The George Dana Boardman Lectureship in Christian Ethics

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XXVII

THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Delivered Before
The University of Pennslyvania
January 18, 1988

By

The Honorable Walter E. Fauntroy
U.S. House of Representatives
District of Columbia

Including Response by

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FOREWORD

Undoubtedly, the twenty-seventh George Dana Boardman Lecture, delivered at the University of Pennsylvania on January 18, 1988, held a special significance. Like previous Boardman lectures that expressed strong convictions in common sense terms which left room for argument, the lecture excited applause and reflection. Unlike the others, however, it played a prominent role in a historic celebration and ended with a stirring rendition of a popular song.

The historic celebration in question was the third annual national holiday in honor of the late Baptist minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who died at the hands of an assassin twenty years ago this spring in Memphis, after little more than a decade of public service, which ushered in an era of greater sensitivity to the rights of Americans from every walk of life. For the occasion, a close personal friend of King delivered the Boardman lecture, which was held in conjunction with a commemorative program sponsored by the University.

The Honorable Walter E. Fauntroy, from the U.S. House of Representatives, arrived on campus in the afternoon. In the Dubois College House, he greeted Rosa Parks, whose arrest for refusing to obey a Jim Crow law instigated the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, by which King first came to national attention as a "drum major for justice." Parks and Fauntroy together gave an informal talk to a crowd of University students about the need to keep the memory of King alive for generations to come. Later in the evening, Fauntroy proceeded to the Harrison Auditorium where a cross-section of the Penn campus heard him deliver the Boardman lecture entitled, "The Impossible Dream."

The congressman called for a commitment to change. Drawing on memories of his close association with King, he noted that to many in his time, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a dreamer of impossible dreams. Nevertheless, said Fauntroy, King turned several "impossible dreams" into living realities. The fact that King managed to have public facilities desegregated, in the face of strong opposition, serves as a good example. From this the congressman found encouragment that, although injustice continues to plague society, if we pledge ourselves to the kind of ideals that inspired King, we will find it possible to create a more equitable order.

Frequent applause made it clear that the lecture inspired an eagerness to turn dreams of a better world into realities. No part of the lecture had more effect than the ending, which, as mentioned, featured a stirring rendition of a popular song. The song is "The Impossible Dream." Singing it with great force, Fauntroy used the song to underscore his message and moved members of the audience to raise their voices in unison.

In response to the lecture, Dr. Mary Frances Berry addressed an attentive audience later in the week. Berry, who was active in the Civil Rights Movement, holds the chair as the Geraldine R. Segal Professor of American Social Thought in the History Department at the University of Pennsylvania. She opened her speech with modest hopes of adding a bit to the image of King that had been conveyed by the congressman. As she proceeded, she surpassed her hopes.

Berry cited a litany of landmark stands taken by King for the good of the country. She recalled that, beyond racism in America, he opposed the war in Viet Nam, before such opposition became fashionable. She also conceded flaws in his character. But they matter little, she argued. King was an extraordinary leader; he did indeed do great things. She urged the audience to work toward the kind of society of which he dreamed. Drawing to a conclusion, Berry asked, What would he do if he were alive today? She answered that King would find the right way to keep the flames of justice burning and she challenged the audience to do the same.

This material should prove of interest for generations to come, whenever Americans reflect upon the significance of the national holiday for King. Future readers can examine this material to learn, as stated in Dr. Berry's response to the lecture, "about such

things as the fiery force that ran deep in King, the important part he played in our history, and the right way to take him as an example." It is therefore an honor to present this to the public.

Like a great many things, this publication is the product of several hands. The Department of Religious Studies and the Afro-American Studies Program deserve credit for working together to sponsor the lectures. The names of two members of these organizations deserve special recognition: Dr. Jacqueline Wade and Dr. Guy Welbon, who never tired of lending assistance. Members of the University of Pennsylvania MLK Commemorative Program Committee also had a hand in the affair, as did the offices of the President and the Provost for the University. Finally, Mary-Anne Smith handled the cover. Thanks to all.

-Roland L. Williams, Jr.
Editor

Faculty, 1987-88

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CALL: THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

Walter E. Fauntroy

Mr. Presiding Officer, Members of the Faculty and Student Body of the University of Pennsylvania. It is indeed a pleasure for me to share with you today your series of activities celebrating the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I bring you greetings from our Congressional Black Caucus: the now twenty (22) Black men and one beautiful Black woman who, together on Capitol Hill, seek to have the U.S. Congress address the basic problems confronting this Nation, problems that just happen to be reflected most acutely in the Black experience.

Most of the people in this Country who have lost their jobs in recent years to the flight of U.S. capital, U.S. technology and U.S. plants to cheaper labor markets abroad are white. But because Blacks are disproportionately represented among those who are last hired and first fired in the labor intensive auto, rubber, steel and textile industries, unemployment reflects itself most acutely in the Black experience where we routinely have an unemployment rate of 2 1/2 times the national average.

Most of the people in our country who are not being trained in the capital intensive, information based, service oriented jobs of the present and future in America are white. But because Blacks are disproportionately represented among those who suffer from the neglect of our public schools, the failure to train our youth for a productive future reflects itself most acutely in the Black Experience.

