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Chapter One. “The Trouble Is…”

1. For these quotations from King as well as a recollection of the events that evening, see Belafonte and Shnayerson, My Song, 326–328.


3. See, for example, West, Radical King; Laurent, King and the Other America; Honey, To the Promised Land; Dorrien, Breaking White Supremacy; Le Blanc, “Martin Luther King.”

4. For his own account of his reading of Marx’s Capital in 1949, see King, Stride toward Freedom, 78.

5. King, Where Do We Go from Here?, 88.

6. Robinson, Black Marxism, 2.

7. In a later book, Black Movements in America, Robinson featured King as an exemplary religious figure in a broadly Black radical tradition, though he did not consider King’s economic analysis.

8. In a major new edited volume on King’s political philosophy, for example, the only essay dedicated to an analysis of King’s economic thinking—Tommie Shelby’s “Prisons of the Forgotten”—is better understood as a contribution in normative moral philosophy.

9. Relevant works include: Garrow, Bearing the Cross; Honey, Going Down Jericho Road; T. Jackson, From Civil Rights to Human Rights; Honey, To the Promised Land.

10. See Phillips, “In the latest JFK files.” On King’s alleged Marxism, see also Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?” To date, the most thoughtful treatment of King’s affinities with Marxist theory is Laurent, King and the Other America.

11. Fraser and Jaeggi, Capitalism.


13. See the excerpts of Marx’s writings collected in “Marx on Slavery and the U.S. Civil War.”


23. Reed, “Introduction to Oliver C. Cox,” xiii.
27. King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1966], 7, 8. See also King, “Other America” [1968].
29. King did say rather starkly to the SCLC staff in 1967 that “racism, economic exploitation and militarism are all tied together,” that “you can’t really get rid of one without getting rid of the others” (“Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1967]). For a helpful survey of the twentieth-century Black Left in America, see Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left*.
32. A. Gordon, preface to *Anthropology of Marxism*, x–xi.
35. On Coretta Scott King’s activism in the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s, see Theoharis, “‘I am not a symbol,’” and Scott King, *My Life, My Love, My Legacy*. For an account of the strategy of “thinking with King beyond King,” see Threadcraft and Terry, “Gender Trouble.”
40. White, *Challenge of Blackness*.

Chapter Two. “The Other America”

4. Dawson, “Future of Black Politics.” Note also the parallels with Du Bois, who insisted that “criticism is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society” (Souls of Black Folk, 36). On King’s appreciation of Du Bois—whom he regarded not only as a “teacher” to those who read him but also as a preeminent theorist of “divine dissatisfaction”—see King, “Honoring Dr. Du Bois.”
5. Lloyd, Black Natural Law, x.
7. See King, “Other America” [1967].
8. Harrington, Other America; National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Kerner Report, 1.
10. Baldwin, Voice of Conscience, 45. For a discussion of King’s involvement in the labor movement, see Honey, Going Down Jericho Road and To the Promised Land; and King’s writings collected in Honey, ed., “All Labor Has Dignity.”
11. Baker, Betrayal, 7. On his connection with the poor and working classes, King “was nothing if not consistent,” notes the historian Michael Honey. “Going back to his days in graduate school, he had spoken of his strong concern for the poor based on his Social Gospel theology. He had championed ‘we, the disposessed’ in Montgomery. He had constantly spoken and written about and organized around issues confronting poor and working-class people. He had indicted the Vietnam War as a crime that used poor people as cannon fodder and destroyed resources that should have gone to ending their poverty” (To the Promised Land, 122). As Sylvie Laurent notes, King’s roots in the Black social gospel ensured that he “was immersed in a spiritual framework which has its own tradition of care and dedication to the poor” (King and the Other America, 73). For further discussion of King’s sensitivity to the poor, developed very early on, see Baldwin, There is a Balm in Gilead, 123; Honey, To the Promised Land, 19; and Dorrien, Breaking White Supremacy, 18-19.
14. Spence, Knocking the Hustle, 111. Despite this book’s many strengths, its treatment of King is strikingly disingenuous, if not altogether nonsensical. Spence commits a performative contradiction of sorts, offering, as he does, essentially an intellectual critique of intellectualism. And in treating King almost exclusively as a rhetorician, a master of “prophetic utterance,” Spence misses entirely both the rich substance of King’s social criticism and, most remarkably, King’s demonstrable record of driving people to do precisely the sort of hard political work that Spence calls for.
17. Reed, Class Notes.
18. See Branch, Parting the Waters, 93–110 passim; and Dorrien, Breaking White Supremacy, 271, 276–287.
19. See Ansbro, Martin Luther King, Jr., 122.
Notes to Chapter Two

