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THE USE OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT: AN INTERPRETATION

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Abstract. The roots of nonviolent direct action and the development into a powerful method of persuasion and coercion will be explored in an attempt to explain its distinctive role in the Civil Rights Movement. The paper will focus on the participation of the three actions, the political, the legal and the passive, in the victorious moments of the Movement.

Key words: African American history, Civil Rights Movement, Nonviolent/Passive Resistance, Martin Luther King, Pacifism.

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ПАССИВНОГО СОПРОТИВЛЕНИЯ В ХОДЕ ДВИЖЕНИЯ В ЗАЩИТУ ГРАЖДАНСКИХ ПРАВ: АНАЛИЗ

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Аннотация. В статье анализируются истоки ненасильственного прямого действия, как формы гражданского неповиновения, и его развитие в мощный метод убеждения и принуждения, с целью объяснения его особой роли в ходе Движения за защиту гражданских прав. Автор рассматривает три типа действий, применяемых в ходе Движения – политические, правовые и пассивные.

Ключевые слова: афроамериканская история, Движение в защиту гражданских прав, ненасильственное/пассивное сопротивление, Мартин Лютер Кинг, пацифизм.

I

“Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth?” [16, p. 2] asked Martin Luther King rhetorically in his letter from Birmingham jail. Nonviolent direct action was the cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement against white oppression in the Southern states. Nonviolent protest functioned as a means of pressure against

social injustice, racial discrimination and political ostracism, and assisted the Movement achieve some of its major accomplishments. Historians and political scientists have questioned the effectiveness of nonviolent action and criticized the significant role that legal and political action had in the Movement. To what extent was nonviolent action effective and how important was its role in the Movement? Was the creation of a

mass movement stimulated by nonviolent direct action or has its significance been exaggerated? Did nonviolent action generate political support for the Civil Rights Movement or did legal and political action play a more crucial role?

This essay will examine the adoption of nonviolent direct action by Martin Luther King and its distinctive role in the Civil Rights Movement. The roots and of this phenomenon and the development into a powerful method of persuasion and coercion will also be explored in an attempt to explain the role of nonviolent action in the Civil Rights Movement.

II

“The survival of democracy” said A.J. Muste “depends on the renunciation of violence and the development of nonviolent means to combat evil and advance the good” [17]. The idea of pacifism emanating by the idea of fighting evil with good was, and still is, the core of the Christian belief. The denial to use violence, as stems from Christianity, was known to Martin Luther King, Jr., from an early age. His roots lie in Atlanta, Georgia, where he was born on January 15, 1929 [2, p. 174]. As the son of Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., pastor of the prestigious Ebenezer Baptist Church, Martin Luther King Jr., was educated in the Black Baptist tradition of the Christian faith. M.L. King Jr., following his father’s footsteps into the ordained ministry, attended Morehouse College in Atlanta and Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania [15]. He obtained his doctoral degree in philosophical theology in 1955 at Boston University [13, pp. 97-111], where he deepened his knowledge on theological issues and became familiar with the idea of nonviolence.

As a scholar at Boston University, King studied the writings of several philosophers. From Kant to Aquinas and from Whitehead to Mill, King explored the ideas and thoughts of significant philosophers. Plato, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Rauschenbusch, Bentham, Hobbes and Marx gave him the theoretical background “to recognize all such ideologies, philosophies and attitudes whenever he found them” [13, p. 101]. An in-depth study of their philosophical ideas helped King to form his personal point of view on social, theological, economical and political issues. The

knowledge that he had gained during his university studies gave him the ability to be prepared for what he would confront as a civil rights leader. As L. Harold DeWolf, King’s doctoral advisor, mentioned, “He was quick to recognize all ideologies, philosophies and attitudes whenever he found them. He knew what he thought of them and how he wished to respond to them, for he had thought about such matters at the beginning” [13, p. 101].

