




The Color of Compromise

Chapter 8



Compromising with Racism during the Civil Rights Movement



May 17, 1954 -- *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka*, Supreme Court unanimous decision opinion
Chief Justice Warren: "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

August 1955 -- Emmett Till murdered


December 1955 -- Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat

December 1955 -- Martin Luther King, Jr. -- President of Montgomery Improvement Association




Reaction to Integration

Within months of the Brown decision Citizens' Councils that promote white supremacy are set up in the South, including white business class.



G.T. Gillespie, president emeritus of a Christian school, Bellhaven College, in Jackson, Mississippi in a speech entitled, “Christian View of Segregation” argues that while the Bible has no clear mandate for or against segregation of the races, “Segregation is One of Nature’s Universal Laws.” He points out that though there are a variety of birds, bluebirds never mate with redbirds. Of course, this analogy invokes the specter of interracial sex. He argues from scripture (Leviticus) not to mix “diverse things.”



A more famous minister, Rev. Billy Graham, was a racial moderate regarding segregation. While he personally removed ropes at a 1953 crusade separating black and white seating, he did not actively push for desegregation. His primary focus was on evangelization believing improvement would come via one conversion and one friendship at a time.



The Christian Moderate and
the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”




1963 -- 50 plus bombings in a white neighborhood of Birmingham

1963 -- April 12th Good Friday, Martin Luther King Jr. arrested


1963 -- June 12th Medgar Evers (NAACP Field Secretary) assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi

1963 -- August 28th "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" and "I Have a Dream" speech

1963 -- September 15th Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing kills four girls

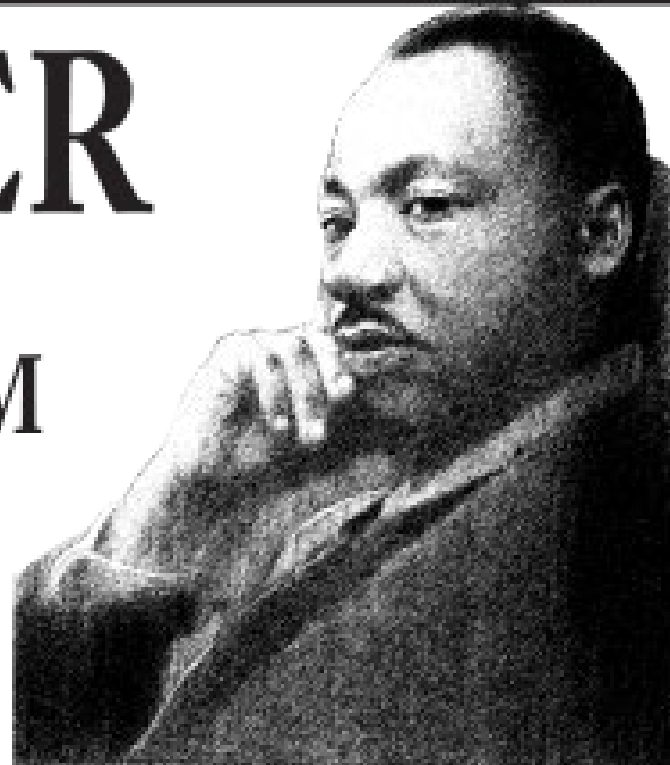


Eight white Birmingham clergymen wrote Martin Luther King criticizing both the protests, as both “unwise and untimely” and the fact that non-Birmingham residents were involved in the protest. The group that included Baptists, Methodists, a Presbyterian, and a Jewish Rabbi, argued that rather than using boycotts and marches, King should use litigation to gain integration. This letter prompted King to write his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” While the intentions were good, it was the very reasonableness of the clergymen that “reveals the underlying problem of complicity with racism.”




King's letter addressed the issues saying, among other things, he had been asked to go to Birmingham by the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, an affiliate of the SCLC of which he was president. Besides, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here." He tells the clergymen that they are right in their call for negotiation for that is the purpose of direct action. "... there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth." He tells them, "... we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure."

LETTER
FROM A
BIRMINGHAM
JAIL



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."


-Martin Luther King Jr.




When told to wait he reminds them that “wait” has almost always meant “never.” A just law is a law that conforms to the moral law of God, but, quoting Augustine, “An unjust law is no law at all.” He, in his disappointment with white moderates, writes against a person “who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom. . . . Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.”