23. See King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 83–84. See also King, “My Pilgrimage to Non-violence,” 475–477. “I read Marx as I read all of the influential historical thinkers—from a dialectical point of view, combining a partial ‘yes’ and a partial ‘no.’ In so far as Marx posited a metaphysical materialism, an ethical relativism, and a strangulating totalitarianism, I responded with an unambiguous ‘no’; but in so far as he pointed to weaknesses of traditional capitalism, contributed to the growth of a definite self-consciousness in the masses, and challenged the social conscience of the Christian churches, I responded with a definite ‘yes.’ My reading of Marx also convinced me that truth is found neither in Marxism nor in traditional capitalism. Each represents a partial truth. Historically capitalism failed to see the truth in collective enterprise, and Marxism failed to see the truth in individual enterprise. Nineteenth century capitalism failed to see that life is social and Marxism failed and still fails to see that life is individual and personal. The Kingdom of God is neither the thesis of individual enterprise nor the antithesis of collective enterprise, but a synthesis which reconciles the truths of both.”
25. S. Ferguson, “The Philosopher King,” 103, citing King’s final address to the SCLC: “For years . . . I have labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of the society. A little change here, a little change thee. Now I feel quite differently. I think you’ve got to have a reconstruction of the entire society, a revolution of values.”
27. Consider, for example, King’s 1965 reflections on poverty, in which he calls for a “mental and spiritual re-evaluation—a change of focus which will enable us to see that the things which seem most real and powerful are indeed now unreal and have come under the sentence of death.” This is an unmistakably dialectical assertion. The moment of negativity, the presumption of the irrationality and therefore untruth of extant reality, is borne along by a commitment to ongoing historical movement toward rational reconciliation. King continues: “We will not build a peaceful world by following a negative path . . . we must fix our visions not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but upon the positive affirmation of peace” (“Octopus of Poverty,” 119).
29. On King’s encounter with James, see James, “A Visit with Martin Luther King,” and King, “To C. L. R. James.”
30. King, “Other America” [1968], 160. Though we do not pursue the comparison here, it might be worth noting that the trope of “despair” has a certain salience in post-Hegelian critical theory, including its Black radical iterations. See, for example, the discussion of Frantz Fanon in Marasco, *Highway of Despair*.
33. These arguments about the implicit rationalism and narrative plot structure of the modern dialectical tradition are developed in much greater detail, albeit without discussion of King, in Douglas, *In the Spirit of Critique*. For a rich treatment of the reconciliatory “mode of emplotment” in the dialectical and historical theory of C. L. R. James, see Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, and for a critique of the European cultural imperialist dimensions of the Hegelian dialectical tradition, see Cicarelli-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*. It is important to acknowledge, too, that King’s mobilization of this aspect of the dialectical tradition can be said to reinforce troublesome denials of agency, including, for example, King’s patriarchal denial of Rosa Parks’ agency in the Montgomery struggle. On this point, see Threadcraft and Terry, “Gender Trouble.”


38. Lloyd, *Black Natural Law*, 117. On “negative theology,” see also Lloyd’s commentary on how the Black natural law tradition challenges the terms of European humanism. Following Sylvia Wynter—and, we might add, in the vein of Frantz Fanon’s earlier challenge to the idea of “European man”—Lloyd argues for a “rejection of the concept of man, burdened with its particularly white, European, and masculine associations, and for the development of a new concept of the human . . . a concept of the human [that is] essentially defined by what it is not, marking what is in the world but never fully captured by it” (*Black Natural Law*, xi; see also Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality”; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*).


41. Lloyd, *Black Natural Law*, x, xii.


44. King, “Other America” (1968), 162–164.

45. See Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, 700. See also King, “Honoring Dr. Du Bois.” Though he did not specifically mention Du Bois’s idea that white people in the United States reap a sort of unearned psychological benefit or “wage” simply by virtue of their whiteness, King certainly described Du Bois very explicitly as a pioneer in the field of ideology critique. Du Bois was a “teacher” who challenged the “poisonous fog of lies,” the “twisted logic,” the “army of white propagandists—the myth-makers of Negro history,” and who “restored to light the most luminous achievement[s] of the Reconstruction,” including “free public education . . . not only for the benefit of the Negro” but also “poor whites,” and “the Negroes’ capacity to govern and fitness to build a finer nation in a creative relationship with poor whites” (113–117).
47. Marx, Capital, 1:165–166, emphasis added.
48. Harvey, Companion to Marx’s Capital, 41.
49. Roberts, Marx’s Inferno, 85.
50. See, for example, King, Where Do We Go from Here?, 196.
51. Consider Frank Wilderson’s claim that “violence against black people is ontological and gratuitous as opposed to merely ideological and contingent” (“Gramsci’s Black Marx,” 229). King would agree, though he clearly historicized racial formations in ways that render his thought incompatible with the grander claims of the contemporary Afro pessimist school.
52. Lloyd, Black Natural Law, xiv.
54. Lloyd, Black Natural Law, 101.
55. King, “Where Do We Go from Here?,” 250.
56. Roberts, Marx’s Inferno, 102.
57. Roberts, Marx’s Inferno, 96.
60. This phrase, or some variation of it, enjoys a long lineage among critical and radical thinkers in the modern West and beyond; we highlight one popularization of it, well known in certain circles, by Kwame Nkrumah, King’s contemporary and decolonial comrade. See Nkrumah, Consciencism, 78.
63. Edwards, foreword, Terms of Order, xviii; see also A. Gordon, preface to Anthropology of Marxism, xi.
64. King, “Other America” [1968], 166.
66. Geuss, Politics and the Imagination, 42.