King was introduced to Gandhi’s writings during the psychology of the religion course he took at Boston University [6, p. 43]. While still a student and before becoming a civil rights leader, he argued that the pacifist approach to a civil rights struggle other than India’s, would not be enough to guarantee success [6, p. 43]. King also admitted that, when he was still studying at the theological school, he believed that “the only way to solve the problem of segregation was an armed revolt” [6, p. 43].

A key role in King’s adoption of Gandhi’s philosophy was his collaboration with Bayard Rustin and Glenn Smiley. Both active civil rights workers, members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), they became King’s aids while he was a leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) [6, p. 67]. King was only twenty-six years old when he emerged as the leader of the MIA and it was clear that his rhetorical abilities and his educational background would help him in the new epoch that he was about to create. However, he was young and relatively inexperienced in situations such as the bus boycotts. Smiley, underlining King’s immaturity in one of his letters to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, wrote: “For being new at this (the Movement), King runs out of ideas quickly and does the old things again and again. He needs help” [6, p. 70].

Rustin’s and Smiley’s guidance was of great importance because they changed King’s conception of nonviolence. They presented it as a tactical weapon of resistance and infused him the doctrine of nonviolent direct action in order to make him believe firmly in its power. “King believes and yet he doesn’t believe”, wrote Smiley, “If he can really be won to a faith in nonviolence there is no end to what he can do” [14, p. 40].

Smiley and Rustin opposed the idea of King being a proponent of the nonviolence doctrine and

at the same time being protected by armed guards and living in an “arsenal” [14, p. 40]. In such a hostile environment, armed protection seemed preeminent, but it did not help King in creating an image of himself as America’s preeminent advocate of nonviolence [2, p. 173]. Martin Luther was aware of the theory of nonviolence and its use in India by Mahatma Gandhi but he doubted about its success in the deep South of the United States where armed-self defense prevailed.

III

The analysis and the presentation of the actual events could well be the subject of an entire paper but, because of the limitations of space, the events will be presented only briefly as base for the evaluation of the NVDA.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a benchmark for the Civil Rights Movement and a significant moment for King’s interpretation of the use of the nonviolence as a tactical weapon against segregation. Being president of the MIA, King had the opportunity to practice and evaluate the power of nonviolent direct action. In his article titled “The Pilgrimage of Nonviolence” published by the Christian Century magazine [10], King mentioned that: “The experience in Montgomery did more to clarify my thinking on the question of nonviolence than all of the books that I had read. As the days unfolded, I became more and more convinced of the power of nonviolence” [10, p. 423].

The boycott came to an end in December 21, 1956, one year after it had started, with a victory for the Negro community and success for the nonviolence technique. King was instrumental in leading the boycott and he emerged as the most promising civil rights figure. As Thomas Frazier mentioned in his study over the use of nonviolence in the sit-in movement, “King’s leadership in Montgomery was the first widely publicized appearance of the “new” Negro” [5, p. 36]. The new Negro that Alain Locke mentioned in 1925 when he was speaking of a “new spirit that is awake in the masses” [12] and which King, three decades later, mentioned stating that the Montgomery bus boycott created “a new Negro in the South, with a sense of dignity and destiny” [7, p. 97]. The creation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) gave King the opportunity to remain in a place where he could influence the African

American community to act methodically in order to succeed social change and justice.

“If the Negro is to achieve the goal of integration, he must organize himself into a militant and nonviolent mass movement”, King wrote in his book *Stride Towards Freedom* published in 1958 [5, p. 37]. King probably, in a way, foresaw that the power of nonviolence could boost the confidence of the African Americans and would unite the scattered incidents into an organized mass movement.