The Everyday Racism of American Christians




The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (signed by President Johnson July 2nd), among other things, created the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**. Dr. King saw the act as a significant step toward racial equality.






Urban Uprisings and “Law and Order”





Six days of urban uprising in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles resulted in 34 deaths, over 1,000 injuries, \$34 million in damages, and 4,000 arrests. M.L. King tells Mike Wallace, “I think we’ve got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard.” He also notes, “Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention. There is no other answer.”


Billy Graham saw it differently saying those rioting in Watts wanted the overthrow of the American government. Thus Graham called for tough laws, and this law and order rhetoric resonated with white evangelicals leading many to be critical of civil rights activists in general.



“Sadly, millions of everyday Christians saw no contradiction between their faith and the racism they practiced in subtle yet ubiquitous ways.” Pastors urged their church members not to sell their houses to black people. After the Brown decision “segregation academies” are started often with the word Christian in the school name.



Among the barriers to overcoming racism are the images of Jesus as white. The explosion at 16th Street Baptist Church which killed four little girls also blew out a stained-glass window of a white Jesus.



Even when a person like Martin Luther King is celebrated, it is done with the purpose and effect of undermining the radical nature of his message. A year before his death he preached a sermon attacking U.S. militarism and the war in Vietnam. When he died he was planning a Poor People's Campaign. Also forgotten is how strongly many moderate Christians opposed him.



Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome

Chapter 5: Slavery's Children




“For these are all our children. We will profit by, or pay for, Whatever they become.”

James Baldwin


African Americans have a life expectancy rate five to seven years less than that of whites.



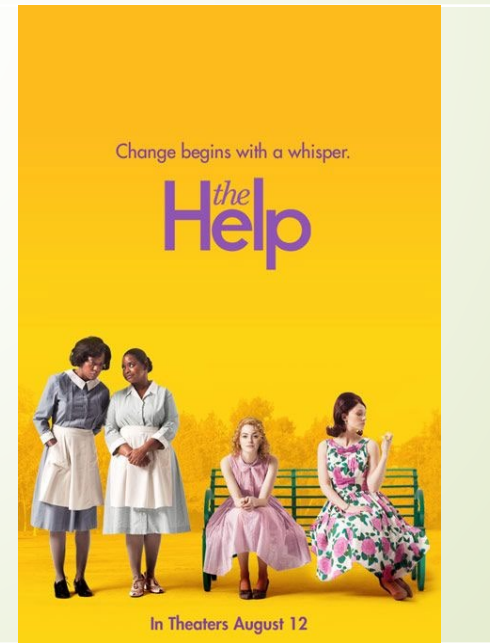
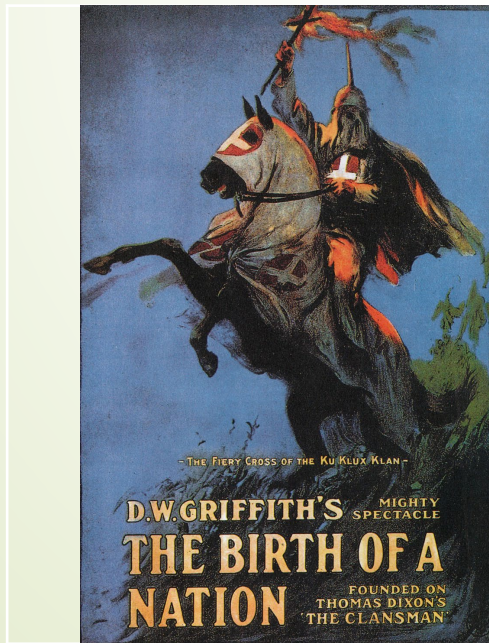
Media's Contribution to Our Self-Image



“It is difficult, if not impossible, to get an accurate assessment of one’s group if we must rely only on information commonly depicted in media. Our schools, literature and mass media give an incomplete and often times intentionally misleading view of who we are as a people.”





D.W. Griffith's infamous movie, the first full feature silent film, **Birth of a Nation** celebrated the KKK and is probably only the most well-known film distorting history. Even when there are movies that are not explicitly racist they can deal in stereotypes. In 2011 in **The Help** the lead female roles were maids thus black women were portrayed in submissive roles.





Fulfilling the Stereotype



“People who believe themselves to have little worth, little power, little self-efficacy will often do whatever they can do to don the trappings of power, even if it means acting out the demeaning roles society considers appropriate for them. “Inspiring fear is another way of turning powerlessness into power.”