Chapter Three. “Something Is Wrong with Capitalism”

2. References to a “second phase” abound in the correspondences, public and private addresses, and published writings of King’s later years. See, for example, King’s remarks to colleagues at the 1966 Southern Christian Leadership Conference: “even though we gained legislative and judicial victories during this period [the decade following the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott] . . . we must admit it: the changes that came about during this period were at best surface changes, they were not really substantive
changes” (“Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1966], 6). See also King, “New Sense of Direction,” 6.

3. Scholarly work aside, consider two popular pieces published recently, on the occasion of King’s birthday: Sustar, “The Evolution of Dr. King,” and Dreier, “Martin Luther King Was A Democratic Socialist.”

4. See Marx, Capital, 1:235–256: “Capital is money, capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here the subject of a process in which while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself. . . . Money therefore forms the starting point and the conclusion of every valorization process. . . . Value therefore now becomes value in process, money in process, and, as such, capital.” See also Marx, Capital, 2:211. Note that the Penguin translation has it as “value in process,” though our analysis draws on the work of Harvey, who, in The Limits to Capital and elsewhere, vivifies this reading of capital as “value in motion.”

5. See Marx, Capital, 1:149.

6. See King, “Man Who was a Fool,” 73: “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. . . . This is the inter-related structure of reality.”

7. Fraser and Jaeggi, Capitalism, 40–42.

8. See King, Stride Toward Freedom, 78.


11. For a discussion of the Montgomery city contract with the Chicago-based National City Lines, including an account of how, as that private firm lost money, it put further pressure on the city, see Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 26–28, 52; and Jackson, Becoming King, 131–132.

12. See Hall, “Long Civil Rights Movement”; G. Gilmore, Defying Dixie; Ezra, Economic Civil Rights Movement. See also King’s appreciation of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Depression-era writings on the boycott as a weapon in the struggle against racial discrimination (Where Do We Go from Here?, 151).

13. Cited in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 43.

14. Laurent, King and the Other America, 72–73. See also Gary Dorrien’s review of King’s intellectual influences, both within the Black church and in formal schooling, and how readers of King have at times been misled, partly owing to King’s own account of his intellectual development (Breaking White Supremacy, 260–281).

15. “I studied philosophy and theology at Boston University under Edgar S. Brightman and L. Harold DeWolf. . . . It was mainly under these teachers that I studied Personalistic philosophy—the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality. This personal idealism remains today my basic philosophical position.” (King, Autobiography, 31).
18. Williams and Bengtsson, “Personalism.”
19. “Alienation is a form of living death,” King said in 1967. “It is the acid of despair that dissolves society” (Trumpet of Conscience, 44). King’s references to alienation tend not to reflect the traditional Marxist concern about estranged labor, but rather a concern with social estrangement and the psychology of racism and consumerism. There is no evidence that King ever read Marx’s early and more “humanist” writings. In late 1949, King read Capital and The Communist Manifesto. King admired Erich Fromm, though apparently he did not read Fromm’s groundbreaking 1961 study, Marx’s Concept of Man, which, in effect, introduced the Western world to Marx’s humanistic writings. This is yet another sign of how King’s critique of political economy gestured beyond the conceptual tools of European radicalism; as we discuss below, King’s emphasis on consumerism and the circulation of consumer goods through unequal social relations speaks presciently to the lived realities of a postproduction neoliberal economy. See, for example, King, “Along this Way,” where he refers simply to “the legion of damned in our economic army,” a condition in which “the Negro in America is an impoverished alien in an affluent society” (quoted in Laurent, King and the Other America, 121).

22. For a recent commentary on King’s subjection to anticommunist hysteria, see Honey, To the Promised Land.
23. On King’s evolving disavowal of Marx and Marxism, in addition to recent work by Laurent, Honey, and Dorrien, see Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?,” 117–125.
24. Berdyaev, “Marx and Personalism.”
25. J. Pius Barbour, quoted in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 43; King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1966], 20.
28. See Sokol, There Goes My Everything, 93–94; T. F. Jackson, From Civil Rights to Human Rights, 279; Honey’s introduction to King’s “To the Mountaintop,” 181. (Emphasis added.)
30. Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” 78. See also the discussion of “expropriation” and the violence of its “colonial logic” in Dawson, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” and Fraser, “Expropriation and Exploitation.”
33. King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1966], 7. 8. See also Andy Clarno’s account of a “necropolitics” that, he argues, is characteristic of racial capitalism: “capitalism
consistently operates through racial projects that assign differential value to human life and labor. Yet racism cannot be reduced to an effect of capitalism; rather, processes of racial formation are relatively autonomous from and constitutive of capital accumulation. While white supremacy may intensify exploitation by devaluing Black labor, it can also generate ‘necropolitical’ projects that equate the security of the white population with the elimination of Black, indigenous, or other devalued populations” (*Neoliberal Apartheid*, 9).

