

The American Oligarchy, Civil Rights and the Murder of Martin Luther King

The 'Foundations' of Social Control

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Civil Rights and Social Control

As the American civil rights movement emerged in the 1950s, the established American oligarchy, in all its various forms and avenues of influence, set in motion simultaneous attempts to control the evolution of the movement, in order to both divide the movement and its leaders against each other, and also to control its direction. The Civil Rights Movement arose as an independent and people-driven movement in a struggle for black rights in America. In this, the movement presented a great threat to the establishment oligarchy, as historically the subjugation of black people within western society was not merely a result of western policies, but lies at the very foundations and bedrock of western 'civilization', politically, socially, and economically. Thus, challenging the segregation of race inevitably challenges the entire political, economic and social system.

The National Security State and its various apparatus, such as the CIA, FBI, police and military structures, saw the Civil Rights Movement as a threat to the status quo (as it was), and treated it as an 'enemy of the state'. The apparatus of the National Security State were spying, infiltrating and disrupting the civil rights movement, and were ultimately planning for its elimination. Simultaneously, the major philanthropic foundations of America's richest families and billionaire elites (whose imperial interests are served through the National Security State), moved in to actively fund the Civil Rights Movement, so as to control its progress and make it 'safe for Capitalism.' The idea was to prevent the Civil Rights Movement from remaining an organic people-driven movement and taking its natural course, which falls outside the false boundary of the social construct of race, and would seek to unite all oppressed and impoverished people of the world in one struggle against the system, itself. The role of the billionaire philanthropies was to ensure that the 'Civil Rights Movement' remained race-based, and that it became about black people being absorbed into and rising within the system, instead of fighting against it. It was about financially co-opting the movement to suit the interests of the ruling oligarchy.

Martin Luther King, the most articulate, intelligent and respected leader of the Civil Rights Movement, was also the most hated by the ruling oligarchy. The wealthy philanthropies attempted to co-opt him, the political establishment attempted to use him and the 'National Security State' despised him and hated him. King was tolerated by the oligarchy so long as his focus was on the issue of race, as the oligarchy has always functioned on the basis of 'divide and conquer', so 'identity politics' - that is, basing political, economic and social views based upon one particular identity you have (whether it is race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc) - lends itself to being easily controlled. If everyone adheres to

'identity politics', then people will remain divided and the overall power structures of society will remain intact, and actually increase in legitimacy.

When Martin Luther King began speaking about more than race, and openly criticized the entire social structure of empire and economic exploitation, not simply of blacks, but of all people around the world and at home, he posed too great a threat to the oligarchy to tolerate him any longer. It was at this point that the National Security State chose to assassinate Martin Luther King, and the philanthropies greatly expanded their financing of the Civil Rights Movement to ensure that it would be led in their desired direction.

Civil Rights and the National Security State

A Congressional investigation in the 1970s revealed that the FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, began a program in 1956 called COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program), which was "a secret, often illegal FBI campaign of surveillance and sabotage against a wide variety of right-and left-wing groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Panthers and the Fair Play for Cuba Committee." [1] Among the key targets of COINTELPRO was the Civil Rights Movement, which largely emerged in 1955 with Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The Boycott was organized by a young Baptist minister named Martin Luther King, Jr., who was thrown into the national spotlight as a result:

COINTELPRO involved not only wiretapping, but as the investigation showed, attempts to disrupt, discredit, and defame perceived political radicals. Hoover targeted few figures as relentlessly as Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The charge, Communist influence in the civil rights movement. [2]

Of particular note, was in August 1963 when King gathered more than a quarter of a million Americans in the march on Washington to champion Civil Rights. Hoover was not amused:

That march spurred Hoover to action. A little more than a month later, the FBI Director petitioned the Attorney General, then Robert F. Kennedy, to approve a wiretap on King's telephone. Kennedy only agreed, according to his attorney Nicholas Katzenbach, in order to protect King. [3]

In fact, in December of 1963, no more than a month after the John F. Kennedy assassination, FBI officials met in Washington to explore ways to "neutralize King as an effective Negro leader." [4]