Most of the people in this country who have been hurt by cuts in Pell Grants, guaranteed student loans and other aids to education are white. But because Blacks are disproportionately represented

among those dependent upon such federal programs in higher education, these cuts reflect themselves most acutely in the Black experience where twenty five (25%) percent of our young people who could have gone to college eight years ago have no opportunity to do so today.

Most of the people in this country who require food stamps, Medicaid and Aid to Families with Dependent Children are white. But because Blacks are disproportionately dependent upon such programs to survive in these times, the cuts in these programs reflect themselves most acutely in the Black Experience.

It is for these reasons that we in the Congressional Black Caucus worked so hard to have the Congress declare the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a National Holiday. It now annually affords all Americans the thoughtful inspiration to do more to move our Country to the high ground of principles that Dr. King enunciated but which we so often fail to live. I thank you for this opportunity to share in this mountain top experience at the University of Pennsylvania.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a dreamer of what many in his time considered "Impossible Dreams." He dreamed of a day when "for white only signs" would be taken down across the southland. "Impossible," they told him. "You can't change the system." But Martin Luther King, Jr. worked at Montgomery and Birmingham until he made that dream a living reality.

He dreamed of a day when millions of Blacks would be free to register and vote in every region of this country. "Impossible," they told him. "You can't change the system." But though scarred and worn at Selma, he made that dream, too, a living reality.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a dreamer of what many considered impossible dreams, but he did not rest until he had made of his impossible dreams, living realities.

At the time of his death, Dr. King was dreaming yet another impossible dream. I know what it was because he shared it with me, and it became my dream too. It was the dream of a world free of the barbarism of war, the decadence of racism, and the scourge of poverty. He did not live long enough to work on that dream. He died before the Vietnam war, which he summoned the nation to oppose,

came to a much belated end at tremendous costs to our economy. He died before a "white backlash" had sounded the call to retreat on civil rights that is heard today. He died before the scourge of poverty had reached the deeper level that it has today among "the least of these" in the United States, in Africa, and in Latin America.

But as we all know, he died pointing us to the well-springs of our faith in God: "I've been to the mountain top," he said, "and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but we as a people will get there by and by."

I believe that. I believe that if those of us who revere the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. busy ourselves doing the work that he would have been doing were he alive today, we shall see the realization of more of his "impossible dreams." I believe, therefore, that the best way to celebrate Dr. King's birthday is to commit ourselves, our time and our talent to the tasks that he would have been undertaking were he still among us. It is for that reason that I want to focus my remarks upon one feature of "the system" that Dr. King would have been working to change were he with us today, and I want to challenge you to help change it.

Living the Dream

In the name of Martin Luther King, Jr., I come to challenge you today to change a package of public policies in this country that have been based on these three theses:

1. First, the poor have too much money.
2. Second, the rich have too little money.
3. Third, our problems abroad lend themselves to military solution.

The supply-side economic policies of the last eight years that have been based on these three theses have been responsible for three things: an acceleration of the flight of U. S. capital and jobs to cheaper labor markets abroad, the skyrocketing of our annual trade deficit to nearly $200 billion, and similar annual budget deficits that have more than doubled our national debt from $900 billion in 1981 to $2 trillion today.

The result is that the American people are being hit by a "triple whammy":

1. Jobs in the labor-intensive auto, rubber, steel, and textile industries are rapidly leaving the country.

2. The nation is cutting back on the very education and training programs that would retool our work force in the skills required for the capital intensive, information based, service-oriented jobs of the future.

3. The profits made by foreign corporations and investors on the sale of their products here and the financing of our enormous federal debt are coming back to our country in the hands of foreign corporations and individuals to "buy America."

The Three Theses

Let us look first at the faulty theses upon which these policies are based.

The Poor Have Too Much: Supply-side economic policies pushed five million more Americans below the poverty line and rendered tens of thousands of individuals and families homeless, because the policies are based on the thesis the the poor have too much money! Since they have too much money, we cut $280 billion from programs designed to meet the needs of the old, the young, the sick and the poor. We cut Pell Grants and guaranteed student loans for our youth, job training, aid to families with dependent children, and housing subsidies for our poor and unemployed. We cut Medicaid and Medicare for our elderly. The poor have too much!

The Rich Have Too Little: Since the same policies assume that rich have too little, we gave over the same five year period $750 billion in tax relief primarily to rich individuals and major corporations. Thirty-five percent (35%) of all of the individual tax relief went to the top five (5%) percent income earners of the country. The average person making $15,000 a year ended up paying $100 more in federal taxes than before this so called tax relief package went into effect. But if you made $200,000 a year, you got an additional $20,000 in tax relief under this tax give-away program for the rich. The thesis was that the rich would reinvest that money in new plants and equipment and put the American people back to work.

What was not understood was that the problem with our economy is not that we spend too much on the old, the young, the sick and the poor; nor is it that the rich of our country have too little money. Our problems stem from the fact that increasingly our

economy is shaped by the linkage of our financial system with a system of global capital markets and international institutions and relationships that seek to maximize profits quite without regard to national boundaries.

The truth is that for the past fifteen or twenty years we have been experiencing a steady decline in economic performance, in manufacturing output, and in product design. In sector after sector, we are losing market shares in the world at large as well as at home. The consequence is rising unemployment, inadequate profits and therefore reduced investment, still worse productivity, and a falling dollar.