34. See Marx’s preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. For an account of how this “big-picture” Marxist development narrative—the emphasis on the expansion of social and productive capacity—figures in the work of Walter Rodney, another exemplary theorist of what we might call the Black radical tradition, see Douglas, “‘Brutal Dialectics.’”


36. See, for example, King’s account of the “problem bequeathed to us by the accelerated progress of science. As machines replace men, we must again question whether the depth of our social thinking matches the growth of technological creativity. We cannot create machines which revolutionize industry unless we simultaneously create ideas commensurate with social and economic reorganization, which harnesses the power of such machines for the benefit of man” (“Thirteenth Convention,” 51).

37. On the theory of “underdevelopment,” see Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, and Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*. King’s position here is quite consistent with the summary findings of the Kerner Commission: “What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it” (*National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Kerner Report*, 2).

38. King, “Freedom’s Crisis,” 288–292. “We have yet to confront and solve the international problems created by our wealth in a world still largely hungry and miserable. But more immediate and pressing is the domestic existence of poverty. It is an anachronism in the second half of the 20th century. Only the neglect to plan intelligently and adequately and the unwillingness genuinely to embrace economic justice enable it to persist.” Or, “the question on the agenda must read: why should there be hunger and privation in any land, in any city, at any table, when man has the resources and the scientific know-how to provide all mankind with basic necessities of life” (*King, Where Do We Go from Here?*, 187). It is also worth noting King’s observations about how social awareness moves, and does not move, across racial capitalism’s spatial boundaries: “while so many white Americans are unaware of conditions inside the ghetto, there are very few ghetto dwellers who are unaware of the life outside. . . . It is not only poverty that torments the Negro; it is poverty amid plenty. It is a misery generated by the gulf between the affluence he sees in the mass media and the deprivation he experiences in his everyday life” (*Where Do We Go from Here?*, 119). Compare James Ralph’s observation: “throughout much of American history blacks were exploited, beaten, and oppressed
while most Americans and people around the world went about their daily affairs barely aware of the situation. Indeed, racial segregation and oppression isolated blacks from the American mainstream, making their wretched conditions invisible” (*Northern Protest*). See also Finley et al., *Chicago Freedom Movement*.


41. King, “Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” 188. See also Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 222–224. This conception of “internal colonialism” has a long history in Black radical thought, and King can be described as latecomer. See, for example, Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin’s discussion of the use of the term among members of the Revolutionary Action Movement in the mid-1960s and, later, the Black Panther Party, in *Black against Empire*. For a critique of the 1960s-era application of the thesis as it applies to an understanding of the exploitative nature of racial capitalism, see Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, 196–197.

42. Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” 78.


44. Marx, “Theories of Surplus Value.”


47. See Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, chap. 5, for a helpful discussion of how, by 1962, King’s thinking was profoundly affected by concerns about deindustrialization, ghettoization, and structural joblessness.


49. See, for example, the reference to “nobodiness” in King, “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” 289–302.


51. See Endnotes Collective, “Misery and Debt,” 30115. See also Chen, “Limit Point”: “The rise of the anti-black U.S. carceral state from the 1970s onward exemplifies rituals of state and civilian violence which enforce the racialization of wageless life, and the racial ascription of wagelessness. From the point of view of capital, ‘race’ is renewed not only through persistent racialized wage differentials, or the kind of occupational segregation posited by earlier ‘split labor market’ theories of race, but through the racialization of unwaged surplus or superfluous populations from Khartoum to the slums of Cairo” (217). See also Kali Akuno’s account of how “Black disposability,” which he fears will have a “genocidal effect” on the Black working class if left unchallenged, is the driving point of emphasis for the exemplary justice struggles underway in Jackson, Mississippi (Akuno and Nangwya, *Jackson Rising*, 8–9).

52. King, *Where Do We Go from Here?,* 172.

53. Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” 77. Also relevant here is the theory of “accumulation by dispossession,” which accounts for how neoliberal growth crises have shifted the pursuit of profit away from expanded reproduction and toward various modes of
privatization of public assets (see Harvey, *New Imperialism* and Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions*). See also Chakrabarty and da Silva, “Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt,” for a cogent discussion of dispossession through predatory finance and racialized debt incumbency.

54. Cited in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 574.

55. Cited in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 579, 582.

56. Consider, for example, King’s frequent reference to the Biblical parable of Dives and Lazarus, which was a persistent set piece for him, from his early days pastoring at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery to his final Sunday sermon at the National Cathedral. Even in that final Sunday sermon, in March 1968, King reiterated the point that Dives, the rich man, “didn’t go to hell because he was rich; Dives didn’t realize that his wealth was his opportunity. It was his opportunity to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus,” who was poor and sick and needy (“Remaining Awake,” 216). The point seems to be that one can acquire wealth and property, so long as one is charitably oriented in the disposal of it. It is perhaps worth mentioning that this ethical stance does not appear to square with King’s own ethical practices. Touched early on by Gandhi’s vow of poverty, King was famously averse to acquiring any sort of property, much to the chagrin of his home life (see Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 114–115). In 1960, when he had to confront trumped-up charges of tax evasion in Montgomery, King proclaimed that, “I own just one piece of property, a 1954 Pontiac” (cited in Garrow, 129). Despite the occasional bourgeois preaching, we might say, the bourgeois label never really fit the man.