The bus boycott was only the beginning of a number of events, most of which originated by the theory of nonviolence. “The basic conception”, said Ella Baker, “was that it would capitalize on what was developed in Montgomery in terms of mass movement” [4, p. 3]. The student sit-in movement (1960) [4, p. 27] came after the boycott. The sit-ins were followed by the Freedom Rides (1961), the Birmingham demonstrations (1963), the March on Washington (1963) and the March from Selma to Montgomery (1965). The last march was one of the last major demonstrations of the Southern struggle which led to the Movement’s most significant political achievements: the enactment of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

“In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps”, Martin Luther King wrote in his *Letter from Birmingham jail*, “a collection of the facts to determine whether injustice exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action” [16, p. 2]. The MIA used all these steps in Birmingham and managed to achieve most of its goals. As the historical timeline shows, King was not content with his success in Birmingham but tried to capitalize his victory and create a mass movement. The Civil Rights Movement, in order to overcome the obstacles should gain political support, a fact which King well understood.

The use of the nonviolent action could give him the base he needed in order to generate a positive climate in the movement through persuasion of either the public opinion and the political leadership or both. We should always bear in mind that a mass movement cannot only reckon on one tactic, in our case nonviolent action. African Americans should not only overcome the prejudice of public opinion but make a hole in the wall of the political system, which excluded them from the social and political life of the nation.

IV

The significance of nonviolent direct action, in the form in which it was used by King and the SCLC, has been analyzed and commented by historians and political scientists over decades. There are controversies over this subject in terms of the important role of nonviolence tactics in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the role of visceral love in nonviolence as was underlined by King.

Primarily, King's tactics were based on the ideas Gandhi used in India as part of his strategy against the oppression of the Indians by the British Empire. The system of nonviolent tactic that Gandhi developed, the Satyagraha, among other things equated love with nonviolence [14, p. 41]. King raised public sense and created a moral high ground on which nonviolence was based. In *Stride Towards Freedom* King mentions that "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale" [5, p. 34], thus providing a connection between the moral principles of Christianity with these of Gandhian philosophy.

Adam Fairclough in his article *The Quest for Social Change* mentions that King "was simplifying complex ideas and communicating them in a way that black Southerners – poorly educated, politically inexperienced, but imbued with deep religious sensibility – could grasp easily" [4, p. 4]. On the other hand, James Cone in his article titled *Martin and Malcolm on Nonviolence and Violence* clarifies that despite the fact that King was influenced by his commitment to theology and God, a fact that emphasizes the infinite value of humanity and love, "it is another thing to love individual whites personally but quite another to use love as a political instrument of social change" [2, p. 176].

In spite of the significance of love in his theory and his persistence in nonviolence, King used the doctrine of direct action in order to do politics. David J. Garrow in *Protest at Selma* (1980), mentions that the nonviolence tactic fell into two phases [4, p. 2], nonviolent persuasion and nonviolent coercion. Adam Fairclough, analyzing Garrow's opinion mentions that King's first phase lasted from his appointment as a leader of MIA in 1956 until the Albany protests of 1961-

1962, while the second started after the failure of the Albany campaign [4, p. 2].

In the first period, King considered nonviolence as a means of "persuading Southern whites of the moral injustice of segregation and discrimination" [4, p. 2]. After the failure in Albany, he relinquished the tactic of persuasion because it was unable to achieve his goals and he turned to "nonviolent coercion" [4, p. 2]. "The organized strength of Negroes alone", King said some years after Selma, "would have been insufficient to move Congress and the administration without the weight of the aroused conscience of white America" [7, p. 225]. Additionally, Garrow believes that coercion was transformed into nonviolent provocation [4, p. 2] and that King's aim was to "stimulate legislation and law enforcement" [7, p. 224] through demonstrations. The role of mass media was more than crucial for both the stimulation of the public opinion and for the federal interference, a fact that King was clearly aware of. "The federal government", Garrow mentions quoting King "reacts to events more quickly when a situation cries out for its intervention" [7, p. 224]. In a passage from a 1964 volume, King underlined the fact that Southern African Americans as repressed people, should coerce the interaction of their tyrant the role of which had the federal government, mentioning that "instead of submitting to surreptitious cruelty in thousands of dark jail cells and on countless shadowed street corners, they would force their oppressor to commit brutality openly <...> while the rest of the world looking on" [7, p. 224].