That truth is best illustrated, I think, by an experience I had a few years ago when my son, Marvin, asked me to buy him a portable radio for Christmas. So I went downtown to one of our local department stores and saw on the shelf my favorite make of portable radio, RCA Victor. The label said, "RCA Victor portable radio", AM/FM, $87.00. I was just about to buy it when I noticed on another shelf something called "Sanyo." It said "portable radio, AM/FM three speakers, tape recorder, $47.00." Now, I love America and I know that when I buy American-made products, I am supporting jobs for my fellow Americans and taxpayers.
But when I saw something better for less, quite frankly, I will tell you what I did: I said, "Sanyo" and I bought it.

That's the problem with our economy: not that the poor have too much money. The problem is that most Americans are doing just what I did and for good reason. We have had to wash out our mouths in the last ten years to pronounce what is best. We're buying Nissans, Toyotas, Kawasakis, Suzukis and Sanyos from Japan; Volkwagons, Mercedes, and BMV's from West Germany and textile goods from Taiwan, Korea and, now, mainland China where they have a billion people who work for one-half cent a minute.

The blame for this is not to be placed on the poor, but on the fact that, in my view, the rich have been getting "drunk at lunch." Let me explain what I mean. When the "supply-side economics" program was proposed, we in the Congressional Black Caucus said "why should we cut $1.5 billion from the free lunch program for hungry children while we continue the free lunch program for the rich." We have a free lunch program for the rich that cost us $3 billion a year, but we do not call it public welfare; we call it the "the

three martini lunch deduction." We say to the rich "because we know that you are sitting down at lunch planning how to create more jobs for the American people, we won't tax you on the money you spend--keep the cash!"

The problem is that the rich have apparently been getting drunk at lunch. They had to be drunk to be sitting down at lunch a decade ago trying to figure out "how can we make cars that break down after three years so that people will have to refinance and buy new ones?" They had to be drunk not to realize that the world will beat a path to the door of anyone who makes a better mouse trap. Even if you call it Subaru, we will buy it if it's better.

The rich had to be drunk to say to the West Germans and the Japanese, two nations we leveled forty years ago, that "you shall not engage in the most inflationary spending a nation can undertake--military spending. For military spending absorbs vital natural resources that otherwise would be going into consumer productivity, thus forcing the cost of consumer goods up. So you shall not do that."

I can imagine the Japanese Generals, who went out of the army and into business, saying to American businessmen, "We can't make weapons?"

"No", say the American businessmen, "you can not do that."

"Well," say the Japanese, "let's go to lunch. If we can't make weapons, can we make some little old motorcycles and give them funny names like Kawasaki and Suzuki, Yamaha and Honda?"

The U. S. businessmen reply, "Can you get your people to work for cheaper than we have to pay Archie and Edith, and Calhoun and Sapphire?"

"Sure", say the Japanese, "our people will work for 8 cents a minute."

"Well" say the American businessmen, "if you put it that way, you go ahead and open up a little old motorcycle factory. We'll convert our dollars to Yens and Harley-Davidson won't miss our money."

"Fine," say the Japanese, "let's have another drink. Now, if we can't make weapons, can we make some little old radios and television sets and give them funny names like Hitachi, Sony, Panasonic, and Mitsubishi?"

The American businessmen reply, "Can you get your people to work for cheaper than we have to pay Archie and Edith, and Calhoun and Sapphire to work in America?"

"We get them to work for 8 cents a minute in Japan and 2 cents a minute in Taiwan and Korea. At these rates we could open up some textile factories there too."

"Fine, you open up those factories and we will convert our dollars to Yen and Won and Marcs and Francs--and American companies won't miss our money."

"Wonderful", say the foreign business interests, "let's have a big drink! Now, if we can't make weapons, can we make some little old automobiles and give them funny names like Toyota and Subaru, Nissan, Mazda and Honda?"

"Can you get your people to work for cheaper than we have to pay Archie and Edith, Calhoun and Sapphire?"

"We get our people to work for 8 cents a minute," said the foreign investors.

"If you put it that way, just give us some more Geisha girls, and y'all can make anything y'all want."

They were drunk at lunch, but drunk like foxes who understand that the name of the game is to exploit cheap labor anywhere you can find it in the world. So they will convert their dollars to Yen, Marks, Wons, Francs, Pounds, Rubles, or Rands, so long as they get a higher return on their investment.

And that is why these supply side economics policies have not worked. That is why the rich ended up investing $55 billion of their initial tax relief in foreign productivity. I don't like it, but I understand it! If I were making $200,000 a year and Uncle Sam said "you need help, take $20,000 more," what would I do with it? If I had a choice between investing it in RCA Victor and the "Edsels" of

our country, or in Mitsubishi, or Mercedes, or Volkswagon, I would convert my dollars to Yen or Marks or Francs or whatever else would bring me a higher yield on my investment.

Yes, our economy is shaped by the linkage of our financial system with a system of global capital markets and international institutions that seek to maximize profits quite without regard to national boundaries.

