

**“Living the Dream”:
A History of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

by

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Statement of Originality

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Abstract

On 2 November 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday into law. His signature ended a fifteen year struggle to make King's birthday a Holiday. Advocates for the Holiday, such as Coretta Scott King, Representative John Conyers and Senator Ted Kennedy planned to honour not only King, but the entire civil rights movement that famously confronted the 'American Dilemma' of institutionalised racism in the 1950s and 1960s. The Holiday was seen as an act of atonement for centuries of racism, slavery and segregation that stretched back to the American Revolution. It honoured the African American contribution to American life and celebrated racial integration and nonviolence.

After the first King Holiday in 1986, scholars Vincent Harding, Michael Dyson and David Garrow argued that it relied too much on King's 'I Have a Dream' speech. They wrote that King's radical legacy was forgotten and that conservatives sought to downplay his criticism of militarism and economic inequality. Scholars were correct to note this trend, yet since 1986 little has been added to this analysis, even as scholars heed the call by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall to study the Long Civil Rights Movement. Most who write about King Day focus on the 1970s and early 1980s Holiday campaign and this thesis builds on their work by analysing Holiday celebrations in the mid-to-late 1980s and 1990s.

In 1984, Congress established the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission in order to organise King Day. Led by Coretta Scott King, the Commission planned ten King Holidays from 1986 to 1996. It left a vast, but underutilised, archive for scholars. This thesis is based on research in that archive and presents a new understanding of how the King Holiday was celebrated.

This thesis is a history of the Holiday and the Commission. It addresses the questions: Why was King celebrated with a Holiday; who celebrated; and how? It analyses who organised the Holiday and what images of King they promoted. The thesis argues that King's 'I Have a Dream' speech symbolised celebrations in the 1980s because the Commission attempted to create a popular Holiday. This meant that King Day had a moderate and even conservative tone, made possible because many appointed to the Commission were conservatives. Yet, in the mid-1990s, during President Clinton's administration, a new image of King was presented to the public: King the Drum Major. This image was based on King's 'Drum Major Instinct' sermon and emphasised King's humility, dedication to service and concern about economic inequality.

Introduction

I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy,
tell them not to talk too long.

King, *Drum Major Instinct*

On 9 April 1968, two mules pulled a “crude farm wagon” that carried the body of Martin Luther King Jr. through the streets of Atlanta.¹ In contrast to the “gleaming African mahogany coffin,” the dilapidated wagon symbolised King’s affinity with the poor.² According to the *New York Times* the “lowly and the powerful” came to Atlanta to witness “one of the strangest corteges ever seen in the land.” The mourners gathered inside Ebenezer Baptist Church included Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, Governor Nelson Rockefeller (New York) and former Vice President Richard M. Nixon, each a potential presidential nominee in 1968. Fifty representatives of the United States House of Representatives and thirty United States Senators attended, as did Governor George Romney (Michigan), city mayors, religious leaders and black radical Stokely Carmichael. President Lyndon B. Johnson and former president Dwight D. Eisenhower, however, stayed away, as did the segregationist Governor Lester Maddox (Georgia). Their absence indicated King was not universally popular. A report in the *Times* estimated that of the one hundred and fifty thousand people who marched in or watched the funeral procession, a mere ten percent were white.³

King’s assassination prompted an immediate outpouring of tribute in song, speech and poetry. Robert F. Kennedy recited the poet Aeschylus when news of King’s murder reached him. Kennedy appealed for Americans to replace bloodshed with understanding and called for racial peace, reminding his audience that he, too, had lost a family member to assassination, killed by a “white man.”⁴ Cultural figures also paid prominent tribute to King and musicians led the way. On 5 April singer James Brown dedicated a concert to King that was telecast live in the hope that riots

¹ As an Afro-American symbol, the mule has signified labour and bondage. It was used in the Poor Peoples’ March on Washington. William H. Wiggins Jr., *O Freedom!: Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 107; Homer Bigart, “Leaders at Rites,” *New York Times* 1968, 1.

² Bigart, “Leaders at Rites,” 1; Coretta Scott King, *My Life With Martin Luther King, Jr.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 342; Rebecca Burns, *Burial For A King* (New York: Scribner, 2011), 132-133, 152-155.

³ Bigart, “Leaders at Rites,” 1, 33; David L. Lewis, *Martin Luther King: A Critical Biography* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), 390-392.

⁴ Kennedy quoted Aeschylus, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978), 874-875; Burns, *Burial For A King*: 20-22.

afflicting Boston would cease if people stayed home to watch his performance.⁵ Nina Simone performed the newly composed ‘Why? (The King of Love is Dead)’ on 7 April at the Westbury Music Festival on Long Island, NY.⁶ In part, these tributes commenced a long commemorative trend. Since King’s death, the US has memorialised him extensively. King has been remembered on more than 730 street names, in the US Capitol building’s “first sculpture of a black American,” and with the recent opening of the National Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial on the Mall, Washington DC.⁷ Many memorials evolved as expressions of grief, however great controversy surrounded some attempts to remember King with public time and space. Perhaps no memorial was more controversial than when the US Congress legislated in 1983 for the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday.

This thesis begins by tracing the origins of the Federal King Holiday from 1968 to 1983. In the aftermath of King’s murder, civil rights activists initiated a campaign to establish a federal holiday in honour of the late civil rights leader. By the early 1970s, three million signatures had been collected to form the largest ever petition submitted to Congress to date.⁸ Congress passed King Holiday legislation in 1983, signed by President Ronald Reagan, and the thesis discusses planning for the first King Day celebration in 1986. That initial planning spanned 1984 to 1985 – a relatively brief period – but an analysis of that time reveals the long-term intentions of King Holiday organisers. During these years, organisers followed the example of King birthday celebrations in Atlanta to forge the traditions by which the Holiday would be observed in years to come. The thesis then analyses the Holiday itself and the commemorations it has stimulated with the purpose of understanding what it means to the people of the US and its impact on American life. In particular, I focus on the period that spans the life of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission from 1986 to 1996 and then the final years of the twentieth century. This period is important because the Commission ushered in and organised the new Holiday, helped to establish it across the nation and reshaped it again for the twenty-first century.

⁵ John Ligan, “How Nina Simone and James Brown Mourned MLK, Jr. Onstage,” *The Atlantic* (4 April 2013), <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/04/how-nina-simone-and-james-brown-mourned-mlk-jr-onstage/274605/>, accessed 9 April 2015; Brown met President Nixon and made a single request: a King Holiday. David L. Chappell, *Waking From the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Random House, 2014) 93, 216n2.

⁶ NPR, “‘Why?’: Remembering Nina Simone’s Tribute to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.,” *NPR Music* (6 April 2008), <http://www.npr.org/2008/04/06/89418339/why-remembering-nina-simones-tribute-to-the-rev-martin-luther-king-jr>, accessed 9 April 2015; Ligan, “How Nina Simone and James Brown Mourned.”

⁷ AP, “Pensive Pose of King Bust at Capitol Draws Criticism,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 26 January 1986, 6; By 2003, 730 places had a street named after King. Derek H. Alderman, “Street Names as Memorial Arenas: The Reputational Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr in a Georgia County,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 67; Kevin Bruyneel, “The King’s Body: The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and the Politics of Collective Memory,” *History and Memory* 26, no. 1 (2014): 75-108.

⁸ “3 Million Petitions for King Holiday,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 30 January 1971, 2; One journalist reported that eight million signatures appeared on the petition, David A. Andelman, “Most Major Cities Will Ignore Birthday of Dr. King on Friday,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1971, 19.

The thesis considers three major questions. First, why was King memorialised with a holiday? Second, what images of King have been portrayed on the Holiday? Third, how have politicians, civil rights activists and the King family used the Holiday for their own ends? I argue that King's 'I Have a Dream' speech provided early inspiration for Holiday organisers and an image of King the Dreamer became the original King Day icon. A perceived overreliance on the 'Dream' speech, however, became a subject of concern among King's former colleagues and historians who rejected this depiction of King as too simplistic and superficial. Academics contend that King's portrayal as a benign dreamer shorn of radicalism has little to do with his real life activism. Throughout this thesis, I explain how such an image of King was developed and projected by the King Holiday Commission. By drawing on the Commission's underutilised archives, I expand the work of previous scholars to enable a greater understanding of why King's 'I Have a Dream' speech came to dominate early Holiday celebrations. In a departure from the prevailing academic consensus, I discern a shift in King's portrayal during the 1990s. Holiday planners moved away from the 'I Have a Dream' image in an attempt to recall King's more challenging legacy. They invoked King's 'Drum Major Instinct' sermon, when he defined himself as a humble Christian servant of the poor and condemned militarism and economic inequality.⁹ Though the Holiday would not become radical *per se*, organisers drew from King's radical legacy in order to foster a more meaningful commemoration. By portraying King the Drum Major, a more activist image, the Commission answered liberal critics and attempted to use the Holiday to advance King's unfinished agenda.

