

A New Sense of Direction

Martin Luther King, Jr.

A few months before his assassination in Memphis, April 4, 1968, Dr. King spoke to the staff of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference meeting in retreat at Frogmore, South Carolina. He was preparing them for the Poor People's Campaign scheduled for the spring of 1968. This is Dr. King's last thorough evaluation of "the movement," its prospects and problems, in our possession.

While the description of urban violence may seem dated, Dr. King's analysis of the causes and cures of urban injustice remains disturbingly relevant. His understanding of what was happening among youth as well as his understanding of American militarism is, for better or worse, equally pertinent. Especially important, in view of current claims that Dr. King was undergoing a fundamental change of political philosophy toward the end of his life, is his concluding affirmation of non-violence.

This is about the third time that I've tried to grapple with this entire question of the "state of the movement" in our staff retreats, the question of *where we are* and *where do we go from here*. I assure you it isn't easy to have a new perspective each time on this same old question, but I've made an attempt to restate it in my discussion prepared for this evening. I hope as a result of our discussions, together we will be able to find new guidelines and "a new sense of direction."

In the recent past our struggle has witnessed two phases. The first phase began in the early fifties when Negroes slammed the door shut on subservience and submission; the adaptation of non-violent resistance to the oppressive conditions of our coun-

try. We moved black people into the Southern streets to demand that their citizenship and manhood be respected. Considering that we were in the South—with such a complex system of brutal segregation—indeed we were inaugurating a rebellion. For merely to march in public streets was to rock the status quo to its roots. Boycotting buses in Montgomery, demonstrating in Albany and Birmingham—the true citadels of segregation; defying guns, dogs and clubs in Selma while maintaining disciplined-tactical-non-violent strategy . . . all this was totally confusing for the racist rulers of the South. If they allowed us to march, they destroyed their myth that the black man was content. If they shot us down or brutalized us, they told the world that they were inhumane brutes. They attempted to stop us with threats of terror and fears—the tactics that had long been effective tools of suppression. Non-violent strategy had muzzled their guns and Negro defiance had shaken their confidence. When finally reaching for clubs, dogs and guns they found the world and the nation watching. *It was at this moment that the power of non-violent protest became manifest.* It dramatized the essential meaning and nature of the conflict and in magnified strokes made clear who was the evildoer and who was the undeserving and oppressed victim. The nation and the world were jarred awake and proceeded to wipe out thousands of Southern laws, ripping gaping holes in the edifice of segregation, through national legislation.

These were certainly days of luminous victories. Negroes and whites collaborated for the cause of human dignity. But we must admit that there was a limitation to our achievement. I have decided that this is the basic thing that I want to communicate.

Negroes became outraged by blatant inequality. Their ultimate goal was total, unqualified freedom. The majority of the white progressives were outraged by the brutality displayed. Their goal was improvement or limited progression. Obtaining the right

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to use public facilities, register and vote, token educational advancement, brought to the Negro a sense of achievement; he felt the momentum. But it brought to the whites a sense of completion. When Negroes assertively moved on to ascend the second rung of the ladder, a firm resistance from the white community became manifest.

Resistance began to characterize the second phase, which we are now experiencing. The arresting of the limited forward progress by white resistance revealed the latent racism which is deeply rooted in our society. The short era of widespread goodwill evaporated rapidly. As elation and expectations died, Negroes became more sharply aware that the goal of freedom was still distant. Our immediate plight was yet substantially an agony of deprivation.

In the past decade little has been done about the gross problems of Northern ghettos. This fact was evident because all civil rights legislation had been designed to remedy Southern conditions. A sense of futility and frustration spread and choked against the hardened white attitudes. Non-violence as a relevant protest form was under attack as a tactical theory. Northern Negroes expressed their dismay and hostility in a succession of riots. The decade of 1955 to 1965, with its elementary constructive periods, had misled us. Everyone underestimated the amount of rage Negroes were suppressing and the amount of bigotry the white majority was disguising.