57. Quoted in Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 304. See also King, “Three Evils of Society.”


65. King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1966], 23.

66. See, for example, King’s remarks to the SCLC staff in 1968, which reflect his final position on jobs programs and guaranteed income: “We must demand, for instance, an emergency program to provide employment for everyone in need of a job, or, if a work program is impractical, a guaranteed annual income at levels that sustain life in decent circumstances” (“A New Sense of Direction”).

67. King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1966], 23. See also King, *Where Do We Go from Here?*, 209. It is perhaps worth noting that King’s redefinition of work and call for a guaranteed basic income shares similarities with, but also moves beyond, James Livingston’s arguments against jobs programs. See Livingston, *No More Work*. 
68. See, for example, King, “To Minister to the Valley.”

69. For a cogent discussion of the U.S. Government’s mortgage interest deduction as an example of this “socialism for the rich,” see Desmond, “How Home Ownership Became the Engine of American Inequality.” See also Cedric Durand’s commentary on how, throughout the rich countries, state efforts to manage the 2008 financial crisis “led to the socialization of the costs of the financial collapse—indeed, on a scale never previously imagined—without the working classes or the unemployed ever feeling the supposed benefits of this ‘communism for capital.’” Durand notes that “between autumn 2008 and the beginning of 2009, the total amount that states and central banks in the advanced countries committed to supporting the financial sector (through recapitalization, nationalization, repurchasing assets, loans, guarantees, injections of liquidity) has been evaluated at some 50.4 percent of world GDP!” (Fictitious Capital, 39).

70. See King’s reflections on state support of white land acquisition in “The Other America” [1968], 165.

71. Myerson and Smith, “We’ll Need an Economic Program to Make #BlackLivesMatter.” Matthew Desmond’s book-length study, Evicted, provides a vivid contemporary portrayal of precisely the sort of rent-based expropriation that so dearly troubled King more than a half-century ago.

72. On the Indian Bhoodan or Land Gift Movement of the 1950s, see King, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” 107. For a rich discussion of how Indian political and intellectual history factors into King’s thinking and midcentury Black internationalism, see Immerwahr, “Caste or Colony?”


75. King, “Other America” [1968], 165.


77. Forged initially by the early-century contributions of Rosa Luxemburg, the critical theorization of military stimulus spending experienced a watershed moment in the late 1960s, with the publication of Baran and Sweezy’s Monopoly Capital. See also Luxemburg, Accumulation of Capital.

78. Marx, Capital, 1:172, emphasis added.

79. Singh, Race and America’s Long War, 79. See also Beckert, Empire of Cotton; Johnson, River of Dark Dreams; Baptist, Half Has Never Been Told; Blackburn, Making of New World Slavery.

80. Singh, Race and America’s Long War, 79.


82. Singh, Race and America’s Long War, 96–97.

83. Amin, Law of Worldwide Value, 84.

84. Terry, “Requiem for a Dream.” See also Rasberry, Race and the Totalitarian Century.

85. Terry, “Requiem for a Dream,” 313.

86. Terry, “Requiem for a Dream,” 315.


89. King, “New Sense of Direction.” Here it is perhaps worth quoting the fuller passage: “It is difficult to exaggerate the creative contribution of dynamic young Negroes of the past eight years. They took non-violent resistance, first employed in Montgomery, Alabama, in mass dimensions and developed original applications—sit-ins, freedom rides and wade-ins. To accomplish these ends they first transformed themselves. Young Negroes had traditionally imitated whites in dress, conduct and thought in a rigid middle-class pattern. . . . Now they ceased imitating and began initiating. Leadership passed into the hands of Negroes, and their white allies began learning from them. This was a revolutionary and wholesome development for both. It is ironic that today so many educators and sociologists are seeking new methods to instill middle-class values in Negro youth as the ideal in social development. It was precisely when young Negroes threw off their middle-class values that they made an historic social contribution. They abandoned those values when they put careers and wealth in a secondary role, when they cheerfully became jailbirds and troublemakers. When they took off their Brooks Brothers attire and put on overalls to work in the isolated rural South, they challenged and inspired white youth to emulate them. Many left school, not to abandon learning but to seek it in more direct ways. They were constructive school dropouts, strengthening society and themselves. These Negro and white youths preceded the conception of the Peace Corps, and I think it is safe to say that their work inspired its organization on an international scale.”