The money we have exported has returned to America in the form of Nissans, Toyotas, Kawasakis, Suzukis, and Sanyos from Japan, Volkswagons, Mercedes, and BMWs, from West Germany, textile goods from Taiwan, Korea, and, now, mainland China, where they work for one-half cent (1/2) per minute. Our purchase of these products, because in many instances they are cheaper and of better quality than we can produce in the U.S., has resulted in a $58.6 billion balance of trade deficit with Japan, a $15.7 billion balance of trade deficit with Taiwan, a $15.6 billion trade deficit with West Germany, a $13.3 billion trade deficit with Canada and a $7.3 billion trade deficit with Korea just to name a few. All of this on the thesis that the rich have too little!

Problems abroad lend themselves to military solutions: The third thesis upon which we have operated is that our international problems lend themselves to military solutions. Since that is the case, we said, let us drastically increase our defense spending by $123 billion with an aggregate military spending bill of $2.3 trillion for five years. I can't tell you how much $2.3 trillion is, but I can say to you that, if we spent a million dollars a day since Jesus was born, we could not spend but one half of $2.3 trillion.

The result of these "VOODOO" economic policies by which we gave away $750 billion in tax relief at the same time that we increased military spending by $123 billion, is that the man who came into office on pledging to balance the budget in four years became responsible for more deficit spending in four (4) years than all of the presidents of the United States put together had built up in the 200 year history of our Nation. Our National debt went from $900 billion in 1981 to $1.8 trillion in 1985 and over $2 trillion today.

There is no problem, however, for the foreigners who are profiting from our balance of trade deficit. They have been quite willing to loan some of their profits back to the U.S. Government when the U.S. Treasury goes to the Bond Market each month to borrow money to wipe out the red ink in our annual budget deficit of about $200 billion per year. Each year we must raise $116 billion in tax money simply to pay the interest on our now $2 trillion National debt. The foreign corporations and the investors who loan us that money get a healthy share of those interest payments to go along with the profits made as a result of our trade deficits with them.

The Triple Whammy

The result of all this is that the Amierican People are being hit with a "Triple Whammy." First, these policies have, accelerated the flight of U.S. capital and jobs to cheaper labor markets abroad with a resulting enormous trade deficit. They have, secondly, cut the very programs that would help retool America's youth for the information based service-oriented jobs of the future. And, third, the capital that has fled the country through the trade deficit and the interest that we pay foreigners for financing our budget deficit is returning in the hands of foreign corporations to buy American owned businesses, land, and productive resources at an alarming rate. Let me elaborate upon this third point briefly, before issuing a challenge in the name of Martin Luther King Jr.

As Time Magazine reported last August, "Foreign scouting parties are combing America's highways and by-ways" to buy every available profitable venture. They are the Japanese, the West Germans, the British, the French, the Dutch, the South Koreans, Taiwanese, and the Swiss with money made from sales of Nissans, Toyotas, Kawasakis, Suzukis, Sonys, Panasonics, and Seikos and other products.

With the interest they collect on the loans they make to cover our national debt, Japanese corporations last year bought the Exxon Building in Manhattan and the Mobil Oil Tower in Dallas. The Kobayashi Corporation of Japan has bought the NBC Plaza and the ABC Headquarters in Los Angeles, in addition to the Dunes Hotels in Las Vegas ($157 million). According to Time Magazine, Japanese direct investment in U. S. real estate and corporations was $23.4 billion in 1986 up 18% from 1985. In the next two or three years, Time Magazine said, Japanese investments will be a torrent.

With the money that Americans spend on Volkswagons, Mercedes, BMWs and a host of other products plus the interest on the money they lend us to finance our debt, the West Germans bought General Tires, A&P Grocery Stores and Celanese Polyester last year.

The French, with their $4.6 billion U.S. trade surplus and interest payments on our national debt, bought G.E. Television and Electronics. The Dutch have bought Norelco, Magnavox, and Philco. The Swiss have bought Carnation Milk. The British have bought Smith and Wesson, Smith-Corona and Endicott Johnson Shoes. The Japanese have bought 1/3 of the seafood packing industry in Alaska.

I could go on and on. The point is, however, that foreigners are eager to gain access to the advanced fruits of American research and technology, as well as to enjoy the benefits of U. S. rates of corporate taxation which, thanks to our tax relief policies, are lower than elsewhere.

Unless something is done to change this course upon which we are embarked, we are all going to be living on a vast plantation in America owned by foreign corporations and investors. With the money these foreign investors and corporations are making on our balance of trade deficit, the money they are earning on the national debt they are servicing for us, and the money they are saving by having us provide them their military security, they are buying America.

The Challenge

I challenge you bright university students to help those of us who revere the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. to change this system. We can no longer afford policies based on the thesis that our international problems lend themselves to military solutions, that the poor have too much money and that the rich have too little. Our international problems do not lend themselves to military solutions; they are social, economic, and political in nature, and therefore require non-violent social, economic, and political solutions.

We must aggressively seek peace through non-violence in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We must organize our nation and the world to "study war no more," to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and set at liberty those who are bound.

In closing, I want to paraphrase the words of the Reverend Charles Adams of Detroit, Michigan. When you leave this university, you will inherit the whole world with all of its problems. I challenge you to go into all the world and take the power of your mentality, the energy of your integrity and the fire of Dr. King's dream.