The riots are now in the center of the stage and are being offered as the basis for contradictory positions by whites and Negroes. Some Negroes argue that they are the incipient forms for rebellion and guerilla tactics that will be the feature of the Negro revolt. They are represented as a new stage of Negro struggle, replacing the old and allegedly outworn tactic of non-violent resistance. At the same time some white forces are using riots as evidence that Negroes have no capacity for constructive change and by their lawless behavior forfeit all rights and justify any form of repressive measures.

Now I would like to examine both questions. First, is the guilt for riots exclusively that of Negroes? And are they a natural development to a new stage of struggle? A million words will be written and spoken to dissect the ghetto outbreaks. But for a perceptive and vivid expression of culpability I would like to submit two sentences that many of you have probably heard me quote before from the pen of Victor Hugo. "If the soul is left in darkness, sins will be committed. The guilty one is not he who commits the sin but he who causes the darkness." The policy-makers of the white society have caused the darkness. It was they who created the frustrating slums. They perpetuate unemployment and poverty and oppression. Perhaps it is incontestable and deplorable that Negroes have committed crimes, but these are essentially deriv-

ative crimes. They are born of the greater crimes of the white society.

When asking Negroes to abide by the law let us also declare that the white man does not abide by the law. Day in and day out he violates welfare laws to deprive the poor of their meager allotments. He flagrantly violates building codes and housing regulations. His police forces are the ultimate mockery of law. He violates laws on equal employment and education. The slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society. Negroes live in them, but they do not make them any more than a prisoner makes a prison. And so let us say forthrightly that, if the total slum violations of law by the white man over the years are calculated and compared with the lawbreaking of a few days of riots, the hardened criminal would handily be the white man. In using the term white man I am seeking to describe in general terms the Negro's adversary. I seek not to categorize all white people by any use of the term white man. I think it is very important to say this, for there are millions who have risen morally above prevailing prejudices. They are willing to share power and to accept structural alterations of society, even at the cost of traditional privilege. To deny their existence as some ultra-nationalists do is to deny an evident truth. More than that, it tends to drive away allies who can and have strengthened our struggle. Their support serves not only to enhance our power, but their break from the attitudes of the larger society splits and weakens our opposition. To develop a sense of black consciousness and peoplehood does not require that we scorn the white race as a whole. It is not the race per se that we fight but the policies and ideology formulated by leaders of that race to perpetuate oppression.

In summing up the general causes of riots we would have to say that the white power structure is still seeking to keep the walls of segregation and inequality substantially intact, while Negro determination to break through them has intensified. I find five basic causes of riots—the white backlash; pervasive discriminatory practices; unemployment; the war in Vietnam; and the urban problems of crime and extensive migration.

The *white backlash* is a primary cause because it explains the ferocity of the emotional content of their outbursts and their spontaneity. The depravity of the white backlash shattered the hope that new attitudes were in the making. The reversion to barbaric white conduct marked by a succession of murders in the South and the recrudescence of white hoodlumism in the Northern streets and cold systematic withdrawal of some erstwhile white allies constituted a grim statement to Negroes. They were told that there were firm limits to their progress, that they must expect to remain permanently unequal and permanently poor.

The pervasiveness of discriminatory practices has been so much taken for granted that its provocative effect is easily forgotten. Even as the Negro manages to grasp a foothold on the economic ladder, discrimination threatens to push him off after he has only ascended a few rungs. It hounds him at every level to stultify this initiative and insult his being. For the pitifully few who climb into economic security it persists and closes different doors.

Intimately related to discrimination is one of its worst consequences, namely, *unemployment*. You will remember that the United States teetered on the edge of revolution in the 1930's when national unemployment mounted to 25 per cent of the populace. But throughout the South and expressly in the North, in the midst of historic prosperity, unemployment for Negro youth, according to government figures, runs as high as 30 to 40 per cent in many cities. Understanding that most of their lives are yet to be lived, the slamming of doors before their faces can be expected to induce rage and rebellion.