On the other hand, Thomas Frazier argues that the use of the terms *passive resistance* and *nonviolent resistance*, "might imply merely a passive or non-active relationship to the social system" [5, p. 29]. Avoiding these terms, he prefers to use the term nonviolent coercion in order to underline the fact that the people who participated in the Movement cannot be accused of nonparticipation [5, p. 29]. He believes that both King and the CORE, organizer of the sit-ins, were profoundly influenced by the teachings of Gandhi. According to Frazier, the Movement followed the doctrine of Satyagraha, part of which was the dramatization of the situation and "the coercion with the tools of civil disobedience or noncooperation" [5, p. 34].

Elliot M. Zashin in *Disobedience and Democracy* (1972) disagrees with Garrow's opinion about the transition of nonviolent persuasion to nonviolent coercion. The experience of the Deep South, according to Zashin, proved that nonviolent action was not used as a means of persuasion. White segregationists did not rise "from the dark depths of prejudice and racism" [16, p. 2] and persuaded African Americans that nonviolent tactic can only be used as a means of coercion and pressure towards racists [4, p. 2]. Zashin quoting King mentions that the latter understood, that coercion was the only way to success and that the Civil Rights Movement should create "a crisis and foster <...> a tension" [4, p. 2].

On the other hand, Robert J. Glennon minimizes the significance of nonviolent direct action and moves a step further highlighting the role of law in the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. Glennon in his article entitled *The Role of Law in the Civil Rights Movement: The Montgomery Bus Boycott 1955-1957*, focuses "on the event that signaled the start of the modern civil rights movement" [8, p. 59].

The author downgrades the importance of the boycott and devalues the role of direct action in the movement, mentioning that nonviolence "assumed almost mythological proportions" [8, p. 60]. At the same time he criticizes other historians for exaggerating the influence of the boycott and not paying sufficient attention to the legal action. He believes that the bus segregation acted mostly as "a visible reminder of the southern caste system" [8, p. 62] and that the Montgomery bus boycott emphasized the fact that even though the largest percentage of the citizens who were using public transportation were African Americans, they were still treated as second class citizens.

Furthermore, Glennon mentions that the bus boycott can be taken as an example of the dedication of a community to fighting the unjust system and as an example of its efforts and persistence to achieve its goals. Yet, the author states that "however prolonged human effort, no matter how righteous the cause does not inevitably result in a favorable political change" [8, p. 61]. Despite the fact that the MIA brought the issue into national attention, it was not the one that succeeded in desegregating the buses.

Glennon analyzes the *Browder vs. Gayle* (1956) [8, p. 68] case in order to prove that it is

court decisions that influence the ultimate success of the desegregation and not the direct action campaigns. The Browder suit was based upon the ex parte Young case, a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court (1908) [18, p. 209] which allowed suits in federal courts against States or state officials, waiving in that way, the doctrine of sovereign immunity under which the state is immune to civil suits and criminal prosecutions [18, p. 209]. "The ex parte Young case", Glennon continues, "changed the procedure concerning injunctions against the operation of a state statute on the ground that it violates the constitution" [8, p. 69] and paved the way for the MIA to desegregate the buses by winning the Browder case. Moreover, these cases "completely bypassed the United States Court of Appeal and received an initial hearing before three judges and an immediate review by the Supreme Court" [8, p. 69]. This adjustment accelerated the procedure and the complaint could reach the Supreme Court a short time after the initial filing of the complaint, a fact that proved to be decisive for the success of the Montgomery bus boycott.

Apart from legal action, political action also played a distinctive role in the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. Manfred Berg in *The Ticket to Freedom, The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* charts the successes, the failures and the organized efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) to "politicize the black population" [1, p. XV]. The writer presents a detailed history of the NAACP revealing a dynamic and politically astute organization the primary aim of which was mobilizing African Americans to "assert their citizenship rights by trying to register as voters" [1, p. 5].

