rightful” place in society. The irony was that for African American men to gain more control over their lives, African American women would have to give up the power and control they had held over the family. In the first stage of King’s movement however, only the message about matriarchy was being heard. The African American styles would only take off late in the movement.

By the mid 1960s, African Americans began to wear and develop African American styles. Activists in the mid to late 1960s began to show a culture that was distinctly African American. This was often called soul, and was thought to be something only African Americans enjoyed. Soul style pervaded everything from clothing and hair to food and music.<sup>101</sup> Hair had long been a subject of concern for African American women. The early 1900s saw changes in the world of African American women’s hair. In this world, made possible by a growing African American middle class, African American women would become increasingly involved in the hair care market. The most preeminent among them would be Madame CJ Walker who would not only make a fortune for her hair products line, but also help African American women to learn the skills needed in the beauty parlor. Unlike the white companies of years past, these African American owned businesses would attempt to attract women to buy their products with health and convenience promises. The emphasis on straightening hair however remained. This was not to say that hair straightening products necessarily sent the message that African American women should look white. Indeed, much of the focus was on looking presentable and

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<sup>101</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 192-247.

being able to better yourself. Without such hair care products, many African American women had a very difficult time growing and styling their hair.<sup>102</sup>

*Ebony* magazine was a prime example of the radically changing trends in style that African American women saw in the first stage of the civil rights movement. Women in the 1950s found themselves reading articles in the nation's premier African American magazine which emphasized a mainstream, somewhat white, look. Such articles told women what hair styles to wear to attract men. In November 1956, Orville Nelson, a celebrity hair dresser, told *Ebony* that:

I like long hair. It's the difference between a male and female. It adds to a woman's sexual make-up, gives her a feeling of glamour and warmth. A man becomes endearing to a woman with long hair; she becomes a woman in every sense of the world. The way things were going it wouldn't have been long before we would have been feeling bald heads.<sup>103</sup>

Long straight hair was the desired look. Good hair was straight, looked and felt like white hair. Bad hair was African looking and therefore nappy or kinky.<sup>104</sup>

That changed late in the classical civil rights movement. An emphasis on African American hair and African American style would become more popular only with the rise of the youth movements. Straightening hair was no longer necessary. This began as the SNCC movement grew. A child of SCLC, SNCC workers formed under the direction of SCLC's Ella Baker. They would grow away from SCLC by the mid 1960s. SNCC workers, sometimes accidentally, began to adopt similar styles, including natural

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<sup>102</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, editor, "Hair," *Black Women in America*, Vol. 2 H-Q 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 36, 76.

<sup>103</sup> "Women's Hair Styles and Men Prefer," *Ebony*, November 1956.

<sup>104</sup> "Natural Hair," *Ebony*, December 1967.

hair styles. It caught on among the youth workers to such an extent that even outsiders could tell who they were by this uniform of sorts.<sup>105</sup> By the late 1960s, this sentiment would have hit its peak. The Afro would begin to catch on, and would come to symbolize discontent with civil rights progress.<sup>106</sup>

This is not to say that all African Americans embraced the new styles. When asked for a Newsweek poll in June of 1969 if they liked the natural hair styles, only forty-five percent said yes. Forty-eight percent of the respondents said that they did not like such styles. When asked their opinions on the African clothing styles, the approval rating dropped to thirty-five percent and the disapproval grew to fifty-four percent. Perhaps at this point, there was an age factor involved in approval and acceptance of the natural styles.<sup>107</sup> The natural styles first caught on at college campuses, and some students whose hair would not naturally yield to the style of the day looked for chemical solutions. Other students found themselves fighting with their parents and elders over the acceptability of the style. While for these students it was a political statement, for their parents it was merely sloppy.<sup>108</sup>

The African American church also tended to be leery of the new styles. Ministers tend to be conservative, and the African American church was no exception. For these ministers it represented the potentially dangerous militant activity. Some who attended

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<sup>105</sup> Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85.

<sup>106</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, ed, "Hair," *Black Women in America*, Vol. 2 H-Q 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 3,4.

<sup>107</sup> "Report from Black America," *Newsweek*, 30 June 1969.

<sup>108</sup> Byrd, *Hair Story*, 58-59, 61-62.

churches white wearing Afros were soon told by their ministers that they were hell bound because of it.<sup>109</sup> It is no wonder then that Coretta and the wives of the SCLC wore rather conservative hair styles.

In fact, the civil rights movement had changed its focus to economic objectives by the time *Ebony* picked up on the new fashion trends. They introduced such trends in a quiet way. In February 1966, the magazine asked, “Are Negro Girls Getting Prettier?” Although they mention improved nutrition, they point out that self-confidence and a better attitude has helped women in the modeling arena to make great strides.<sup>110</sup> Four months later, *Ebony* would become bolder, in discussing natural hair styles. Women in this article discussed the economic advantage of natural styles which mean no wigs or hair straightening chemicals or devices. They also discussed ways to make the look distinctly feminine, such as adding a hoop earring.<sup>111</sup> *Ebony* would later glory the beauty pageant contestant who was making strides in national and international events, although struggling at the state level. These girls were winning despite less white coloring and appearances. And they were doing so not just in these pageants, but also in the homecoming contests in colleges.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps the ultimate tribute would come when soldiers wrote to *Ebony* in 1968 complaining that they could not find African American pinups. *Ebony* responded by printing pictures of a variety of African American women with hair varying from long and straight to short and natural. They told offended readers

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<sup>109</sup> Byrd, *Hair Story*, 62-63.

<sup>110</sup> “Are Negro Girls Getting Prettier,” *Ebony*, February 1966.

<sup>111</sup> Phyl Garland, “The Natural Look,” *Ebony*, June 1966.

<sup>112</sup> “New Trend Toward Black Beauties,” *Ebony*, December 1967.

to cut out the pictures and send them to someone in the service who would appreciate them.<sup>113</sup> African American women were outwardly encouraged to be blacker, in at least appearance.

However, societal pressures, particularly some from within the African American community increasingly expected and demanded that African American women would and should retreat to the same women's positions that white women held. African American women were to be ladies. Elizabeth Rose in a letter to Coretta Scott King wrote that she always wanted to be a lady, something she defined as "sweet tempered, quiet, gentle, and refined."<sup>114</sup> The man should be the leader of the house and the woman should sit back and encourage him in that manner. This was even seen in women's heroes of the 1950s and 60s.

African American women did have their own heroines in the later half of the 1950s and early 1960s. *Ebony* magazine several times glorified women, however these women tended to be noted for either their work in traditional women's causes or their entertainment talent. In January 1955, *Ebony* chose to highlight several African American women, on the basis of their beauty, rather than any particular talent or accomplishment. Although while praising her talent, they admitted that Dorothy Dandridge was also smart, they also highlighted Hilda Simms for her sex appeal and Joyce Bryant for her wild, African-like beauty.<sup>115</sup> In August and November of that same

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<sup>113</sup> "Something for the Boys," *Ebony*, August 1968.

<sup>114</sup> Elizabeth Rose to Coretta Scott King, 27 December 1962, SCLC, Box 116, Folder 10.

<sup>115</sup> "Five Most Beautiful Negro Women," *Ebony*, January 1955.

year, the magazine highlighted Mary McLeod Bethune, first for her legacy and second as part of a list of African Americans now in *Ebony's* new Hall of Fame, emphasizing her work with women and education. The only other woman to make the Hall of Fame list was Sojourner Truth.<sup>116</sup> In February 1956, *Ebony* would make its first annual addition to that same Hall of Fame, adding Madame CJ Walker, who was noted for her hair products company and for her charitable donations in her will.<sup>117</sup> Walker may have been a noted business woman, but she had built her legacy in a business catering to women and was thus serving women through her business accomplishments.

By 1959, the focus on traditional women as heroines wasn't as prominent. The new heroes were women in the civil rights movement. However, they tended to be nice, safe married women rather than single or radical women. *Ebony* that year published an editorial on women. They praised the African American women who often accomplished more than African American men in the way of education, work and life span. For these authors, Harriet Tubman became a heroine of old, who made way for the more modern ones like Rosa Parks and Daisy Bates, as well as policy makers and politicians in Washington.<sup>118</sup> Constance Baker Motley, a forty-one year old Civil Rights attorney would also win acclaim from *Ebony* in 1963. Motley was an NAACP attorney. Motley, whom the author explained, was a wife and mother, made no secret of the fact that she was a career oriented woman, she told *Ebony*, "I think a woman has to be good enough at

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<sup>116</sup> "My Last Will and Testament," *Ebony*, August 1955; "Ebony Hall of Fame," *Ebony*, November 1955.

<sup>117</sup> "Ebony Hall of Fame," *Ebony*, February 1956.

<sup>118</sup> "Oh, Women!" *Ebony*, May 1959.

her job to justify her skipping the housework. She certainly should be able to earn enough to justify paying a housekeeper.”<sup>119</sup> All three of these women were married and had connections with the NAACP (Parks had been a secretary for the NAACP long before the Montgomery movement), the civil rights organization most respected by African Americans in this era.<sup>120</sup> The perfect African American woman was a married woman who was modest in action and mild in behavior.

Not all of American society realized such heroines existed. When Betty Friedan prepared to interview Stokely Carmichael and Ruby Smith Robinson in 1966, she wrote that she expected that from African Americans will rise many female leaders in the mode of Sojourner Truth. Along such lines, she wanted information on the roles that African American women had in the civil rights movement.<sup>121</sup> Even America’s greatest feminist did not seem to recognize the existence of African American heroines.

Just as African American heroines were temperate women, African American women were told they were to be moderate wives who looked after their husband’s needs and desires. In January 1956, American women opening up *Ebony* magazine would have been attracted to an article called “Most Dangerous Years of Marriage.” This article highlighted marital problems. It discussed a man who left his wife who was just a pretty toy with no substance, and promoted the idea of a woman as a companion. A wife was

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<sup>119</sup> Allan Morrison, “Top Woman Civil Rights Lawyer,” *Ebony*, January 1963.

<sup>120</sup> “The Big Man is Martin Luther King Jr.,” *Newsweek*, 29 July 1963. This article said that while King was the most respected black leader, the most respected black organization was not the SCLC but the NAACP.

<sup>121</sup> Betty Friedan to Stokely Carmichael, and Ruby Smith Robinson, 12 July 1966., SNCC, Box 4, Folder 1, (page one of this letter is not in existence at this collection.)

not to be too demanding and insecure, needing attention, as that would drive the man off.<sup>122</sup> She was to be there for the man, to meet his needs but not to emphasize her own and to expect him to meet them. *Ebony's* Bachelor highlights which typically ran in late spring or early summer of each year were similarly instructive about what men expected in their wives. In 1958, *Ebony* began this trend of selecting a wide variety of single men, known and unknown in the community, and displaying them in a special article. *Ebony* reported that the men in this first year's selection want women who were interested in them, but especially interested in their work, friends, and hobbies. The men sometimes complained that women expected too much financially from marriage, although this early crew of men was somewhat more liberal in that they were willing to allow their wives to keep their jobs. This would not be repeated in 1960 when more than half of the men profiled wanted homemakers and almost a quarter said the women could work if they also took care of the home.<sup>123</sup> In 1961, one of the bachelors described what was in his mind the perfect woman: "When I think of the word feminine, I envision a well-proportioned young lady whose prime ambition is to make her companion feel needed. She is soft of voice, graceful, and pleasant. She is intelligent and possesses good common sense. She is attentive, and above all else, she is honest and sincere."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "Most Dangerous Years of Marriage," *Ebony*, January 1956.

<sup>123</sup> "Leap Year's Eligible Men," *Ebony*, June 1960.

<sup>124</sup> "Most Eligible Bachelors of 1961," *Ebony*, July 1961.



The perfect woman then was someone who looked good, could make her man feel like he was in charge, was bright, and paid attention to her husband. This was explicitly evident in the 1963 version of the eligible bachelors article. *Ebony* wrote that:

From descriptions of their ideal women, it is evident that space-age man, whose struggle for existence becomes more competitive each day, needs a home in which he can let down his defenses, and be surrounded by sympathy, understanding and affection. He desires a wife who also is a charming companion, capable of sharing his fondness for art, music literature, sports or travel.

Quotations taken from individual men pictured in the article emphasized the fact that the man wanted to be in charge of the house and that the home focused around him. A 29 year old young man from New Mexico said that his wife must “accept me as captain of our marital ship,” while a 28 year old from California said that his wife must believe that “success of her man is also her success.”<sup>125</sup> *Ebony* saw these attitudes as an advancement. In 1964, they wrote that the idea of a woman as merely a homemaker was gone, now men wanted someone who could be involved in the things that interested him.<sup>126</sup> Perhaps it was advancement, but it was still a male-centered version of home and marriage.

These men seemed to want to avoid the same thing that African American women also wanted to avoid: matriarchy, or at least the accusation of it. *Ebony*'s Lerone Bennett Jr., wrote a couple of articles, one in August 1960, and another in September 1963, that illustrated African American men's concerns with matriarchal or domineering women. Bennett argued that the heritage of slavery created conditions in which African American

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<sup>125</sup> “Bachelors for 1963,” *Ebony*, June 1963, 156, 157.

<sup>126</sup> “Bachelors for 1964,” *Ebony*, June 1964.

women became the dominate person in families. Due to the discrimination that followed slavery, those women often supported the families with their jobs, gained more education, and began to control household financial decision making. As a result, African American women and men often had tense relations which lead to unfulfilled sex lives. All these problems could be solved if the woman would just take her proper place in society. "Having proved that women are people, the Negro woman now faces a greater task. In an age when Negroes and whites, men and women, are confused about the meaning of femininity, she must prove that women are also women."<sup>127</sup> African American women were being told that their control and influence over the family was creating issues for their husbands and families. The entertainer, Lena Horne, would later argue for the women. She points out that African American women disliked the emphasis on the concept of matriarchy. It had come to be used as a derogatory term meaning that the woman is pushy or bossy. She explained that it wasn't something African American women were likely to lose, as their position in the work force, relative to African American men meant they were likely to be the head of the house.<sup>128</sup> Even women who were successful were supposed to take more pride in their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Business woman Sarah Washington Hayes, president of her company Apex News and Hair, gave up the business world. She let her husband run her company, while she retreated to the home, claiming that the new career woman was not like the one from the 1920s. This new woman enjoyed housekeeping and being a mother

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<sup>127</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., "The Negro Woman." *Ebony*, August 1960; Lerone Bennett Jr., "The Negro Woman," *Ebony*, September 1963.

<sup>128</sup> Lena Horne, "The Three-Horned Dilemma Facing Negro Women," *Ebony*, August 1966.

even more than the challenge and adventure of business.<sup>129</sup> Apparently this more modern version of Madame CJ Walker intended to down play her role in the business world and emphasize her role as a wife and mother.

Similarly, when Coretta Scott married Martin Luther King, Jr. she became Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr. Her fame would come because of who she was married to, not because of who she herself was.<sup>130</sup> No longer was she Coretta the concert singer with the astounding voice. No longer was she that bold young woman who had ventured into the North, becoming one of the few African American students at Antioch College. No longer was she the budding activist who had made a stand in her teacher certification program by saying she would not practice teach at a segregated school.<sup>131</sup> Instead she became the minister's wife, and mother of the civil rights leader's children. Coretta came to represent what African American women everywhere were told they were to be.