Go to Poland where the worker is not free. Go to the Middle East where all sides are frustrated and confused. Go to Geneva and find the formula for peace. Go to the Soviet Union and set Jewish captives free. Go to South Africa and destroy apartheid. Go to Ireland and stop the bloodshed. Go to Nicaragua and pull the tentacles of moral insensitivity and military madness from around the necks of the people. Go to the cities of the United States and reverse endemic unemployment, inadequate educational opportunities, substandard housing, absentee landlord desolation and blight, the lack of adequate health care, the systematic destruction of the family, unrelieved poverty, drug addiction, and unmitigated despair.

Go, solve the problems, find the solutions, meet human needs, turn night into day, despair into hope, the trampled down into the upward bound.

King's dream is your key to the world--not to dominate it, but to deliver it; not to exploit it, but to enrich it. Take his dream and inherit the earth.

The past is yours, learn from it. The present is yours, fulfill it. The future is yours, preserve it. Knowledge is yours, use it. Cancer is yours, cure it. Racism is yours, end it. Injustice is yours, correct it. Sickness is yours, heal it. Ignorance is yours, banish it. The arms race is yours, freeze it. War is yours, stop it. Hope is yours, affirm it. People are yours, love them. America is yours, save it. The world is yours, serve it. The environment is yours, cleanse it. Death is yours, delay it. Life is yours, extend it. Truth is yours, know it. The dream is yours, claim it.

Be intimidated by nothing; you have everything it takes to fulfill Martin Luther King's dream. Do not be blinded by prejudice, disheartened by the times, or discouraged by the system. Face the system: challenge it, change it, confront it, correct it. Let nothing paralyze your mind, tie your hands, or defeat your spirit.

If you have a hard way to go, walk it by faith. If you face a mean problem, work with it until you work through it. If you have a misunderstanding, settle it. If you have a grudge, drop it. If you have hatred or resentment, shake it off. If you have a high mountain, move it by faith or climb it by work. If you have a battle, fight it. If you have a handicap, rise above it. If you have race prejudice, overcome it. If you have temptation, conquer it. If you have evil, destroy it. If you have a challenge, face it. If you have trouble, take it. If you have a cross, bear it. If they knock you down, get up. If they push against the ropes, come out swinging. If they laugh at you, keep smiling at them. If they talk about you, keep praying for them. If they hate you, keep loving them, and, if they kill you, rise again in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr.

If they ask you why you do all of this, tell them that, in the name of Martin Luther King, Jr., you have decided:

> "To dream the Impossible Dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go. To right the unrightable wrong, to love pure and chaste from afar. To strive when our arms are too weary, to reach the unreachable star. This is my quest: To follow that star no matter how hopeless, no matter how far; to fight for the right without question or pause, to be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause. To be willing to give when there is no more to give, to be willing to die so that honor and justice might live. And, I know, if I'll only be true to this glorious quest my heart will lie peaceful and calm when I'm layed to my rest. And the world will be better for this: That one man, scorned and covered with scars, still tried with his last ounce of courage to dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to reach the unreachable star."

RESPONSE: FAN THE FIRE

Mary Frances Berry

I at first declined to speak on this occasion, because I understood that my colleague, Congressman Walter Fauntroy was speaking. The congressman and I have been engaged in many struggles together. We have stayed overnight in various places, in which we have sat in together, while we waited out whoever it was we were negotiating with over an issue of social justice. Often, during those times, he sang "The Impossible Dream" to keep us awake and he talked about such things as the fiery force that ran deep in King, the important part he played in our history, and the right way to take him as an example. With those talks in mind, I doubted that there would be anything left for me to say tonight. I was encouraged to give this speech a try by a graduate student in the history department. Seeing so many of you out here shows this campus can sustain another talk about King and issues of social justice. I will try to add something of importance to what my collegue has already said.

As we gather here, a sea of troubles plague the land. This is the last year of the Reagan presidency. We are in a period of increased racial violence around the country. It is also a period in which black student enrollment on campuses all across this country is declining. Homeless people roam our city streets. Drugs and violence associated with drugs terrorize our communities. Segregated housing persists. In terms of our economy, we have been what I call whistling through the graveyard since October 19 last year, when the Stock Market hit a record low. The dollar has never been less stable. We have problems.

Walter Fauntroy talked the other night about budget and trade matters. I have concluded the trade deficit problem is based on the fact that we buy what we do not need from people we already owe more than we can pay. The budget deficit problem to me relates to

a point that Oliver Wendell Holmes made. One of the most distinguished supreme court justices in our history, Holmes said taxes are the price you pay for civilization. I think we want civilization but we do not want to pay for it. And I think Congressman Fauntroy explained to you that the laws of history do not say that once a nation has become powerful economically it must stay that way. There is a waxing and a waning in the affairs of nations as of people, and just because the United States has been powerful economically, that does not mean that we will not be eclipsed by other forces and bad policy to become a third or fourth rate economic power, if we refuse to pay the cost to stay a leader in the world.

I find it very useful to analyze current problems in the light of the tactics and strategy Martin Luther King used in dealing with problems during the period when he was here on earth. When I focus on his life, I think of contradictions and hypocrisy. A famous historian once said, history never embraces more than a bit of reality; another historian said it resembles tricks played on the dead. A lot of what has happened with Martin Luther King, since his assassination, illustrates what the historians meant.