The NAACP, the oldest civil rights organization in the U.S., had been focusing on voting registration long before other civil rights organizations began voting registration programs. According to Berg, King's charismatic personality and his "gift for mesmerizing oratory" [1, p. 167] overshadowed the significant efforts of other organizations in different kinds of action. Berg indicates that the Montgomery bus boycott was primarily organized by the local NAACP branch and highlights the fact that Rosa Park herself was a high-ranked member of the local NAACP chapter. Furthermore, the writer mentions that the

NAACP “clearly preferred boycotts over sit-ins and demonstrations” [1, p. 177], bringing the organization against SCLC and CORE, which chose to use such means for action. According to Berg, the NAACP officials believed that boycotts would educate the white merchants “about their financial stake in desegregation” [1, p. 177].

Despite the scattered statements by NAACP officials, such as Roy Wilkins who claimed that he was the pioneer of direct action [1, p. 175] in an effort to contradict the criticism that the NAACP could only act in lobbies and courtrooms, the NAACP mainly focused on voting registration. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the NAACP won a number of court victories, the most famous of which was the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) [1, p. 5]. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the NAACP attorney Robert L. Carter suggested that the MIA file a federal court action to challenge the segregation laws, a step that led MIA to win the *Browder v. Gayle* case and achieve the desegregation of the buses in Montgomery [8, p. 67].

The NAACP was present in several frontlines of the struggle but the voter registration campaign was by far the most productive one, diminishing in this way the significance of nonviolent direct action in the Civil Rights Movement. Roy Wilkins stated that even if voter registration was “unglamorous work, less spectacular than sit-ins, freedom rides and mass demonstrations, it was more effective in the long run” [1, p. 188]. And indeed, a look at the tables Berg presents in his book, does indicate a remarkable increase in African American registered voters between 1956 and 1970. During this period the number of registered voters increased by more than two million [1, p. 188, table 3] and the percentage of the enrolled eligible Black voters rose from 29, 1 to almost 60 percent [1, p. 189]. Moreover, in 1960 there were twice as many eligible white southerners voters as blacks while in 1971 the number of black eligible voters registered had risen “with whites leading by just 6 percent” [1, p. 188].

The value of nonviolence is also examined and criticized in Lance Hill’s *The Deacons for Defense*. Hill beside the presentation of the history of the Deacons for Defense and Justice criticizes the significance of nonviolence in the

achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. In his opinion, nonviolence is a myth which was fabricated in order to delude African Americans into believing that passive resistance changed the attitude of the federal, the state government and white segregationists. It was used in order to persuade Americans that “the system had worked and the nation was redeemed” [9, p. 259] and that King’s nonviolent strategy led the movement to a victory.

Hill attacks the nonviolent organizations underlining that the organizations which defended and fought for nonviolence failed to achieve their goals. “Martin Luther King”, Hill mentions, “had fallen victim to state repression and terrorism” [9, p. 259]. Moreover, he mentions that both the “Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the SCLC had failed to secure local reform, voting rights, or protective federal legislation” [9, p. 259]. The writer clearly states that not only did nonviolence fail but also that nonviolence “in the form of streets riots and armed-self defense” [9, p. 259] forced the federal government to pay attention to segregation and pass laws in order to solve the problem. He believes that the threat of violence achieved more in a couple of years than the Civil Rights Movement in almost ten years. “Violence”, Hill continues, “played a fundamental role in uprooting segregation and economic and political discrimination from 1963 to 1965” [9, p. 259].

Armed self-defense, transformed into defensive violence, a term that describes the “collective acts of violence” [9, p. 260], was intended to protect the African American community from police brutality and white intimidation. “Thousands of black men” [9, p. 261] were in favor of armed self-defense, denouncing in that way nonviolence and becoming part of an aggressive type of movement, which Hill describes as “a form of collective political behavior” [9, p. 261]. After all, as Strain mentions in *Pure Fire*, self-defense was not illegal like the violent expressions of some parts of the black population, but, on the contrary, was “within the social and political matrices of American life, both legal and justifiable” [14, p. 179].