Coretta Scott King, Martin's widow, stood at the crux of this memorialisation. She spent years looking after their four children – Yolanda, Martin, Dexter and Bernice – early in the civil rights movement, however by the mid-to-late 1960s, Coretta emerged as an activist in her own right. After King's assassination, she became the prime guardian of his legacy, particularly after instigating construction of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.¹⁰ Though closely aligned with Democrats, Coretta cultivated relations with both sides of politics throughout the 1970s and 1980s in order to shape public understanding of her husband's legacy. When Coretta joined the fight for the Holiday, she "gave the pro-holiday side its emotional power," according to David L. Chappell. In one of the few consolations of being made a sole parent with four children to support, "King's enemies had to treat his widow with circumspection and ... a show of respect." Furthermore, Coretta "had one advantage that her husband had never had, namely the nation's memory of him."¹¹ Like their mother, the King children also became prominent in political and religious activities during the 1980s and used their power as heirs to shape their

⁹ Martin Luther King Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper Collins, 1968), 259-267.

¹⁰ Glenn Eskew, "Coretta Scott King: Legacy to Civil Rights," in *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Ann Short Chirhart and Kathleen Ann Clark (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2014), 344-368.

¹¹ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 98-99.

father's legacy. As many claimed that legacy, however, conflict over the meaning of his life, work and death became frequent and often bitter.

The too-often-overlooked Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission became central to early Holiday planning.¹² Established in 1984 to coordinate the first federal celebration, scheduled for 1986, Congress authorised the Commission to organise a Holiday that appealed to a broad spectrum of American society. Coretta Scott King chaired the organisation, which included representatives and senators from Congress as well as presidential appointments. With her support, the Commission remained active for eleven years and guided the Holiday from its inception until 1996, when it disbanded.

This thesis uses the Commission as a lens to analyse King's legacy during the 1980s and 1990s. Though scholarship has increasingly focused on the civil rights movement's grassroots organising, national coordination remained important and continued in the 1970s and 1980s.¹³ The Holiday campaign emanated out of cities like Atlanta, Detroit, New York and Washington DC, and consisted of grassroots support and labour protests, however its ultimate success was national. As a consequence, this thesis expands upon recent scholarship by David L. Chappell and Stephen Tuck to advance our understanding of civil rights on the national stage, with an analysis of the federal King Holiday and the Commission that organised the US' newest holiday.¹⁴

As a nonviolent activist, King was one of the most influential leaders of the twentieth century. His global influence came to rival Gandhi's and the philosophy he preached and practised served as a counter point to that century's violent racism. King's memorialisation entrenched an image of him as the leader of the civil rights movement, obscuring the role of local working class activists and women.¹⁵ Though King's reputation as the most charismatic and prominent movement leader existed before 1986, the Holiday further elevated him in the national historical consciousness relative to his contemporaries. Coretta sometimes promoted King as the founder of the movement, claiming that "it is widely held that Martin Luther King, Jr. began the civil rights movement of the 1960s."¹⁶ In fact, for historians, sociologists and political scientists, the origins of the movement stretched further back in time and were far more complex.

¹² Hereafter known as King Commission, King Holiday Commission or King Federal Holiday Commission. State based King commissions will be denoted by the name of relevant state.

¹³ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 3-4; For an example of scholarship about local struggles, see John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*; Stephen Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought to Be: The Black Freedom Struggle from Emancipation to Obama* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Contradiction, Confirmation, and the Cultural Landscape," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 10.

¹⁶ Coretta Scott King, "Community Service in the Academy," 21 July 1995, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0026, Box 3: Commission Committee Files 1984-1996, Folder: Community Service Committee (Folder 3), Preface, 1-2.

Nonetheless, King's memorialisation presented a conundrum: how to avoid an exaggerated account of his influence while crediting him for his achievements? Some academics downplay the uniqueness of King's leadership. Clayborne Carson argued that the movement would have happened irrespective of King's presence, while Manning Marable asserted that had King not led, someone else in the 1960s would have since by that time the movement was unstoppable.¹⁷ Nathan Huggins argued that by memorialising King, however, Americans could "recapture many of the ideals, aims, and achievements of the movement." Huggins suggested that those not active in the movement would be unable to (re)discover it as effectively with the study of other leaders. Since King was central and his vision more inclusive than others, Huggins argued he was a better lens through which to view the movement.¹⁸ Chappell agrees: "To personify is to vivify, and thus to preserve."¹⁹ As we shall see, King supporters fought for the purity of his message, both among themselves and against those who they believed distorted King's message. Meanwhile, President Reagan and conservatives – including and especially black conservatives – manipulated King's message in ways antithetical to the fallen leader's philosophy, causing great unrest among King's legatees.²⁰

King Day as American Holiday

Established by activists and politicians with competing motivations, the Holiday was forged from a long history of black resistance and married to an American holiday tradition. It elevated an African American to a venerated status previously enjoyed only by white men in the Pantheon of American heroes. In the aftermath of the civil rights movement, holiday planners hoped to unite black and white Americans in reflection, to continue King's work to end racial division. They hoped to reconcile citizens in a nation with a fraught racial history and to 'integrate' the US calendar. However, individuals and groups interpret holidays in very different ways. John Bodnar argues that public commemoration "involves a struggle for supremacy between advocates of various political ideas and sentiments." In such struggles, ordinary people represent a "vernacular culture" that conveys "what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like." "Vernacular culture" threatens the "sacred and timeless nature of official expressions" of culture that originates in the "concerns of cultural leaders." Official culture, however, represents "an ideal rather than complex

¹⁷ According to Marable, King's "powerful influence must be explained" in terms other than indispensability. Firstly, he was a black preacher without peer as an orator who knew his people and secondly, he appealed to whites. Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 75-79.

¹⁸ Nathan Irvin Huggins, "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charisma and Leadership," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 478-479.

¹⁹ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 179.

²⁰ Chappell's description of those who assumed King's legacy – legatees – is used throughout this thesis. Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 92.

or ambiguous” history and presents “the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness.”²¹ The fight for the King Holiday exhibited tension between the vernacular and elite. Working class and middle class blacks fought for the Holiday; however, once it had been established, conservative public officials sought to imbue it with idealised American values rather than values most obviously associated with King. The King Commission exemplified this tension. Comprised of prominent citizens, it became an official cultural leader tasked with the responsibility of inventing King Holiday traditions.²² The Commission had to create a holiday for all Americans, so it attempted to balance a complex vernacular depiction of King with an elite and idealised interpretation of his life.

The King Holiday gave African Americans an official opportunity to celebrate their American identity and citizenship. As Matthew Dennis argues, Americans make history by defining “themselves and their place in a collective national past” and compete “politically with each other through their commemorations of earlier landmark events and heroes.”²³ Major upheavals in American history have reformed the national calendar, beginning in the Revolutionary era. Independence Day “is the oldest” American political holiday, and though it celebrates the founding of the nation in ideal terms, it is as local as it is national. Vernacular parades, picnics and firework displays, not federally sponsored, “emerge through the organizational work of local civic groups and individuals.”²⁴ George Washington’s birthday celebration was the Revolution’s other calendar reform, “built on the conventions and traditions of English celebrations of the [British] King’s birthday.”²⁵ In the nineteenth century, abolitionists used Thanksgiving – seemingly apolitical and not an official public holiday at the time – to advance the anti-slavery cause. The Civil War and Reconstruction then stimulated the codification of holidays and added Thanksgiving and Memorial Day to the federal calendar.²⁶

African American Memorialisation

The period from Reconstruction to 1900 illustrates how holidays can have contested meanings. Irish and Italian Americans used Columbus Day to legitimise their citizenship, as both Catholics and recent immigrants. Columbus’ brutality toward the people of the Caribbean was forgotten, as the historical reality was overtaken by the myth. African Americans likewise struggled to persuade the

²¹ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-14.

²² Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1-14.