Myths about the Civil Rights Movement




Myth #1: Nonviolence is the same thing as passivity

Reflect: What is the difference between passivity and nonviolent resistance?

Can you apply this strategy in your own life?



Myth #2: Through nonviolent demonstrations and lunch counter sit-ins, segregationists peacefully realized the error of their ways.

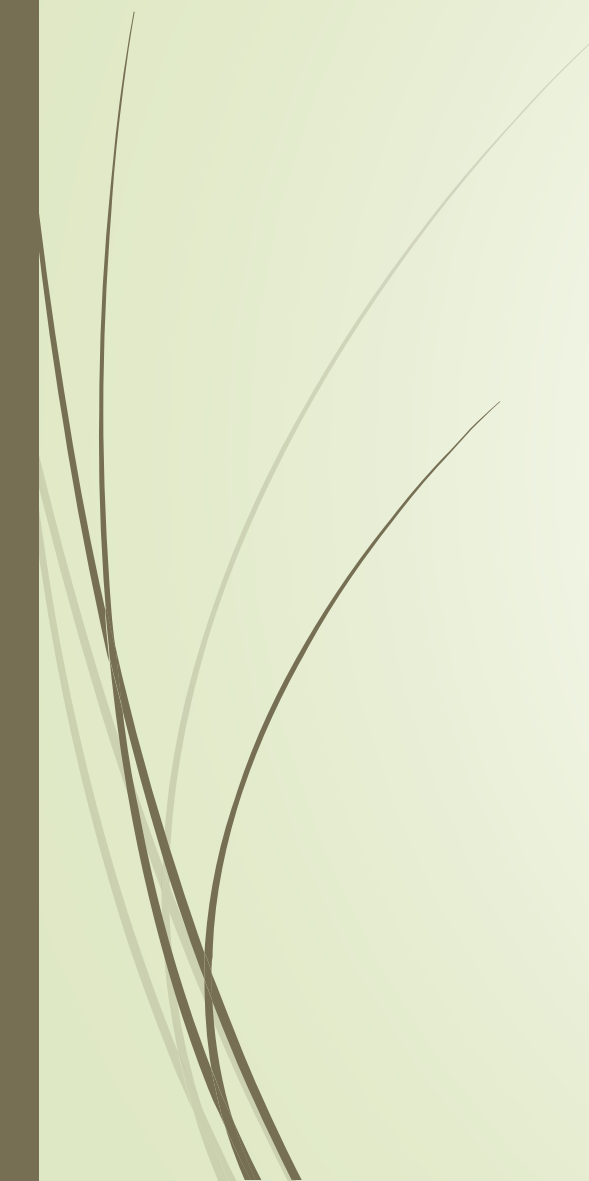



Reflect: We all like to think that, had we lived in the right generation or the right area of the country, we would have marched with Dr. King. But given the real economic and physical risks involved would you have engaged in nonviolent direct action?

Do you take risks for justice today?




White Citizens' Councils





White Citizens' Councils often met in living rooms to strategize politically to maintain segregation, ensure that sympathizers to the Civil Rights movement (and often their families) would lose their jobs, and show violence toward Civil Rights activists.

Nonviolent activists were often brutally attacked. The Freedom Riders are just one of countless examples of what happened to many who nonviolently entered white spaces.




They were established all across the South starting in Mississippi. They were referred to as the “Uptown Klan” since they included many in the business community. They had television and radio programs. States would sponsor films to benefit segregation. They sought to intimidate people trying to register black voters as well as intimidate white businessmen and politicians who were sympathetic to integration. These councils played a significant role in electing Ross Barnett governor of Mississippi.




The Power of Nonviolence

An essay by Martin Luther King, Jr.

“This method is nonaggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually.”



“Another thing that we had to get over was the fact that the nonviolent resister does not seek to humiliate or defeat the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. The end of violence or the aftermath of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community. A boycott is never an end within itself. It is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor, but the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption.”



Attack the system rather than the individuals caught in the system.

Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all. Love because God loves us, and love the person while hating the deed the person does. Strive for respect and dignity for all people.

King knew that some people who believe in nonviolence don't believe in a personal God, but everyone for nonviolent resistance believes that the universe is somehow on the side of justice.

Congressman John Lewis 1940-2020

► "To those who have said, 'Be patient and wait,' we have long said that we cannot be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now! We are tired. We are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again."

John Lewis when he spoke at the March on Washington, March 1963.