When, in 1964, three civil rights workers disappeared, Martin Luther King "publicly questioned whether the FBI had done enough to safeguard the lives of civil rights activists and black citizens. An enraged Hoover then began to publicly denounce King, telling reporters that King was, 'The most notorious liar in the country'." Hoover had "decided that Martin Luther King was an enemy to the country." The FBI then began a massive campaign to discredit King, with the FBI compiling "a tape recording of Reverend King with extra marital lovers." King was sent a copy with an anonymous note which said, "King, there is only one thing left for you to do. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, fraudulent self is bared to the nation," and "King and his advisors interpreted the note as calling for him to commit suicide." [5]

Important in understanding the nature of COINTELPRO, is that, "COINTELPRO was not just surveillance, it was active disruption. It was putting agents into the movement to incite

rivalries, a jealousy, to try to get people fighting against each other and not trusting each other.”[6]

As a Congressional investigation into the activities of COINTELPRO revealed, “the infiltration of an informant into the top post of the United Klans of America, then largest of several major Ku Klux Klan organizations, was seriously considered in 1967.” Further, “in the early 1970s the leadership of the Black Panthers was so riddled with FBI informants that the bureau virtually ran the organization.”[7]

Even the National Security Agency, the massive intelligence agency that dwarfs the CIA in its size, had begun in the 1960s, compiling a watch list of US citizens whose phone calls were wiretapped. In 1967, “the list was expanded to include the names of U.S. citizens involved in antiwar and civil-rights activities.”[8]

The Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964, which banned discrimination based on “race, color, religion, or national origin” in employment practices and public accommodations. Martin Luther King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize the same year. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act was signed. In 1966, Black Power was created as a group designed to be armed and ready to take on the Ku Klux Klan, and was made most famous by the Black Panther Party.

In April of 1967, Martin Luther King gave a speech entitled, “Beyond Vietnam,” in which he most publicly and famously spoke out against not just the Vietnam War, but all war. He declared that he could not confront the evils of poverty without confronting “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today — my own government.” King stated, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”[9]

After delivering such a monumental speech against war and empire, King was attacked by the national media; with Life Magazine calling the speech, “demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi,” and the Washington Post saying that, “King has diminished his usefulness to his cause, his country, his people.”[10]

Martin Luther King was vastly contributing to the use of the apparatus of government in expanding and strengthening the democratic nature of society. This was largely at odds with the aims and methods of the National Security State “secret government,” operating through the realm of ‘deep politics.’ This was particularly prescient as the civil rights movement coalesced with the antiwar movement, posing a significant political threat to the established powers. When King spoke out against the Vietnam War and imperialism, the ‘secret government’ could no longer tolerate him. Protests in the civil rights and antiwar movements were often becoming violent, and prompted violent state responses. In regards to COINTELPRO, “efforts to discredit Reverend King intensified as he began to criticize as he began to criticize the Vietnam War.”[11]

In 1967, “the National Guard was called out twenty-five times to deal with rioting, gunfire, arson, and looting.” In 1968:

The Pentagon took unusual steps to combat civil disturbance. A plan and command, named Operation Garden Plot, was devised for “DOD [Department of Defense] components [that is, U.S. armed forces] to respond to reasonable requests from the FBI for military resources for use in combating acts of terrorism.”[12]

Under Operation Garden Plot, “Military Intelligence – working with the FBI, local county and state police forces – undertook and directed a massive domestic intelligence-gathering operation.” Further, “security forces ranging from Army troops to local police were trained to implement their contingency plans.” The name of this Army task force that took on this operation was the Directorate of Civil Disturbance Planning and Operations.[13] In the Army surveillance of King, as Peter Dale Scott documented:

The 20th Special Forces Group is reported to have used reservists from the Alabama National Guard, who in turn traded arms for intelligence from the Ku Klux Klan. In other words the U.S. Army with these programs, consciously or not, was countering a militant left by building up and arming a militant right.[14]