Consider this: here is a holiday, celebrated nationally for the third time, approved by a president who did not want the bill passed, but knew it would be passed over his veto; therefore there were people on the King Commission who Mrs. King did not want there, and who oppose and make fun of everything King represented. The fact that Ronald Reagan of all people signed the bill to establish the Martin Luther King holiday, I think, King would have appreciated as an example of how you can obtain forced concessions from the powerful. If you have a movement for justice, you can force concessions that people would never in the absence of moral compulsion think that they would make.

There are other kinds of contradictions. I have watched people (who opposed King's leadership, criticized him and scorned him, and even tried to trick him in the last two years of his life) discover publicly that they loved him once he was assassinated. Since the day he was interred, he has been appropriated for ownership by people who want to use his name, without regard for whether they use it in the cause of justice for which he lived and died.

We know in our own time that whenever somebody who has been a controversial figure dies, whether it is an untimely death or not, there are people who did not support him saying, "Yes, I was with him all the way, I was with him right from the beginning, I knew he was right, when nobody else did." This behavior is a contradiction, but it happens. So when I think about Dr. King's life, the interweaving of successes and doubts, and confusion and steadfastness, I think of what happens to people. When you are dead, you belong to the ages, and so people do with you what they will.

I think about books that have been written about him. I think about David Garrow's book, *Bearing the Cross* . Widely praised, the book focuses on King's personal habits. The author of the book tells us what we already knew about Martin Luther King, what we already know about most people, that he had imperfections, that he was not a perfect man. But really, these imperfections are beside the point in terms of his leadership.

I think too about the accident of leadership, coming to leadership. Here is a man who was in a place and chosen to lead a movement and it turned out that he was the best prepared person there to lead it, by skill, by education, by faith, by charisma. And there he was. Another sort of contradiction or an irony, but there he was. And then I think too about the speeches, and I think about what people take from what you say. And I think about how many times I have seen myself and other people have what they say characterized ways they never imagined, because they meant something else. People select what they want; the heart of what was said is overlooked. I think of Dr. King's speech, at the March on Washington in 1963. Everyone who discusses that speech talks about "I have a dream." How many times have you heard it: "I have a dream." Well, people who knew Martin King well know that he had given the speech as a sermon before, and he called it "the bounced check speech." It is rare indeed that anyone focuses on the "bounced check."

Well the part of Dr. King's speech that we have to do something about is the part he kept reminding people of over and over again: the bounced check. It is the part where he said, "in a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory

note, to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And then he went on to say, "it is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.' But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt, we refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check-- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice." So it was the bounced check that he was there to try to cash.

As I think about King and leadership, I consider how he developed throughout the conflicts in the movement over strategy, but then his success in obtaining federal support for equal opportunity, and of all of the laws that got passed ending progress established. In 1963 he was so clearly the leader that he was chosen man of the year; when the cover of Time came out in January 1964, there was his picture. Then there was the Nobel Peace Prize in '64, and he was at thirty four years old an international symbol of justice.

Students often when they ask me today, "Where are the leaders?"

I say, "Martin Luther King Jr. was not a leader until he became a leader; you're not a leader until you become a leader." So they can be leaders. He became a leader, he was not a leader when he began. That is one of the lessons of his life.

And then there are lessons to learn about what happens to leadership once they accomplish certain goals. We forget what happened. By 1965, two very significant things happened to Martin Luther King that changed his public image and caused his popularity to decline and his support to erode. But we conveniently forget that. His commitment to nonviolence caused him to speak out against the war in Vietnam. And there were blacks inside the Johnson administration, and leaders of black organizations outside, along with a lot of whites, who echoed Lyndon Johnson in saying, "what right does he have to speak out on foreign policy? He is a civil rights leader; why is he speaking about

foreign policy?" And any of us know what that is like. It's like when you try to talk about educational issues, and people want to confine you to what I call an equal opportunity ghetto.

When I was invited to a meeting at a great university a few years ago, they said to the assistant in my office, "we'd like her to come and make a speech. She can talk about whatever she wants, but we're having a morning and an afternoon session. One of them is on equal opportunity in education and the other one is on quality education. Now we know she'd like to speak about the equal opportunity one, and that's going to be in the morning." And my assistant, who had worked for me about fifteen years then and was very wise in these matters said, "No, she's not interested in an equal opportunity for any old kind of raggedy education; she's only interested in an equal opportunity for a quality education. So if you have a session in which you are combining both of those, she will speak."

Let us think about this. On any policy matter, if the issue is not civil rights; you are unlikely to see any blacks on television. Civil rights, that is what the media want you to talk about. Confine yourself. But Martin Luther King Jr. understood something. If you let people define you, they can confine you. And what did he say? He said, "I've fought too long and too hard against segregation to start segregating my mind or concerns." And so he continued to speak out against the war.

And then there was the Watts riot in '65, and the Moynihan report, which was used to blame poverty and powerlessness on deficiencies in the black family. King had already been speaking about the needy and poverty, and he talked about racism and how the two were combined together and how they perpetuated the conditions in the poor communities in the ghettos of America. But what did he say about the Moynihan report? He said, "Well, I don't mind it."

He said, "I think [black people] accept serious criticism. Indeed, we should be self critical about our problems."

But, he said, I believe that if we focus so much on internal black community problems without discussing American racism and governmental responsibility to help solve the problems, the

danger will be that "the problems will be attributed to innate Negro weakness and used to justify neglect and rationalize oppression."