²³ Matthew Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days: An American Calendar* (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1, 4.

²⁴ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 13.

²⁵ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 168.

²⁶ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 10, 87; For a discussion of anniversaries, see William M. Johnston, *Celebrations: The Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today* (New Brunswick: Transaction 1991).

nation to commemorate the Civil War with historical accuracy and an inclusive attitude.²⁷ Frederick Douglass determined he would resist white desire to forget that slavery defined the War and pledged to “never forget” its true meaning.²⁸ David Blight argues that Civil War memorialisation in the nineteenth century smothered the issue of slavery in a conscious effort to forget that “peculiar institution.” Tales of white soldiers’ valour dominated remembrances with an “obliteration of any sectional identity or animosity” among whites, so that both North and South claimed to have fought an honourable war over states’ rights. Blight further argues that whites marginalised blacks in the South on Memorial Day.²⁹ Begun as Decoration Day by black Americans, whites co-opted what became Memorial Day in the drive for North-South reunion.³⁰ African Americans rarely controlled depictions of themselves since whites controlled most memorialisation.³¹ Furthermore, post-Civil War memorialisation was frequently paternalistic and ignored black agency.³² A Frederick Douglass statue in Rochester, New York, was “only one of a few successful monument projects commemorating African American heroes of the period.”³³

The importance of commemorative days for black Americans, however, preceded the Civil War. There had long been a desire for black celebrations to counter the white supremacy of an American calendar created by a Revolution that left many blacks enslaved.³⁴ Black holidays, celebrations, parades and festivals provided an alternative calendar from which to resist white hegemony. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, black celebration days included the Fifth of July, Juneteenth, Decoration Day and ‘Emancipation Days.’³⁵ African American commemorations have been the subject of rich scholarship in recent decades.³⁶ Black festivals broke the monotony of slave life, providing a release for behaviour not condoned during other times of the year. These festivals included Negro Election Day in New England (1741-c.1861), Pinkster in New York and New Jersey (co-opted from a Dutch holiday in the eighteenth century), and General Training (a

²⁷ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 84-85, 119-124.

²⁸ David W. Blight, “‘For Something Beyond the Battlefield’: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4: 1156.

²⁹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 4th ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 2, 45, 83, 89.

³⁰ Blight, *Race and Reunion*: 64-97, esp 69-71.

³¹ Renee C. Romano, “Beyond ‘Self-Congratulatory Celebration’: Complicating Civil Rights Anniversaries,” *The American Historian*, no. 2 (2014): 30-31.

³² Mitch Kauchun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 177-179.

³³ Kauchun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*: Fig.14.

³⁴ Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison: Madison House, 1990), 25-56.

³⁵ Genevieve Fabre, “African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72-91; Blight, *Race and Reunion*: 64-71; Blight, “‘For Something Beyond the Battlefield’,” 1161.

³⁶ Scholarship on African American festivals includes, Shane White, “‘It Was a Proud Day’: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834,” *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994); Keith A. Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power and the Making of the African-American Holiday Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Kauchun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*; Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*

parade for black Revolutionary War veterans) in parts of the North. As northern states emancipated slaves, blacks in New England pushed the boundaries of their freedom and transformed the “black festivals of the eighteenth century into the city parades” during the early nineteenth century.³⁷ In the South, such celebrations had to wait until after the Civil War.³⁸ Nonetheless, attempts to establish nationwide black holidays centred on dates of historical significance in the quest to end slavery. The 1st of January was dedicated to commemorate the abolition of the slave trade in 1808, even though it “never became a national day for all blacks until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.”³⁹ The 5th of July signified African American freedom since some northern states emancipated slaves on Independence Day. However, Frederick Douglass denounced the 4th of July for its implicit tolerance of black oppression – the Revolution allowed slavery to continue – so northern blacks celebrated emancipation the following day.⁴⁰ The 1st of August commemorated emancipation in the British West Indies in 1834.⁴¹

Twentieth century black holidays built on these traditions and were, in a sense, precursors to King Day. Congress founded National Freedom Day during Truman’s presidency to commemorate Lincoln’s signing of the Thirteenth Amendment. Major R. R. Wright, a key proponent of the idea, hoped the celebration would give black Americans a truly national celebration.⁴² According to the House of Representatives, the day was for the “spreading of good will and the promotion of a better understanding and harmonious cooperation among the white and colored citizens of the United States.”⁴³ Widespread observance was elusive, however, as it was not a paid federal holiday nor was it fully supported by black organisations.⁴⁴

In the context of the 1960s civil rights and Black Power movements, African Americans placed a new emphasis on culture and celebration. According to Keith Mayes, between 1976 and 1983 black holidays were at the forefront of the Black Freedom Movement during which a

³⁷ White, “‘It Was a Proud Day’,” 15-17, 21.

³⁸ Kauchun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*; Kathleen Clark, “Celebrating Freedom: Emancipation Day Celebrations and African American Memory in the Early Reconstruction South,” in *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory and Southern Identity*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 107-132.

³⁹ In regard to the 1st January, Fabre argued slavery, in fact, had been strengthened after the abolition of the slave trade. Fabre, “African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” 80.

⁴⁰ Douglass’ questioned: “What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?” Fabre, “African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” 75-77.

⁴¹ Fabre, “African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” 80-86; For further explanation of black holidays and Juneteenth (19 June), which commemorates when southwestern blacks learnt of their emancipation in 1865, see Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 20-22.

⁴² Jr. Hanes Walton et al., “The Presidential and Congressional Documents on the First African-American National Holiday: National Freedom Day,” *The Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 3 (2001): 348-351.

⁴³ Committee on the Judiciary, *Requesting the President to Proclaim February 1 As National Freedom Day*, 80th, 2nd, 17 June 1948, in Walton et al., “The Presidential and Congressional Documents on the First African-American National Holiday,” 368.

⁴⁴ Walton et al., “The Presidential and Congressional Documents on the First African-American National Holiday,” 348-353.

“grassroots insurgency” to celebrate a King holiday evolved.⁴⁵ Mayes writes that “the black holiday drive in the late twentieth century ... suggests both a nadir in civil rights and black power politics and a shift in movement concerns.” The civil rights and Black Power movements changed course by making “‘holiday’ civil rights a central concern” and Mayes ultimately concludes that holiday making signified a shift in priorities, not the burn out of activism.⁴⁶ Black Power emphasised cultural, not just legislative and statutory, concerns and holidays were part of this assertiveness.⁴⁷ Based on a tradition of black celebration, Kwanzaa evolved as a Black Power festival and holiday that resisted white oppression and required no white approval.⁴⁸ Kwanzaa first began in Los Angeles, California, on 26 December 1966 as a week long celebration that ended on 31 December.⁴⁹ For Black Power activists, “Kwanzaa was their answer to what they understood as the ubiquity of white cultural practices that oppressed them as thoroughly as had Jim Crow laws.”⁵⁰ As a black alternative to Christmas, it de-emphasised “holidays from mainstream white America” and was “a hodgepodge of indigenous African practices placed inside a black American ritual framework.”⁵¹ In some respects, Kwanzaa was unlike other past US black celebrations. In the post-emancipation parades in New England much “African-American culture was lost when the [slave era] multifaceted festival was reduced to the parade.” Intending to display their citizenship and freedom, parade participants minimised African heritage, often thought of as embarrassing.⁵² Kwanzaa reversed this trend and sought to reclaim a long lost sense of African-ness. In this respect, the King Holiday had more in common with the post-emancipation parades, since it did not emphasise King’s African-ness. It, too, featured parades as a central ritual, yet King Holiday organisers aspired to desegregate the American Calendar so white and black Americans could celebrate racial equality together.

Following King’s assassination, African Americans initiated a trend to memorialise the civil rights movement and attempted to establish the King Holiday as a national memorial. Just as Frederick Douglass realised a century earlier, African Americans of the late twentieth century recognised the importance of historical commemoration of their own sacrifice to ensure a just future.⁵³ Liberal black legislators, such as Congressman John Conyers and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), introduced King Holiday legislation annually to Congress until success ultimately

⁴⁵ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 189.

⁴⁶ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: xx, 207.

⁴⁷ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 27-44.

⁴⁸ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 49-51.

⁴⁹ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 91-96.

⁵⁰ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: xix.

⁵¹ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 43, 79.

⁵² White, “‘It Was a Proud Day’,” 46.