Coretta Scott King was born in 1927 to Obadiah and Bernice Scott. Raised in Alabama, she was blessed with determined if not wealthy parents. Her father had some success in truck farming. The only African American man in their area to own a truck, Coretta recalled that he was often stopped and harassed. She would later remember her childhood fears that her father would not return from work and decide that those had prepared her for life with King and had helped her accept the dangers that her husband faced while she stayed at home. She wrote that "I learned very early to live with fear for

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<sup>129</sup> "Life of a Wealthy Wife," *Ebony*, April 1957.

<sup>130</sup> Octovia Vivian, *Coretta*, 3, makes this argument and says that Coretta is the first black woman to so be projected, comparing her to Eleanor Roosevelt and Jacqueline Kennedy.

<sup>131</sup> Octovia Vivian, *Corretta*, 27; Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 42-43.

the people I loved. It was good training, for I have lived that way most of my life. My father, in his bravery and his refusal to be beaten down, is very much the same kind of man my husband was.”<sup>132</sup>

A studious child, in 1945 she would leave the South to attend Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio where she earned a degree in music and elementary education. She followed that experience by attending the New England Conservatory of Music in 1951. It was there that she met Martin Luther King, Jr. She married him in her parents’ home in Alabama in June 1953. She would follow King when he moved to Montgomery, Alabama in 1954 and assumed the pastorate of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a well-heeled congregation. Coretta would follow King when he moved to Atlanta in 1960 to co-pastor Ebenezer Baptist Church with his father. This move allowed King to devote even more time to the SCLC. Coretta would occasionally join her husband at events in the South, but primarily her role was one of supportive pastor’s wife and mother.

Coretta would give birth to their first daughter Yolanda, nicknamed Yoki, in 1955, only a few short weeks before Montgomery bus boycott began. Yolanda, less than three months old, would be home with her mother and a lady from the Dexter church when the King family house was bombed. Similarly, Coretta’s children would all enter the world at times when Coretta faced her greatest trials as the wife of America’s best known civil rights leader. Martin III, nicknamed Marty, would be a year old when Coretta found her self on a plane, rushing to New York, to see her husband who had been stabbed in Harlem only hours before. His younger brother Dexter, named after the

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<sup>132</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 27.

church that the Kings had left in Montgomery, would still be in the womb when Coretta would learn that her husband had been taken in the middle of the night from an Atlanta jail to Reidsville and consequently be sentenced to hard labor. Less than a month after Bernice, called Bunny, was born, her mother would learn that King was being held in the Birmingham jail.<sup>133</sup> This young family would mean that Coretta would be expected to stay home, take care of her children, and play the role of a minister's wife within her husband's congregation.

She had been trained for this life early in their relationship. Even while they were dating, King groomed her to be the wife of a minister. Coretta remembers that King was always reminding her to fix her hair and make-up or telling her what kind of clothing to buy even while they were dating. This was a big change for her, as her background was at Antioch College where being stylish was not as important as it was in King's world.<sup>134</sup> Her hair would remain straight, and done in conservative styles. Her appearance would always be proper and lady like. She perceived her mother-in-law, her example of what a preacher's wife should be, as someone to whom being fashionable and well-dressed was very important.<sup>135</sup> In January 1959, *Ebony* magazine did a woman behind the great man piece on Coretta. She came across as the perfect preacher's wife. Her hair was long; she wore conservative colors and styles, and was 5' 4" and 143 pounds.<sup>136</sup> So she began married life with her minister's wife mother-in-law as an example of what she should

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<sup>133</sup> Coretta Scott King, "My Dream for My Children," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1964.

<sup>134</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 62-63.

<sup>135</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 79.

<sup>136</sup> "The Woman Behind Martin Luther King," *Ebony*, January 1959.

strive to look like, and her husband's expectations that she would keep up a polished appearance.

It was also important to King that his wife be capable of performing the standard wifely tasks. Before they married, he asked if she could cook, so Coretta and her sister invited him over for a dinner which they prepared for him. Afterwards he told her that she had successfully proved her cooking skills.<sup>137</sup> Ironically as the movement advanced, Coretta would have to become very flexible with her cooking skills. Because she knew her husband was capable of being late and bringing home company with little to no notice, she got used to preparing meals that were often delayed and cooking in large quantities.<sup>138</sup>

Coretta even changed religions for King. Coretta grew up as Methodist. As a child, she attended the Mount Tabor AME church. The rural Alabama congregation was not well-off, and they could not afford a permanent preacher. So at times, both of her grandfathers had filled-in on the Sundays when they could not afford to bring in a visiting speaker. She developed a great respect for the church as a center for African American community life. She also developed Methodist customs and theology. She saw the Baptist services as much more emotional than the Methodist ones. She did not believe that baptism by emersion was necessary for salvation. This did not fit with King's

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<sup>137</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 67.

<sup>138</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 139.

Baptist theology. So, even though she disliked the idea, the Sunday after they married, Coretta found herself being baptized.<sup>139</sup>

Coretta found herself married to a man with very definite opinions about the role of women in general, and about the role of his wife in particular. King's "Advice for Living" column in *Ebony* magazine often reflected his attitudes toward women and family. Women were to be pure and virtuous, and to focus on motherhood. When asked in November 1957, if virginity for a woman was worth while, especially as a woman was likely to lose a boyfriend because of her choice not to participate in pre-marital sex, King responded that yes, virginity was still worthwhile. He tied the loss of virginity into guilt and the break down of the family and said that real men still honored women who waited.<sup>140</sup> This advice was repeated in October of 1958 to a younger girl who mourned the loss of a boyfriend due to the same issue.<sup>141</sup> This would be an attitude that King would maintain throughout the early stages of the movement. In April of 1966 King would be interviewed by Hugh Downs on the "Today" show. He defined sex as sacred within marriage and said that it was a way in which man could help God with his creative work.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, a woman in May of 1958 wrote to ask where the men who valued things other than beauty in a woman were. King responded, agreeing with her that beauty would not ensure a successful marriage, but that it also took good morals and

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<sup>139</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 29-31, 74-75.

<sup>140</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, November 1957.

<sup>141</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, October 1958.

<sup>142</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview with Hugh Downs on "Today" Show, 15 April 1966, MLK Speeches, III, Box 10.

housekeeping skills.<sup>143</sup> His answer must have been a small comfort to the business woman who wrote, looking to be prized for much more. From King's viewpoint however, it was purity and virtue that were to be praised in African American women.

To give King credit, African American women were very often portrayed by society in a manner far from virtuous. Dr. Kermit Mehlinger talked to *Ebony* readers about the historical image of African American women. It was, he said, put onto her by white society and showed her as over sexed, lacking in the more mature ability to develop love. He wrote that:

The white man projected a schizophrenic image onto her. On the one hand, she was like a jezebel, a passionate, hyper-sensuous siren-easy to 'make' and responding to his overtures in a completely uninhibited, receptive manner. On the other hand, she was a grinning roly-poly mammy, moored down to her fat bottom by the sheer weight of her ample breasts. Thus she was only to him like a vending machine with two slots. One for sexual pleasures, the other for oral (milk) pleasures.<sup>144</sup>

White reporter Grace Halsell would agree with Mehlinger. Halsell tried a feminine version of *Black Like Me* and attempted to live for six months as an African American woman. She reported nearly being raped by the husband of a white employer who wanted the experience of sex with an African American woman. Later friends congratulated for her efforts, but she pointed out that no one offers such praises to the African American woman who daily faces such trials.<sup>145</sup> Opposition to the civil rights movement would also attack African American women for their supposed overt

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<sup>143</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, May 1958.

<sup>144</sup> Kermit Mehlinger, "The Sexual Revolution," *Ebony*, August 1966.

<sup>145</sup> Grace Halsell, "I Lived Six Months as a Black Woman," *Ebony*, December 1969.



sexuality. Coretta recalls that during the Montgomery movement, she would pick up the phone, only to hear the voice on the other end of the line accusing her and her husband of being involved in perverted sex acts.<sup>146</sup>

King's attitude toward African American women can then sometimes be taken as a defense of African American womanhood. King knew that this disrespect of African American women came across in actions toward them, and he attempted to show the opposition as often violent toward women. In his Mother's Day sermon of 1963, he mourned the fact that this was a time where women were beaten by men just for their color and desire for freedom.<sup>147</sup> Just a few months later, he would describe for readers of the *SCLC Newsletter* the police brutality record in Birmingham, Alabama. He would describe in general terms African American women being accosted, assaulted and threatened into silence.<sup>148</sup> Again when things heated up in Selma in 1965, King expressed anger at Sheriff Clark for being so depraved that he would become physically violent with a woman as he would with a stray dog.<sup>149</sup>

Women as mothers and caretakers were also a part of King's thinking. His answer to a woman who wrote into his "Advice for Living" column in June of 1958 is frighteningly indicative of the extent to which he expected women to care for the family.

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<sup>146</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 123.

<sup>147</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "What a Mother Should Tell Her Child," 12 May 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4A.

<sup>148</sup> "Birmingham ... How it all Began," *SCLC Newsletter*, July 1963, Vol 1. No 10, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 22.

<sup>149</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "King Speaks out Against Sheriff Clark," 20 January 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 7.

That month, a woman wrote, complaining about her alcoholic husband who had been violent. King's advice was that alcoholism was an illness, and that she should stay with the man and try to help him to find himself.<sup>150</sup> A correspondent the year before had posed a question about birth control, wanting to know if it were a sin. King responded that it was not, and that although a woman's first and most important duty was motherhood, she had to be responsible about it.<sup>151</sup> It is interesting to note here that he does not say that a mother's most important duty is motherhood, but a woman's. This portrays the mindset that all women should strive to achieve motherhood as their ultimate fulfillment.

Mothers had several duties to their children. First, she was to put within her children certain inalienable principles. These principles were also to reflect the values of racial uplift (social and economic improvement) and advancement of civil rights. In his previously mentioned Mother's Day sermon in 1963, King also told his audience that mothers should instill in their children the idea that they were a citizen of the world and to be concerned about it. They were also to teach them to strive for excellence and to be prepared to take advantage of the chances they would find in an improved social order.<sup>152</sup>

The old idea of the African American family as a matriarchal one was also an anathema to King and his organization. In "The Negro Family," a speech given at the University of Chicago in 1966, King blasted the matriarchy that developed after slavery

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<sup>150</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, June 1958.

<sup>151</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, December 1957.

<sup>152</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "What a Mother Should Tell Her Child," 12 May 1963, MLK Speeches III, Box 4A.

and continued in a society in which African American women found it much easier to get and retain jobs than African American men. This not only harmed the growth of men, but also hurt the children who did not have their mother's watchful eye and tender care.<sup>153</sup> Matriarchy for King then, was wrong, not only because it stole the father's rightful place, but because it also harmed the children. This view was something that King's organization agreed with. In December of 1965, the SCLC sent out a press release celebrating African American male leadership. After analyzing an SCLC survey done with workshop participants, they decided that African American families in the South were becoming less matriarchal. This they claimed, as particularly true of families that were involved in the movement.<sup>154</sup> Matriarchy was on its way out and the men of the SCLC were ecstatic.

Historians now debate the existence of such matriarchy. While it was easy to feel that African male slaves had been robbed of their masculinity, several authors such as Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman, now point out that there was a culture of resistance which makes this idea not entirely true. Other feminist historians point out that African American families may be matrifocal, but that African American women receive no real advantages from it as they would in a pure matriarchy.<sup>155</sup> Ideas of

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<sup>153</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Negro Family," 27 January 1966, SCLC, Box 28, Folder 22.

<sup>154</sup> New Generation of Negroes Becoming Less Woman-led, SCLC Department Concludes, News release, 15 December 1965. SCLC, Box 121, Folder 19.

<sup>155</sup> Brian Ward, "Sex Machines and Prisoners of Love: Male Rhythm and Blues, Sexual Politics, and the Black Freedom Struggle," *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 41-67.

historians aside, King and the men of the SCLC were concerned about matriarchy, and did believe that many African American families were matriarchal.

Coretta Scott King would find more freedom to be the woman and activist that she had once been only after Martin's death. Prior to his death she had longed to go to jail for the cause, to march, to be involved. Instead she was often relegated to answering the phone and a few limited public appearances such as the fund-raising Freedom Concerts. These jobs fell into the realm of traditional women's work. They did not challenge her image as a traditional mother and minister's wife. She was her husband's help meet, standing by his side in time of trouble, doing some of his secretarial work and helping raise both his children and money for his cause. She did not put her body on the line and risk doing anything that would mean she might not be there to take care of her kids for a long period of time.

Coretta appeared to be the ever loyal wife, always supporting her husband in his works and goals. Phyl Garland would describe her:

As a devoted wife, she took particular care of her husband, preparing his favorite dishes, like homemade vegetable soup, when he was able to be with the family, making it a point to get the special kind of shoes he liked and making certain buttons were sewed on and other wardrobe matters kept intact. This is the side of her that was not known by the public that sometimes regarded her as a bit too poised and too reserved to be for real.<sup>156</sup>

That side of Coretta was much more imagined by the public than Garland realized. The Kings made sure that it was. When King was fined for violating an anti-boycott agreement in Montgomery in 1956, Coretta appeared with him at a last minute press

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<sup>156</sup> Phyl Garland, "Coretta King: In Her Husband's Footsteps," *Ebony*, September, 1968.

conference as they left the courthouse. She announced to reporters and thus the world that “all along I have supported my husband in this cause and that this point I feel even stronger about the cause, and whatever happens to him it happens to me.”<sup>157</sup> When King was stabbed in Harlem in 1958 the world would see Coretta walk into Harlem Hospital wearing a dark dress, and carrying a small purse and gloves, ever the well dressed lady. As King recovered, the Associated Press would carry a photography of King in the hospital, sitting in a chair, his mother to his right and his wife, slightly behind him, leaning into him, her hand beneath his chin and jaw, as if she would hold up his head.<sup>158</sup> This image was eerily similar to one taken of Helen Chavez and Cesar almost 10 years later.

At times, Martin and Coretta’s relationship was merely an image. There were periods of marital discord between the couple that attracted FBI attention. In June 1964, a confidential memo was sent to the FBI director from the Atlanta office informing him that they had information that tension between King and Coretta had grown to the point that it “could conceivably result in a breach between the principals.”<sup>159</sup> Given what other historians have written about King’s marital record and the FBI involvement in it, it should be no surprise that there was some tension in the household. David Garrow, King historian, wrote in that 1965 King would be forced to consider his private life when tapes were sent to the SCLC headquarters, and heard by Coretta, which featured sex noises and

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<sup>157</sup> Press Conference, Reactions to Conviction transcript, 22 March 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 198-199.

<sup>158</sup> Picture section of Carson, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV. No pages given for these pictures.

<sup>159</sup> SAC, Atlanta to J. Edgar Hoover, 8 June 1964, FBI, 100-106670-NR.

King telling dirty jokes. His extra marital affairs were apparently well-known to his colleagues, at least some of which worried about his reputation and what could happen if those came out.<sup>160</sup> Regardless of what happened behind closed doors however, the image was maintained for the public good.