90. Holt, Children of Fire, 354, 357.


94. See King, “National Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace,” 143, and King, Trumpet of Conscience, 57–59: “The bloodlust interpretation [of the summer of 1967] ignores one of the most striking features of the city riots. Violent they certainly were. But the violence, to a startling degree, was focused against property rather than against people. There were very few cases of injury to persons, and the vast majority of the rioters were not involved in attacking people. The much-publicized ‘death toll’ that marked the riots, and the many injuries, were overwhelmingly inflicted on the rioters by the military. It is clear that the riots were exacerbated by police action that was designed to injure or even to kill people. . . . I am aware that there are many who wince at a distinction between property and persons—who hold both sacrosanct. My views are not so rigid. A life is sacred. Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being. . . . The focus on property in the 1967 riots is not accidental. It has a message; it is saying something. . . . Those people wanted the
experience of taking, of redressing the power imbalance that property represents. Possession, afterward, was secondary.” We should note, too, that two points here compare favorably with Robinson’s articulation of the nature of the Black radical tradition, namely, 1) the absence of mass violence and 2) the rejection, or revaluation, of Western ideas about property ownership (*Black Marxism*, 168). The question of violence and King’s situation within the Black radical tradition is taken up in chapter four.


97. See Livingston, “Against Apocalypse Economics.”

98. Jackson, From Civil Rights to Human Rights, 251.

Chapter Four. “Showdown for Nonviolence”

1. See, for example, the policy platform of the contemporary Movement for Black Lives: https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/.


7. See Tillmon, “Welfare is a Women’s Issue.” “I’m a woman. I’m a black woman. I’m a poor woman. I’m a middle-aged woman. And I’m on welfare. In this country, if you’re any one of those things you count less as a human being. If you’re all those things, you don’t count at all. Except as a statistic. . . . There are millions of statistics like me.” Tillmon goes on to say, in an oft-cited passage: “Welfare is like a super-sexist marriage. You trade in a man for the man. But you can’t divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you, of course, cut you off anytime he wants. But in that case, he keeps the kids, not you. The man runs everything. . . . You give up control of your own body. . . . The man, the welfare system, controls your money. He tells you what to buy, what not to buy, where to buy it, and how much things cost. If things—rent, for instance—really cost more than he says they do, it’s just too bad for you. He’s always right.”


14. Fraser and Jaeggi, Capitalism, 89.
15. Fraser and Jaeggi, Capitalism, 85.
18. See Getachew, Worldmaking after Empire. Getachew documents how in the ideas behind the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s, in particular the intellectual and political leadership of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania and Michael Manley in Jamaica, reflected an extension of Myrdal’s “welfare world” thesis.
21. See the discussions of how the AFL-CIO—including its Black worker organizing apparatus, the A. Philip Randolph Institute—remained staunchly opposed to King’s critique of U.S. foreign policy in Laurent, King and the Other America, 144–145, and Honey, To the Promised Land, 104–105.
22. Getachew, Worldmaking after Empire, 163.
23. “What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn’t earn enough money to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee?” (King, “All Labor Has Dignity,” 175).
26. See, for example, King, “Birth of a New Nation,” 58–75.
27. For a more comprehensive account of King’s theory of the state, what we refer to as his conventional conception of the political, see Long, Against Us, But for Us.
29. Cited in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 488.
30. King, Where Do We Go from Here?, 144.
31. Cited in Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 488.
32. Quan, “It’s Hard to Stop Rebels That Time Travel,” 174.
35. Quan, “It’s Hard to Stop Rebels That Time Travel,” 175.
38. Harding, Martin Luther King, 48–49. On the point about socialisms “that we have seen,” clearly King’s rejection of communism was motivated by a concern about the state-centered conception of the political. But, to be sure, King is far more ambiguous and ambivalent in regard to democratic socialism. Michael Long has argued, in contrast to Harding, that King’s praise of the Scandinavian welfare states in the mid-1960s is evidence of his affirmation of the “good state,” or his affirmation that the state-centered conception of the political could be redeemed as a “trustee of the beloved community.”
Long, who has written the only book-length study of King’s theory of the state, contends that while King was well attuned to the lived realities of state repression, he did not believe that coercive violence was the defining nature of the modern state as such. “As part of a family subjected to political repression, as one who was repeatedly jailed for disobeying unjust laws, and as a leader of those who suffered state-sanctioned brutalities, King was well aware of the tendency of the state to transform itself into a repressive police state, and so chose carefully not to provide any ontological grounding that might sanction an understanding of the state as primarily a coercive power. Thus King grounded the state in human sociality, a move that easily enabled him to call upon the state to be more than a jailer” (Against Us, But For Us, 219). Our driving point in this chapter is just that King’s political imaginary exceeded the presumption of state governability.

39. Harding, Martin Luther King, 48–49, emphasis added.

40. Harding, Martin Luther King, 100–101. Harding refers to a “certain logic” in “the vision of a man who had committed himself unequivocally to the empowerment of the poor, to the transformation of the nation, away from racism, from militarism and materialism, toward a more humane and compassionate way of life” (100, emphasis added). Harding, who coauthored King’s legendary 1967 antiwar speech and developed a profound connection with King in the final years, is remembering and celebrating not any appeal to new ways of being governed, but rather an appeal to a new way of life.

41. One is reminded here of Robinson’s introduction to his chapter on the “nature” of the Black radical tradition: “This brings us finally to the character, or more accurately to the ideological, philosophical, and epistemological natures of the Black movement whose dialectical matrix we believe was capitalist slavery and imperialism” (Black Marxism, 167).