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. The murder was blamed on James Earl Ray, a fugitive who was later arrested in London and extradited to the United States. Even after King’s death, J. Edgar Hoover “continued the campaign to discredit the civil rights leader.”[15]

The King family had for a long time, publicly acknowledged that they believed the accused killer, James Earl Ray, to have been innocent of the crime he was accused. In fact, in 1999, the case was taken to court, in one of the most important, and yet least-widely reported court cases in the last century. O.J. Simpson’s trial became a national issue seared into the collective cultural subconscious, while the trial of the charge of government conspiracy in the murder of Martin Luther King, received barely a whisper of attention. The jury at the trial concluded that:

Loyd Jowers, owner of Jim’s Grill, had participated in a conspiracy to kill King, a conspiracy that included J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, Richard Helms and the CIA, the military, the Memphis Police Department (MPD), and organized crime. That verdict exonerated James Earl Ray who had already died in prison.[16]

Upon the announcement of the verdict, Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King’s widow, said, “There is abundant evidence of a major high level conspiracy in the assassination of my husband, Martin Luther King, Jr. And the civil court’s unanimous verdict has validated our belief.” She continued:

The jury was clearly convinced by the extensive evidence that was presented during the trial that, in addition to Mr. Jowers, the conspiracy of the Mafia, local, state and federal government agencies, were deeply involved in the assassination of my husband. The jury also affirmed overwhelming evidence that identified someone else, not James Earl Ray, as the shooter, and that Mr. Ray was set up to take the blame.[17]

William Pepper, the lawyer for the King family who took the case to trial, and who was previously the lawyer for James Earl Ray, spoke upon the final verdict of the jury. He stated that Martin Luther King:

took on those forces, powerful economic forces that dominated politics in this land, they killed him. He was killed because he could not be stopped. He was killed because they feared that half a million people would rise in revolution in the capitol of this country, and do what Mr. Jefferson said needed to be done every 20 years, to cleanse this land. This land has not been cleansed. This nation has not faced the problems that Martin Luther King, Jr. died trying to face and confront. They still exist today, the forces of evil, the powerful economic

forces that dominate the government of this land and make money on war and deprive the poor of what is their right, their birthright. They still abound and they rule.[18]

As it was revealed at the trial:

Members of the Army's 111th Military Intelligence Group, based at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia, had come to Memphis and were keeping King under 24 hour a day surveillance.[19]

William Pepper, the lawyer for the King family, later wrote a book on the trial and the evidence for the assassination, titled, "An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King." In it, he lays out the evidence:

of how Martin Luther King was killed, not by James Ray, a bumbling patsy, but by a Memphis policeman in league with the Mafia, backed by soldiers — some armed with high-powered rifles, others with cameras to film the event — in a special Military Intelligence unit.[20]

Judge Joe Brown had presided over James Earl Ray's final appeal of his conviction, which thrust him into the national spotlight. It was out of this that he got the job to host the television court program, "Judge Joe Brown." However, he continued to speak out on matters of the Martin Luther King assassination. Brown has publicly stated that James Earl Ray did not shoot King, and that, "Dr. King was shot with an M-21, which is a specially accurized edition of the M-14 semi-automatic weapon that the military used." [21]

Following the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4, 1968, the Pentagon's Directorate of Civil Disturbance Planning and Operations emerged "during the massive rioting that broke out in black ghettos of nineteen cities after the assassination." The headquarters of the Directorate was in the basement of the Pentagon, in "the domestic war room." As Peter Dale Scott explained:

In effect, plans and programs were being established to institutionalize martial law on a long-term or even permanent basis. A number of steps were taken toward eroding the prohibition, established in the Posse Comitatus Act of 1876, against the ongoing use of the army in civilian law enforcement.[22]

The military intelligence operation "was supplemented at various stages by the CIA, the Secret Service, the Internal Revenue Service, and the National Security Administration." [23] By 1968:

many Justice Department personnel knew that the military was preparing to move in massively if needed to quash urban riots, and some officials feared the development of a large national military riot force. It was well known among top officials that the Department of Defense was spending far more funds than the Justice Department on civil disorder preparations indicative of the growing trend at the federal level toward repression and control of the urban black rioters.[24]

A US Senator later "revealed that Military Intelligence had established an intricate surveillance system covering hundreds of thousands of American citizens." Further:

At first, the Garden Plot exercises focused primarily on racial conflict. But beginning in 1970, the scenarios took a different twist. The joint teams, made up of cops, soldiers and spies,

began practicing battle with large groups of protesters...

