

# Correspondence

## Martin Luther King

To the Editors: The moving address by Dr. King, "A New Sense of Direction" (*Worldview*, April), . . . leads one to assess anew the view which Dr. King had of where he was heading at the time of his death.

Clearly, his commitment to non-violence was undiminished. He recognized the emergence of new forces and new ideas within the black community which might question the appropriateness of the non-violent tool chest, but while predicting an escalation in scale—to mass civil disobedience—he makes no retreat whatsoever from the nonviolent posture.

Regarding the racial aspect of his program he is less categorical. Although he unhesitatingly embraces the black power consciousness which was already sweeping the black community well before his death, he takes care to cast his program in humanistic rather than in racial terms. Sympathetic elements in the white community are afforded a role in the movement, and the ultimate vision is a "colorless" society of "the creative majority."

Are such positions still viable within the black community? Can they be effective?

Curiously, such questions, so vigorously debated in the months following King's death, seem to have lost much of their urgency today. In part this may be due to the failure to appear of any genuine successor to Dr. King. His movement appears to have largely died with him, and the struggle which continues today, although building upon the solid accomplishments of Dr. King and possible only because Dr. King had prepared the way, is hardly the same struggle. The vanguard of black activism in the seventies centers around such disparate groups as the Congressional Black Caucus, the National Welfare Rights Organization, programs of black capitalism and black economic development, and localized manifestations of black

nationalism and community control. There is no national black leader, nor is there a national black program, although Gary represented an incipient effort to formulate one.

To be sure, violence is not a stated element of the programs of the black activist organizations, but Dr. King's program can hardly be adequately characterized merely by the absence of violence. An active, consciously chosen *nonviolence* is the essential element of the King philosophy and, generally speaking, this attitude is conspicuously absent from the black movement today. In this sense, the King philosophy has not so much been rejected as ignored. The tactics of confrontation have largely been abandoned, and with this shift the choice of violence or nonviolence has largely become irrelevant.

The ultimate vision which Dr. King articulated, however, of a colorless society of right-thinking people, has probably been more consciously rejected by a significant percentage of the black community in recent years. To be sure, differences in goals, after careful scrutiny, often prove to be merely differences in time horizons. Dr. King's vision may have been of an America (or a world) many centuries in the future. If this were his time horizon, then it may not be in contradiction to the more separatist, less idealistic objectives being articulated by an ever growing number of blacks today. Apples should not be compared with bananas. Today's blacks, by keeping white allies at arms' length, by focusing on what blacks can and must do for themselves, by talking in terms of a separate black nation or of other forms of black separatism, are searching for ways to address their own problems in the most effective and expeditious way. This is not to say that they are unconcerned about a good society for all mankind. Far from it. But it says that they have decided that their priority must be to seek the security and well-being of the black community first. It says further that this security must be found in a black setting, with white participation kept to a minimum.

Their time horizon is next year; Dr. King's dream is for the next century.

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To the Editors: Your publication of the hitherto unavailable evaluation of the civil rights movement by Dr. King shortly before his death is an important contribution—not merely to those of us with an abiding interest in the history and continuing fate of the movement, but to all of America. For even more than in the dark days of that speech, America needs now to comprehend the vision of such an analysis and to feel anew the unkillable spirit of such a leader.

Many people of both races and all ages were touched by his and the movement's highest spiritual qualities. There is no knowing how many such people there are, but I am convinced there are far more than anyone has ever acknowledged, including many white Southerners who are probably not even aware of how much their attitudes were affected by the movement. I know from having interviewed a number of the men and women who worked under Dr. King that there is a large cadre of experienced movement people who are still dedicated to integration and nonviolence, and to the corresponding insight, most important of all of Dr. King's, I believe, that the social changes this country needs cannot be achieved through violence because violence is what, in essence, is wrong with the country. . . .

Repeatedly in Dr. King's 1968 analysis of the movement, he spoke of the need to change the country's values, and, most beautifully, he invoked the hope for a broadened movement to achieve this. This is what his movement and the early SNCC's movement were all about—putting people in motion for fundamental change of the culture.

I hope . . . more people who believe as Dr. King did will find new confidence to express themselves, and that more and more people who missed his message the first time or

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