42. Robinson, Black Marxism, 168.

43. Robinson, Black Marxism, 168.

44. King, “Showdown for Nonviolence,” 70.


46. For a discussion of Du Bois’s conservationist argument and its parallels with King’s later thinking, see Douglas, W. E. B. Du Bois and the Critique of the Competitive Society.

47. Robinson, Terms of Order, 150. See also Erica Edwards on the tensions inherent in Black charismatic leadership, which captures something of the layered nature of King’s two conceptions of the political: “One of the founding problematics of a black political modernity in the making is this double potential of the charismatic leadership role: to discipline, on the one hand, and to disrupt, precisely by way of charismatic performance, the disciplinary machinations of the capitalist order on the other” (Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership, 5). Also relevant here is Carson, “Martin Luther King, Jr.”

48. Robinson, Black Movements in America, 144.

49. For a recent account of how King’s patriarchal notions of movement leadership compare with theories of movement leadership today, see Kauffman, How to Read a Protest.
51. See Dellinger, “Last March of Martin Luther King.”
54. For a discussion, in the context of the Black radical tradition, of “the general strike as refusing to bargain and plead with the state and instead simply refusing it outright,” see Martel, “Stages of Freedom.”
55. Quan, “‘It’s Hard to Stop Rebels That Time Travel,’” 174, emphasis added.
58. See Long, *Against Us, But for Us*, 73.
64. See Jensen and King, “Beloved Community.” See also Greg Burris’s reference to the “quasi-mystical dimension of Robinson’s work,” which “is most apparent in those moments when he dips into theology” (“Birth of a [Zionist] Nation,” 131).
66. King, “Showdown for Nonviolence,” 69. King’s fears were warranted. Consider the case of the Attica Prison uprising of 1971. Heather Ann Thompson has shown how the Attica insurrection at the hands of Black inmates, which gripped the nation’s attention for four days and resulted in 43 deaths, had a marked impact on white consciousness and contributed significantly to the emergence of more repressive criminal justice policies and practices, ultimately what has come to be known as the New Jim Crow, which has had devastating consequences on Black communities in the United States (see *Blood in the Water*).
67. Here it is worth emphasizing that King seems to have thought that moral sensitivity to suffering was affected by historical development in material capacity. In *Where Do We Go from Here?*, for example, he argued that “what followed the Civil War was morally worse than the crimes that precipitated it” (248). We take this to mean, at least in part, that the expansion of state access and provision during Reconstruction thereby expanded the moral field, rendering the continued denial of rights and resources both morally problematic and morally urgent in ways that it had not been, could not have been, prior to that historical precedent.
70. On King’s vision for the persistence of racial identity in a radically transformed society, that is, his rejection of a “colorblind” vision of the beloved community, see Sundstrom, “Prophetic Tension.”
Notes to Chapters Four and Five

71. See Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 169. See also Robinson’s later essay, “In Search of a Pan-African Commonwealth,” 161–169. In trying to imagine a Pan-Africanism that could confront the neoliberal entrenchment of the transnational capitalist elite and “rupture the boundaries drawn by national sovereignty and imperial ambitions,” Robinson suggests that “the Pan-Africanist movement must now collude with these opportune supra-national pressures.” Drawing on the cultural and revolutionary Pan-Africanism “employed and articulated by James, Padmore, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, and more frequently and significantly the anonymous black masses which confronted slavery, colonialism and imperialism on the ground in Africa and the Diaspora,” any potential “Pan-African Commonwealth must seek to fulfil Sekou Toure’s (1974) recognition that ‘Since revolutionary Pan-Africanism basically refers to an Africa of Peoples, it is in its interest to uphold the primacy of peoples as against States.’” One wonders how King’s appeal to a “new kind of togetherness” might be said to bear on his own Pan-African vision, and whether or not we might situate King in this pantheon.

72. King, “Statement on the Poor People’s Campaign.”

73. It is worth pointing out that while the neoliberal empowerment of private capital might appear to align with a call for “ungovernability,” it is, as Quan puts it, a form of “ungovernability from above,” one that must be distinguished from democratic struggles for “ungovernability from below” and one that “cannot be equated with the absence of governing.” Quan goes on to point out that “neoliberal state actors typically seek to dismantle whatever remnants are left of the social welfare contract so that ruling apparatuses appear to take on . . . the antistate form. . . . The antistate antics displayed by many state actors are political theater and should not be confused with the absence of governing from the top” (“’It’s Hard to Stop Rebels That Time Travel,’” 179n29).

74. Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism*, 76, 80–81.