King would many times compliment his wife for her support. In a speech at the Second Annual Institute on Non-violence and Social Change in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1957, King would thank his wife, commenting that without her behind him, he could not have made it. She had always been with him, even during the lowest points of the Montgomery movement.<sup>161</sup> As he resigned from the church at Dexter and prepared to move to Atlanta, King would thank the church for celebrating both he and his wife, calling her his coworker and thanking her before them for standing with him and helping steady him.<sup>162</sup> The world knew she stood behind her husband, the ever loyal and loving wife.

One of Coretta's most often recognized contributions to the movement was her Freedom Concerts which she began to give in November 1964. King's funeral program mentioned Coretta as having realized her highest dreams after her marriage by singing the freedom songs and serving as her husband's disciple.<sup>163</sup> She was glorified in the SCLC *Newsletter* for her concert tour. A soprano, Coretta went on an eight day tour

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<sup>160</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 373-376.

<sup>161</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Some Things We Must Do," 5 December 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 330.

<sup>162</sup> Address Delivered during 'A Salute to Dr. and Mrs. King' at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 31 January 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 352-353.

<sup>163</sup> Obsequies Martin Luther King Jr., (funeral program), 9 April 1968, MLK, Box 11, Folder 3.

which included five West Coast cities, with more planned in other regions of the country. Her song selection was designed to describe the movement along with accompanying narration.<sup>164</sup> A similar article in another edition of the Newsletter advertised the continuance of these concerts and informed the readers that those interested in her appearing could contact the SCLC's Atlanta office.<sup>165</sup> Coretta reported that some \$50,000 was brought in for the SCLC and its member organizations through these concerts.<sup>166</sup> Even her old dreams of having a career as a professional singer became work auxiliary to her husband's efforts.

Coretta occasionally traveled to events and gave speeches, sometimes filling in for her absent husband. But even these appearances tended to be tied into traditional women's causes or womanly concerns. King wrote to a friend, J. Pius Barbour in 1958 that Coretta had done numerous speeches and went on to list a number of cities in which she had given women's day addresses. King added however that she liked to sing much more and suggest that Barbour let her do both, speaking for the morning service and holding a concert in the evening.<sup>167</sup> One time in which Coretta filled in for her husband was at the Youth March for Integrated Schools, held in Washington, DC. King had been stabbed only weeks before and was not able to appear. Coretta was sent instead. It was

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<sup>164</sup> "Thousands See, Hear Mrs. King in Freedom Concert Tour," SCLC *Newsletter* April-May vol. 2, no. 10., SCLC, Box 122, Folder 27; Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Give First Concert in Atlanta, news release, 28 April, 1965, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 10.

<sup>165</sup> "Mrs. King to Resume Concerts in October," SCLC *Newsletter*, July-August vol. 2, no. 8.

<sup>166</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 249.

<sup>167</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to J. Pius Barbour, 8 August 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 463-464.

the perfect even for her to speak at. It was a youth march, held for students and involved education, a mother's concern. She focused on the nonviolence and the role of youth in American society, complementing them on their efforts in the struggle.<sup>168</sup> Another such event came in March 1962, when she went to Geneva with the Women's Strike for Peace, a group which was against atomic weapons testing. She wrote in her autobiography that after this event she was "convinced that the women of the world, united without any regard for national or racial divisions, can become the most powerful force for international peace and brotherhood."<sup>169</sup> Even as Coretta was active outside the home on occasion, it was not the main role her husband wished for her, and she knew it. After King's death she wrote that "From the beginning he would encourage me to be active outside of the house, and would be very pleased when I had ideas of my own or even when I could fill in for him. Yet- it was the female role he was most anxious for me to play."<sup>170</sup> Her speeches tended to promote traditional womanly values such as motherhood and peace.

Coretta was also noted for her role as a mother. In a random quotes section of the *SCLC Newsletter*, the organization cited Coretta as remarking that they had to teach their children early to be concerned with world problems and issues.<sup>171</sup> Octovia Vivian, the wife of an SCLC staff member, would later quote Coretta as having said "I deeply

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<sup>168</sup> Coretta Scott King, "Address at Youth March for Integrated Schools," 25 October 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 514-515.

<sup>169</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 208-209.

<sup>170</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 60.

<sup>171</sup> "Quote and Unquote," *SCLC Newsletter* April-May vol. 2, no. 10, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 27.



believe I can only be worthy of seeing my dreams for my children come to pass by being willing to struggle, to sacrifice, even suffer, with an abiding faith in the future and unquestioning devotion to the principles of love, justice, and equality.”<sup>172</sup> This was reflective of King’s ideas that mothers should prepare their children for the improving social order and teach them to view themselves as citizens of the world.

Coretta also was a mother who guided her children through a new, increasingly desegregated world. Lena Horne, the entertainer, admitted that the role of an African American mother in this new era was a hard one. One of the problems an African American mother had to deal with now, according to Horne, was the idea of placing her children in desegregated schools.<sup>173</sup> When the King family moved to Atlanta, Coretta would have to find a school for her children to attend. Her children understandably did not want to be the only African American students in schools which had not desegregated. So, Coretta joined with Juanita Abernathy and they sent their children to school together.<sup>174</sup> While Coretta was not going to bow to the system of segregation, she still did not want her children to be isolated and to face the dangers they might have as the only African American students. It was through her that they would learn to embrace the rapid changes.

Coretta tried to show the world that she did teach her children good values. In an article intended for the eyes of thousands of American women, white and African

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<sup>172</sup> Octovia Vivian, *Coretta*, 50.

<sup>173</sup> Lena Horne, “I’m Proud to be a Mother,” *Ebony*, April 1959.

<sup>174</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 251.

American, in *Good Housekeeping* Coretta described some of her parenting triumphs. She began by telling her readers how socially conscious her children were. The King family had agreed that they would experience a sacrificial Christmas in 1963. The children would get one present only, avoiding the excesses of the season, and the family would send the money saved to help those who had lost family members in the civil rights cause. Instead of throwing a tantrum as the average American child would have, the King children went along, the oldest two were more than happy to do so and in fact told people of this novel idea.<sup>175</sup>

Coretta similarly showed the readers of *Good Housekeeping* that she was teaching her daughter to be proud of who she was, but not at the expense of degrading whites. This was a reflection of the concern for all mankind that King wanted African American mothers to instill in their children. Yolanda, influenced by the same white media that influenced all American children, informed her mother that African American people just were not as pretty as whites. Her mother was horrified and went to find her copies of *Ebony* magazine featuring photos of attractive African Americans. After admiring the African American figures in the magazine, Yolanda was convinced then that African Americans were much prettier than whites. This was not exactly the lesson her mother had intended for her to learn, and so Coretta had to try once more.<sup>176</sup> This was an important lesson for Yolanda to learn. Further more, it was a lesson that proponents of the classical civil rights movement would be very concerned that children everywhere

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<sup>175</sup> Coretta Scott King, "My Dream for My Children," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1964.

<sup>176</sup> Coretta Scott King, "My Dream for My Children," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1964.

learn. With the increasing tension with African American radicals, many of which were young, those who were strong adherents of the nonviolent movement would have been concerned that children be comfortable with being black, but not aggressive in their blackness.

Coretta concluded the article by telling the readers of her aspirations for her children's lives. These aspirations were largely a list of values that she hoped mothers would learn and pass on to their children. While she was excited that Martin III realized there were world wide problems that needed to be addressed such as hunger and poverty, she hoped that he would grow up to live in a world where other adults realized that as well. She hoped her children would escape segregation, be free of prejudice but identify with their race, and to not be obsessed with material things. Coretta ended the article by announcing to the reader that she would soon be working toward making these dreams happen for her children. She claimed to believe that a woman's place was at home, but that "women, more wives, more mothers must enroll actively in the crusade to make America truly what it was intended to be, as chartered in the divinely inspired language of the Declaration of Independence. I believe in America and the American Dream. The American Dream is a vital part of my dream for my children."<sup>177</sup> Her concert tours mentioned in the article were now solidly attributed to her role as a mother and her motherly concern for her children. She was singing, not just to raise money for the SCLC, but because she wanted to change the world for her children.

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<sup>177</sup> Coretta Scott King, "My Dream for My Children," *Good Housekeeping*, June 1964.

Of the many things Coretta was not allowed to do, one of them was to go to jail. Not all of the wives of SCLC leaders were under the same restraints. Wyatt Tee Walker's wife Ann joined him as a Freedom Rider in 1961. She was jailed alongside of her husband, the executive director of the SCLC, in Jackson, Mississippi. In the process of her arrest, her wedding ring disappeared from her personal belongings.<sup>178</sup> The SCLC didn't mind giving this incident some small publicity, especially as it served the dual purpose of publicizing the dishonesty of Mississippi law enforcement, but never would they have wanted to see a similar story about the president's wife. Coretta found this frustrating. When the Kings visited India in 1959, Coretta saw how women had been used in Indian politics, and how they had been involved in Gandhi's movements and how they had gone to jail for Indian liberation.<sup>179</sup> Coretta, who would not be allowed to go to jail, must have found this very frustrating. She badly wanted to volunteer to be arrested for the cause and to spend time in jail, but her husband told her that she could not do so while the kids were young.<sup>180</sup> Traveling for speeches and the Freedom Concerts must have also meant leaving her children in someone else's care, but those things were allowed. Those things did not spoil Coretta's image as loving mother and preacher's wife.

This image of Coretta as the loving, supportive, wife and mother was very effective. While King racked up the Nobel Prize and many other awards and honorary

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<sup>178</sup> "Director and Wife Jailed," SCLC *Newsletter*, August 1961, vol 1, no. 2, SCLC, Box 122, folder 20.

<sup>179</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 176.

<sup>180</sup> Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin*, 192.

degrees, his wife received honors and invitations due to her role as King's wife and the mother of his children. SCLC announced in 1962 that Coretta had been named the Mother of the Year at the annual Mother's Day Luncheon of the Que-Ives. She was honored for this at the Town and Country Club in Brooklyn, New York. The SCLC press release announcing this came with the news that Coretta would also be the Women's Day speaker at an AME church in Chicago.<sup>181</sup> Her awards and speeches were due to her motherhood and femininity, not for her own accomplishments.

King's death changed Coretta's role. She played a much more active role in the cause as a widow than a wife. The first major movement she was involved with was the Poor People's Campaign. A day care center was named for her in Resurrection City.<sup>182</sup> *True Unity News*, a newspaper put out in Resurrection City announced that Coretta would lead a march in Washington in support of them.<sup>183</sup> A year after her husband's death, Coretta would become involved in a hospital worker's strike in Charleston, South Carolina. She came for a one day visit, inspired the strikers and praised working African American women, and led a march through town. Her presence in town created such a scene that the chief of police decided not to arrest anyone while she was in town, seeing it as much too risky.<sup>184</sup> *Newsweek* noticed this and reported that Coretta would probably still work with the SCLC, but that she was likely to be involved in her own causes as

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<sup>181</sup> Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr. Named Mother of the Year, news release, 17 May 1962, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 8.

<sup>182</sup> Poor People's Campaign Information Center, news release, 11 June 1968, SCLC, Box 177, Folder 23.

<sup>183</sup> "Woman Power!" *True Unity News*, 13 June 1968, no. 6, SCLC, Box 180, Folder 14.

<sup>184</sup> "The Queen is with US," *Newsweek*, 12 May 1969.

well. Reporters for *Newsweek* said that as she was leaving after accepting an honorary degree at Boston University, a young student grabbed Coretta's hand and thanked her for being herself.<sup>185</sup> It took her husband's death for her to be recognized in her own right.

In many ways, Helen Chavez played a similar role for the United Farm Workers. When it came to their positions in society, Mexican women had a varied historical tradition. While there was very much a tradition that encouraged women to act in roles subordinate to men, there was also a long history of Mexican women as leaders in causes, particularly labor movements. Many of the ideas concerning women's appropriate behavior came from the Spanish heritage, and can be traced back to the arrival of Cortez.<sup>186</sup> The role of the father as head of the house remained from earlier times. What changed was the role of women in the church, as men were gradually less interested in the Catholic faith and women were left as the main practitioners.<sup>187</sup> The Virgin of Guadalupe became the patron saint of Mexico, and this may have caused men to see women in her image, as mothers and intercessors.<sup>188</sup> If women were to be saint-like, they were to be pure and holy, just like the Virgin herself. This focus on the woman as a copy of the saint created an image of women as wives and mothers.

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<sup>185</sup> "Keeper of the Dream," *Newsweek*, 24 March 1969.

<sup>186</sup> Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 63; Carmen Tafolla, *To Split A Human: Mitos, Machos Y La Mujer Chicana* (Mexican American Cultural Center, 1985), 18.

<sup>187</sup> Guillermo Lux and Maurilio Vigil, "Return to Aztlan: The Chicano Rediscovered His Indian Past," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 12-13; Gallegos y Chavez, 70; George J Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1993), 164-170, 273.

<sup>188</sup> Irene I. Blea, *La Chicana and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 42; Gallegos y Chavez, 74.

Ironically perhaps, since it hardly fits the saintly image of motherhood, Mexican women had long been activists. During the Mexican Revolution of 1810, Mexican women became active in many causes. Gertrudis Bocanegra was involved in the promotion of Indian education.<sup>189</sup> Others founded feminist groups, published papers, and become involved in labor movements as they increasingly found themselves in the work force. Carmen Huerta organized the Second Congress of Workers in 1880. In 1906, Lucretia Toriz was involved in a Vera Cruz textile strike. Juana Mendoza and Sara Ramirez were both involved in labor journalism. Mendoza would go on to be a colonel in Emiliano Zapata's army. Similarly, another woman, Dolores Jimenez y Muro, who wrote arguments for the rights of women and Indians, would also join Zapata and write the preface to his *Plan de Ayla*.<sup>190</sup> Some of these women can be seen as predecessors for 1960s Mexican American women being involved in the farm labor movement.

There were also Mexican American women who were active in causes in the United States. In the 1930s and 40s, Josefina Fierro tried to help Mexicans who face deportation due to the Great Depression, and worked toward ending the zoot-suit riots which consumed Long Beach, California during WWII.<sup>191</sup> *La Pasionaria*, Emma Tenayuca, was an organizer and spokeswoman for a pecan shellers' strike in Texas in 1938. Later removed from her public position because of her radical politics, she

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<sup>189</sup> Blea, *La Chicana*, 42; Irene Blea, *Toward a Chicano Social Science* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 79.

<sup>190</sup> Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 53; Mirande, 204-207, 210; Nava, 110; Blea, *La Chicana*, 43.

<sup>191</sup> Blea, *Toward*, 80.

continued her work behind the scenes.<sup>192</sup> Dolores Huerta would later inherit her nickname. Tenayuca had inspired another young woman as well. Luisa Moreno was from South America, but she worked with Mexican Americans in the United States, starting with the Texas pecan shellers' strike. She later helped to organize strikes in a variety of fields and among canner workers. In 1938, she called a meeting in Los Angeles for Spanish speaking people. One of the ideas promoted at the conference was the organization of farm workers.<sup>193</sup> A film, *Salt of the Earth*, shown as a SNCC fundraiser in New York City in the 1960s, also showed changes that could happen in Mexican America society during labor strikes. A film about a largely Mexican American mining strike in New Mexico showed that when the men were put under court injunction, the women took up the strike. This meant that the men had to do more of the domestic duties. This was hard for some of them, but the end result was more unified families.<sup>194</sup> Mexican American women had a long history of being involved in labor movements, some of which had changed their roles in society.