The fourth cause is the war in *Vietnam*. We are committing grave atrocities in Vietnam. We are left standing before the world glutted by our own barbarity. We are engaged in a war that seeks to turn the clock of history back and perpetuate white colonialism. The bombs in Vietnam explode at home—they destroy the dream and possibility for a decent America. I must also comment that the poor are conscripted in double measure for combat. They constitute more than 24 per cent of the front-line troops in a war of unprecedented brutality. Our young men are marching under slogans of democracy, supposedly to defend a Saigon government that scorns democracy. At home they know that there is no genuine democracy for their people and that on their return they will be restored to a grim life even if they are bedecked with hero's medals. A black man who runs rampant through the ghetto during a riot has been given the clear example of his own government running rampant throughout the world.

Finally, there exists a complex of causes, found in the degenerating conditions of *perverted urban life*. Our cities are choked with air pollution, dense traffic conditions, and insufficient water systems. Public facilities are outworn and inadequate. Within this chaos of neglect Negroes are stifled at the very bottom in squalid slum conditions, the equal of which are not to be found in any industrial nation of the world. Every large city reads the results of the myriad poor and black people who have migrated there in desperate search of the American fulfillment. Although it is a known fact that millions of Negroes have been forced off the land in the South by the contraction of agricultural employment during the past two decades, no national planning has been enacted to remedy this calamity.

When white immigrants arrived in the United States in the late nineteenth century, a benevolent

government gave them free land and credit to build a useful, independent life. In contrast, when the Negro migrated he was left to his own initiative and resources. He crowded the cities and was herded into the ghettos, locked out of employment, subjected to gross exploitation within a context of searing discrimination. Though other minorities had encountered obstacles, none have been so brutally scorned nor so consistently denied opportunity as the Negro.

These were the conditions that have become a volatile fuel for violence and riots. As a social psychologist, Kenneth Clark, has said: "It is a surprise only that outbreaks were not experienced earlier." There are thoughtful social scientists who are now acknowledging that the elements of social catastrophe have accumulated in such vast array that no remedies may be available.

I must admit I'm not totally optimistic. But I cannot accept defeat. I believe that there are several serious programs that can reverse the tide of social disintegration. Beyond this I believe that, as destructive as the riots may be, they have been analyzed in a substantially one-sided fashion. There is a striking aspect to the violence of riots that has stimulated little comment and even less analysis. In all the riots together the property damage reached colossal proportions, exceeding a billion dollars. Yet the physical injury inflicted by Negroes upon white people was inconsequential in comparison. The bruising edge of the weapon of violence in Negro hands was employed almost exclusively against property, not persons. The inner rage of Negroes is not yet expressed in anti-humanism. There is a deeply rooted aversion to violence toward people, particularly random persons who are not an immediate menace. Thousands of white people are a daily presence in the ghetto and remain unharmed. It would be a serious mistake, I feel, to discount non-violence as a force present in Negro life. Many observers like to believe that the urban Negro is too sophisticated and too angry to be non-violent. He is depicted as a scarcely controlled brute. These same observers rationalize the non-violent marches and demonstrations in the South as irrelevant on the grounds that they were substantially processions of pious, elderly ladies. The fact is that in all our marches some men who normally were of very violent tendencies were fully involved.

It was routine procedure while in Birmingham for us to collect hundreds of knives before the demonstrations began to insure against momentary weaknesses of participants. We know from direct experience that even the intensely violent individual can discipline himself if his aims are served by other means. This experience has been duplicated for us in the North. In Chicago, 1966, when vicious, screaming white hoodlums lined the sidewalks, our guards were, in many instances, young gang lead-

ers and members. These men, who are accustomed to violence and expert in its practice, had they been released from their commitment to peaceful marching were entirely capable of reducing the white bullies to shivering pulp. They were capable of peaceful conduct and iron discipline because they were willing to experiment with us in finding a constructive solution.