And how many times in the last few years have I thought about that--that sometimes we get into the trap ourselves of helping people to justify and neglect and rationalize oppression by agreeing with them that the whole problem is we in our community need to do something, rather than pointing out that there is racism, and governmental responsibility as well as individual and community responsibility.

But so adamant was Martin Luther King Jr. by that time in talking about poverty and the need for an economic bill of rights and about the big defense budget, military expenditures, and war that, in June 1966, there was a White House conference on civil rights and Martin Luther King was told that he could not speak. He was told, "No, we don't want you to speak. You are persona non grata." Also by the end of 1966, he had tried to take his message of nonviolence to Newark, Watts, and Chicago, and he had failed.

Then something else happened which sounds very much like what goes on now. Public discussion about his role sounded like what so-called conservatives, black folk and white folk, say about civil rights leaders today. What did they say? "You have been eclipsed. You've already desegregated the busses and the lunch counters, why don't you shut up? What are you talking about? What else do you want? Why are you out there still talking about these issues--are you just trying to keep yourself visible, talking about poor people and Vietnam, because black power has carried the day?" There were other people who told him, "There is no problem. You've solved it now."

What else happened to him? He was called a communist sympathizer and a womanizer. There were rumors about FBI tapes, and there was criticism from a lot of people, some black, for not staying in jail long enough.

Some people said, "Martin comes through here, then he leads the movement, then he goes to jail, then he gets out and he goes somewhere else. He doesn't stay in jail long enough."

Other people criticized him for going to jail too often. "He's always going to jail."

And who were the people who were saying this? People who would never go to jail at all in the interests of justice and dramatizing a cause. Also, there were people who criticized him for alienating the White House by opposing the war in Vietnam, and they would say, "Look, Lyndon Johnson did so much for blacks, you shouldn't be saying anything."

Articles in the newspapers asked, "What more do Negroes want? They have civil rights, why doesn't King declare victory and go home?" In every movement, there is always somebody who wants you to declare victory and go home. I remember now, when I discuss apartheid and what we need to do in the struggle. Some people say, "Apartheid, I thought that was last year; now that you got some sanctions passed, why don't you declare victory and go home?"

It was in the period, from 1966 to '68, that Dr. King formulated plans for the Poor People's march across racial lines. It was a prototype for Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, and like other movements across racial lines in the past, Mexican-Americans, Indians, poor whites, Asian-Americans and blacks helped to make a case for a public policy that would end the years of joblessness, poor housing and bad education.

At that time, King preached that memorable sermon in Ebenezer Baptist Church. The people who were with him say he was agonizing over how to carry out the campaign and how it was necessary for it to be redemptive. In his sermon he ends by talking about his funeral eulogy. He said, "I'd like somebody to say that day Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like somebody to say that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody," and "I want you to be able to say that I did try to feed the hungry" and "I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe the naked" and "I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity," and that "he most of all wanted to be remembered as a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness."

Then he was assassinated. People are always saying to me, "Martin Luther King died." Martin Luther King didn't die, he was killed. And I remember where I was, when I heard about it. I was in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on the campus of the University of

Michigan, outside the student union. I remember a particularly negative response from some white students in front of the student union when my law school classmate passed the building crying over the assassination. But there's another part of that story that I ought to tell you.

After that, my friend and I went back to the law school. And in those days, many students did believe, that there was a problem of race in America, and that they had some kind of responsibility to be involved, and care about it; some of them knew that, others didn't. And I'm happy to say that when we went back to the law school, all of our friends there, the people who were in our class with whom we were very close, sort of gathered us up in their arms, and they cried with us. And so it was not all a sour experience. But I will never forget that day.

When King was dead, the Poor People's march that he had decided to cancel, after Johnson withdrew as a candidate for president, in the hope that Robert Kennedy or Hubert Humphrey would get elected and be more receptive to his hopes for an economic bill of rights, went on anyway. But the Poor People's campaign collapsed. I don't know whether it was Resurrection City, the tent city on the mall, whether it was the rain, or the mud, or whether it was the increasing backlash against the aspirations of the overlooked and unattended-to in our society, but the march failed. We have not had that kind of coalition on an issue of poverty since.

In assessing King, some people say his problem was that he was flawed basically because he was impractical. And then there are other people who say that he loved humanity too much, that was his problem, and that he did not understand how strong racism was, otherwise he would have been able to come up with some stronger medicine to deal with it. Other people say that he was simply out of his depth, that leadership is for a particular time and place, and that he was a leader for the South, but that once he left the provincial problems, that he didn't know what else to do. Other people forget his last years and say he had no plan or program beyond getting rid of Jim Crow facilities in the South.

I know people, including me, are always saying, "What would King be doing if he were alive today?" We don't know what he would be doing, but that's all right. We know some things he would

not be doing given the pattern of his life. But we can be sure that whatever he would be doing, he would do what is important to the cause of justice today. He would find the right phrases to say the right things to people to move the cause along. I think he would be able to shame people who think it is all right to say stereotypically that all blacks should be arrested if they are in the wrong neighborhood, or beaten up because their car broke down in the wrong place. I think King would find some way to explain how wrong that is. And I think he would find some way to shame people who pretend that housing and schools are desegregated when they are not. Or, people who say things like all blacks who do not have jobs are lazy, and all whites who do have jobs are the best qualified people. I think he would find some way to explain to them that it does not make any sense. And I think he would also find a way to tell people that it is ridiculous to say that all white people who are unemployed had their jobs taken away through affirmative action by unqualified black people.