After the 1910 Mexican Revolution, more Mexican women were in the work force, often holding jobs that had previously been considered men's jobs. When these women started to demand suffrage, they still found themselves the keepers of the home.

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<sup>192</sup> Elizabeth Martinez, "Chingon Politics Die Hard: Reflections on the First Chicano Activist Reunion," Edited by Carla Trujillo, *Living Chicana Theory* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1998), 125; Blea, *Toward*, 81; Mirande, 230; Tafolla, 25.

<sup>193</sup> Blea, *Toward*, 81; Mirande, 230, 232.

<sup>194</sup> Press Release from Billings Associates, no date, SNCC, Box 89, Folder 10.



The men were still the ones dealing with the issues outside of the home.<sup>195</sup> This meant that certain behaviors were expected of women of Mexican heritage. Girls were to learn modesty and to avoid brash attention-getting behavior. They married earlier, usually desiring to become wives and mothers rather than professionals.<sup>196</sup> Such women were not likely to become independent women, standing up for the cause of their choice. Married women were expected to agree with their husbands.<sup>197</sup> If a wife appeared to disagree with her husband or to abandon her family in pursuit of a cause, she would have been regarded as unnatural and out of place. Single women who were not wives and mothers were even more of an oddity.

The union rhetoric continued to show women serving in secondary roles, rather than in independent ones. The players in Luis Valdez's impromptu *Teatro*, constantly showed women in roles helping men. Women who complained were told to stop focusing on the feminist issues and to direct their attention to the cause.<sup>198</sup> Valdez, who made little effort to change, recognized that this was a problem and said that the union

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<sup>195</sup> Sylvia Gonzalez, "The Chicana Perspective: A Design for Self-Awareness," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 81-82; Mirande, 211; John H. Burma, *Spanish-Speaking Groups in the United States*. (Duke University Press, 1954), 8-9,11; London and Anderson, 181.

<sup>196</sup> Carlos G. Velez-I, "Ourselves Through the Eyes of an Anthropologist," Edited by Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 42; Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, 366-7; Gallegos y Chavez, 70-72, 74; Gonzalez, 87; Brown Women's Venceremos Collective, "On the Brown Women's Struggle!" Edited by Gilberto Lopez y Rivas, *Conquest and Resistance: The Origins of The Chicano National Minority* (Palo Alto, CA: R & E Research Associates Inc., 1979), 170.

<sup>197</sup> James Officer, "Politics and Leadership," Edited by Renato Rosaldo, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert. *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 161; Arnulfo D. Trejo, *The Chicanos: As We See Ourselves* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979), 93.

<sup>198</sup> Aida Hurtado "The Politics of Sexuality," editor Carla Trujillo, *Living Chicana Theory* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1998), 406-410.

needed to take another look at their beliefs about women.<sup>199</sup> Although he apparently did nothing to improve the portrayal of women, he at least recognized the role that women played in the union and that it was perhaps a bit out of the cultural norm.

The union did not necessarily want Mexican Americans to acknowledge these changed roles. Young women often found themselves floating between traditional ways and more modern ones. Amalia, a labor union worker in Southern California and Northern Mexico, was one such young woman. She typically wore the jeans associated with many of the young people of her age. Before she made an appearance at a union rally however, she went home and changed into a traditional Mexican dress.<sup>200</sup> Here was a young woman, very untraditional in the sense that she was single and stepping out side the home to be involved in a cause. Yet, for union purposes, through her clothing, she would become the traditional woman that the union needed her to be, the woman that union members would perhaps expect her to grow up to become.

Farm union leadership also had to worry about the supposed morals of women in the cause. King and the civil rights movement leaders were more concerned with outsiders' views of African American women's morality. The farm labor movement would be more concerned about the view of those involved directly in the movement. Jessica Govea wrote from Canada where she was working on the table grape boycott in 1969 to update Chavez. Stationed in Montreal, she wrote to Chavez that she was

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<sup>199</sup> Luis Valdez, "Notes on Chicano Theater," Edited by Gilberto Lopez y Rivas, *Conquest and Resistance: The Origins of The Chicano National Minority* (Palo Alto, CA: R & E Research Associates Inc., 1979), 146.

<sup>200</sup> Horwitz, 102.

enjoying the French-Canadians, saying they “are very groovy. And being a girl is a great advantage!! As I told Marshall: ‘They’re really good for one’s morale, but I don’t know about one’s morals!!’ He didn’t seem to think that was very funny.”<sup>201</sup> Govea’s apparent critic Marshall Ganz, a white student working with the cause, was probably aware of the worries that union leaders had about the reputations of women involved in the union. Union leaders knew that women who were active in the union ran the risk of being labeled prostitutes. Chavez said that in the early years of the union, “If we had a picket line and we had Mexican women in the picket line – our women – very few would get in the picket line in those years. People said they had to be a whore otherwise they couldn’t possibly be in the picket line.”<sup>202</sup> The farm workers union had to convince Mexican American women that good, moral women joined the picket line. They needed women to serve as physical proof that a strike was occurring. Without women’s participation, such lines would have considerably fewer participants.

The farm labor leaders promoted this traditional image of Mexican American women. In particular, women were shown as wives and mothers. After some strikers, including a large number of women, were arrested for shouting “*Huelga*,” the union gave thanks at a Mass held in a Delano park for the mothers who had been arrested.<sup>203</sup> Chavez would later detail abuses that women, wives, mothers, and sisters had endured upon being

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<sup>201</sup> Jessica Govea to Cesar Chavez, 13 May 1969, UFWP, Series III, Box 34, Folder 12.

<sup>202</sup> Cesar Chavez, interview with Dennis J. O’Brien, 28 January 1970, conducted as part of the oral history program of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, 1970, Walter Reuther Library Oral Histories.

<sup>203</sup> “The Great Mass for all Farm Workers” *El Malcriado* vol. 1, no. 23.

insulted and arrested.<sup>204</sup> The union often named women hurt in attacks. When they reported that striker Manual Rivera was run over, the union also announced that Helen Chavez was nearly pushed to the ground and that Wendy Goepel, a white woman who worked with the union, was hit with a club.<sup>205</sup> The union would often highlight the opposition's treatment of women in the cause. Sal Giumarra, a grape grower, they would claim, practically beat up a female packer, a mother whose box didn't appear to be packed correctly. She had worked for him for five years, but he fired her, the pickers working with her, and threw grapes at her. This incident had driven her into the union.<sup>206</sup> Although these women were stepping out beyond the normally silent supportive roles, they were called referred to in traditional terms as wives and mothers.

But even this rhetoric did not appease all Mexican American women. Lupe Ortiz worried about equality in the work place carrying over into Mexican American home life and destroying the traditional roles associated with it.<sup>207</sup> For women like Ortiz, equality in union leadership was a potential threat to the values they were raised with. She was content in the gender roles to which she had been assigned by custom and culture. The union responded to women like this, pointing out that a woman's work on the picket line was really a mother's concern for her children's future. In the past, the Mexican American women had been expected not only to watch her children and keep her house,

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<sup>204</sup> Cesar Chavez to Dear Brothers, *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 35.

<sup>205</sup> Delano *Newsletter*, Special Bulletin, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

<sup>206</sup> The Grapevine, flyer, UFWOC, Box 5, Folder 24.

<sup>207</sup> Huerta, interview with Baer and Matthews.

but to work as well. Picketing, the article claimed, wasn't all that different.<sup>208</sup> *El Malcriado* also tried to provide Mexican American women with examples of women in traditional gender roles who were also involved in the cause. One woman was a nurse, a safe feminine occupation. Another woman had followed her husband to the East Coast to help him with his work on the boycott.<sup>209</sup> The message from the union was clear. Women could and should work on the union cause; it was not beyond the bounds of their traditional roles as Mexican American women. Women in leadership positions however would be another issue.

Women were a great help in Chavez's movement. At the beginnings of Chavez's movement in May 1962, he twice wrote to community organizer Fred Ross telling him that he had women, apparently from his and Helen's families, working as registration crew.<sup>210</sup> Susan Drake wrote to a sympathetic union support in Los Angeles that many women who used to work in the fields now worked around the union office, often using secretarial skills that were self taught or dredged up from what they had learned in high school.<sup>211</sup> As well as these women, many women worked on the picket lines, as strikers, and on boycott teams sent to cities in the United States and Canada to discourage grape sales.

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<sup>208</sup> "A Woman's Place is on the Picket Line," *El Malcriado*, vol. 4, no. 2.

<sup>209</sup> "From the Fields to the Picket Line." *El Malcriado*, vol. 4, no. 5.

<sup>210</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 2 May 1962, FRP, Folder 6; Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 10 May 1962, FRP, Folder 6.

<sup>211</sup> Susan Drake to Mrs. Artie Stokes, 7 April 1968, NFWM, Part II, Box 2, Folder 3.

The two most recognized women in the union were Helen Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Helen was, in so many ways that Huerta could not be, the perfect Mexican American woman. The stories about Helen showed her to be the traditional wife and mother. She worried about her husband's safety. One reporter went so far as to claim that it was her main worry.<sup>212</sup> In reality she did much more than worry. Helen was did field work, and put together boxes in the packing shed to earn a little money to help the family finances.<sup>213</sup> She also printed materials for the union, kept the union's books, gave up prize money she had won for a union gas bill, and was arrested for the cause.<sup>214</sup> She did as her husband asked, worked for his cause and still had time for her family.<sup>215</sup> Chavez himself took the credit for her, saying he thought he'd done "a fairly good job of organizing her."<sup>216</sup>

The union did not publicize her role and give her the credit she deserved for her hard work. Los Angeles activist and family friend Flora Chavez said that Chavez could not have built the union without Helen's help.<sup>217</sup> Partly because Chavez was protective

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<sup>212</sup> "The Fox and the Grapes," *LA Times West*, 23 November 1969.

<sup>213</sup> Cesar Chavez to Fred Ross, 17 August 1962, FRP, Folder 9.

<sup>214</sup> Accounts of this can be found in many sources including Ferriss and Sandoval, 71, 75-76; Steiner, *La Raza*, 279; Ronald B. Taylor, *Chavez and the Farm Workers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 142-143; James P. Terzian and Kathryn Cramer, *Mighty Hard Road: The Story of Cesar Chavez* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., Inc., 1970), 67, 83; Jean Murphy, "Unsung Heroine of La Causa," *LA Times*, 21 December. 1970.

<sup>215</sup> Richard Garcia, 59.

<sup>216</sup> Renato Rosalso, Gustav L. Seligmann, and Robert A. Calvert, *Chicano: The Beginnings of Bronze Power* (New York: William and Morrow and Co., Inc., 1974), 60.

<sup>217</sup> Flora Chavez, interview, School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Oral History Resources Center, California State University, Long Beach, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women and the World War II Work Experience Project*, oral history collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

of his family, the media spot light did not often fall on her.<sup>218</sup> At times of high media attention, the Chavez family was rarely in the limelight. This protection was never more evident than during his 25 day fast in the spring of 1968 when Chavez chose to live at the union compound Forty Acres rather than at home.<sup>219</sup> Helen's role would be the quiet one. After reading his father's diary, her son Paul would call her Chavez's strength and encouragement.<sup>220</sup> She was the perfect traditional woman, quietly supporting and upholding her husband in his important work and dealings with the outside world.

The image of the modest and obedient woman has not only cultural traditions, but also religious ones that both African Americans and Mexicans would have been familiar with. This image comes predominantly from Proverbs 31. King Solomon, the author of this chapter, writes describing the perfect woman. She is one that does her husband "good and not evil all the days of her life" and one that "looketh well to the ways of her household" whose "children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."<sup>221</sup> Helen's behavior often typified that of the scriptural Biblical helpmate.

This Biblical connection would be made with drama and fanfare at the Mass concluding the 25 day fast. The fast, which following the tradition of fasting, was

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<sup>218</sup> Flora Chavez, interview, School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Oral History Resources Center, California State University, Long Beach, *Rosie the Riveter Revisted: Women and the World War II Work Experience Project*, oral history collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>219</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 85; "The Fox and the Grapes," *LA Times West*, 23 November 1969.

<sup>220</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 85; Pitrone, 96; Ferriss and Sandoval, 140.

<sup>221</sup> Proverbs 31.12, 27, 28 KJV.

supposed to be a personal commitment made by Chavez to God, ended very publicly. Helen appeared by her husband's side, supporting her husband publicly and in a religious ceremony. *El Malcriado* would describe her in similar terms later, as a woman who had supported her husband's repudiation of a well-paid job in the Peace Corps to help farm workers.<sup>222</sup> Helen was the holy woman who supported her husband in all that he did.

If the union was counting on women to provide a leveling measure of calmness to the movement, thus preventing violence, they were fortunate to be acting within a culture whose patron saint was the Virgin of Guadalupe. Women were revered as nearly religious figures and were seen as the ones who brought God to the movement. No woman brought this touch of religion better than Helen Chavez.

The pictures taken and stories told during the 25 day fast at Forty Acres show Helen Chavez as a modest and holy woman. She attended Mass daily during the fast and prayed with her husband often.<sup>223</sup> Pictures of her at the Mass ending the fast show her seated in the background, near her husband, either with her head covered by a white lace veil, or with the veil in her lap. The Christian tradition of veiled prayer comes from a Biblical reference found in I Corinthians, in which Paul tells the church at Corinth "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be

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<sup>222</sup> "A Page from the Life of Cesar Chavez." *El Malcriado*, vol. 1, no. 44.

<sup>223</sup> "The fast..." *El Malcriado*, vol. 2, no. 2.



covered”<sup>224</sup> These scriptures are taken by many religious groups to mean that a woman should not pray or attend religious services without a veil or covering.<sup>225</sup> Helen in these pictures is appropriately devout. She has her veil, demonstrating her respect for God, for the occasion and for her husband.

Helen and Cesar seemed truly affectionate, even when out of the public eye. Susan Drake, who was a bit younger than Helen, remembered being amazed during a drive to a meeting with Helen and Cesar that the couple would still hold hands.<sup>226</sup> Chavez’s presidential files still contain a note that Helen sent him at La Paz around 1971. The note, addressed to her “Love” accompanied some melons that she had bought for him at Forty Acres.<sup>227</sup>

In some ways both Helen and Coretta used an old standard of the feminist movements. Do what you want for your cause, but do it under the guise of motherhood. Both sold their work as an extension of their motherhood. Both were portrayed by their movements as mothers. However, Helen was actually more active in the cause. Perhaps this was due to the relative economic wealth and outside support going to their organizations. Chavez desperately needed his wife’s help and cooperation in ways that King did not. King had the community of Montgomery from the beginning. Chavez

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<sup>224</sup> I Corinthians 11.5-6 KJV.

<sup>225</sup> David K Bernard, *Practical Holiness: A Second Look* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1997), 211.

<sup>226</sup> Susan Drake, interview with Sydney Smith, 28 May 1980, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 5.

<sup>227</sup> Helen Chavez to Cesar Chavez, c. September 1971, UFWP, Box 3, Folder 9.

began with only his wife and family. The practical realities of both movements influenced how much their wives would be encouraged to be involved.