Moreover, Hill moves a step forward stating that moderate leaders, who did not in reality have the power of expressing their opinions and fighting for them, were enforced by the negotiation power

that was given by armed self defense and that they had never enjoyed [9, p. 262]. Moreover, he quotes Herbert Haines and William van Deburg, in an effort to corroborate his opinion, who also argued that “Black power rhetoric enhanced the bargaining position of moderates” [9, p. 330] “In the final analysis”, Hill continues, “the most important elements of contemporary black political identity and consciousness-group identity, racial pride, militancy without regard for white approbation to defend rights at all costs owe more to Malcolm X than to Martin Luther King” [9, p. 271].

Hill attacks the idea of nonviolence and devalues King’s strategy underlining that after all “violence and separatist rhetoric served to drive whites out of the movement” [9, p. 271], giving African Americans the independence and time to transform their consciousness and forging a new black identity [9, p. 272]. According to the writer, “nonviolence never intended to help African Americans” [9, p. 267] to create a new identity with self-respect and pride, due to the fact that King’s campaign lacked values such as masculine honor and self-reliance. Finally, he criticizes King for failing to support the image that both blacks and whites had of the African Americans as a passive and impulsive race and also for failing to challenge and uproot the stereotype from the heart of Americans, both white and black [9, p. 267].

Martin Luther King’s tactics and the significance of the role of nonviolence, as was presented above were severely criticized by historians who have been arguing the effectiveness of nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement and have underlined the underestimation of legal action (Glennon), political action (Berg) and armed self-defense (Hill). On the other hand, historians such as Adam Fairclough believe that the effectiveness of nonviolence in the Civil Rights Movement and its significance in King’s life and leadership must be examined in depth. This can only happen by taking into consideration “the dynamics of social change in the 1960s and the political world in which King and his followers operated” [4, p. 1].

Adam Fairclough, in his article titled *Martin Luther King Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change* examines the problems and the difficulties of studying King’s nonviolent direct action. At first, he mentions that King had never presented the nonviolence theory in a systematic

way “nor did he record a detailed account of his tactics” [4, p. 3]. Furthermore, it must be taken into consideration that nonviolence was a theory which King developed while he was growing up and becoming a more experienced leader and civil rights worker. It is possible to sketch the basic steps and aspects of nonviolence but it is difficult to define the exact theory, probably because the evolution of the theory was connected with the success or failure of the movement.

Moreover, Fairclough questions Garrow and Zashin who believe that King’s strategy underwent a change and shifted from persuasion to coercion. Fairclough does not only argue that King considered nonviolence as a form of “moral persuasion” [4, p. 3] but he also proves that, at least in his early years as a leader, he stated that nonviolence can be transformed into a useful tactical weapon through militant mass movement. He quotes King who said that “a mass movement exercising nonviolence is an object lesson in power under discipline” [4, p. 3].

The power of nonviolence might have been criticized and have given rise to arguments but under no circumstances it should be underestimated. King was young when he entered the struggle for civil rights and relatively immature in the world of the movement as a civil rights leader. His idealism and his absolute commitment to both the idea of nonviolence and the ultimate goals of the movement cannot be denied [4, p. 4]. His excellent rhetorical skills and his stunning personality helped to farther his cause but he never relied on these. King evolved nonviolence, learned from his mistakes and tried to find ways to make direct action more effective in order to be used some times as a means of mobilization and some times as a means of putting the state and the federal government under pressure. After the Freedom Rides, he understood that nonviolent protest can even force the federal government to take action, even against its will, only because the crisis that was created by the movement or the chaos that sometimes seems to be close at hand demanded government response [4, p. 5].

SCLC’s failure in the Albany campaign in Georgia proved to have taught a lot to Martin Luther King. A few years later, in the Birmingham and Selma campaigns King proved that he did learn from his own mistakes and that the practice of nonviolence was developed and became more

effective. He knew that if he wanted to succeed he should create a “serious local crisis through sit-ins, economic boycotts and demonstrations in order to negotiate the demands of blacks” [4, p. 5]. By generating the public concern, King hoped to instill a feeling of morality among white citizens in order to support the cause of blacks for equality and rights.