⁵³ Carol Morello, “Out of the Confederacy’s Shadow; Va’s New King Day a Symbolic Leap,” *Washington Post*, 15 January 2001, 1.

came in 1983.⁵⁴ White legislators supported the Holiday, but black politicians made it a cause and eventually won support from sceptical whites. Black legislators negotiated with not only white liberals but also white conservatives whose votes were required to ensure passage of the legislation. Black liberals fought for and won the holiday debate, however black conservatives soon exerted a disproportionate influence on Holiday planning. Though “King holiday supporters were the latest in a long line of Afro-Americans who” wanted “a national holiday to commemorate Afro-American freedom,”⁵⁵ when the long awaited holiday came, some organisers denied it was a ‘black’ holiday.

The Rightward Turn

The attempt to deny King Day black holiday status was due, in part, to the political culture of the time. Most historians and political scientists acknowledge the rightward turn in US politics in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁶ Patrick Allitt argues that the “Democratic New Deal coalition broke up” between 1964 and 1980 as socially conservative white southerners “began to vote Republican when black southerners began to vote Democrat.”⁵⁷ Allitt contends that conservative intellectuals regrouped after the radical sixties and found new allies among neoconservatives – “former Cold War liberals” who feared “society was deteriorating and becoming ungovernable.” This coalition “became the theoretical branch of an electoral coalition that would dominate American politics for the remainder of the century.”⁵⁸ A second alliance, with much of the white working class, further ensured conservatives sustained a winning electoral coalition for Republicans.⁵⁹

Though most historians consider the eighties as conservative, not all accept the label entirely.⁶⁰ David T. Courtwright has examined the morality struggle of the “culture wars” and argues that Americans divided along “two distinct constellations of issues”: moral issues like abortion and economic issues like taxation.⁶¹ Courtwright suggests the decade was too complex to define simply as conservative, on the basis that rigid definitions of liberal and conservative break

⁵⁴ Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*: 134-151.

⁵⁵ Wiggins nominated Rev. Absalom Jones as one of the earliest proponents of a black holiday. As of 1 January 1808, he urged an annual day be dedicated to remembering the crime of slavery. Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*: 139.

⁵⁶ Allitt writes “before the 1950s there was no such thing as a conservative movement in the United States.” Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 2.

⁵⁷ Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 191.

⁵⁸ Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 191.

⁵⁹ Allitt defines conservatism as “an attitude to social and political change that looks for support to the ideas, beliefs, and habits of the past and puts more faith in the lessons of history than in the abstractions of political philosophy.” Furthermore, Conservatives are “skeptical and anti-utopian” doubting the “possibility of human, social, or political protection.” Allitt writes “conservatives have generally taken an antitheoretical approach to their world. American conservatism, moreover, has often been *reactive*, responding to perceived political and intellectual challenges.” Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 2-3.

⁶⁰ Works that characterise the 1980s as conservative include, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*; William C. Berman, *America’s Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁶¹ David T. Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.

down at an individual level. For example, an individual person might have a moral outlook usually described of as left wing, but an economic outlook usually thought of as right wing. Though prominent, powerful and vocal, “moral conservatives failed to win on their key issues, much less recapture the culture.” Conservatives filled the air with angry talk, but, according to Courtwright, made little progress on issues of importance to them, such as prayer in schools, obscenity laws, restricting gay rights and legalized gambling, and reversing *Roe v Wade*.⁶² Bradford Martin likewise portrays a decade of vigorous left wing activism stimulated by continuity with movements from previous decades.⁶³ Though conservatives had enormous power, as exemplified by the elections of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush to the presidency, they encountered resistance, which this thesis will highlight.

Similarly, historiography on the seventies is being revised.⁶⁴ Once seen as the pathway to an inevitable mass conservatism, some historians now view the seventies as “a second act of a long 1960s rather than the first act of an early 1980s.”⁶⁵ Certainly, some key developments indicate this to be the case. The Supreme Court decision in *Roe v Wade* prohibited states from ‘placing an undue burden’ on a woman’s access to an abortion, second wave feminism flourished, gay rights activists used tactics honed in the sixties and support for Great Society style programs continued. Furthermore, according to Stephen Tuck, the seventies, “was the high-water mark of the black liberation movement.” Tuck asserts that, “the overall story of African American protest that emerges during the decade is not so much one of fragmentation as one of proliferation.” Rather than irrevocably falter after King’s death, blacks asserted their rights in a multitude of ways, empowered by the legislative victories of the sixties. Tuck argues that the seventies “was not a decade of defending rights but a decade of seeking to expand rights further, and in some cases managing to do so.”⁶⁶ As will be seen, the King Holiday campaign became part of the proliferation of black activism, disrupting the notion of a conservative hegemony. The Holiday represented a major victory for civil rights activists. Chappell argues “the holiday was part of a remarkable – though still unheralded – run of successful civil rights legislation in the 1980s.” This provides the “strongest

⁶² Even Ronald Reagan’s free market idealism frustrated conservatives who thought the free market undermined traditional institutions. Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 4-5.

⁶³ Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), ix-xix.

⁶⁴ Barbara Keys, Jack Davies, and Elliott Bannan, “The Post-Traumatic Decade: New Histories of the 1970s,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 1 (2014): 1-17.

⁶⁵ Stephen Tuck, “Introduction: Reconsidering the 1970s - The 1960s to a Disco Beat?,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (2008): 619.

⁶⁶ Stephen Tuck, “‘We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off’: The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest during the 1970s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (2008): 641.

evidence against suspicions that the holiday was just a symbolic sop ... to pacify black voters and distract them from the lack of real progress.”⁶⁷

Despite the victory, conservatives “appropriated King as a useful icon” in support of their own ideology. Presidents Reagan and Bush used King Day commemorations to promote individualism, capitalism and conservative American Christianity. Reagan espoused a revisionist history. According to Dennis, Reagan “invoked King’s message of nonviolence not as a recommended strategy for civil disobedience during social protest (which it did not seek to encourage) but rather to preach against youth violence, particularly within urban black communities.”⁶⁸ Later, President Bush continued, albeit in a less obvious manner, to prioritise a narrative that highlighted individual valour within the movement, as opposed to collective endeavour. Critics argued this threatened to nullify King’s message and render him a benign icon.

The Long Civil Rights Movement

The conservative ascendancy and resistance to it raise the question as to whether the Holiday campaign continued the civil rights movement or signalled a new phase or era. In that respect, this thesis sits within an emerging body of literature on the Long Civil Rights Movement. The movement is commonly dated to either beginning with the *Brown v Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954 or the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. Writing in 1964, activist Bayard Rustin argued the period from 1954 to 1964 “will undoubtedly be recorded as the period in which the legal foundations of racism in America were destroyed.”⁶⁹ In this “classical” phase, as Rustin defined it, Congress passed landmark legislation that included the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁷⁰ However, more acts followed that resulted from the ‘classical’ phase, including the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.⁷¹ Mass nonviolent

⁶⁷ This unheralded run includes: “extension and strengthening of the Voting Rights Act in 1982,” “comprehensive sanctions on South Africa,” the Civil Rights Restoration Act and “strengthening amendments to the Fair Housing Act.” Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 121.

⁶⁸ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 271.

⁶⁹ Bayard Rustin, *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 111.

⁷⁰ A broad definition of civil rights applies “to all rights that people have in relation to government.” A narrower view of civil rights, often used by scholars and jurists, can be “defined as affirmative promises governments make to protect the rights of groups.” In contrast, civil liberties are “individual freedoms that governments promise not to violate,” such as the “constitutional guarantee of free speech and protection against cruel punishment.” See, “Publisher’s Note,” *The Encyclopedia of Civil Rights in America*, ed. David Bradley and Shelly Fisher Fishkin (Armonk, New York: Sharpe Reference, 1998), xiii.