While the farm labor movement had Dolores Huerta as a woman in a strong leadership role, the SCLC had no such direct equivalent. It did have some women in leadership roles; however their positions were not as long term as Huerta's was. Nor were they celebrated as heroes. Two such women were Ella Baker and Septima Clark.

Ella Baker was born in Virginia in 1903 and grew up in North Carolina. Influenced by her mother who had been a teacher and a volunteer for the Baptist Missionary Society, Baker also grew up hearing stories of resistance from her very independent grandmother who had been born in slavery. After graduating from Shaw University in 1927, Baker moved north to New York. In the 1930s, she would become involved in many political organizations and be exposed to the ideas of various colleagues at the WPA. In the 1940s and 50s she would become involved with the NAACP and eventually In Friendship, a group which raised funds to help the MIA and other activists who had forced out of their jobs as a result of movement involvement. She would later be a driving force behind the organization of the SCLC.<sup>228</sup> For all her work, many men in the movement found Baker hard to get along with. When Baker became interim Executive Director of the SCLC in April 1959, Lawrence Reddick wrote in his notes that he thought she would do a better job than her predecessor. He also seemed happy that as a leader she could no longer blame other people for SCLC deficiencies, but

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<sup>228</sup> "Baker, Ella Josephine," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed, *Black Women in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 58-62.

he wondered if even that would stop the complaining that was a habitual part of her nature.<sup>229</sup>

Part of the reason that Ella Baker didn't get along with the men of SCLC was her view on leadership. While the men of SCLC were busy building the focus of the movement around a few key leaders, Ella Baker was much more community oriented. It also did not help that she was a woman, a very independent woman, working among a group of ministers who had a strong background of masculine leadership.<sup>230</sup>

Like many of the African American women leaders of the time, Ella Baker's role wasn't noticed by much of the American public. The rise of the civil rights movement however is largely due to her. Ella Baker had been highly disappointed that the MIA didn't push forward in the South after they won the Montgomery bus boycott. With Stanley Levison and Bayard Rustin, Baker helped push for the start of the SCLC in 1957. Later, as the SCLC announced a voting registration drive for which they were ill-prepared, Levison and Rustin would tell King that Baker could go and work for the SCLC. Baker did not know about this until after King had agreed to have her as acting director. Although not happy about their having mapped out her life in such a manner, she knew if she didn't get involved the movement might falter. Some men of the SCLC grew to resent the divorced Baker's presence. She reminded them of their mothers. Like many of them had found their mothers domineering, they felt Baker too was trying to run

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<sup>229</sup> Notes by Lawrence Dunbar Reddick on SCLC Administrative Committee Meetings on 2 April and 3 April 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 177-179.

<sup>230</sup> Peter J. Ling, "Gender and Generation: Manhood at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," in Peter J. Ling, and Sharon Monteith, eds, *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004) 101-108; Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 40-51.

their lives. Baker for her part would be frustrated with the ministers whom she felt would rather stay in their pulpits than do the hard work of organizing for the cause. Baker and King had a particularly contentious relationship, as King often ignored her ideas. Baker also felt that Coretta should speak up more, and not hide behind her husband. For Baker, the SCLC was nearly moribund. They often ignored her ideas, and did not like her thoughts about recruiting more women to teach basic literacy and citizenship skills. Thus when the sit-ins began in 1960, Ella Baker saw those students as the hope for the future of the movement. She would eventually resign from the SCLC in 1960 and concentrate her efforts with SNCC.<sup>231</sup>

Septima Poinsette Clark was born in 1898 in South Carolina. She attained a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and a teaching certificate. She taught on Johns Island in South Carolina where she became a community activist, working to improve health conditions and teacher salaries. Widowed at an early age, she earned a BA and MA in the 1940s and continued to teach in public schools until she was fired in 1956 for maintaining an association with the NAACP. She would then join the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee where she worked as the director of workshops. It was at Highlander that she developed many of her skills in teaching citizenship classes. She would continue that work in 1961, joining the SCLC as the director of education and teaching. She continued

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<sup>231</sup> Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 132-150; Carol Mueller, "Ella Baker and the Origins of 'Participatory Democracy,'" in Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, *Black Women in United States History*, 51-68; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) 170-195.

with the SCLC until 1970.<sup>232</sup> Her education program was one that Baker had wanted years before, but that the SCLC did not move toward until Baker had left their organization. It was Clark that would write to King in 1956 and invite him to the Highlander Folk School. She invited him and his family to enjoy a time of retreat there, at the expense of a school, which would cover his room, board, and transportation expenses for week or two. Clark was the Workshop Director at the time.<sup>233</sup>

Both Clark and Baker were adamant that women should be respected and their needs met within the movement. Clark wrote to Andrew Young in 1964, complaining that it was just as important to see that women were paid as were the men. While she agreed with him that men with families were important, she argued that women also had needs that should be taken into account. Her involvement in the movement meant that she had to run two homes, one in Atlanta and one in Charleston, as well as help her grandchildren who did not have a mother. She also points out that other women in the organization were in a similar position.<sup>234</sup> Young responded, defending his treatment of women within the organization, claiming that women workers had received raises with new grants.<sup>235</sup>

Radical women in the cause were mentioned typically as women and mothers. Diane Nash was one such example. Born in Chicago in 1938, she attended college in the

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<sup>232</sup> “Clark, Septima Poinsette,” in Darlene Clark Hine, ed, *Black Women in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 259-261.

<sup>233</sup> Septima Poinsette Clark to Martin Luther King, Jr., 30 July 1956, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 328-329.

<sup>234</sup> Septima Clark to Andrew Young, 12 July 1964, SCLC, Box 154, Folder 6.

<sup>235</sup> Andrew Young to Septima Clark, 20 July, 1964, SCLC, Box 154, Folder 6.

South, first at Howard and then at Fisk in Tennessee. Active with a group of Nashville students in the lunch counter sit-ins, Nash would barely miss becoming the head of SNCC.<sup>236</sup> Diane Nash had married SCLC's Mississippi Field Secretary James Bevel. She had become pregnant just before she was jailed for missing a hearing appealing a conviction for contempt of court for refusing to leave the all white section of a Mississippi court room. In announcing the news, SCLC headlines screamed out that former Freedom Rider Nash was pregnant and headed to jail. They informed their readers that she was due in August but determined to serve the entire two year sentence if need be.<sup>237</sup> Nash herself, in a SNCC news release, announced that she was going to abandon the appeals attempt and serve the jail time unless the unjust charge was dropped. She said she has been asked how she could do this since her baby was due so soon. She responded that her child would be born in Mississippi in either case and thus still be born in prison. Her time in jail was merely the way to ensure that someday all children could live free from the moment of their births onward.<sup>238</sup> The SCLC then began a public campaign to free Nash, sending a telegram to Attorney General Robert Kennedy and releasing the text of it to the public. This telegram left out Nash's prior civil rights work, but referred to her as a former beauty queen, the wife of an SCLC field secretary, and an expectant mother.<sup>239</sup> This publicity move meant that SNCC would soon after receive

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<sup>236</sup> "Nash, Diane," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed, *Black Women in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 427-429.

<sup>237</sup> "Pregnant Diane Nash En route to Jackson Jail," *SCLC Newsletter*, April 1962, vol, 1, no. 6, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 20.

<sup>238</sup> SNCC News release, 30 April 1962, SNCC, Box 36, Folder 3.

<sup>239</sup> SCLC Protests Jailing of Expectant Mother in Jackson Mississippi, SCLC News release, 3 May 1962, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 8.

requests for photos of Nash. Julian Bond of SNCC wrote to a staff writer at the *Militant* explaining that he did not have any publicity photos of Nash but that he would send some when they arrived. He suggested that another organization might have such a photo but added that it might not show her as being pregnant.<sup>240</sup> Pregnancy allowed the movement to reduce her from radical, active woman, to loving mother.

As for King's part, he was more likely to hold up the traditional heroines as examples for his congregation. While identifying a possible speaker for the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church's annual Women's Day event in 1958, King decided to contact Daisy Bates. He asked her to speak both for the church service and at an MIA mass meeting the following night. King wrote that it would mean a lot to the women of the area if she would appear and that her appearance would be "the greatest impetus, the greatest inspiration, the greatest challenge to the women to carry on, even as you are doing so courageously."<sup>241</sup> By mid-1958, the entire country knew Daisy Bates, president of the Arkansas NAACP, as the woman who was leading and encouraging the fight for school desegregation. While it might have been progressive of King to ask a woman to fill his pulpit, he still chose a heroine in the model of the day. She was well-dressed, married, and used the conservative methods of the NAACP.

The emphasis on images of traditional women seen in the civil rights movement was also seen in the farm labor movement. Helen Chavez's devotion to the union may

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<sup>240</sup> Horace Julian Bond to Fred Halstead, 16 May 1962. SNCC, Box 32, Folder 2.

<sup>241</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Daisy Bates, 1 July 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 445-446.

have appeared to have been derived from her loyalty to her husband. Dolores Huerta's devotion to the union however, came only from her own desire to see the union arise. Huerta did not grow up in a traditional family. Her parents divorced and she moved with her mother to Stockton, California. Her mother served as an example of what a single woman could accomplish on her own. Huerta was also never put in the position of serving her brothers. She fought for the cause because she believed in it, not because she was trained to follow the lead of a male figure who needed her loyalty and cooperation.<sup>242</sup> She was a leader who could hold her own with men. Richard Garcia, movement historian, wrote that she was a woman caught between the old and the new, who managed to get along without relying on her femininity.<sup>243</sup>

Huerta rapidly became one of the farm labor movement's leaders. Although her title did not always reflect it, she was second in command to Chavez. She had been involved in farm labor movements before and had introduced Chavez to some of the people who influenced his thinking and organization. Long before her involvement with Chavez's union, Huerta had wanted to be involved in organizing farm labor. She met discouragement however, as people informed her that it wasn't something a woman should do. Father McCullough, a priest who worked with immigrant workers, told her

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<sup>242</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 62-63; Richard Garcia, 60; Dick Meister and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 117; Mirande, 233; Manuel P. Servin, *An Awakened Minority: The Mexican-Americans* (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1970, 1974, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 284; Huerta, interview with Baer and Matthews.

<sup>243</sup> Richard Garcia, 59-61.



that it was “no place for a woman.”<sup>244</sup> Eventually she made second husband, Ventura Huerta, quit work and attempt to organize for her.<sup>245</sup>

Not surprisingly, this marriage failed, and Huerta would look for other ways to build the union. She found her place when she join Chavez’ efforts in 1962. Willing to do whatever was needed for the union, she trained herself in contract negotiations. For her union work, she was arrested 22 times and investigated by the FBI. As she worked, she earned a nick name, *La Pasionaria*, a nickname used for Mexican female activists in the past. She claimed that being a woman was not a hindrance to movement involvement. She said that women, who were more patient, made the best contract negotiators. Farm workers would take help from anyone, anyone who offered it, even a woman.<sup>246</sup> Huerta’s devotion won her the well deserved revolutionary nick name, but her image would cause problems.

A single, twice-divorced, mother, her image was problematic. It would have been difficult for the union to promote her and to still maintain the image of the cause as a traditional one. Until she developed a name for herself among the farm workers, men

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<sup>244</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 70.

<sup>245</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 60; Richard Garcia, 59.

<sup>246</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 59; Ferriss and Sandoval, 105, 136; Dolores Huerta, “Dolores Huerta Talks About Republicans, Cesar, Children and Her Home Town” *La Voz del Pueblo*. (November-December 1972). Reprinted, Edited by Manuel P. Servin, *An Awakened Minority: The Mexican-Americans*, (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1970, 1974, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 286; Huerta, interview with Baer and Matthews; Sam Kushner, *The Long Road to Delano* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 169; Leonel Martinez, “Huerta has Devoted Life to Union,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 25 Sept. 1995.

<sup>246</sup> London and Anderson, 67; Peter Matthiessen, *Sal si puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution* (New York, Random House, 1969), 50.

would not talk to her.<sup>247</sup> Some Mexican American women did not like her because they felt that in being devoted the cause, she had neglected her responsibilities as a mother.<sup>248</sup> A divorced woman, she supported her family off of union donations and child support.<sup>249</sup> This meant that she could not be portrayed as a traditional woman in the same way that Helen Chavez was.

Huerta did not try to build up an image of herself as a traditional mother and woman. Occasionally others tried to do that for her, and occasionally she used the rhetoric to counter attack criticism, but she did not try to create the image for herself. Historians, reporters, the AFL-CIO, and others occasionally described her as a mother, citing the number of children that she had and her relationship with them.<sup>250</sup> One particularly interviewer said that "...I can't believe it from looking at you, that you are the mother of seven children. You look much too young and much too pretty to bear that enormous responsibility."<sup>251</sup> On another occasion, Representative Philip Burton introduced Huerta at a Congressional hearing saying "Mrs. Huerta, the mother of seven children, is truly one of the unsung heroes of this effort to help the poor." Huerta, as she

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<sup>247</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 76.

<sup>248</sup> Griswold del Castillo and Garcia, 61; Ferriss and Sandoval, 77.

<sup>249</sup> Ferriss and Sandoval, 77.

<sup>250</sup> London and Anderson, 67; Peter Matthiessen, *Sal si puedes: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution* (New York, Random House, 1969), 50; Dolores Huerta, interview on "Labor News Conference," 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

<sup>251</sup> Dolores Huerta, interview on "Labor News Conference," 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

often would, rapidly moved on, ignoring the part about herself as a mother, and talking about the movement in general and everyone who had played a part.<sup>252</sup>

If pressured about her role as a mother, Huerta would try to portray her involvement in the cause as an extension of motherly duties. She knew that how a woman handled the criticism could make or break her involvement in the union.<sup>253</sup> She argued that women were badly needed in the cause and that they should not abandon it upon marriage. The children she explained were raised by everyone, the union members helped when needed.<sup>254</sup> Her children also joined her in her work, helping on the boycott, on the picket lines, and passing out leaflets.<sup>255</sup> She felt she was doing what God had called her to do and that her children had turned out alright despite the nontraditional family situation.<sup>256</sup> Thus Huerta sent the message that her behavior was not really all that radical. She was being obedient to God, and in the process improving the futures of workers, many of whom had children like her own.

Despite these defense tactics, the union still did not publicize her as one of the leaders. Huerta herself went along with that. When an interviewer for the Labor Press Conference series ran by the AFL-CIO commented that it seemed the union had woman power, Huerta was quick to deflect attention from herself. She remarked that there were

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<sup>252</sup> AFL-CIO News, 13 May 1967. UFWOC, Box 1, Folder 1.

<sup>253</sup> Huerta, "Dolores Huerta Talks," 287.

<sup>254</sup> Richard Garcia; Hoobler and Hoobler, 101; Huerta, "Dolores Huerta Talks," 287; Jean Murphy, "Unsung Heroine of La Causa," *LA Times*, 21 December. 1970; Dolores Huerta, interview on "Labor News Conference," 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

<sup>255</sup> Dolores Huerta, interview on "Labor News Conference," 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

<sup>256</sup> Huerta, interview with Baer and Matthews.

a lot of women in the strike, saying that “We have Cesar’s wife. Helen, who heads up our credit union. We have a nurse – a young volunteer who has been helping us for the last few years and has formed the Farm Workers Clinic....”<sup>257</sup> Her two examples were women who were in much more traditional work and positions than she was. Helen was the obedient wife, and the nurse was in traditional women’s work.