As time went on, "Garden Plot evolved into a series of annual training exercises based on contingency plans to undercut riots and demonstrations, ultimately developed for every major city in the United States. Participants in the exercises included key officials from all law enforcement agencies in the nation, as well as the National Guard, the military, and representatives of the intelligence community.[25]

Garden Plot oversaw suppression of antiwar and civil rights protests and riots from the 1960s into the 1970s, having been called to a variety of cities over that period of time. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who was, at the time, campaigning for the presidency, broke the news to a large gathering of African Americans in Indianapolis, Indiana. He spoke, not of campaign issues, but of the man and ideas that King was and represented:

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness, but is love, and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.[26]

The Billionaire Oligarchy and the Civil Rights Movement

The major philanthropic foundations of America (primarily the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and a host of others), represent the interests of the most highly concentrated sources of power in the world. The foundations are run by and for major elite interests, who simultaneously control the economic and political apparatus of entire nations and the world economy. The foundations were founded in the early 20th century as a means of these same elites to steer social progress, and ultimately undertake projects of social engineering. It was these very same foundations that were the principle financiers of the eugenics movement, which gave birth to scientific racism and ultimately led to the Holocaust.[27] In short, these foundations had one principle aim: to socially engineer society according to the wishes of their owners. Through the banks and corporations these elites owned, they came to dominate the global economy. Through the think tanks they established, they steered politics and imperial foreign policy, and through the foundations, they engineered 'culture' and co-opted social movements into social engineering projects. Thus, every threat to the established social order would become an asset in its advancement and legitimization.

In the 1950s, the Ford Foundation began taking an interest in the Civil Rights movement, and after convening a study on how to "improve race relations," the Ford Foundation began giving grants to black colleges "to improve the quality of their educational offerings." [28] By 1966, the Civil Rights movement was one of the major areas of Ford Foundation funding. Against the backdrop of the summer of 1966 in which there were 43 "urban disorders" (riots in ghettos), which had been "precipitated by confrontations between blacks and the police," the Ford Foundation announced that it would "direct significant resources to the social justice area." Among the aims of the Foundation were: "to improve leadership and programming within minority organizations; to explore approaches to better race relations; to support policy-oriented research on race and poverty; to promote housing integration; and to increase the availability of legal resources through support of litigating organizations

and minority law students.”[29]

There was a transformation between 1966 and 1967 of the notion of ‘black power’, which was increasingly viewed by elites and ‘authorities’, such as J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI, as “the beginning of a true black revolution.” Many advocates of ‘black power’ saw it as the beginnings of a revolt against “white western imperialist” America.[30]

The problem for elites was in having such prolific and anti-establishment leaders of social change movements. King was accepted by the established powers, although very reluctantly, as it was a political necessity to support him unless one wanted to risk a revolution. However, when King moved against not only the issue of racial inequality, but the issues of poverty and imperialism, and drawing the connections between these areas and building opposition to them, King could no longer be tolerated by the established powers. Thus, they killed him. King, who was without a doubt, the leader of the Civil Rights movement, was, in his last year, steering the Civil Rights movement against poverty and empire. This would have been the natural progression of the Civil Rights movement had King lived longer, fighting for the rights of all people around the world and at home, and aiming to unite them all under a common cause of liberation against systemic oppression. This was simply too much for the oligarchy to accept, and thus King was killed. With King gone, the movement lent itself to be more easily steered in “safer” directions.