⁷¹ Rustin declared the ‘classical phase’ over too quickly. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 fell outside Rustin’s periodization, yet it could be considered a delayed victory from that phase. King, for example, campaigned in the North for housing desegregation in 1966, and Andrew Young declared that the 1969 Charleston hospital workers strike was the final gasp of the SCLC’s involvement in the street based civil rights movement. Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 3-27; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 431-525, 535-49; Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 495-501.

campaigns in Montgomery, Albany, Birmingham and Selma,⁷² distinguished this period from preceding eras and a great emotional attachment to the romance of the ‘classical’ movement narrative remains, even though in reality the hard work of desegregation preceded the 1950s and continued well into the 1970s.⁷³

Defining the movement’s beginning and end is notoriously problematic and attempts to do so have stimulated one of the most vibrant and contentious fields in recent American historiography. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s Long Civil Rights Movement theory urges historians to engage with the concept of a “long and ongoing civil rights movement” instead of the classic Montgomery to Memphis declension narrative. Dowd Hall asserts the movement was “an undefeated but unfinished revolution” in 1968 since subsequent school and work place desegregation represented the most comprehensive reform.⁷⁴ Dowd Hall’s influential essay crystallised an idea and Long Civil Rights Movement literature has placed a new emphasis on the movement’s antecedents.⁷⁵ Other important work includes Glenda Gilmour’s *Defying Dixie*, which illustrates the movement’s connections to labour activism stretching back to the early twentieth century.⁷⁶ Recent scholarship also examines the post-1965 movement that followed Selma and the Voting Rights Act. Timothy J. Minchin and John A. Salmond’s work, for example, examines the ongoing battles to integrate the nation through the difficult task of desegregating public accommodations, schools and work places.⁷⁷ They argue that the legislation of the mid-sixties did not mark the end of struggle; rather, it laid the foundation for desegregation in the late-sixties and seventies. Enforcing that legislation propelled desegregation.

Critics of the Long Movement theory, most notably Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, argue it has “become hegemonic.” It “collapses periodization schemas, erases conceptual differences between waves of the BLM [Black Liberation Movement], and blurs regional distinctions in the African American experience.” Imaginatively, Cha-Jua and Lang equate the

⁷² The protests in Selma can be considered part of the ‘classical’ phase of the movement. They had the hallmarks of movement activities in Montgomery, Albany and Birmingham. For more on the Selma campaign, see Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 368-430.

⁷³ Timothy J. Minchin, “Beyond the Dominant Narrative: The Ongoing Struggle for Civil Rights in the US South, 1968-1980,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006): 65-86.

⁷⁴ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* (2005): 1254-1255.

⁷⁵ For works influential in the Long Movement debate, see, Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984); William H. Chafe, “The End of One Struggle, the Beginning of Another,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (University of Mississippi, 1986); William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷⁶ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁷⁷ Timothy J. Minchin and John A. Salmond, *After the Dream: Black and White Southerners Since 1965* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011). Minchin independently emphasised that much of the reshaping of southern and American society occurred after 1968, in Minchin, “Beyond the Dominant Narrative,” 65-86.

Long Movement to a vampire because its “distinctive trait is its *undead* status.” The Long Movement “exists outside of time and history, beyond the processes of life and death, and change and development.” Like a vampire it “is thoroughly rootless and without place.” In short, “the cumulative result is a largely ahistorical and placeless chronicle with questionable interpretive insight.”⁷⁸ Chappell, too, questions the value of the Long Movement theory: “Historians have ... asserted far too much continuity in the story of race and rights since the Civil War. While nobody can deny that the story stretches back to European slavers’ first contacts in Africa – indeed back before then – most scholars overemphasize the industrial-age American continuities.”⁷⁹

The positions of Long Movement theorists and their doubters are almost impossible to reconcile, so the lens of the Second Reconstruction may offer a better view. Steven F. Lawson considers the Second Reconstruction (the First being post-Civil War, 1865-1877) to have begun in December 1946. Harry S. Truman’s appointment of a President’s Committee on Civil Rights launched “the federal government’s postwar effort to advance racial equality.”⁸⁰ It spanned decades and in 1975 C. Vann Woodward argued it had showed “no signs of having yet run its course or even of having slackened its pace.” Understanding the Second Reconstruction’s purpose is, however, more important than deciding on when it began. To that end, Woodward argued that, “The Second Reconstruction addressed itself to all the aspects of racial relations that the first one attacked and even some that the First Reconstruction avoided or neglected. These included political, economic, and civil rights.”⁸¹

One aspect that Woodward did not mention, and one I add, is that of memorialisation. African Americans controlled more interpretive power in the ‘Second Reconstruction’ than during the first and they seized the opportunity to democratise and integrate the American Calendar.⁸² With regard to the Holiday, Chappell argues “King’s legatees achieved their most decisive political victory in the entire period since King’s death – while setting no expectation whatsoever of substantive

⁷⁸ Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 265-266.

⁷⁹ David L. Chappell, “The Lost Decade of Civil Rights,” *Historically Speaking*, no. April (2009): 37.

⁸⁰ Steven F. Lawson, “Introduction,” in *One America in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Steven F. Lawson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xv.

⁸¹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 8-9.

⁸² The Voting Rights Act of 1965 led to rapid mass voting enrolment in Mississippi, which changed voting patterns and delivered real power to African Americans. Black enrolment in Mississippi lifted from “6 percent to almost 60 percent in two years” Tony Badger, “Fatalism, Not Gradualism: The Crisis of Southern Liberalism, 1945-65,” in *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Tony Badger and Brian Ward (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 74; Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 339-352; For a history of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, see Glenn Eskew, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and the New Ideology of Tolerance,” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2006), 28-66; Glenn Eskew, “Exploring Civil Rights Heritage Tourism and Historical Preservation as Revitalization Tools,” in *Past Trends and Future Prospects of the American City: The Dynamics of Atlanta*, ed. David L. Sjoquist (Lanham and New York: Lexington Books, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009); For an account of black political power being used to institutionalise black history in the southern memorial landscape, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 270-315, esp 301-307.

change.” Chappell states that the Holiday campaign acknowledged “that if substantive gains were no longer feasible, symbols were still important” because the “concession of a holiday devoted to a martyr for civil rights would provide recurring leverage, or at least publicity, to advance his unfinished cause.”⁸³ Indeed, symbols were important and fighting for the Holiday often meant that the integrationist struggle continued in local communities, neighbourhoods and town halls. The campaign united black and white Americans as much as it frequently pitted black against white. Holiday advocates likewise encountered strong currents of white southern chauvinism and vestiges of the Confederacy that lingered in memorials and state holidays like Robert E. Lee’s birthday.⁸⁴

Though not part of the ‘classical’ movement, the Holiday campaign resembled the movement in significant ways. It had national leaders who joined with grass roots activists around a major issue to advance black interests. The campaign represented an important victory for King’s legatees; indeed, it was a long sought victory not won during the First Reconstruction or in the early to mid-twentieth century. Aware that the desire for national reunion had once trumped black desires to remember slavery as the cause of the Civil War, the imperative to remember King one hundred years later was strong. And, unlike the First Reconstruction, there was no trend to valorise brutality and racism. Officials and police officers like Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor and Sheriff Jim Clark, both violent white supremacists who used their authority to oppress civil rights protestors in Birmingham and Selma, were disgraced.⁸⁵ The movement won history’s plaudits; brutal segregationists did not.

Civil Rights in American Memory

The King Holiday became part of a trend to commemorate the civil rights movement and desegregate the memorial landscape. As W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes in *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* the consolidation of black political power in southern cities led to the establishment of museums devoted to black history.⁸⁶ The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the Rosa Parks Museum, the Selma Voting Rights Museum, the National Civil Rights Museum and the new Center for Civil and Human Rights, in Atlanta, are but a few dedications to the movement that

⁸³ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 92.

⁸⁴ Important studies about public opinion toward the Holiday at the local level and narratives of the federal Holiday campaign include, Nicholas O. Alozie, “Political Tolerance Hypotheses and White Opposition to a Martin Luther King Holiday In Arizona,” *Social Science Journal* 32, no. 1 (1995); Thomas J. Shields, “The ‘Tip of the Iceberg’ in a Southern Suburban County: The Fight for a Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday,” *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 4 (2003); Lee Siegelman and Barbara Walkosz, “Letters to the Editor as a Public Opinion Thermometer: The Martin Luther King Holiday Vote in Arizona,” *Social Science Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1992); William J. Starosta, “A National Holiday for Dr. King?: Qualitative Content Analysis of Arguments Carried in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*,” *Journal of Black Studies* 18, no. 3 (1988); One informative discussion included Congressman John Conyers, Dr. Elsie Scott (President of Congressional Black Caucus Foundation), Denise Rolark Barnes (publisher of the *Washington Informer*) and Moses Boyd (Senior Counsellor of the Washington Group), in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen?* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2008).

⁸⁵ For more on Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor and Sheriff Jim Clark, see Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 156, 199, 227-230, 378-413.