Leadership in the movement had to appear to be masculine, and it did. Often lost in Chavez’s shadow, Huerta is rarely seen in published photos of the movement. The leaders of the UFW would be recognized to be Chavez and Larry Itliong, former leader of the primarily Filipino Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC). Huerta does not appear in the Sacramento March pictures. In the Mass concluding Cesar Chavez’s fast, the union woman pictured is not Huerta the leader, but Helen the wife.<sup>258</sup> Although she was in leadership, her role was made nearly invisible. This meant that sometimes people did not recognize her as a union leader. Huerta once received a letter from a woman who worked for the Industrial Union Department in Illinois. This woman wrote almost apologetically to explain that she had scolded a Teamsters official who had complained to her that his Los Angeles colleague was being “shunted off to some woman.” Figuring that the woman was Huerta, the correspondent had informed him that the woman was probably the union vice president.<sup>259</sup> A fellow labor leader interested in

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<sup>257</sup> Huerta, interview on “Labor News Conference,” 3 December 1968, WKP, Box 8, Folder 2.

<sup>258</sup> Kushner, 157.

<sup>259</sup> Jeanne (no last name) to Dolores Huerta, 18 May 1966, UFWOC, Box 6, Folder 18.

the movement had not known who she was. Neither did much of the rest of the world acknowledge her and her work.

The gender images created by the union in the California grape strike were made largely to maintain and increase their membership base. The union had to promote traditional gender roles. Such imagery was of little practical promotional value outside of the Mexican American community. However within it, it was very important; men and women had to be assured that Mexican American gender roles would not change. In their efforts, the union had to develop a form of machismo which upheld nonviolence. A real man was now one that led his family into the nonviolent union. Helen Chavez showed how women could be involved and still be the modest obedient wives they were expected to be. Huerta, and active women like her, often found themselves in the position of altering their image or justifying their roles in traditional manners. Mexican Americans were then left to hope that both their economic picture might improve and their comfortable family lives would remain the same.

In recognition of a male dominated society, both the civil rights and the farm labor movements promoted the traditional woman. African American women had conservative activist heroines held up as examples. Coretta Scott King herself would be glorified as the ideal wife and mother, who was an example to other African American women. Helen Chavez would similarly be praised. Both of these women cultivated reputations as loving mothers and wives who supported their husbands in their respective causes. They were both conservative models for their times. Coretta kept to conservative clothing and hair styles. Helen did the work that her husband needed to do, following

him in his goals and desires. More radical women such as Dolores Huerta in the farm labor movement and Ella Baker, Septima Clark and Diane Nash, associated with the SCLC, tended to receive less exposure. While their work was important, perhaps even more important than the work of the wives, their images were problematic in a society that placed a high value on traditional women and families.

### **Children and Families in the Movement**

Both King and Chavez displayed strong supportive attitudes toward family and children. King saw his movement as increasing the strength of the African American family. In his beginning stages, King also saw the movement as something that would protect children. That image later changed with the use of children in Birmingham protests. Chavez knew that to keep a worker devoted to the cause, family support and agreement was needed. He then portrayed his movement as one which was a support and extension of the traditional Hispanic family.

There was a climate of concern about families and children in Cold War American society. Some of that concern was from within the African American community, some from within the larger American community. In general, the American public was concerned with creating strong families. Women were expected to stay home and be content with their families; even famous movie stars were shown doing the grunge work associated with home. For their part, men were expected to provide for their families in a culture of consumerism.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Basic Books, 1999).

In the African American community itself, fears abounded concerning the African American family. *Ebony* talked about economic equality in 1966, pointing out that African American women would often work when their children were young, head a household, and that African American families were more likely to be poor than whites. The hope here lay in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which promised equal pay for women.<sup>261</sup> African Americans also pointed out that the family would have to change as an increasing number of African American families strove to become middle class. C. Eric Lincoln wrote that middle class was not just an economic status but a way of life. It was a series of social patterns of behavior which were imbedded in American society. Thus, if the African American family wanted to be middle class, they'd have to adopt middle class life styles.<sup>262</sup> *Ebony's* editorial of that same issue which focused on African American women, agreed, saying that "The immediate goal of the Negro woman today should be the establishment of a strong family unit in which the father is the dominant person and the children are brought up to respect not only their parents but the rights others." The children would then be more likely to stay involved in school, and less likely to be in gangs. If there was no father figure available, then the mother should attempt to find one for her kids.<sup>263</sup> These articles came close to articulating the idea that if one was going to be accepted as a normal American, one would have to live and act like white middle class Americans.

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<sup>261</sup> "The Long Thrust Toward Economic Equality," *Ebony*, August 1966.

<sup>262</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, "A Look Beyond Matriarchy," *Ebony*, August 1966.

<sup>263</sup> "For a Better Future," *Ebony*, August 1966.

A mainstream demonstration of concern about African American families was the Moynihan Report. Officially known as *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, it was published by the Office of Policy Planning and Research in the Department of Labor in March of 1965. The report was introduced to an American society in turmoil. President Johnson only the year before had begun to gear up for and promote the War on Poverty, so there was a concern about the economic conditions of Americans. Thanks to journalists, the Watts Riots in Los Angeles had provided Americans with a disturbing picture of African American men in inner city life. Moynihan offered a neat explanation for contemporary problems: the alleged long-standing break down of the African American family.<sup>264</sup>

This report warned Americans that the African American family was at the point of collapse, especially among the lower classes. They warned that in city areas nearly one quarter of African American marriages ended in divorce, and that nearly one-fourth of African American births were illegitimate, something that was eight times the rate of white illegitimate births. This meant that nearly one-fourth of African American families were headed by females, a group which was more likely to be dependent upon forms of welfare, particularly Aid for Families with Dependent Children. The authors of the report blamed this trend on a variety of causes, starting with slavery and Reconstruction, which they said conspired to set up the African American woman as the head of the family. A lack of employment opportunities and low wages in recent times served to further this imbalance within the family. This had in turn led to a matriarchal society

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<sup>264</sup> Steve Estes, *I AM A MAN*, 107-129.



within the African American population. Children, particularly young boys, then found few strong working men as role models to emulate later in life. This lack of positive male role models led to more juvenile delinquency and alienation from the patriarchal American society, which took the forms of a refusal to look for work or the development of narcotics habits. The theme of the report then was this, to solve the problems of African American families, one had to improve the position of African American men and end the culture of matriarchy, thus ensuring that African American men could take on the responsibilities and live as white men did.<sup>265</sup>

King called for strong African American families. Even at the early stage of his career, King believed that men should spend time at home and with their families, advice he passed on to readers of *Ebony* in 1958.<sup>266</sup> King also talked to his congregations about the proper treatment of children, saying that there were just some unwritten laws that people should follow. In regards to children these laws included not only supporting them, but loving them, spending time with them and not being so busy that you neglect them.<sup>267</sup>

To some extent, King agreed with the Moynihan Report. He lamented the fact that African Americans had high illegitimate birth rates, telling the audience of “Face the Nation” in 1965 that many African American men had never had a chance to assert his masculinity due to slavery and segregation and the rise of the matriarchy. These men

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<sup>265</sup> *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1965).

<sup>266</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “Advice for Living,” *Ebony*, April 1958.

<sup>267</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “A Walk Through the Holy Land,” 29 March 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 164-175.

then often left their families and created more illegitimate children. King saw the problem here as less matriarchy based and more one of economic security.<sup>268</sup> These same ideas, King later repeated these same ideas in a speech at the University of Chicago on African American families. There he too detailed the rise of woman centered families and discussed the impact of that on African American men. He continued not to focus on matriarchy, but to blame the economic system which deprived African American men of well paying jobs. It was a miracle King concluded, that the African American family had survived at all<sup>269</sup>

In his early days, King also saw the movement as one that should protect the bodies, minds, and rights of African American children. In the Montgomery movement, King had talked about the cause as having given the children a sense of pride and hope for a better world ahead. Yes, he admitted, these children knew that tensions were high in Montgomery at the moment, but they also knew that the cause would in the end change their lives for the better.<sup>270</sup> Around that same time, King addressed school desegregation. He referred to school segregation as something that psychologically harmed them, made them feel inferior. In 1956, a year after the Montgomery movement had began; King told an educators' group that segregation was wrong for three basic reasons, the second one being that it gave the segregator and the segregated false perceptions as to their value in

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<sup>268</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview on "Face the Nation," 29 August 1965, MLK Speeches, III, Box 9.

<sup>269</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Negro Family," 27 January 1966, SCLC, Box 28, Folder 22.

<sup>270</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "We are Still Walking," *Liberation* vol 1., December 1956, 6-9. *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 445-451.

life. In particular he said, segregation had been proven by psychologists to change the personalities of children.<sup>271</sup>

Children were to be protected in another way as well. Although some people saw this as contradictory to his nonviolent stance, King praised President Dwight Eisenhower for sending troops into Little Rock's Central High school in 1957. King, as head of SCLC wrote to Eisenhower, thanking him for sending troops into Little Rock to make sure that Central High School would be integrated. He also asked the President to keep the troops in the school until the African American students could attend without fear of being physically or mentally harmed. King also used the occasion to call for a meeting between the President and African American leaders, as well as the formation of a Civil Rights commission.<sup>272</sup>

King also fell in with plans developed by A. Philip Randolph for a Youth March for Integrated Schools. The plan was for King to call for northerners to show support for southern African American students involved in integration. Eight northern African American leaders would then announce that they were planning a march of school-aged children down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC. In this way, children would highlight the problems of their southern peers.<sup>273</sup> By the time this march occurred in October of 1958, King would be recovering from his stab wounds received on a book

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<sup>271</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Desegregation and the Future," *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. III, 471-479.

<sup>272</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 5 November 1957, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 308-309.

<sup>273</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to Gardner C. Taylor, 2 September 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 483-485.

tour in Harlem. Coretta would give the speech in his place, complementing the youth for attending the march, and telling them that they were proof that American was changing and that the young people would no longer be quiet, but would work for the rights of Americans.<sup>274</sup>

King would praise the students on the front lines of school integration and the movement as well. In a speech made at the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual NAACP Convention, King addressed the young people. He praised them for their courage in the face of hostility and their use of positive action against segregation. He also praised their discipline, pointing out that they had done so much without violence coming from them, even though admittedly there would be occasional violence toward them.<sup>275</sup>

However this protective attitude toward African American children would be challenged when the 1963 Birmingham movement seemingly ground to a halt. An injunction prohibiting marching had been issued. King would violate it and be sent to jail, however this would not entirely inspire the community. Problematically, funds for bail were low, and although some adults might volunteer to go to jail, not all of them could afford to stay there for the time that it might take. The movement needed volunteers who could go to jail and stay there. Also participation in the mass meetings and protests had fallen, and as it did the media disappeared. Meanwhile James Bevel and a Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) member Isaac Reynolds would concentrate their

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<sup>274</sup> Coretta Scott King, Address at Youth March for Integrated Schools, 25 October 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 514-515.

<sup>275</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the Fiftieth Annual NAACP Convention, 17 July 1959, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 245-250.

efforts on recruiting and training high school students for the movement. King was reluctant to use these children but knew the movement needed to be revived. So, on a Thursday the teens were invited to a rally at a church. From there, hundreds of teens, many of them untrained in nonviolence, marched on city hall and were arrested. Inspired by the arrest of over 500 teens, participation shot up at the next day's march. That protest would be stopped in Kelly Ingram Park where the police commissioner Bull Connor ordered fire hoses and dogs turned on the protestors, many of whom were young teens. The resulting photographs horrified the nation and spurred President Kennedy to send federal officials to help in negotiations.<sup>276</sup>

King later justified using the children. When he was asked how could he justify using the children who might be hurt, King said that the children are hurt anyway, psychologically and spiritually. If they marched, it would serve to make the world notice and then something would be done about the problems they were marching against, segregation would be stopped. Considering how much segregation had hurt children, how much more could they truly be hurt by protesting and marching against it?<sup>277</sup> King would again defend his use of children when referring to the African American family. He pointed out that it was a struggle for African American families to develop normal family lives. These family ties could be renewed and strengthened if they fought together to change the society and end oppression.<sup>278</sup> African American children then marched to

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<sup>276</sup> Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 242-250.

<sup>277</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "What a Mother Should Tell Her Child," 12 May 1963, MLK Speeches, III, Box 4A.

<sup>278</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Negro Family," 27 January 1966, SCLC, Box 28, Folder 22.

improve the lives of themselves and their families in a society that had been atypically cruel to them.

Why had King changed on this point? Actually this wasn't a complete change. King had always felt that children needed to be trained to be socially responsible. As early as 1958, in an "Advice for Living Column," King wrote to a concerned parent that "Somewhere along the way every child must be trained into the obligation of cooperative living. He must be made aware that he is a member of a group and that group life implies duties and restraints. Social life is possible only if there exists a balance between liberty and discipline."<sup>279</sup> This children's march would then become an extension of the idea that children should be socially conscious.

Also, although it was called a children's march, many of those arrested were not young children. They were in fact high school aged youngsters. They were not all that much younger than many of their college aged peers who had become involved in the 1960 lunch counter sits. Many of them were the same age that the Little Rock Nine had been during their very long and turbulent year at Central High School. Of the Little Rock Nine, King had said as early as 1958 that they needed credit for standing against the threats and harm, and that they had inspired others with their dignity.<sup>280</sup> King himself received death threats related to school integration. One letter, signed by the KKK promised that they'd help get an African American man off of death row if King would just keep African Americans from the busses and schools. Closing their note by

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<sup>279</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "Advice for Living," *Ebony*, March 1958.

<sup>280</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview at Bennett College, 11 February 1958, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 363-367.

threatening that “Yours & Coretta’s Ass Will be blown ski-hi if you don’t behave,” the message was clear that King was to leave the issue of integration alone.<sup>281</sup> If King who was not directly involved in any high level school integration movement was getting threats related to it, he must have known that the Little Rock Nine and children like them were living lives full of unspeakable horrors. He would later say that “Lest it be forgotten, the opening of hundreds of schools to Negroes for the first time in history required that there be young Negroes with the moral and physical courage to face the challenges and, all too frequently, the mortal danger presented by mob resistance.”<sup>282</sup> In reality, the SCLC did not foresee the violence that was visited upon the protestors at Birmingham. Ralph Abernathy said that the leadership really did not think that cops would hurt children.<sup>283</sup> Perhaps the children would be roughed up, but surely not attacked. The organization expected that African American students could stand and fight nonviolently with few consequences. After all, they had often been put in the position of doing so in the past, particularly in instances of school desegregation movement. This would be, the SCLC leaders thought, nothing new for African American young people.

Also, the children’s marchers were not that much younger than their contemporaries in SNCC who would the next summer gear up for the Mississippi Summer Project. These were the same students that King had been meeting with ever

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<sup>281</sup> Anonymous KKK letter, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. IV, 489.

<sup>282</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Burning Truth in the South,” *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V., 447-451, first printed in *Progressive* 24 (May 1960) 8-10.