75. Dawson, “Future of Black Politics.”


77. Fraser, “Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode,” 58.

Chapter Five. “Liberated Grounds on Which to Gather”

1. Terry, “Requiem for a Dream.”

2. White, *Challenge of Blackness*.


16. Horton and Freire, *We Make the Road by Walking*, 44.
20. For recent commentaries on this well-documented history, see Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 153–154, and Honey, *To the Promised Land*, 49–52.
25. See Robinson’s articulation of the “nature of the Black radical tradition” (Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 168–169). Harding cites Frantz Fanon, who in a personal letter to a friend written just days before he died, said that “we are nothing on earth if we are not first of all slaves to a cause” (“Vocation,” 28). On this connection between the IBW and Robinson’s formulation of the Black radical tradition, see White, *Challenge of Blackness*, 200–202.
28. This is not to suggest that Harding’s initial efforts with the King Center, where he was tapped to initiate the Library Documentation Project, were ever flush with cash. “We originally had big dreams that all the guilty white folks all over the country would be contributing pounds of money to the Martin Luther King Center,” Harding said in 1970. “That was not the case, because they didn’t feel as guilty as I thought” (See Poinsett, “Think Tank for Black Scholars,” 47). See also Derrick White’s account of Harding’s work with the King Center and its fundraising challenges (*Challenge of Blackness*, 74–86).
29. See Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, 75–77. Allen cites Ford Foundation president Henry Heald, who in 1965 communicated in no uncertain terms his desire to use public-private partnerships to push an investment-oriented agenda. Note that JCPS later became the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and is frequently referred to simply as the “Joint Center.”
31. It is worth quoting at length Derrick White’s very helpful summarization of the tensions between the King Center and the IBW: “The IBW’s separation from the
King Center occurred because the latter insisted on a narrow racial liberalism from all of its components, reflecting its larger goal of becoming the official interpreter of King’s life and legacy. The King Center provided the IBW with physical space, but over the course of 1970, its board of directors also demanded strict ideological adherence to civil rights liberalism. The IBW and the King Center’s differences reflect larger issues regarding the interpretation of King’s life and legacy. After his assassination, a variety of groups sought to explain the significance of King’s life and activism. The mainstream press emphasized his ‘dream’ and nonviolent action against the backdrop of urban rebellions and Black Power militancy. The SCLC stressed King’s aggressive nonviolent activism, which they continued in a variety of campaigns after his death. Harding approached King’s life from a nuanced perspective, one that accepted his religious ecumenicism and his radicalism in terms of peace, poverty, and racial pride. These somewhat conflicting interpretations formed the basis of a contested historical memory. The King Center, under Coretta Scott King’s leadership, sought to be the official voice and interpreter of King. In this process, the center and its commitment to commemoration were essential. The center echoed the mainstream media’s interpretation by focusing on King’s belief in nonviolence and by making the March on Washington the centerpiece of the historical narrative. This decision, rooted in ideology and memory, reduced or eliminated King’s ideas on poverty, militarism, and racial pride. King’s views expressed in Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos of Community?—such as a guaranteed income, universal healthcare, and the importance of racial pride—were, perhaps deliberately, marginalized for the sake of a broadly approved and supported memorial. The center’s board required a narrow, King-centered historical interpretation of the civil rights movement. Any King Center component that deviated from this narrative faced intense scrutiny and, ultimately, contraction” (Challenge of Blackness, 60–61).

34. Clark, Myrdal, and Wilson, Dark Ghetto, 11.
41. See White, Challenge of Blackness, 84.
42. For an account of the IBW’s pedagogical work and involvement in the Attica prison uprisings of 1971, see Grady-Willis, Challenging U.S. Apartheid, 164.
43. White, Challenge of Blackness, 19–50.

46. Harding, “Toward the Black University,” 158.

47. See Benson, Fighting for Our Place, and Rickford, We Are an African People.

48. For helpful commentaries on student demands for Black studies programming and the reactionary postures of historically Black college and university (HBCU) administrators and trustees, in the 1960s and well into the era of neoliberalism, see R. Ferguson, We Demand, and Myers, We Are Worth Fighting For.

49. White, Challenge of Blackness, 41.


52. Wilder, Ebony and Ivy.


55. paperson, Third University, 32.

56. “The walls of the academy,” Harding said in “Vocation,” are, “on the whole, merely more tastefully, delicately wrought extensions of the walls of the government, industry, and the military” (4).

57. paperson, Third University, xiv.

58. paperson, Third University, xiv–xv, 36.

59. paperson, Third University, 42.

60. paperson, Third University, xvii, xxiii.

61. paperson, Third University, 36.


63. Harney and Moten refer to the sociality of the undercommons as a form of “prophetic organization” (Undercommons, 27, 31), which bears a striking resemblance to appeals to prophetic sociality in the late 1960s. See, for example, Gerald McWorter, who emphasized “the prophetic social role of the Black University” (“Nature and Needs of the Black University,” 6).


65. Boggs “Think Dialectically,” 266.


67. Harney and Moten, Undercommons, 111.

68. Harding, “Prof. Vincent Harding on Martin Luther King,” 93.

69. paperson, Third University, 32.

70. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle.”

71. Harney and Moten, Undercommons, 133. For a generative discussion of how Sylvia Wynter came to reflect on this very problematic during her time at the IBW, and in the process reckoned with Marxism and the Black radical tradition, see White, “Black Metamorphosis.”


73. King, Where Do We Go from Here?, 179.
75. See Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 331.
77. See, for example, King, “To the Mountaintop,” 192–195.
78. King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1967].
79. King, “Speech at SCLC Staff Retreat” [1967].