The Civil Rights Movement profited a great deal from the introduction and the increasingly important role of television in American society. Berg mentions that in 1960s “90 percent of all American homes <...> were introduced to the new medium” [1, p. 173]. He added that even if it is difficult to estimate the impact of television on the audience “the fact that images of hateful racist mobs and frenzied police descending on peaceful black demonstrators <...> can hardly be overestimated” [1, p. 173]. The power of both image and publicity supported the Movement and changed public opinion in favor of African Americans. After all, “in a crisis” King stated “we must have a sense of drama” [4, p. 10]. It is remarkable fact that even President J.F. Kennedy pointing out the contribution of television in the movement, stated that police commissioner Bull Connor, who ordered violent responses, which were broadcast nationwide and internationally, “had probably done more for the civil rights than anyone else” [1, p. 173].

Moreover, King was accused of provoking racist violence and the movement depending on violence. King believed that he “invited racist violence but he did not in any sense provoke it” [4, p. 11] while he emphasized that the only thing that he did was to bring violence before the eyes of Americans through the television. A situation that had its roots in the very past of the American nation and was part of the everyday reality of every African American in the United States was only then understood by the rest of the Americans. Even if King was accused of manipulating the black community, he did not exclude himself and his staff from the danger of white brutality and that is why he believed that he did not only provoke brutality but he was also another victim of white retaliation.

King understood the ultimate power of image so he used publicity to his advantage, transforming it into a tactical weapon together with images of gushing, beating, club-wielding and lynching he

succeeded in having a major impact on public feeling and morality [4, p. 11]. This also affected the government officials who feared the effect of negative publicity on local economy and a general reaction by the federal government. Just as Paul Good wrote, “the presence of reporters not only publicized their cause but also acted as a deterrent in places where officials feared bad publicity” [4, p. 11] because local governments dreaded federal pressure for desegregation and the possibility of forced interference in state governance. Moreover, publicity in a way protected demonstrators because, as Stanley Levison stated, it “restrained even the most vicious elements from moving out too freely” [4, p. 11].

The Civil Rights Movement achieved most of its goals, with the greatest success being the signing of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965). It is not a coincidence that the most significant laws for the African Americans were passed during the Civil Rights Movement. Legislation justified King in his efforts and persistence and gave him the strength to expand the movement. Fairclough mentions that King never took African Americans’ support for granted, thus he decided to not only to continue his fight in the South but also to relocate to the North and make Chicago his base.

The potential of nonviolent direct action seemed immense but King would never have expected the failure of the northern campaign. With more than 1 million blacks, Chicago was the great opportunity to expand the movement and mobilize the African American community to fight for its rights. Nevertheless, the cynicism and defeatism of blacks who lived isolated and poor, who were unemployed or underpaid made King to be out of tune [4, p. 12].

Segregation in Chicago did not seem present to such an extent as in Black Belt but that it was because it had been transformed mostly into economic segregation. The underprivileged northern African American population needed someone who could find solutions to their problems and who could create a feeling of unity and self-respect among them. King failed to give them what they needed but Black Power did. The uprising nationalism gained ground and put aside King’s nonviolence in a country where armed confrontations had never become obsolete. Malcolm X, the Nation of Islam and the Black

Panthers created an era which had been supported by many and rejected by others. Nevertheless, evolution is an integral part of history especially in a country with so many ideological, racial, economic and social antitheses.

V

Nonviolence direct action highlighted the necessity of an ideology without nationalistic ideas and violent reactions. According to this ideology, King taught the leaders of the next generations how to fight for their ideas and how to move off the beaten track. Nonviolence, so weak but so powerful, sought to wake people's consciousness without the use of armed-violence; created a movement, achieved most of its goals and transformed a simple reverend into one of the most influential leaders of the modern American history.

King's untimely death prevented him from offering more to public life, he, nonetheless, left a great heritage to next generations proving them that goals can only be achieved with resistance, effort, persistence and morality.

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