Now this leads me to say that we must formulate a program and we must fashion the new tactics which do not count on government goodwill but instead serve to compel unwilling authorities to yield to the mandates of justice. We must demand, for instance, an emergency program to provide employment for everyone in need of a job, or, if a work program is impractical, a guaranteed annual income at levels that sustain life in decent circumstances. A second feature of our program must be the demolition of slums and rebuilding by the population that lives in them. Third, we must make a massive move toward self-determination and the shaping of our own destiny. In other words, we must get rid of the domestic colony which is the ghetto. Fourth, we must delve deeply into the political arena. Wherever possible we must elect well-qualified and committed Negro candidates, as we have in Cleveland, Gary, and in states all across the South. In Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia we have, for the first time, Negroes in state legislatures. We've got to escalate this kind of program, and it is high time that we retire all the white racists who are in Congress. They can be retired if we vote in larger numbers.

Now there is scarcely any division among Negroes about these measures. Divisions arise only around methods for their achievement. I am still convinced—and this is the basic point that I want to get at—that a solution of non-violence remains possible. However, non-violence must be adapted to urban conditions and urban moods. Non-violent protest must now mature to a new level to correspond to heightened black impatience and stiffened white resistance. The higher level is *mass civil disobedience*. It is a concept well known in our struggle for justice. There must be more than a statement to the larger society—there must be a force that interrupts its functioning at some key point. That interruption must, however, not be clandestine or surreptitious. It must be open. It is not necessary to invest it with guerrilla romanticism. It must be open and conducted by large masses without violence. If the jails are filled to stop us, the meaning will become even clearer. The Negro will be saying, I am not avoiding penalties for breaking the law, I am willing to endure all your punishment because your society will not be able to endure the stigma of violently and publicly oppressing its minorities to preserve injustices. Mass civil disobedience as a new stage of

struggle can transmute the deep anger of the ghetto into a creative force. To dislocate the functioning of a city without destroying it can be more effective than a riot because it can be both longer lasting and more costly to the larger society, but not wantonly destructive. It is a device of social action that is more difficult for the government to quell by superior force. The limitation of riots, moral questions aside, is that they cannot win, and their participants know it. Hence riots are not revolutionary but reactionary because they invite defeat. They offer an emotional catharsis, but they must be followed by a sense of futility. Civil disobedience in its mass application has the prospect of success. It is militant and defiant, but not destructive.

Since young people will have to play a great role in the kind of program I have rather sketchily outlined, let me say a few words about the mood of American youth. This is important for many reasons, for the mood of youth is part of the mood of the nation in general. Under the impact of social forces unique to their times young people have splintered into three principal groups.

The largest group of young people is struggling to adapt itself to the prevailing values of our society. Without much enthusiasm they accept the system of government, the economic relationships of the property system, and the social stratifications our system engenders. Even so, they are a profoundly troubled group and are harsh critics of the status quo. In this largest group social attitudes are not congealed or determined, they are fluid and searching. Though recent studies point to the war in Vietnam as their focus of concern, most of them are not ready to resist the draft or to take clear-cut stands on issues of violence and non-violence. But their consciences have been touched by the feeling that is growing all over the world of the horror and insanity of war. They sense the imperative need to respect life and the urgency of moving past war as a way to solve international problems.

There is a second group of young people, presently small in number but dynamic and growing. They are the radicals. They range from moderate to extreme in the degree to which they want to alter the social system. All of them agree that only by structural change can current evils be eliminated because the roots are in the system rather than in man or in faulty operations. This is a new breed of radicals. Very few adhere to any established ideology or dogma. Some borrow from old doctrines of revolution, but practically all of them suspend judgment on what the form of the new society must be. They are in serious revolt against old values and have not yet concretely formulated the new ones. They are not repeating previous revolutionary doctrines. Most of them have not even read the revolutionary classics. Ironically, their rebellion comes from having been

frustrated in seeking change within the framework of the existing society. They tried to build racial equality and met tenacious and vicious opposition. They worked to end the Vietnam war and experienced futility.