⁸⁶ Brundage, *The Southern Past*: 302.

have upended the racist memorial landscape in the US. These institutions have transformed the memorial landscape of the South and created memorial sites for future generations to learn about the nation's history of racial discrimination.⁸⁷ A growing body of literature is now dedicated to memorials, and their messages. Glenn Eskew notes an attempt to inculcate a new ideology of tolerance with the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, opened in 1992. A city-sponsored institution, it displays the city's civil rights history and holds an archival collection. He goes on to say that "the overwhelming message" of the Institute was "tolerance and support for universal human rights" and that, "the process of memorializing the movement has created a tangible expression of a new international ideology that links the American story with the universal demand for human rights."⁸⁸ Finally, Eskew argues that southern "civil rights memorials and museums" celebrate the "triumph of racial tolerance and the assimilation of blacks into the existing political and capitalist world system."⁸⁹

Owen J. Dwyer similarly asserts that the museums and monuments dedicated to the movement have "desegregated America's memorial landscape" by presenting an "antiracist rendering of the past." Inclusive memorialisation facilitated a move from the hagiography of a white supremacist past, however Dwyer notes a "growing consensus as to what the movement stood for and who the protagonists were." A "mainstream narrative" has forced "women's, working-class, and local histories to the margins of the landscape in order to focus on charismatic leaders and dramatic events."⁹⁰ Dwyer highlights the omission of women activists, like Ella Baker and Septima Clark, who are largely overlooked by a focus on King and his male colleagues. Typically, men have been portrayed as national leaders while women are portrayed as community level activists.⁹¹ A narrative that prizes pivotal events and elite leadership dominates, at the expense of an historical analysis that considers the complexity of the movement.⁹²

Dwyer argues that civil rights memorials often consign black commemoration to historic black neighbourhoods and institutions. He suggests that while "American public history has been desegregated," the "memorial landscape" is uneven. Most memorials to black Americans are located in historically African American neighbourhoods; this has reinforced old divisions and a perception that such memorialisation is only important to black Americans.⁹³ Similarly, Derek H.

⁸⁷ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998), 1-2.

⁸⁸ Eskew, "The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," 35-39, 60.

⁸⁹ Eskew, "The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," 28.

⁹⁰ Owen J. Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement: Place, Memory, and Conflict," *Professional Geographer* 52, no. 4 (2000): 660-661.

⁹¹ Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 663-664; Women are included in more monuments today, especially the Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, the Viola Luzzio Memorial and the Selma Voting Rights Museum.

⁹² Dwyer, "Interpreting the Civil Rights Movement," 665.

⁹³ Owen J. Dwyer, "Location, Politics, and the Production of Civil Rights Memorial Landscapes," *Urban Geography* 23, no. 1 (2002): 33.

Alderman notes that African American neighbourhoods were most likely to name streets after King.⁹⁴ Dwyer and Alderman correctly identify that the trend to commemorate black heroes mainly in traditionally black areas was problematic. However, that trend had an obvious logic behind it. As Pierre Nora argues, within *lieux de mémoire* (memorial sites) “a residual sense of continuity remains” with historic events at geographic sites.⁹⁵ Nora thought that “when certain minorities create protected enclaves as preserves of memory ... they reveal what is true of all *lieux de mémoire*: that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away.” Sites “arise out of a sense that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory, hence ... we must create archives, mark anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies and authenticate documents because such things no longer happen as a matter of course.”⁹⁶ Nora argued that in France, where peasant culture had disappeared, memory transformed from the “historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual ... from repetition to remembrance.”⁹⁷ Memorials to King exist in geographic locations with a historic connection to him; usually he had been in these places. The locations where King lived, protested and delivered speeches made for obvious memorial sites. The conversion of the Loraine Motel in Memphis, where King died, and the dedication of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Park in Atlanta, where King lived and worked, testifies to this connection.⁹⁸

Memorialisation of Martin Luther King Jr.

The 1980s marked a period of intense scholarly interest in King.⁹⁹ Major biographies and historical works include David Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross*, Adam Fairclough’s *To Redeem the Soul of America* and Taylor Branch’s *Parting the Waters*.¹⁰⁰ An academic round table, “Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Leader and the Legacy,” was hosted by the United States Capitol Historical Society

⁹⁴ Derek H. Alderman, “Street Names and the Scaling of Memory: The Politics of Commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr Within the African American Community,” in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement: Controversies and Debates* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 90.

⁹⁵ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1: 2.

⁹⁶ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1: 7.

⁹⁷ Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1: 11.

⁹⁸ Kevin Sack, “Museums of a Movement,” *New York Times*, 28 June 1998, 12, 22.

⁹⁹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Plume, 1982); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement 1954-1963* (London: Macmillan London, 1988); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65* (New York: Touchstone, Simon and Schuster, 1998); Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ For an analysis of works that explore the “sources of King’s thought” see Daynes, who notes many King scholars rely on the same stories and points. He also notes there was a twelve year gap between works by Lewis (1970) and Oates (1982) and that, “in those years, the memory of King moved, for most Americans, from the present into history.” Gary Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes: Joseph R. McCarthy, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Politics of American Memory* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 189-190, 205; For more about King biography, see Clayborne Carson, “Reconstructing the King Legacy: Scholars and National Myths,” in *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 239-248.

in October 1986, after the first King Holiday. One participant, a former speechwriter to King, Christian pacifist and historian, Vincent Harding argued that “most of those who were leading the campaign for the national holiday had chosen ... to allow King to become a convenient hero, to try to tailor him to the shape and mood of mainstream, liberal/moderate America.” Harding elaborated: it “appears as if the price for the first national holiday honouring a black man is the development of a massive case of national amnesia concerning who that black man really was.”¹⁰¹ Harding, one of the authors of King’s most controversial speech, ‘Beyond Vietnam,’ given 4 April 1967, expressed this view repeatedly.¹⁰²

The round table conference set the tone for the post-1986 analysis of King’s legacy.¹⁰³ Historians writing about collective memory, such as Michael Kammen, base their analysis of King’s image on Harding’s work. Kammen argued that the “radical image” of King “has been depoliticized” so he instead appears as “a charismatic advocate of civil rights rather than a more broadly based critical conscience.”¹⁰⁴ Kammen was no doubt influenced by the fact that King’s “‘I Have a Dream’ speech had become omnipresent in American consciousness.”¹⁰⁵ Others, such as Taylor Branch, argue that in the 1980s many Americans were interested in a Holiday that remembered King as the consensus Dreamer of 1963, as opposed to the radical activist of 1965-1968. For Branch, it was “a disquieting sign that the official literature for the new King Holiday seldom mentions the crucible years after he won the Nobel Prize.” According to Branch, those years represented a period when King’s influence declined: a radical period when he criticised the nation for its conduct in the Vietnam War and acceptance of vast economic inequality.¹⁰⁶ Peter Ling likewise argues that the King “remembered on such occasions is overwhelmingly the orator of 1963 who mesmerised a nation.”¹⁰⁷ There is little doubt that the Dreamer image captured the imaginations of Americans but Garrow argues the Holiday helped dilute King’s legacy and distort his image: “Making King an object of official celebration inescapably leads to at least some

¹⁰¹ Vincent Harding, “Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Future of America,” *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 468-469; Bill Strickland, “Critik: The Institute of the Black World (IBW), the Political Legacy of Martin Luther King, and the Intellectual Struggle to Rethink America’s Racial Meaning,” in *Radicalism in the South Since Reconstruction*, ed. Chris Green, Rachel Rubin, and James Smethurst (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 168.

¹⁰² Vincent Harding, *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 1-22; Harding Fox, “Vincent Harding, 82, Civil Rights Author and Associate of Dr. King, Dies,” *New York Times*, 21 May 2014, accessed 3 April 2015; Strickland, “Critik: The Institute of the Black World” 169.

¹⁰³ Shun P. Govender, “We Shall Overcome,” in *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman (New York: Pantheon Books and the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 662, 816n23; Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 381.

¹⁰⁵ According to Drew Hansen, the speech appeared in textbooks, posters, T-shirts and hip hop songs, while on the Holiday it was broadcast on radio and television. Drew Hansen, *The Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech That Inspired a Nation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 221.