<sup>283</sup> Abernathy, 262.

since Ella Baker helped them organize them in 1960. At a Youth Leadership Conference that year, King addressed students from ten states who had been recognized as sit-in leaders. He told the press that “The students have taken the struggle for justice into their own strong hands.”<sup>284</sup> In short, the times had changed and King was forced to change with them. The African American youth of the country were not calling out to be protected and coddled by their elders. They were beginning a fight for their own rights on their own terms.

It made great publicity to have children and even entire families in jail. *Voice of the Movement*, a newsletter kept in SCLC files, highlighted the abuses through reports of a SNCC press conference of twenty young females, ages 9 to 13, who were kept in a small cell, in some cases for a month. While in jail they faced broken toilets, a diet consisting of hamburgers every day, and no beds.<sup>285</sup> The SCLC attempted to make headlines out of the arrest of children as early as August of 1960 with the arrest of the Shuttlesworth family. Fred Shuttlesworth, an SCLC leader from Birmingham, Alabama, had three teenage children who had traveled from Tennessee to Alabama that summer. En route, the bus driver insisted that the children obey the segregated setting rules. The children would not do so, and so in Alabama, the driver had the children arrested. They were roughed up by law enforcement while in custody. SCLC director Wyatt Tee Walker went to the jail to investigate at Shuttlesworth’s request and found that the one of the girls needed medical attention. The SCLC threatened a boycott of Greyhound bus

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<sup>284</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., Statement to the Press at the Beginning of the Youth Leadership Conference, 15 April 1960, *Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. V, 426-427.

<sup>285</sup> “Horror in Americus, Georgia,” *Voice of the Movement*, SCLC, Box 155, Folder 36.



lines should the matter not be resolved.<sup>286</sup> Three years later, the *SCLC Newsletter* chose to profile Hosea Williams because he had been in jail three times that year alone. His wife Juanita had been in jail once, his son Hosea II, age eight had been sent to an Orphan's Home for demanding that he be served an ice cream cone in a restaurant, and Williams' eleven year old daughter Elizabeth had been jailed four times.<sup>287</sup>

Reports of children being hurt and injured could stir up even groups that normally were very cautious about joining causes. One such incident brought out the teachers. African American teachers were historically reluctant to get involved in civil rights activities because their jobs could be and often were threatened. After incidents in Williamston, North Carolina however, African American teachers of that community decided to speak up. They wrote an open letter to the Mayor, the Board of Commissioners and the police department, describing their furor over the treatment of children near the campus. They asked for an immediate stop of police brutality including the use of cattle prods. They also asked for an investigation of past practices. How they asked, are we to teach children about government, citizenship and equal protection when this is happening near them?<sup>288</sup> The SCLC was thrilled. Less than two weeks later, they sent out their own press release, pointing out that all members of the association had

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<sup>286</sup> press release, 18 August 1960, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 3; Shuttlesworth Appeals to SCLC, press release, 29 August 1960, SCLC, Box 120, Folder 3.

<sup>287</sup> "Profile of the Month," *SCLC Newsletter*, August 1963, vol 1., no. 11. SCLC, Box 122, Folder 22.

<sup>288</sup> Martin County Teachers Association to the Mayor, Board of Commissioners, and Department of Police of Williamston, North Carolina, 30 August 1963, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 2.

signed this letter, and labeling it an “unprecedented move.”<sup>289</sup> The apparent abuse of children had inspired action and support of teachers, a normally silent segment of the African American community.

The farm workers union often tied appeals for help into requests for help for the children of the movement. In the summer of 1966, the union was nearing the end its first year on the picket lines, and the start of a new school year. Chavez and Chris Hartmire both sent appeals out asking for donations so that these children could have money for new clothes and new shoes. Tied into this request for the children were mentions that the union also needed drivers to transport workers to a union election to be held in late August at Di Giorgio ranch, a request for more food donations, and a request that the correspondents telegram Governor Pat Brown and request union elections at other ranches.<sup>290</sup> Union propaganda often had pictures of children or families. A request from the Hawaii Table Grape Boycott Committee begged people to buy only union grapes. It was accompanied by a monotone drawing of a family, a man with a mustache and a woman with long flowing hair who cradled a child in her arms. To the lower left of this image was a similar drawing of farm workers doing stoop labor.<sup>291</sup> In a flyer used during the Di Giorgio boycott, the union describes the harassment of workers, especially female pickets. The accompanying artwork included a picture of children in the upper left, with the caption that explain if these children wanted to eat they had to work in the fields. In

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<sup>289</sup> “Williamston, North Carolina, Teachers Voice Protest Against Police Brutality,” press release, 9 September 1963, SCLC, Box 121, Folder 3.

<sup>290</sup> Cesar Chavez to Dear Friends, 18 August 1966, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14; Chris Hartmire to Dear Friends, 18 August 1966, SNCC, Box 55, Folder 14.

<sup>291</sup> “Boycott Non-Union Grapes,” flyer, UFWC, Series I, Box 2, Folder 8.

contrast, the lower right side bore a cartoon sketch of a fat grower, meant to represent Di Giorgio Corporation, kicking back, legs crossed, wearing sunglasses, drinking wine and smoking a big cigar.<sup>292</sup> Similar leaflets were put out under the Farm Worker Relief Fund name.<sup>293</sup>

Actually the union has some real concerns about how children were used. They didn't always play these concerns up in propaganda, but they existed nonetheless. One of these concerns was the use of child labor. Jessie DeLaCruz told Anne Lofits about children who were taken to work with their parents who either didn't want to or could not afford to spend money on a baby sitter. The union DeLaCruz said would put an end to that, and the kids would be protected.<sup>294</sup> Gloria Steinem wrote a play, critical of the growers, which she sent to Cesar Chavez. The script of the play describes the fields as a place where there is no one to watch the children while their mothers are working and where each year many of them were hurt by the farm equipment.<sup>295</sup> The idea of ending child labor in the fields though may have been controversial. A lot of families felt that such child labor was necessary for the survival of the family. To broadcast that the union was against it might cost the union support.

Both King and Chavez and their groups would come in for their share of criticism about their treatment of children. King and the SCLC received criticism for using

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<sup>292</sup> "Don't Buy – S&W- Tree Sweet," flyer, VSP, Series V, Box 5, Folder 9.

<sup>293</sup> "Don't Buy Di Giorgio," flyer, NFWA, Series III, Box 6, Folder 20.

<sup>294</sup> Jessie DeLaCruz, interview with Anne Loftis, 15 December 1973, *Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman Vehicle for Social Change*, oral history collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>295</sup> Gloria Steinem to Cesar Chavez, script, 26 May 1969, UFWP, Series 3, Box 54, Folder 5.

children from many quarters. Ralph Abernathy would write that they were criticized not only by the press for using the children in Birmingham, but also by civil rights advocates who did not like the fact that the children had skipped school.<sup>296</sup> Malcolm X, who sometimes said that King's nonviolent movement was unmanly, targeted King for his use of children in Birmingham. Saying that "real men don't put their children on the firing line," Malcolm criticized the use of children in places that he thought men should be.<sup>297</sup>

Accusations that members of the farm labor movement had mistreated children would come largely from internal sources. When union staff member Fred Hirsch resigned from his position in 1968, he wrote a long letter to union leadership, complaining about problems he'd seen during his time there. One of the things he complained about was the use of children. Hirsch was upset because many of the teen age children of strikers had become anti-strike. He claimed that this was unfortunately because those teens could have been used in the movement. Instead, because of their parents' neglect of them, they wanted nothing to do with it. These kids he implies have become juvenile delinquents. In particular he castigates the union for letting Dolores Huerta abandon her children who have apparently been seen around town looking for somewhere to sleep or something to eat. Hirsch also details an incident where leadership let a man pass out Christmas presents who apparently had a reputation for child

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<sup>296</sup> Abernathy, 262.

<sup>297</sup> Steve Estes, *I AM A MAN*, 97.

molesting. This incident caused a lot of tension between Hispanic and Filipino groups in the union and ended up with some children having had to talk to the police.<sup>298</sup>

Susan Drake regretted the apparent neglect of some of the children. Like Hirsch, Susan Drake concluded that movement was tough on families, and that many children of devoted union parents may have turned against it because their parents weren't around. Although her criticism of Huerta is softer, she claims that one of Huerta's daughters had mental problems which might have been less severe if her mother had been around. The Drakes divorced, but Susan didn't blame the movement for that, saying that involvement in the movement probably kept their marriage together longer.<sup>299</sup>

Both groups had some very real concerns about children. King and the civil rights movement were concerned about the slow pace of school integration. Chavez and the farm labor union worried about children used in the work force. Both of their concerns were very real, but both groups managed to use children promote other concerns of their organizations. Both groups found that the use of children made great propaganda. Because the SCLC's treatment and use of children put them in danger however, critics would be much more vocal in expressing their concerns. Those who worried about children in the farm labor union were largely concerned that these children were neglected by adults who were too caught up in the cause. Thus their criticism was delivered in a more private manner.

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<sup>298</sup> Fred Hirsch, Some Personal Notes on Delano, 2 June 1968, WKP, Box 13, Folder 2.

<sup>299</sup> Susan Drake, interview with Sydney Smith, 28 May 1980, SMTH, Box 2, Folder 5.

The images of children and gender promoted by King and Chavez were intended to persuade supporters that such movements offered them the security to be found within established social norms. Neither man nor their organizations truly challenged gender mores although they did attempt to convince their followers that nontraditional behaviors such as nonviolent action for men and protests for women were an acceptable pattern of gender appropriate behavior. These images joined images of nonviolence, religion, and patriotic or ethnic pride as methods that both men used to attract support to the cause. Given the similarities, it is no wonder that people began to see the movement as part of the same cause: the fight for minority rights in America. Unfortunately, the unification of such movements was never to be.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In his book published by the Farm Worker Press in Delano, California, Eugene Nelson frequently referred to Kern County, the county surrounding Delano, as Mississippi West. He referred to Tulare County, the county just to the North of Delano's border, as Alabama West.<sup>1</sup> Although Nelson's comparison is referring to the law enforcement tactics and the violence against the strikers that occurred on occasion, Kern County had more in common with the South than just bloodied marchers.

Many involved in the farm labor movement saw the Delano region much as Nelson had. To them, farm workers were in nearly the same situation as Southern African Americans. Many involved in the civil rights movement, such as the student groups and Martin Luther King Jr., himself, came to believe that there could and should be an alliance between the two groups. To some extent these leaders were right. There were many similarities between the two groups, and on the surface, their societies looked remarkably similar, their conditions of oppression were comparable, and by the time Cesar Chavez came into the public eye, King had shifted his focus to the economic issues of African Americans and the poor, so such a unified effort would have made sense. But such unified sense of purpose was not to happen. The less than wealthy whites of Kern County would never have supported such an alliance against the grower elite. King and

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Nelson, *Huelga: The First Hundred Days of the Great Delano Grape Strike* (Delano, CA: Farm Worker Press, 1966), 65, 96, 99, 103.

Chavez would also never be able to meet, first due to Chavez's ill health after his 25 day fast, and then due to King's untimely death. On top of that, issues with the African American community and other labor organizations might have meant that such an alliance would have become impossible.

The social hierarchy of Kern County resembled what remained of the Southern planter society in the South. Delano was the perfect microcosm of the problem. Southern towns had their African American versus white racial issues complicated by various economic layers within each group. Delano however had not only African American and white racial groups, but many others including Mexicans and Filipinos. Reverend R. B. Moore, the African American pastor of St. Paul's Baptist Church liked to describe the racial picture in Delano as fairly progressive. "Why," he said, "we got a regular little United Nations here in Delano... We got Mexicans on the police force and we got a Negro beautician in a beauty parlor."<sup>2</sup> If Reverend Moore's picture of racial harmony in the town was a bit overly optimistic, he still recognized a basic fact: Delano was racially diverse. Moreover, just as in the South, each of these groups had the potential to be and indeed often were divided along economic interests.

When John Dunne visited Delano in the mid-1960s to write about the early stages of the grape strike, he interviewed several of the town's leading members and found that they recognized such divisions. Joe Hochschild, Delano's mayor and a printing press operator, told Dunne "The Slavs are like the Mexicans. They have a heritage problem. They stay among their own, like the Mexicans do. Even people who were born here,

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<sup>2</sup> John Gregory Dunne, *Delano* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967, revised 1971), 124.



right here in Delano, they still speak with a Yugoslavian accent. But one thing the strike has done is bring the Slavs closer to the city people.”<sup>3</sup> If the farm labor movement accomplished nothing else, it had served, unintentionally of course, to unify those of European decent in the community.

Hochschild’s words describe the layers of white society in Delano. Many of the grape growers in the area were of Slavic or Sicilian heritage. The Slavs were and at times still are a society to themselves. There is a Slav Hall, where in the 1960s, Slav community members meet regularly for lunches and dances. A Slav Club was open only to Slavs and their spouses.<sup>4</sup> And, although their individual economic pictures varied, by and large the growers were considered the upper class of Delano.

Whites in town largely did not fit into this group. Delano is located in the San Joaquin Valley region. This was the area of the John Steinbeck’s Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath*. If Steinbeck’s tale distorts some details of the experience, he does not distort the prejudice faced by many migrants to the region in the 1930s, 40s and 50s.<sup>5</sup> Redneck chic as popularized by Merle Haggard from nearby Bakersfield would not take off until the late 1960s, epitomized by his 1969 release of “Okie from Muskogee.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout most of the 1960s, many whites in Delano would still feel the negative effects and the stigma of being migrants from Oklahoma, Missouri, Texas, and Arkansas.

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<sup>3</sup> Dunne, 112.

<sup>4</sup> Dunne, 105-107.

<sup>5</sup> In particular James Gregory attacks the stereotype of semi-literate, crude, dirt farmers that arose partly due to the popularity of Steinbeck’s novel., James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 111.

<sup>6</sup> James N. Gregory, 238-245.

It is little wonder then that many whites in Delano saw the grape strike as a chance to bind together with the town's elite, the grape growers. Here was a chance for whites normally not in the mainstream to gain some recognition and power for themselves, to ally their interests with that of the grape growers.

Whites in the town also identified too much with the growers to have supported a farm labor movement. This identity issue has been found by James Gregory to explain why it was very difficult to organize California's farm labor in earlier periods. The whites in farm labor in the 1930s saw the economic picture from the perspective of the farmer and defended their poverty level wages as all the farmers could afford. In fact, James Lucky who had worked for the DiGiorgio ranch in the late 1930s claimed that he hadn't seen "anybody taking advantage of anyone .... It was friendly and the bosses were good. In fact I talked to the old man DiGiorgio, the one that owned it, and little Joe .... they was just like common people. All the bosses were swell." Workers felt they had more in common with these "common people" millionaires than with unions that might have nonwhite or radical members.<sup>7</sup>

The heritage of many of the whites that flooded into the Valley during the previous three decades was a rural one. Many had come from small or tenant farms in the South or Midwest. Most of them probably had desired to buy land and grow crops in California. This gave them more in common with the growers than with the farm workers whose economic fate they had been more likely to have historically shared. Local whites would have greatly admired the California grape growers, many of whom

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<sup>7</sup> James N. Gregory, 163-164.

were second generation Americans, who had made a fantastic living from the land. These were immigrants who had made it. Whites in the valley, many of whom hoped to buy their own land, would not have felt a sense of class solidarity with the Mexican and Filipino farm workers.