In their concern for higher social values they were thwarted by a combination of material abundance and spiritual poverty that stifled a pure creative outlook. And so they seek a fresh start with new rules in a new order. It is fair to say that at present they know what they don't want rather than what they want. Their radicalism grows because the power structure of today is unrelenting in defending not only its social system but the evils it contains. What is the attitude of this second, radical, group to the problem of violence? In a word, I think it is mixed. There are young radicals today who are pacifists, and there are many armchair revolutionaries who insist on the political and psychological need for violence. These young theorists of violence elaborately scorn the process of dialogue in favor of the tactic of confrontation. They glorify the guerrilla movement, and especially its new martyr, Che Guevara. But across the spectrum of attitudes toward violence that can be found among the radicals is there a unifying thread? Whether they read Gandhi or Fanon, all the radicals understand the need for action—direct, self-transforming and structure-transforming action. This may be their most creative collective insight.

The young people in the third group are sometimes called hippies. They are struggling to disengage from society and to give expression to their rejection of it. They disavow responsibility to organize society. Unlike the radicals, they are not seeking change but flight. When occasionally they merge with a peace demonstration, it is not to better the political world but to give expression to their own world. The hard-core hippie is a remarkable contradiction. He uses drugs to turn inward, away from reality, to find peace and security. Yet he advocates love as the highest human value; love, which can exist only in communication between people, not in the isolation of the individual.

The hippies cannot survive as a mass group because there is no solution in escape. Most of them will regroup, either joining the radicals or drifting back into the mainstream. Some of them may persist by solidifying into a secular religious sect. Their movement already has many such characteristics. We might see some of them establish utopian colonies like the seventeenth and eighteenth-century communities established by sects that profoundly opposed the existing order and its values. Those communities did not survive, but they were important because their dream of social justice and human value continues as the dream of mankind. In this context one dream of the hippie group is very significant, and that is its dream of peace. Most of the hippies are pacifists, and a few have thought their

way through to a persuasive and psychologically sophisticated peace strategy. Society at large may now be more ready to learn from that dream than it was a century or two ago; it may listen to the argument for peace, not as a dream but as a practical possibility, something to choose and use.

From this quick tour of the three main groupings of our young people it should be evident that this generation is in spiritual ferment. Even the large group that is not disaffected from society is putting forward basic questions. Their restlessness helps to account for the radicals with their angry protest and the hippies with their systematic withdrawal. All three groups tend to concur in this flippant but profound comment on adult North America by a disenchanted student: "Even if you win a rat race . . . you are still a rat."

During the early 1950's the hangman among the cold war troops was McCarthyism. For years it throttled free expression and intimidated into bleak silence not only liberals and radicals but men in high and protected places. A very small band of courageous people fought back, braving ostracism, slander and loss of livelihood. Gradually and painfully the democratic instinct of Americans was awakened and the ideological brute force was routed. However, McCarthyism left a legacy of social paralysis. Fear persisted for years and social reform remained inhibited and defensive. A blanket of conformity and intimidation conditioned young and old to exalt mediocrity and convention.

The blanket of fear was lifted by the Negro youth of the nation. When they took their struggle to the streets, a new spirit of resistance was born. Inspired by the boldness and ingenuity of Negroes, white youth stirred into action and formed an alliance that aroused the conscience of the nation. It is difficult to exaggerate the creative contribution of dynamic young Negroes of the past eight years. They took non-violent resistance, first employed in Montgomery, Alabama, in mass dimensions and developed original applications—sit-ins, freedom rides and wade-ins. To accomplish these ends they first transformed themselves. Young Negroes had traditionally imitated whites in dress, conduct and thought in a rigid middle-class pattern. Gunnar Myrdal described them as exaggerated Americans. Now they ceased imitating and began initiating. Leadership passed into the hands of Negroes, and their white allies began learning from them.

This was a revolutionary and wholesome development for both. It is ironic that today so many educators and sociologists are seeking new methods to instill middle-class values in Negro youth as the ideal in social development. It was precisely when young Negroes threw off their middle-class values that they made an historic social contribution. They abandoned those values when they put careers and wealth in a

secondary role, when they cheerfully became jail-birds and troublemakers. When they took off their Brooks Brothers attire and put on overalls to work in the isolated rural South, they challenged and inspired white youth to emulate them. Many left school, not to abandon learning but to seek it in more direct ways. They were constructive school drop-outs, strengthening society and themselves. These Negro and white youths preceded the conception of the Peace Corps, and I think it is safe to say that their work inspired its organization on an international scale.

