

King's Way: A Call to Lovingly Engage in a Search for the Truth
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Introduction

In this paper I was asked to discuss King's approach to conflict, which is based on nonviolent tactics that he utilized in order to search for the truth in a fight. My goals for this paper are for the reader to gain a better understanding of Martin Luther King Jr's approach to conflict by explaining the three fundamental techniques that he used. Fighting a tough-minded fight, this means utilizing a tough mind and a tender heart to search for the truth. Loving our enemies is utilized in order to turn an enemy into a friend. Lastly, expanding the scope of the conflict is used to publicize the issue and to get others involved in the fight.

King's Concepts

Martin Luther King Jr's approach to conflict can best be understood as one that is based on forgiveness, love, and having the strength and courage to fight. King's approach to conflict begins with fighting a tough-minded fight, which is necessary in order to seek out the truth in the conflict and come to a resolution that will benefit both parties involved. However, a question arises. If we advocate for nonviolence than why should we fight at all? We should enter into a fight not to win the fight, but because we have a call to engage in conflict in order to find the truth.

King also believed that learning to love our enemies is important, because love is the only thing that can turn an enemy into a friend. It is important that you have the capacity to love and forgive, because without these characteristics we are unable to search for the truth in the conflict. If we cannot seek out the truth than we are not fulfilling our call to engage.

The last piece to understanding King's Way is being able to expand the scope of the conflict. Expanding the scope of the conflict is significant because it provides a bigger picture for the audience to see. The audience plays the decisive role in the outcome of the conflict, so it is important to be able to expand the scope of the conflict in order to get the proper information to the audience.

King's approach to conflict operates together as a set of tools that can be utilized in any situation, big or small, as a nonviolent means of fighting for what is important. In this paper, I will argue that King's approach to conflict can best be understood as a search for the truth by utilizing fundamental nonviolent tactics such as having a tough mind and a tender heart, expanding the scope of the conflict, and learning to love our enemies.

Fighting a Tough Minded Fight

Fighting a nonviolent fight, which requires one to have a tough mind, is extremely difficult to do. King says that

"The tough mind is sharp and penetrating, breaking through the crusts of legends and myths and sifting the true from the false. The tough minded individual is astute and discerning. He has a strong austere quality that makes for firmness of purpose and solidness of commitment (King 1963: 2).

King believed that having a tough mind provided one with the ability to find the truth in conflicts because it takes someone with a tough mind to be able to think in depth about the issue. "Rarely do

we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think” (King 1963: 2). King believed so strongly that fighting a tough minded fight needed to be utilized in order to bring to light the issues that are important and in doing so one must demonstrate courage as you are sure to be seen as a threat to the change that society fears.

Nonviolence is not weak, because it takes a tough minded person to be able to hold back from violence in the face of danger, while also remaining tender hearted and knowing how to forgive and love your enemies. In the movie *Citizen King* (2004), we see King in the midst of many demonstrations being violently attacked. In one instance, a man hit King in the head with a brick and he had to be hospitalized. King remained true to his word and forgave those who had harmed him and continued to fight using nonviolent tactics to prove that a resolution could still be reached without the use of violence.

Nonviolence is a much more productive approach to conflict, simply because it works better. It takes both a tough mind and a tender heart to be able to successfully enact nonviolent tactics. Nonviolent resistance combines tough mindedness with tenderheartedness and “avoids the complacency and do nothingness of the soft minded and the violence and bitterness of the hard hearted” (King 1963: 8). King uses the example of the serpent and the dove.

“To have serpent like qualities devoid of dove like qualities is to be passionless, mean, and selfish. To have dove like qualities without serpent like qualities is to be sentimental, anemic, and aimless. We must combine strongly marked antitheses.” (King 1963: 6).

In other words, to have tough-mindedness without tenderheartedness or vice versa leaves a person without certain abilities and therefore unable to successfully provide a resolution that will benefit both sides either because they are not open minded enough to seek out the truth or because they are too soft minded to have strength in their own view points.

Nonviolence works better than violence, because it seeks out the truth in the conflict and provides a resolution for both parties that can transform an enemy into a friend. Violence on the other hand does nothing but harm both individuals and violence only continues to spawn more violence. Using nonviolence will provide a solution to the issue, but violence on the other hand does the opposite. Violence only provides a temporary resolution, but more importantly it continues to provide a barrier to reconciliation between the two parties.

“Through nonviolent resistance we shall be able to oppose the unjust system and at the same time love the perpetrators of the system. We must work passionately and unrelentingly for full stature as citizens, but may it never be said, my friends, that to gain it we used the inferior methods of falsehood, malice, hate, and violence” (King 1963: 8).

Why Fight At All?

In advocating for nonviolence as the most productive approach to conflict, King was faced with the question of why we should fight at all. King, much like Gandhi believed that the point in fighting was to find the truth within the argument and we must do that by engaging in conflict with our opponents. “The logical extension of this way of thinking is the notion that conflict is the crucible in which the two can be separated out; truth can be forged and untruth burned away”

(Jurgensmeyer 1984: 16). The process of fighting is the only way to bring about the truth and the deception in the conflict. This is the way a resolution is reached between opposing parties.