The Civil Rights movement was originally “launched by indigenous leadership and primarily mobilized the southern black community.” Thus, it was essential for large foundation funding of the movement, to effectively control its direction and impetus. This “elite involvement would seem to occur only as a response to the threat posed by the generation of a mass-based social movement.” The major foundations “supported the moderate civil rights organizations in response to the ‘radical flank’ threat of the militants, while non-elites (churches, unions and small individual donors) spread their support evenly.”[31] Elite patronage of the Civil Rights movement “diverted leaders from indigenous organizing and exacerbated inter-organizational rivalries, thereby promoting movement decay.”[32]

Foundation funding for civil rights did not become significant until 1961-62, five years after the Birmingham bus boycott, and the peak of foundation support for civil rights was in 1972-73, four to five years after the assassination of King.[33] This indicated that foundation grants to civil rights were ‘reactive’, in that they were designed in response to changes in the movement itself, implying that foundation patronage was aimed at social control. Further, most grants went to professionalized social movement organizations (SMOs) and in particular, the NAACP. While the professional SMOs initiated only 14% of movement actions, they accounted for 57% of foundation grants, while the classical SMOs, having carried out roughly 36% of movement actions, received roughly 32% of foundation grants. This disparity grew with time, so that by the 1970s, the classical SMOs garnered 25% of grants and the professional SMOs received nearly 70% of grants. Principally, the NAACP and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund were the most endowed with foundation support.[34] Many of

the foundations subsequently became “centrally involved in the formulation of national social policy and responded to elite concerns about the riots.”[35]

It became clear that the older, established and moderate organizations received the most outside funding, such as the National Urban League, the NAACP and the Legal Defense and Educational Fund.[36] As the black struggles of the 1960s increasingly grew militant and activist-oriented in the latter half of the 1960s, “foundation contributions became major sources of income for the National Urban League, the

Southern Regional Council, and the Legal Defense and Educational Fund.”[37]

The NAACP and the National Urban League represent the more moderate civil rights organizations, as they were also the oldest, with membership primarily made up of middle class African Americans, leading to many, including King himself, to suggest they were disconnected from the reality or in representing poor blacks in America.[38] The radicalization of the black protest movement led to the emergence of challenges to the NAACP and Urban League in being the ‘leaders’ in civil rights, as new organizations emerged which represented a broader array of the black population. Among them were the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which Martin Luther King led. Foundations increased funding for all of these organizations, but as activism and militancy accelerated in the latter half of the 1960s, the funding declined for the more radical, militant and activist organizations and increased dramatically for the established and moderate organizations. This trend continued going into the 1970s.

In 1967, Martin Luther King’s SCLC received \$230,000 from the Ford Foundation, yet after his assassination, the organization received no more funding and virtually fell to pieces. That same year, the Ford Foundation gave the NAACP \$300,000, and gave the Urban League \$585,000. The Rockefeller Foundation granted the League \$650,000, with the Carnegie Corporation coming in with \$200,000. The Ford Foundation also gave the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) \$175,000 in 1967.[39]

In 1968, with the SCLC out of the picture, Ford increased funding for CORE to \$300,000, increased grants to the NAACP to \$378,000, and gave the Urban League a monumental grant of \$1,480,000. The same year, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation gave the NAACP \$500,000 and \$200,000 respectively. Clearly, the foundations were supporting the older established and moderate organizations over the new, young and activist/radical organizations. From the following year, 1969, CORE received no more grants from foundations, while the Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations increased their grants to the NAACP and the Urban League. In 1974, the NAACP received grants of \$950,000 from the Ford Foundation, \$250,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation, and \$200,000 from the Carnegie Corporation. The Urban League received grants of \$2,350,000 from the Ford Foundation and \$350,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation.[40]

This co-optation of the civil rights movement was so vital to these elite interests for the principle reason of the movement taking its natural course, out of an ethnic or race-based focus and into a class and global social focus. A. Philip Randolph, a civil rights leader, spoke in 1963 at an ALF-CIO convention at which he stated, "The Negro's protest today is but the first rumbling of the 'under-class.' As the Negro has taken to the streets, so will the unemployed of all races take to the streets." [41] This was clearly the sentiment of Martin Luther King in 1967, when he spoke of how poverty, empire, war and economic exploitation are faced not simply by one race or one people, but all people, everywhere. It was an issue and an approach and a natural progression from the civil rights movement, coupled with the anti-war movement, which would ultimately unite all people against the prevailing imperial structures and ideas.