Now these years, the late sixties, are a most crucial time for the movements I have been describing. There is a sense in which the alliance of responsible young people which the movement represented has fallen apart under the impact of failures, discouragement, and consequent extremism and polarization. The movement for social change has entered a time of temptation to despair because it is clear now how deep and how systematic are the evils it confronts. There is a strong temptation to despair of programs and actions and to dissipate energy in hysterical talk. There is a temptation to break up into mutually suspicious groups in which blacks reject the participation of whites and whites reject the realities of their own history.

Meanwhile, as the young people face their crisis, we in SCLC must work out programs to bring the social change movements through from their early, and now inadequate, protest phase to a stage of massive, active, non-violent resistance to the evils of the modern corporate society. As this work and planning proceed we begin to glimpse tremendous vistas of what it might mean for the world if the new programs of resistance succeed in forging an even wider alliance of today's awakened youth. Non-violent, active resistance to social evils, including massive civil disobedience, can unite, I believe, in a new action synthesis the best insights of all three groups of young people. From hippies it can accept the vision of peaceful means to a goal of peace, and also their sense of beauty, of gentleness, and of the unique gifts of each man's spirit. From the radicals it can adopt the burning sense of urgency, the recognition of the need for direct and collective action and the need for strategy and organization. And because the emerging program is one neither of anarchy nor of despair, it can welcome the work and insights of those young people who have not rejected our present society in its totality. They can challenge the more extreme groups to integrate the new vision into history as it actually is, into society as it actually works. They can help the movement not to break the bruised reed or quench the smoking wick of values that are already recognized in the society we want to change. They can help keep open the possibility of honorable compromise.

As I move out of the stage of analysis and move toward my conclusion, I would like to say a few things that I think are basic if we are going to move creatively in the days ahead. I talked a few minutes ago about the temptation of despair. We all face this temptation in our day-to-day work; there are those moments when we almost feel like giving up. We have all been scared in the flames of withering disappointment. The Negro's disappointment is real, part of the daily menu of our lives. In our individual lives we all too often distill our frustrations into an essence of bitterness or drown ourselves in the deep waters of self-pity or adopt a fatalistic philosophy that whatever happens must happen, that all events are determined by necessity. These reactions poison the soul and scar the personality. The only healthy answer is one's honest recognition of disappointment even as he clings to fragments of hope, the acceptance of finite disappointment while clinging to infinite hope.

We black and poor people who have dreamed for so long of freedom are still confined in a prison of segregation and discrimination. Must we respond with bitterness and cynicism? I insist that we shall not—for this can lead to black anger so desperate that it ends in black suicide. Must we turn inward in self-pity? Of course not, for this can lead to a self-defeating black paranoia. Must we conclude that we cannot win? Certainly not, for this will lead to a desperate black nihilism that seeks disruption for disruption's sake. Must we, by fatalistically concluding that segregation is a foreordained pattern of the universe, resign ourselves to oppression? Of course not, for passively to cooperate with an unjust system makes the oppressed as evil as the oppressor. Our most fruitful course is to stand firm, move forward with aggressive non-violence, accept disappointments and cling to hope. Our determined refusal not to be stopped will eventually thrust open the door to fulfillment.

I remember very vividly when, in 1956, I flew from New York to London in the propellor-type aircraft that required nine and a half-hours for a flight that we now make in about six hours by jet. Returning from London to the United States the stewardess announced that the flight time would be twelve and a half hours, although the distance was the same. Why an additional three hours? When the pilot entered the cabin I asked him why. He said something I will never forget. "You must understand something about the winds," he said. "When we leave New York, a strong tail wind is in our favor, but when we return a strong head wind is against us." And then he added: "Don't worry, these four engines are capable of battling the winds."