¹⁰⁶ Taylor Branch, “Uneasy Holiday,” *New Republic*, 2 February 1986, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Ling, “Martin Luther King’s Half Forgotten Dream,” *History Today* 48, no. 4 (1998): 17.

smoothing of the edges and tempering of substance.”¹⁰⁸ Garrow notes that King was “portrayed as ... a prototypically successful American reform leader whose message and achievements comport perfectly with the most reassuring myths about American society and politics.”¹⁰⁹ Hansen likewise argues that the “seeming anachronism” of King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech was “part of its appeal for politicians and the media in the 1980s.” The Dream seemed *passé* to those who thought its central tenets had been realised and that little more needed to be achieved to complete his life’s work. Therefore, by constantly quoting ‘I Have a Dream’ and “de-emphasizing most of King’s other speeches, King’s legacy could be limited to issues” where general agreement existed. Most agreed Jim Crow was immoral and King’s Dream was noble, but no similar consensus existed about causes King championed after 1965. In fact, according to Hansen, “nearly any of King’s speeches after 1965 would have been as explosively controversial in the 1980s as they had been during King’s lifetime.”¹¹⁰

Controversy over King’s image has focused not just on historical accuracy but also on its utility. What do the various representations of King mean and how are they used in the present? Michael Eric Dyson argues that King’s “ability as a symbol to inspire radical social change – is smothered beneath banalities and platitudes.”¹¹¹ He believes the Holiday created a non-threatening image of King and a “seductive amnesia [draws the US] away from the memory of King’s challenging legacy” so he is depicted as a “Safe Negro.”¹¹² Activists – many of whom knew King personally – deplored this amnesia in the historical consciousness. Dianne Nash, a leader of the civil rights movement’s student wing, feared exaltation of King would deter future generations from activism because the young might wait for another great leader, rather than start their own movement.¹¹³

Though most academics and activists legitimately highlight the historical amnesia surrounding King’s radicalism, the Holiday nonetheless stimulates recollections of King that need to be analysed. Gary Daynes provides an authoritative and useful prism through which to view King Holiday politics. Daynes argues that the King family and the organisation King led from 1957, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), divided the fallen leader’s legacy.¹¹⁴ The family claimed King’s birthday, home and church as memorials, pursued a “memorial style” of

¹⁰⁸ David Garrow, “Martin Luther King, Jr. (Legacy),” in *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, ed. Jack Salzman, David Lionel Smith, and Cornell West (New York: Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1996), 1546.

¹⁰⁹ David Garrow, “From Reformer to Revolutionary,” in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement: Controversies and Debates*, ed. John Kirk (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 182.

¹¹⁰ Other causes King championed after 1965 included residential desegregation, education equality and equal economic opportunity, among others. Hansen, *The Dream*: 219.

¹¹¹ Michael Eric Dyson, *April 4 1968: Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Death and How it Changed America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), xii.

¹¹² Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 283-284.

¹¹³ Dianne Nash, interview with Garrow, 27 July 1983, in Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 625, 723n1.

¹¹⁴ For a succinct account of the SCLC’s establishment, see Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 83-98.

remembrance and focused on building monuments to “remind others about him.”¹¹⁵ Coretta and the family built the Martin Luther King Jr. Centre for Nonviolent Social Change, located on Auburn Avenue, Atlanta, between his birth home and the Ebenezer Baptist Church. They aligned themselves with an image of King drawn from 1963–1964, the years King commanded a national and international presence, articulated his celebrated Dream and won the Nobel Peace Prize.¹¹⁶ It seems that Coretta sought to use those elements of King’s legacy that had the most popular appeal in American political culture. On the other hand, the SCLC and its members, including individuals such as Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson and Hosea Williams, alternatively claimed the legacy of King’s death and activism.¹¹⁷ They embraced a less monumental “tributary style” whereby they honoured King by continuing his work through protest (e.g. the Poor Peoples Campaign of 1968 and the Charleston hospital workers strike of 1969).¹¹⁸ The SCLC projected an image of King based on his 1965–1968 activism, when he less popularly challenged US economic inequality and participation in the Vietnam War. These two styles, the ‘memorial’ and the ‘tributary,’ reflect the pre–1965 liberal and the post–1965 radical King.¹¹⁹

Daynes’ delineation of styles is perceptive, particularly where he contrasts the different images portrayed by the family and the SCLC. However, his theory has limitations. First, the term ‘tributary’ style seems an inadequate description. Daynes uses it to explain that the SCLC honoured King “by giving something to him.”¹²⁰ This thesis will build on Daynes’ work but will use the term ‘activist style’ rather than ‘tributary’ on the grounds that it better describes what happened after King’s death. First, the term ‘activist style’ highlights the vitality of efforts to continue King’s work by his former colleagues, whether in the SCLC or once they had left. The SCLC did not so much as give to King, but rather it continued his activism. Second, this thesis illustrates that the line between memorialisation and activism was not as clear as Daynes suggests. Indeed, Coretta built

¹¹⁵ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 51.

¹¹⁶ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 54; King won the Nobel Peace Prize Martin Luther King Jr., “The Nobel Peace Prize 1964 Acceptance Speech,” http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance.html, accessed 14 April 2015; King also won *Time* magazine’s Man of the Year, “Man of the Year: Never Again Where He Was,” *Time*, 3 January 1964.

¹¹⁷ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 51.

¹¹⁸ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 74–75n7; Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America*: 495–501; Jesse Jackson’s People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) may be viewed as a tribute to King. Marshall Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson* (New York: Random House, 1996), 253–280.

¹¹⁹ The National Parks Service adopted a third style of King commemoration. Daynes defines this as a ‘scholarly style’ designed to educate Americans about King. This ‘scholarly’ style endeavoured to provide independent analysis of King’s life at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site. In his footnote Daynes explains, “The designations ‘memorial,’ ‘tributary,’ and ‘historical,’ styles of commemorating the past are mine.” However, he does not explain how he chose those designations. Furthermore, he mentions an ‘historical’ style in his footnote, but in the chapter text that the footnote refers to, the term ‘scholarly’ style is used instead. The ‘scholarly style’ is not defined, however, in his footnote. Daynes believes that the “‘history-memory’ formula overlooks the similarities between academic and popular history, therefore he uses his stylistic definitions to move beyond the ‘history’ and ‘memory’ divide. Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 51, 74–75n7.

¹²⁰ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 51.

monuments, however she continued to be an activist for causes such as the anti-apartheid movement that sought to end segregation in South Africa.¹²¹ Once the King Center was established, she turned her attention to lobby Congress to win the Holiday.¹²² Hence, it was not only the men of SCLC who continued King's activism: Coretta did likewise. And over time, the Holiday evolved into a day on which forms of activism were encouraged in order to achieve social change.¹²³

Amitai Etzioni's theory of public ritual suggests holidays can "socialize members of a society," "reaffirm their commitments to values," and "sustain the integration of society."¹²⁴ Etzioni divides public holidays into two main categories. First are recommitment holidays that "enforce commitments to shared beliefs" and facilitate social change by providing "occasions to symbolize and embody new conceptions of social relations and entities."¹²⁵ Etzioni argues that recommitment holidays can make a "new relationship between society and a member group," and "advance and ritualize a change in the beliefs of those involved." This spurs the integration of member groups "by changing the beliefs around which society congeals."¹²⁶ Second are tension-management holidays, which release "tensions that result from the close adherence to beliefs." New Year's Eve, for example, indulges "disintegrative" behaviour such as excessive drinking in order to release tension developed by conformity to norms throughout the year. This too can reinforce "shared beliefs and institutions *indirectly*, by releasing tension that results from conformity to societal beliefs."¹²⁷ Of Etzioni's two types of holidays, King Day is a recommitment/integrative occasion designed to facilitate new and enhanced social relations. Seen as an attempt to influence American beliefs, some viewed the Holiday as a new method to realise the movement's goals and Etzioni's theory is a counterpoint to criticism that the Holiday encouraged amnesia about King's activism. While it was impossible for the Holiday to do all its promoters hoped, it ensured King's message would be in the "national spotlight" and it provided an annual opportunity for his supporters to air their concerns about race relations.¹²⁸ The Holiday became a forum to highlight King's unfinished agenda, to embed his values in American society, and to further the cause of integration by forging a "new relationship" between whites and African Americans. Far from being a passive 'tribute,' King Day was often 'activist' in style.

The King Holiday has meaning for the entire US, not only African Americans. Eviatar Zerubavel notes that a holiday ensures remembering is collective, "at the level of the entire

¹²¹ Wiki L. Crawford, "Coretta Scott King and the Struggle for Civil and Human Rights: An Enduring Legacy," *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (2007): 106-17; Eskew, "Coretta Scott King," 356-363.

¹²² Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 98-101.

¹²³ Amitai Etzioni, "Toward a Theory of Public Ritual," *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000): 49-50.