In 1970, pamphlets were circulating in which it was said that the black woman "allies herself with the have-nots in the wider world and their revolutionary struggles." While in the past, wrote Patricia Robinson in one pamphlet, the poor black woman did not "question the social and economic system," now she must, and "she has begun to question aggressive male domination and the class society which enforces it, capitalism." [42]

Ultimately, the methods, amounts and sources of elite financing for civil rights organizations had the desired effects. The strategy for civil rights became integration and reform, not agitation and revolution. The distinctly anti-capitalist sentiments of many in the civil rights movement, as well as exponentially increasing criticisms of American imperialism and campaigns against poverty, not simply as a racial issue, but as social and class issues, all ceased to accelerate and advance. From this point on, civil rights procedures took a distinctly institutionalized approach, preferring the legal route rather than the activist route. The legal route was instrumental in advancing notions of black integration into the system (ex: 'affirmative action'), as opposed to black activist-inspired reorganization or revolution of the system. In this sense, the major foundations had the effect of co-opting one of the most promising social movements in recent history, so that it did not negatively damage the prevailing systems and structures of power, and instead, focused on 'reforming' appearance rather than substance, so that blacks can be included within the system, thus removing the impetus for them to fight against it.

Elite Ideology: Social Movements are "Dangerous" to Democracy

It is important to briefly address some of the institutional ideologies of the elite, so as to understand their motivations for co-optation of social movements and their preference and proclivity for social engineering.

In 1970, David Rockefeller became Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, while also being Chairman and CEO of Chase Manhattan. In 1970, an academic who joined the Council on Foreign Relations in 1965 wrote a book called *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*. The author, Zbigniew Brzezinski, called for the formation of "A Community

of the Developed Nations,” consisting of Western Europe, the United States and Japan. Brzezinski wrote about how “the traditional sovereignty of nation states is becoming increasingly unglued as transnational forces such as multinational corporations, banks, and international organizations play a larger and larger role in shaping global politics.” David Rockefeller had taken note of Brzezinski’s writings, and was “getting worried about the deteriorating relations between the U.S., Europe, and Japan,” as a result of Nixon’s economic shocks. In 1972, David Rockefeller and Brzezinski “presented the idea of a trilateral grouping at the annual Bilderberg meeting.” In July of 1972, seventeen powerful people met at David Rockefeller’s estate in New York to plan for the creation of the Commission. Also at the meeting was Brzezinski, McGeorge Bundy, the President of the Ford Foundation, (brother of William Bundy, editor of Foreign Affairs) and Bayless Manning, President of the Council on Foreign Relations.[43] So, in 1973, the Trilateral Commission was formed to address these issues.

The Commission’s major concerns were to preserve for the “industrialized societies,” in other words, seek mutual gain for the Trilateral nations, and to construct “a common approach to the needs and demands of the poorer nations.” However, this should be read as, “constructing a common approach to [dealing with] poorer nations.” As well as this, the Commission would undertake “the coordination of defense policies and of policies toward such highly politicized issues as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and aerial hijacking, and such highly politicized geographic areas as the Middle East or Southern Africa.”[44]

In 1975, the Trilateral Commission published a Task Force Report entitled, “The Crisis of Democracy,” of which one of the principal authors was Samuel Huntington, a political scientist and close associate and friend of Zbigniew Brzezinski. In this report, Huntington argues that the 1960s saw a surge in democracy in America, with an upswing in citizen participation, often “in the form of marches, demonstrations, protest movements, and ‘cause’ organizations.”[45] Further, “the 1960s also saw a reassertion of the primacy of equality as a goal in social, economic, and political life.”[46] Huntington analyzed how as part of this “democratic surge,” statistics showed that throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, there was a dramatic increase in the percentage of people who felt the United States was spending too much on defense (from 18% in 1960 to 52% in 1969, largely due to the Vietnam War).[47]