In any social revolution there are times when the tail winds of triumph and fulfillment favor us, and other times when strong head winds of disappoint-

ment and setbacks beat against us relentlessly. We must not permit adverse winds to overwhelm us as we journey across life's Atlantic. We must be sustained by energies of courage or engines of courage, in spite of the winds—this refusal to be stopped, this courage to be, this determination to go on in spite of, is the hallmark of great movements. In the days ahead we must not consider it unpatriotic to raise basic questions about our national character. We must ask why are there forty million poor people in a nation overflowing with such unbelievable affluence. We must ask why has our nation placed itself in the position of being God's military agent on earth, intervening recklessly in Vietnam and in the Dominican Republic. Why have we substituted the arrogant undertaking of policing the whole world for the high task of putting our own house in order? For its very survival's sake, America must re-examine old presuppositions and release itself from things that for centuries have been held sacred. For the evils of racism, poverty and militarism to die, a new set of values must be born. Our economy must become more person-centered than property and profit-centered. Our government must depend more on its moral power than on its military power.

Let us, therefore, not think of our movement as one that seeks to integrate the Negro into all the existing values of American society. Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness. We are superbly equipped to do this. We have been seared in the flames of suffering. We have known the agony of being the underdog. We have learned from our havenot status that it profits a nation little to gain the whole world of means and lose the end, its own soul. We must have a passion for peace born out of the wretchedness of war, giving our ultimate allegiance to the empire of eternity.

We must also be the custodians of creative black power. We must find the positives in black power and not be afraid to affirm that we agree absolutely with these positives. I have said it so often, that our problem in the ghetto is that we are powerless and we must transform this powerlessness into creative power. We are in desperate need to find our identity. We need to be proud of our heritage. We need to be proud of being black and not ashamed of it. But, in seeking our identity, we must seek it honestly. Every man must ultimately confront the question, "Who am I?" and seek to answer it honestly. One of the first principles of personal adjustment is the principle of self-acceptance. The Negro's greatest dilemma is that in order to be healthy he must accept his ambivalence. The Negro is a child of two cultures, Africa and America. The problem is that, in the search for wholeness, too many Negroes seek to embrace only one side of their natures. Some, seeking to reject their heritage, are ashamed of their

color, ashamed of black art and music, and determine what is beautiful and good by the standards of white society. They end up frustrated and without cultural roots. Others seek to reject anything American and to identify totally with Africa, even to the point of wearing African clothes. This approach leads also to frustration because the American Negro is not an African. The old Hegelian synthesis still offers the best answer to many of life's dilemmas. The American Negro is neither totally African nor totally Western. He is Afro-American, a true hybrid, a combination of two cultures.

Who are we? Let us not be afraid to say it. We are the descendants of slaves. We are the offspring of noble men and women who were kidnapped from their native land and chained in ships like beasts. We are the heirs of a great and exploited continent known as Africa. We are the heirs of rape, fire and murder, and I, for one, am not ashamed of this past. My shame is for those who became so inhuman that they could inflict this torture upon us. We are also Americans—abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. And, in spite of the psychological appeals of identification with Africa, the Negro must face the fact that America is now his home, a home that he helped to build through blood, sweat and tears. Since we are American, the solution to our problem will not come through seeking to build a separate black nation within a nation but by finding that creative majority and together moving toward that colorless power that we need for security and justice.

I want now to say something that I'm sure you expect me to say, and that is that we must remain faithful to love and non-violence. I must oppose still any attempt to gain our freedom by methods of malice, hate and violence, by the methods that have characterized our oppressors. Hate is just as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. It has no boundary lines. I was talking just last evening with some of the young men who have decided to boycott the Olympics. One of the things that frustrated them more than anything else was the fact that they decided to make their announcement at a black conference in Los Angeles, and they arrived at this meeting only to discover that black people were beating and threatening to murder other black people simply because they wanted to raise some unpopular questions. I said to myself, as I listened, that this more than anything else reveals to me that hate has no limits. I refuse to hate. I have seen hate expressed on the countenances of too many Mississippi and Alabama sheriffs to advise the Negro to sink to this miserable level. *Hate is too great a burden to bear.*