King believed that to avoid conflict is to collaborate in perpetuating injustice. However, King does not think that people avoid conflict because they are bad, but instead because they are blind. “Blindness is their trouble; enlightenment is their need” (King 1963: 35). King solidified this argument by using the example of slavery which was also evident in the movie Race the Power of an Illusion (2003). In the movie we see that slavery can be traced to economic factors, because white men convinced themselves that slavery created such a huge economic profit that it must be morally justifiable. These men were not bad; they were blind because religion, science and philosophy were used as reasons for why the black man was inferior to the white man. Soon all of these ideas were in every book, magazine, newspaper, and media outlet available and it became engrained in the culture. Therefore, they sincerely believed that the black man was inferior by nature. The blindness that resides in our society is the reason for which we should engage in conflict in order to search for the truth.

As our Christian duty we must engage in conflict in our world in order to find the truth. Our enemies, as King would call them, hold part of the truth and for this reason we must learn to embrace forgiveness and love so that we can dig deep to find that truth. In Citizen King (2004), we examine King and his struggles to get the white liberals and those involved in the Black Power movement to work together for a common good, poverty. He said that it was not about black and white, but instead about trying to help those who were poor no matter the color of their skin. King was trying to get both groups to think more deeply about the issue and to look past the racial lines to learn how to forgive and love each other as God’s children. As Gandhi would say, King was “redirecting the focus of a fight from persons to principles” (Jurgensmeyer 1984: 3).

In order to set out to find the truth we must first engage ourselves in the conflict with the opponent, but the key to actually finding the truth is that we must learn to love our enemies. The only way for the truth to become evident is to learn how to forgive those who have wronged us and then and only then can we truly begin to love them.

Loving Your Enemies

King expressed the importance of loving your enemies, because “by its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power” (King 1963: 48). In order to first understand how to begin your quest to learn how to love your enemies, you must first learn how to forgive. “He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love” (King 1963: 44). One cannot begin to love their enemies without first learning how to forgive those who have done wrong to you. However, forgiveness does not mean ignoring what the person has done to you or never speaking to the person again. In order to truly forgive you must break down all barriers that stand in the way of reconciliation.

Forgiveness is the first step to learning how to love our enemies, because without forgiveness we cannot love and without the ability to love our enemies we cannot find the truth. Forgiveness is a way of life; it is not something that we just do. We must be able to forgive everyone, including our enemies, before we can learn to love. It is important that we recognize that even those who have done wrong to us possess some element of goodness and we must realize this in order to begin the process of learning to love them. “Each of us has something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against ourselves” (King 1963: 45). We are all human

and we make mistakes, however we are all God's children and for this reason we must learn to love on that basis. "Love your enemies...that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven" (King 1963: 49).

We must love our enemies not just because we are all children of God but also because "love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend" (King 1963: 48). It is extremely important that we learn to love our enemies, because being able to transform our enemies into our friends combines the two competing audiences. Combining audiences helps to expand the scope of the conflict. In expanding the scope of the conflict, it is probable, that our efforts will be publicized and our search for the truth will become evident to the outside world.

Expanding the Scope of the Conflict

Although King did not refer to his approach as expanding the scope of the conflict, this is a useful tool to understanding King's way. In an effort to expand the scope of the conflict, we must first publicize the issue so that it can become evident to the audience. Publicizing the conflict is so important because it can play a determining factor in how our audience will view the issue. A prime example of this is in the book Distorting the Law: Politics, Media, and the Litigation Process where they discuss the McDonald's coffee case. The attorney for McDonalds implied that Stella Leibeck's claim was an example of "a litigious plaintiff seeking damages for harms that she, however unfortunately caused to herself" (Haltom and McCann 2004: 192-193). In publicizing the conflict to sources such as magazines, television, newspapers, and other media outlets the defense was able to redirect the attention of the audience from the truths of the case to play in their favor. In doing so, the defense was successful in publicizing their views and getting society to believe that Leibeck was a greedy plaintiff who caused her own injuries and therefore did not deserve the reparations that she received as a result. "Conflicting claims are made by people about the nature of their interests in controversial matters" (Schattschneider 1975: 24). This case demonstrates the significance of being able to publicize the issue in order to expand the scope of the conflict to an outside audience. Since most of the articles printed were written in a way that favored McDonald's claims, society immediately began to believe what they read instead of engaging in the conflict themselves in order to find the truth.

The audience plays the decisive role when expanding the scope of the conflict, because the audience can decide the outcome of the conflict. "It follows that conflicts are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight or in excluding it, as the case may be" (Schattschneider 1975: 4). King successfully implements this in his book Where Do We Go from Here: from Chaos to Community which discusses how he led the implementation of a plan to gain integration into public facilities in 1963. They were able to be successful in this plan, because they refused to eat or buy anything from facilities that refused to treat blacks as equal as whites. It was not just the boycott that brought about the integration, but "the significant percentage of their sales that vanished, the 98 percent of their Negro customers who stayed home, educated them forcefully to the dignity of the Negro as a consumer" (King 1968: 151). The more they boycotted the more people who became involved in the fight for these rights. Here, King expands the scope of the conflict to a broader audience. In doing so he is able to successfully get integration for blacks into public places.

By expanding the scope of the conflict we are able to redirect the audience's thinking in order to gain power that will help in our search for the truth. The truth comes not from forcing

opinions upon the audience, but instead from competing opinions that the audience provides which helps to reframe, redirect, and rethink the issue for which we are fighting for.

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