And I think he would be able to craft language to rebuke people who say today the problems of poverty and joblessness and drugs and crime that exist in the society at large and more in the black community can be solved by self-help alone and are the result of some innate weakness in the black community. And he would insist that self-help with bad public policy will not work, and that good public policy without self-help will not work, and that you need both in order to achieve justice and real opportunity. And he would tell us that motivation and opportunity are both required to seek excellence, not just one, or the other, but both, and that individuals and the community are principally responsible for the motivation, but that those who control public policy are responsible for insuring opportunity.

I think also not only would he have liked a Jesse Jackson running for president in 1984 and running again now. I think he would like the idea of a Rainbow Coalition hearkening back to the Poor People's Campaign. And I think he would also believe Jesse when he says, as he did in that speech at the Democratic convention, that God is not finished with him yet, and that he's learned some lessons and become a more humble and sensitive person since the last time out. I think he would also be with Mitch Snyder and other leaders nationally of the homeless people as they sleep on the grates, and as they try to get shelters for them, and as they deal with these issues; I think he would be there.

I think also he would have been with me and Randall and Robinson and Walter Fauntroy, when we were over there in 1984 bearing witness to oppression against apartheid at the South African embassy. He probably would have led us there. And I think he would have gone to jail with us, and he would have prayed and fasted with us, and he would have been with us in person as he was with us in spirit at that hour. And even now I think he would be insisting on an end to apartheid, and for peace and understanding among blacks and blacks, and whites and blacks in that troubled land. And I think he would have rejoiced with us when sanctions were passed over Reagan's veto, and I think about how wonderful, how sweet that is. But I think he would have cried with us over the continued oppression, the Botha reaction, the attempt to smolder the flame of justice with the jailings of children and continued violence and shedding of blood. And I think he would help us to find ways to put the issue on the front burner of the American mind again. I think he would do that.

I think he would be pleased about the fruits of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. I think he would have loved the Bork fight. He would have thought it was great to watch Senator Howell Heflin from Alabama, and those other senators from the south, who are the harvest, they are the fruit of the Voting Rights Act of 65, having to vote on the issue. And I think he would like all those people like Mike Espy from Mississippi in the Congress and Kwesei Mfume, the new black congressman from Baltimore, and I think he would smile as I do thinking of the Speaker of the House of Representatives calling on Mr. Mfume. And I think he would like all of the female, black, Asian-American, and Hispanic American congressfolk and mayors and other public officials, and Indian women tribal leaders for the first time. But I think most of all, he would like the white people who have remained committed to progressive causes, despite the prevalence of conservatism in these times, and in spite of the fact that they get little support from their friends and their neighbors and those who are their significant others.

I do not think he would excuse those who use the dominance of conservativism as an excuse for refusing to stand up in the cause of justice. When he heard that, I think he would talk about Rosa Parks, who was here Monday. And I think he would say, when they used conservatism as an excuse, that if Rosa Parks had taken a

poll before she sat down on the bus in Montgomery, she would still be standing up. Every day of his life, if Martin Luther King, Jr. were here, he would be about comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

And so what can we finally learn from all of this in terms of today's problems? Everybody can do something. I tell people they can do things that are political to move the cause forward. They can do the obvious things: vote, run for office, most of all be informed about the issues. Wisdom and knowledge are essential above all else, wisdom and knowledge. They can do the political thing. But there are people who don't want to do the normal political thing. They say, "Well, I don't want to do politics." Well, they can do other things: tutor a child, or an illiterate adult one night a week. I mean, that's not too much time, a few hours a week. Monitor a latchkey child at home, do something like volunteer work in a shelter. I've found that nothing focuses the mind like doing some volunteer work in a shelter or on a soup kitchen line. And if you can't even do that, you can send something to the shelter for people to eat that they don't get to eat.

If you don't want to do anything directly political, you can send a letter on an issue, to a congressman, or a mayor, or a public official. And don't think that letters don't count. Whenever I tell people that they say, "Well, they don't read letters." They don't read them, but they count them, and that's important. The other thing one can do is stand silently outside when a so-called other race person, most typically blacks, buy a house in a community, or Asians buy a store. You can sign a petition, or argue back rationally instead of silently bowing before the voices of bigotry and racism wherever they come from. I've said to students here occasionally here on campus, they'll tell me somebody said something or did something, white students, and I'll say "what did you say?" and they say "nothing." You don't have to, because intelligence means finding a way to deal with these issues.

And in large terms, we can be willing to acknowledge our country's defects along with its accomplishments, because acknowledgement is the first step toward a solution. And I suppose most of all what I learned from all of this, as a guide for my own behavior in this legacy of King, is that if we are in good conscience to commemorate his memory, we must always display great courage and strong faith. We must believe in justice, and we

must each in our own way claim the mantle of King for ourselves. Do not let other people claim it, and use it, and distort it. We must find ways, whether political, social, or personal, whatever comes to hand, to keep the flame of justice from expiring entirely in our time.