Huntington wrote that the “essence of the democratic surge of the 1960s was a general challenge to existing systems of authority, public and private,” and that, “people no longer felt the same compulsion to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talents.” Huntington explained that in the 1960s, “hierarchy, expertise, and wealth” had come “under heavy attack.”[48] He stated that three key issues which were central to the increased political participation in the 1960s were:

social issues, such as use of drugs, civil liberties, and the role of women; racial issues, involving integration, busing, government aid to minority groups, and urban riots; military issues, involving primarily, of course, the war in Vietnam but also the draft, military

spending, military aid programs, and the role of the military-industrial complex more generally.[49]

Huntington presented these issues, essentially, as the “crisis of democracy,” in that they increased distrust with the government and authority, that they led to social and ideological polarization, and led to a “decline in the authority, status, influence, and effectiveness of the presidency.”[50]

Huntington concluded that many problems of governance in the United States stem from an “excess of democracy,” and that, “the effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups.” Huntington explained that society has always had “marginal groups” which do not participate in politics, and while acknowledging that the existence of “marginality on the part of some groups is inherently undemocratic,” it has also “enabled democracy to function effectively.” Huntington identifies “the blacks” as one such group that had become politically active, posing a “danger of overloading the political system with demands.”[51]

Huntington, in his conclusion, stated that the vulnerability of democracy, essentially the ‘crisis of democracy,’ comes “from the internal dynamics of democracy itself in a highly educated, mobilized, and participant society,” and that what is needed is “a more balanced existence” in which there are “desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy.”[52] Summed up, the Trilateral Commission Task Force Report essentially explained that the “Crisis of Democracy” is that there is too much of it, and so the ‘solution’ to the crisis, is to have less democracy and more ‘authority’.

This is the principle ideology behind the political, economic and social institutions and apparatus of power: to control people and protect and expand centralized authority. ‘Democracy’ used in this sense simply implies maintaining an ‘image’ of democracy, with a legislature, judiciary, and executive branch, and of course, voting. Ultimately, a system in which the political, economic and social spheres are directed by and serve the interests of a tiny elite (national or international in composition) is not a true democracy. Voting is a cruel fraud on the people promoting a façade of democracy by allowing the people to vote between two elite-chosen candidates. This is not ‘democracy,’ this is oligarchy.

The Civil Rights Movement is an excellent example of how the imperial structures of society can be turned against an indigenous social movement to either crush or co-opt it. The natural progression of the Civil Rights Movement as a global struggle for liberation against not only racism, but empire, poverty and exploitation was interrupted and deconstructed; but it should not be forgotten. We are coming to a time, now, where the world is more ready for a resurgence of the ideas of Martin Luther King, the very ideas he was articulating in his final year alive, and the very ideas that are capable of uniting all of humanity against our common oppressors. All power structures, in every facet of society, should have their

legitimacy challenged and ultimately have their power withdrawn in place of indigenous power: people power. What systems and structures arise will be plentiful and with successes and failures, and no one can say what the “right” system is; but what is very evident, is that the current system is wrong, and should be challenged on every level, and by every person.

“I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a “thing-oriented” society to a “person-oriented” society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered... The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.”

– Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” 1967

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Notes

[1] Time, The Nation: FBI Dirty Tricks. Time Magazine: December 5, 1977: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,915760,00.html>

[2] Ed Gordon, COINTELPRO and the History of Domestic Spying. NPR: January 18, 2006: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5161811>

[3] Ibid.

[4] Maria Gilardin, Who Killed Martin Luther King? Dissident Voice: April 4, 2008: <http://dissidentvoice.org/2008/04/who-killed-martin-luther-king/>

[5] Ed Gordon, COINTELPRO and the History of Domestic Spying. NPR: January 18, 2006: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5161811>

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