Of course you may say to me: "This is not practical. Life is a matter of getting even, of hitting back, of dog eat dog." "Maybe in some distant utopia," you

say, "that ideal will work, but not in the hard, cold world in which we live." My only answer is that mankind has followed the so-called practical way for a long time now, and it has led to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of individuals and communities that surrendered to hate and violence. I'm sure that many of you have read Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Toward the end he says: "So comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe . . . by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would almost be an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe . . . and America into a new Europe, let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted of us. But if we want humanity to advance, to step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries." And then he moves on toward the end to say: "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf. We must work out new concepts and try to set afoot a new man."

These are brave and challenging words, and I'm happy that young black men and women are quoting them, but the problem is that Fanon (and those who quote his words) are seeking to work out new concepts and set afoot a new man with the willingness to imitate old concepts of violence. Is there not a basic contradiction here? Violence has been the inseparable twin of materialism—the hallmark of its grandeur. This is the one thing about modern civilization that I do not want to imitate. Humanity is waiting for something other than a blind imitation of the past. If we want truly to advance a step further, if we want to turn over the new leaf and really set a new man afoot, we must begin to turn mankind away from the long and desolate night of violence. May it not be that the new man the world needs is the non-violent man? Longfellow said: "In this world a man must either be an anvil or the hammer." We must be hammers shaping a new society rather than anvils molded by the old. This not only will make us new men but will give us a new kind of power. It will not be Lord Acton's image of power that tends to corrupt, the absolute power that corrupts absolutely. It will be power infused with love and justice that will change dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

I must say to each of you that I have made my decision.

I'm reminded of a story. Centuries ago King Nebuchadnezzar issued an order to all who fell under his domain. That order was that at the sound of the trumpet everyone was to bow before the golden image. The refusal to bow would

mean that one would be thrown into the fiery furnace. There were three young men who heard the order. They knew of the injunction, but something deep within them told them that they had to violate the injunction and practice civil disobedience. They stood before the king and said: "We know that the God that we worship is able to deliver us . . . but if not, we will not bow. We know that the power that we have experienced and read about in nature is able to deliver us. We know that the force who has the power to throw up the gigantic mountains, kissing the skies as if to bathe their peaks in the lofty blue, the power to throw out the stars to bedeck the heavens like swinging lanterns of eternity, also has the power to deliver us . . . but if not, we will not bow." They were saying that they had discovered something so dear, so precious and so great that they were going to live with it. They had come to say that they were going to do what conscience told them was right. They discovered that ultimately a great faith is not a bargaining faith. It is never an "if" faith, but it is a "though" faith. It doesn't say, if you do this for me, God, if you do this on that point and that on the other point, then I will serve you; but it goes on to say, "Though he slay me, yet I will trust him." And the great experiences of life are "though" experiences. Marriage is never a bargaining experience, it's a though experience.

I've decided that, on this question of non-violence, I'm going to stand by it. I'm going to love because it's just lovely to love. I'm going to be non-violent because I believe it is the answer to mankind's problems. I'm not going to bargain with reality, but I'm going to stand by non-violence in spite of. And so I say to you that I've taken a vow—I, Martin Luther King, take thee, Non-violence, to be my wedded wife, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer—this isn't a bargaining experience—for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part. I'm going on in the faith and with that determination. I believe if we maintain faith and then escalate our actions we will be able to go to Washington and we will be able to create vibrant movement throughout the cities of our country. And by the thousands we will move, and many will wonder where we are coming from, and our only answer will be that we are coming up out of great trials and tribulations. Some of us will come from Mississippi, some of us will come from Alabama, some from Chicago, some from Detroit, some from Cleveland, but we will all be coming from the same condition. We will be seeking a city whose builder and maker is God. And if we will do this, we will be able to turn this nation upside down and right side up, and we may just be able to speed up the day when men everywhere will be able to cry out that we are children of God, made in his image. This will be a glorious day; at that moment the morning stars will sing together, and the sons of God will shout for joy.