James C. Ailes, Delano's Chief of Police talked admirably about the growers in this fashion. He admired Caratan, a Yugoslavian immigrant grower rumored to be worth some \$27 million. Ailes said, "But he made it. He's no different from the Mexican except for that. But he's still out here working everyday, laying pipe and the like. Well just because a man's successful he shouldn't be treated any different from the man who isn't. Hell, I'm a migrant. I migrated here from Nebraska, you just can't differentiate."<sup>8</sup> Ailes, a migrant from the Midwest, saw the growers as common men, trying to make their fortune through the cherished and revered occupation of farming. A challenge to that grower's property and livelihood would have been for Ailes a challenge to the migrant version of the American dream, the ability to move west, to buy property, and to make one's place in the world.

It was into this stratified society that Cesar Chavez came to build a farm worker's union. His union would take on the appearance of a civil rights movement although he made no pretensions of representing Mexicans of all classes in America. Because the Valley society was an even more complicated version of the Southern one, tactics used in the Southern civil rights movement would work very well in the farm labor movement. The union also defined visible goals such as a higher wage and the fair application of

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<sup>8</sup> Dunne, 114-115.

laws already in place, in a manner similar to the way in which Southern activists had demanded such things the hiring of African American bus drivers and equal access to their rights as granted in the constitution. It was easy and perhaps natural then, for Chavez to borrow from Martin Luther King Jr. and the early stages of the civil rights movement, the same movement that Chavez had observed while dreaming of building a farm workers union.

Although Chavez's movement came to closely resemble King's, and although by 1968, King had come to believe that the next stage in national progress needed to involve the poor of all races, the two men never met. King had acknowledged Chavez's work as early as September 19, 1966; one year after the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) had joined the grape strike. King pointed out that the fight for equality was one they were both involved in and one that was fought in many areas. King telegrammed Chavez that "We are together with you in spirit and in determination that our dreams for a better tomorrow will be realized."<sup>9</sup> There had been tentative plans for the two to meet. King telegrammed Chavez March 6, 1968 to request his presence at a meeting of leaders concerned with the nations poor. The meeting was to take place in March 14 and 15, 1968 in Atlanta, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) offered to pay travel expenses if necessary.<sup>10</sup> But due to his long fast, Chavez could not be at the

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Cesar Chavez, telegram, 19 September 1966, MLK, Box 5, Folder 21.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Cesar Chavez, telegram, 6 March 1968, UFW, Box 2, Folder 7.

meeting.<sup>11</sup> King admired this fast and had already sent a telegram the previous day to tell Chavez so. The telegram read:

I am deeply moved by your courage in fasting as your personal sacrifice for justice through nonviolence. Your past and present commitment is eloquent testimony to the constructive power of nonviolent action and the destructive impotence of violent reprisal. You stand today as a living example of the Gandhian tradition with its great force for social progress and its healing spiritual powers. My colleagues and I commend you for your bravery, salute you for your indefatigable work against poverty and injustice, and pray for your health and your continuing service as one of the outstanding men of America. The plight of your people and ours is so grave that we all desperately need the inspiring example and the effective leadership you have given.<sup>12</sup>

Another meeting with King was planned for March 16, 1968, but that too never occurred.<sup>13</sup> Chavez's twenty-five day fast ended on March 11, but his health had been damaged, and it would be months before he was ready to take on a very active role. Unfortunately, King did not have months left to complete his life of work. He was assassinated on April 4, 1968. Thus, death ended the hope of an alliance between the two most well known of the civil rights leaders.

The SCLC did try to continue King's plans for an attack on the nation's poverty, and they did continue to try to form alliances with Chavez and the farm labor movement, even after King's death. Ralph Abernathy tried to get Chavez involved in the Poor People's March. He, Andrew Young and Bernard Lafayette sent Chavez a telegram on

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<sup>11</sup> Poor People's Campaign, Black and White Together, press release, 15 March 1968, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 10.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., to Cesar Chavez, telegram, 5 March 1968, UFWP, Box 30, Folder 13.

<sup>13</sup> This meeting apparently never occurred due to Chavez's ill health following the fast, although the Poor People's Campaign released an ill-planned press release dated Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup> which claimed that King was going to meet that weekend with Cesar Chavez in Delano. Poor People's Campaign, "Dr. King Touring Nation in Poor People's Campaign," press release, SCLC, Box 122, Folder 10.

June 4, 1968, begging Chavez to come to Washington as he was needed immediately. The SCLC also planned for a grant to develop a Poor People's Embassy, an organization which would constantly fight for the rights of the poor. They invited many people from the poor people's campaign to join as representatives including Chavez and Dolores Huerta as representatives of the farm workers union.<sup>14</sup> Abernathy also joined a farm workers march in Coachella, California, in 1969. Chavez wrote and thanked him, explaining that the "solidarity of black and brown brothers is essential to our common struggle for justice and dignity. Your active commitment to brotherhood as a way of life is a sign of what we are trying to create in this country."<sup>15</sup> Coretta Scott King visited Chavez in jail in 1970 when he defied a court injunction against boycotting Bud Antle, Inc. Jessie Jackson allowed Chavez to come to Chicago to promote his lettuce boycott among Operation Breadbasket participants in late 1970. Jackson used the 1970 opportunity to protest the National Tea Company not only for selling non-union lettuce, but also for failing to hire African Americans and put money into African American banks. He also made an appearance at a fast Chavez underwent in 1988, a fast which was even more dramatic than Chavez's 1968 fast.<sup>16</sup> Some African Americans did indeed support the grape boycott in large numbers. In Detroit, African Americans connected with the *Eastside Voice of Independent Detroit*, no doubt influenced by the union nature

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<sup>14</sup> Proposal for a grant to plan the development of a Poor People's Embassy, UFW, Box 6, Folder 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Abernathy to Cesar Chavez, 4 June 1968, UFWP, Box 69, Folder 11; Cesar Chavez to Ralph Abernathy, 17 September 1969, UFWP, Box 69, Folder 11.

<sup>16</sup> 13 November 1970, FBI, 100-444762-197; 17 November 1970, FBI, 100-444762-198; FBI, 157-15963.

of the town, determined that they would help the United Farm Worker's (UFW) cause by checking stores and publicizing the boycott. For them, the Poor People's March had given birth to a cross-racial coalition of the poor, and this was their contribution to the cause.<sup>17</sup> However, much of this alliance took place after King's death in 1968, as the civil rights movement was losing much of its importance and prestige in America. Had King lived, or had the SCLC been able to take leadership of an interracial movement for America's poor, there might have been the possibility of a stronger partnership between the two groups. This was not to be however, and so King and Chavez's strongest legacies lay in the work in the 1960s, the work that was oriented toward their own racial and ethnic groups.

Ralph Abernathy knew the movement fell apart after about 1965. In his autobiography *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*, he listed five reasons for the SCLC's decline in influence. Abernathy believed that one of the reasons the movement fell apart was that it had been successful at eliminating both segregation and voting discrimination. This meant that many of the original supporters of the movement felt that their work was done; they were not ready to fight for economic equality. The second reason that Abernathy listed for the failure of the movement was its shift to a Northern focus. Northerners, both African American and white, argued that the North did not have racial problems like the South did. The movement's efforts in Chicago then cost the SCLC support. Abernathy's third reason for the SCLC's decline was that nonviolent protest was increasingly out of fashion among young African American leaders.

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<sup>17</sup> Iram Hareem, "Local Blacks to Aid Boycott of Grape Merchants," and "Black Youth Picket Royal's in Grape Boycott," in *The Ghetto Speaks*, vol. 1, UFWA, Part I, Box 4, Folder 20.

Abernathy said that young men such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown were destroying the movement's credibility in both the African American community and with the press. The fourth reason that Abernathy listed for the failure of the movement was the shift in focus from racial to poverty issues. While many people were content to see the movement and the government address racial issues, they were not so content to see these groups address economic injustice, as it would mean higher taxation. Abernathy's last explanation for the decline of the movement was weariness on the part of supporters. He believed that many of the people were tired of the struggle that they had been in for so long. Furthermore, contributors were also weary and not as inclined to give to a movement which addressed the economic issues of a variety of groups and seemed so far reaching and never ending.<sup>18</sup>

Chavez continued the fight to unionize the table grapes. His most successful tool was the grape boycott. The union was given hope that this was succeeding in July of 1969 when grape growers filed a law suit which claimed that the farm labor union's efforts had cost them \$25 million.<sup>19</sup> By April of 1970, the table grape growers were ready to sit down at the bargaining table. The first to give in were not the Delano growers; rather they were growers from the Coachella area. Bruno Dispoto, a Delano grower, signed with the union the following month. Other growers in the Kern County area followed in June. There were still some twenty-six growers from the Delano area

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<sup>18</sup> Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 494-498.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 155.



who managed to hold out until late July. But on July 29, 1970, they too signed with the United Farm Workers. Chavez had succeeded in putting under union contract 85% of all California's table grapes.<sup>20</sup>

But this would be the last of the major triumphs. When the UFW turned from Delano and began to organize in Salinas, they found that the Teamsters had already signed contracts with the growers there; contracts which many felt were not in the best interest of the field workers. At the time, the Teamsters were in the AFL-CIO, and so this was considered a raid upon UFW territory. The AFL-CIO pressured the Teamsters to withdraw with limited success. Based upon this internal disorganization, the growers felt free to ignore both the Teamsters and the UFW throughout 1971 and 1972. When the 1970 table grape contracts expired in 1973, many of the growers signed with the Teamsters, and by September of that year, the UFW had lost 90% of their contracts to the Teamsters. These conflicts with the Teamsters would continue for years. The UFW also failed to win big contracts in other fields, other types of produce, and in other states. With the rise of Ronald Reagan conservatives in California, Chavez could not count on the state government for support either. On top of this, courts began to rule in favor of growers in anti-boycott suits. When Chavez died on April 23, 1993, he was in San Luis, Arizona, preparing to testify in support of a union appeal to overturn a judgment against

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<sup>20</sup> Ron Harley, "Why They Signed with the Union," *Farm Quarterly* (Sept-Oct 1970); "Arvin Growers Sign!" *El Malcriado*, vol. 4, no. 2; Gary Girard, "UFWOC, 26 Growers Sign Pact," *Bakersfield Californian*, 30 July 1970.

the union which provided a \$5.4 million dollar settlement to Bruce Church, Inc., for damages that incurred during a union boycott.<sup>21</sup>

There were other issues that probably would have prevented an effective multi-racial alliance. For instance, the Teamster issue would have eventually played a big role. The Teamsters did have their eye on expanding by unionizing field workers, and at times they were able to successfully challenge Chavez's plans. But, many Teamsters' members were African American, and the Teamsters union had supported King's cause. In fact, in April 1965, King had written to James Hoffa thanking him and the Teamsters for their \$25,000 donation.<sup>22</sup> Hoffa had even expressed sympathy with King's plans to boycott Alabama products and would have liked to have helped in some way that would not violate union contracts.<sup>23</sup> To some extent, the Teamster's alliance with the civil rights movement made natural enemies of an important portion of African American and Mexican labor.

But King did not live to face such conflicts. Instead, his early death meant that his first decade of civil rights work defined his image and the image of his organization, the SCLC. He would be remembered largely as a man who, through nonviolent means, had fought for justice for African Americans. At King's funeral, Ralph Abernathy spoke of him as a prophet "who was imbued with the philosophy of non-violence," and who was sent to heal a sick nation and to free African Americans as Moses had helped to free

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo and Richard A. Garcia, *Cesar Chavez: A Triumph of Spirit* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 116-138, 172-173.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. to James Hoffa, 12 April 1965, MLK, Box 12, Folder 44.

<sup>23</sup> James Hoffa to Martin Luther King, Jr., 29 March 1965, MLK, Box 12, Folder 44.

the Egyptians.<sup>24</sup> *Ebony* magazine spent much of its May 1968 issue commemorating King's life. Their photo-editorial was titled "The Prince of Peace is Dead," and it portrayed King as a man who helped the little people, a true man of peace who would have hated the riots that followed his death.<sup>25</sup> An article by Lerone Bennett Jr., also mentioned the irony of the riots which followed King's death, and reported on King's recent discouragement with the progress of the nonviolent movement.<sup>26</sup> Ten years after his death, Chavez wrote about King, and said that in honoring King's memory, they were celebrating the effectiveness of nonviolence. From King, the farm workers union had borrowed useful strategies. Because of this, they would forever celebrate the man and his life.<sup>27</sup>

The image of the union as a nonviolent civil rights movement has also endured. Long after the grape strike had concluded, those who knew Chavez or knew of him would continue to recognize him as a man who followed the philosophies of Gandhi and King. Chavez's son said he was a man who had practiced nonviolence after the manner of Gandhi and King.<sup>28</sup> Marshall Ganz, a student who had worked with the farm labor movement, said that one of Chavez's "real gifts" was that he had made Gandhi

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<sup>24</sup> Funeral Service for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 9 April, 1968, MLK, Box 11, Folder 4.

<sup>25</sup> "The Prince of Peace is Dead," *Ebony*, May 1968.

<sup>26</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., "The Martyrdom of Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Ebony*, May 1968.

<sup>27</sup> Cesar Chavez, "He Showed Us the Way," *Maryknoll*, (April 1978) vol. 72, no. 4, 51-54, Audio Visual Collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Chavez, "Day Devoted to Cesar Chavez," *Bakersfield Californian*, 31 March 2001.

acceptable to Mexican American Catholics.<sup>29</sup> *Teatro* director Luis Valdez said that “Chavez didn’t just read about Gandhi, he became Gandhi.”<sup>30</sup> When Chavez died in 1993, his funeral was held at Forty Acres, the union compound in Delano. Mourners, marching through Delano, passed a school playground. The children at the school had lined up along the fence to observe the proceedings. A reporter asked those children what they knew about Chavez. One of them replied that Chavez was a man like King who had helped people.<sup>31</sup> In 2001, Californians celebrated the first official Cesar Chavez Day on the anniversary of his birth. When newspaper reporters writing an article about Chavez on the occasion of the first Chavez Day asked about his father, Chavez’s son, Paul, said that his father had helped Mexican Americans and others to gain civil rights and justice.<sup>32</sup> By the time of Chavez’s death, he was generally remembered by the public and by union insiders as a Mexican American civil rights leader, one who followed after the traditions of King.

The legacies that King and Chavez left further defined American protest traditions. Regardless of the race or economic class of the protestor or regardless of what issue one is protesting, one is expected to use nonviolent strategies. These two men and their organizations truly “made” the movements through a series of images and tactics related to nonviolence, religion, ethnic and national pride, and gender roles. Because of

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<sup>29</sup> Ronald Campbell, “Hartmire Recalls Religious Ties of Farm Union,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 25 Sept. 1985.

<sup>30</sup> Max Benavidez, “Cesar Chavez Nurtured Seeds of Art,” *LA Times*, 28 April 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Olivia Reyes, “Children Understand Impact of Chavez on Them, Parents” *Bakersfield Californian*, 30 April 1993.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Chavez, “Day Devoted to Cesar Chavez,” *Bakersfield Californian*, 31 Mar. 2001.

their making of history, they will be remembered as the two greatest individual civil rights leaders of the 1950s and 60s.

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