¹²⁴ Etzioni uses Durkheim's hypothesis that rituals foster integration to counteract disintegration, Durkheim 1995 Book III. This disintegration is characterised by excessive individualism, in Etzioni, "Toward a Theory," 47.

¹²⁵ Etzioni, "Toward a Theory," 49.

¹²⁶ Etzioni, "Toward a Theory," 50.

¹²⁷ Etzioni acknowledges the holidays are not "pure types," Etzioni, "Toward a Theory," 47-49.

¹²⁸ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 92.

community.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, “through symbolic compression, a single calendar day may come to represent several years of actual history.” Zerubavel argues that on King Day Americans commemorate King’s birth and the “entire battle for civil rights during the 1950s and 1960s.”¹³⁰ In a similar vein, William H. Wiggins Jr. writes that the Holiday recognised King *and* the African American contribution to America, democracy and brotherhood.¹³¹ Richard Merelman argues that the culture of the Holiday “resides wholly in the fact that American blacks have been forced to resist domination” and therefore King Day “must be a ritual of resistance.”¹³²

Roy Rosenweig’s and David Thelen’s 1988 national survey of American’s attitudes to history illustrates that African Americans believed that King Day was more important than the Fourth of July holiday by a staggering margin of four to one. Their survey indicated “many African Americans fashioned their distinctive historical consciousness by celebrating holidays like King’s birthday and constructing a black historical landscape.”¹³³ Fath Davis Ruffins likewise argues that the Holiday marked “the first formal declaration of an African American national hero.” She notes, however, that as King became exalted by “non-black Americans, some Black Americans have needed to continue to have a hero who is fully appreciated only by African Americans.” Thus, Malcolm X “loomed ... as an interior hero of the civil rights era,” with his advocacy of “self-defence, racial pride, and resistance as forms of manhood.”¹³⁴ Some Holiday proponents keen to portray King as more than a black hero facilitated this: they denied that King Day was a black holiday.¹³⁵

In 1996, Daynes argued there were four major King images: King the Dreamer; King as one part of a greater movement; King the moderate (compared to Malcolm X); and King the Radical. Daynes thought that King the Radical remained the only viable national image, though he did not elaborate on how that image might be used on the Holiday.¹³⁶ Daynes was correct that the image of King the Dreamer had been so sanitised as to be almost superficial.¹³⁷ However, he did not account for how unacceptable a radical image of King was for conservatives and moderates who had a role

¹²⁹ Eviatar Zerubavel, “Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory,” in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 315.

¹³⁰ Zerubavel, “Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory,” 333.

¹³¹ Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*: 149.

¹³² Richard M. Merelman, *Representing Black Culture: Racial Conflict and Cultural Politics in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 79.

¹³³ David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 154-55.

¹³⁴ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 586-589.

¹³⁵ Some Holiday proponents denied that King Day was a black holiday, even as conservative opponents questioned whether King’s appeal could ever extend beyond the black community. For an account of the debate over a King School Holiday in Richmond, Virginia, see Shields, “The ‘Tip of the Iceberg’,” 508.

¹³⁶ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 142-143.

¹³⁷ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 139.

in shaping his official legacy. Thus, when Democrats reformed King Day with the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 they fostered a new image, King the Drum Major, that encapsulated the greater meaning of his work without alarming moderate supporters. Based on King's 'Drum Major Instinct' sermon, the Holiday reform recalled King's criticism of economic inequality, racism and militarism. In his sermon, given on 4 February 1968, King proclaimed that dedication to service was the path to righteousness. Situated in his post-1965 canon, the sermon's critique of economic inequality and militarism typifies King's radical period. The mid-1990s Holiday celebrations were not radicalised *per se*, yet newly prominent in the Holiday's message was the idea that poverty continued to afflict the US and that much remained to be done to complete King's unfinished agenda. King the Drum Major was humble, local in focus and invited all citizens to engage in active service to humanity. Scholars, however, have neglected the development of this image.

Despite recent scholarship, no extensive study about the Holiday has been published since 1997 and no study solely dedicated to it has ever been written.¹³⁸ That no singularly dedicated study about the Holiday exists is a curious absence when there is much to learn about its origins and evolution over thirty years of commemorations. Furthermore, the King Holiday Commission has been briefly noted in several essays and chapters, however there is little scholarly analysis about what it achieved or failed to achieve.¹³⁹ This thesis, thus, provides a much needed analysis of the Holiday and the King Commission.

Sources

This thesis is based on original research in the Federal Holiday Commission's relatively unknown archive. The Commission disbanded in 1996 and left a vast, but hitherto neglected, archive that is vital to understanding King's legacy as it offers a unique view of Holiday organisation. The Commission was subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act: its meetings had to be open to the public and its records, reports, transcripts and minutes made available for public scrutiny.¹⁴⁰ Since January 2006, the Commission's archive has been available to researchers at the National Archives

¹³⁸ Recent scholarly works include: Cornel West, ed. *The Radical King* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015); Jennifer J. Yanco, *Misremembering Dr. King: Revisiting the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014); Clayborne Carson, *Martin's Dream: My Journey and the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Recent popular works include: Tavis Smiley and David Ritz, *Death of a King: The Real Story of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Final Year* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014); Gil Scott-Heron, *The Last Holiday: A Memoir* (New York: Grove Press, 2012); Clarence B. Jones and Stuart Connelly, *Behind the Dream: The Making of the Speech that Transformed a Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Hampton Sides, *Hellhound on his Trail: The Stalking of Martin Luther King Jr. and the International Hunt For His Assassin* (New York: Double Day, 2010).

¹³⁹ Eskew, "Coretta Scott King," 361; Merelman, *Representing Black Culture*: 80.

¹⁴⁰ King Commission, "Report of Proceedings," 19 June 1989, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, Folder: Report of Proceedings, June 1989, 23, 29-30.

and Records Administration (NARA), Atlanta.¹⁴¹ Thus far, historians have ignored this archive even though it offers a window into the nation's attempt to cultivate King's legacy. The archive also offers a new perspective on Coretta's career as an activist. Coretta's own papers, held by the King family, are presently closed to researchers, but her ideas and plans were transcribed in Commission minutes and records.¹⁴²

Other important sources include the *Congressional Record*, which illustrates the motivations of those who established and opposed the Holiday, and newspapers with national influence. Extensive research in the most important papers, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, provides an overview of national coverage of the Holiday campaign and King Day observances. Atlanta based newspapers like the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* provide a wealth of information about King and his family. Based in King's home city, Atlanta papers frequently had extensive coverage of the Holiday, due to the high level of interest in the hometown icon. African American newspapers such as the *Atlanta Daily World*, with proximity to the King Center, New York's *Amsterdam News* and the *Chicago Defender* are also vital sources as they keenly followed the Holiday campaign and reported early incarnations of King Day. Apart from the *Journal Constitution* and the *Daily World*, the thesis uses four other southern papers: North Carolina's *Charlotte Observer*; the *Birmingham News*; Mississippi's *Clarion Ledger*; and the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. One western paper, the *Arizona Republic*, is also studied in order to provide a perspective on the Holiday from a state very resistant to commemorating King. In addition, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *New Hampshire Union Leader* are analysed as they offer distinct opinions from the North: the former, a view that encouraged the Holiday; the later, a scathing conservative point of view. Research in the New York Public Library microfilm collection meant that these papers were thoroughly examined with a focus on mid-January from 1986 to 1997 and significant days of the Holiday campaign. The papers were selected, out of many, in order to provide a broad sample of Holiday celebrations in the South, North and West. The research gives a substantial indication of regional differences about the Holiday. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* was chosen because of the city's influence on King Holiday celebrations and the *Arizona Republic* due to that state's resistance to the Holiday, likewise New Hampshire's *Union Leader*. North Carolina's *Charlotte Observer* was chosen due to the opposition of Senator Jesse Helms and the *Birmingham News* due to the prominence of Birmingham in movement history and the city's subsequent attempt to come to terms with its racist past. Mississippi's *Clarion Ledger* was selected as it illustrated opinion from the Deep South, while the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* is analysed to ascertain if any

¹⁴¹ Ernie Suggs, "Files Detail Early Efforts to Promote King Day," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 15 January 2006, D1; Zina Rhone to Daniel Fleming, 1 September 2015, in author's possession; The Commission archive is known as RG220: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission. Throughout the footnotes of this thesis, the archive collection title is cited as *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*.

¹⁴² Eskew, "Coretta Scott King," 363-364n1.

changes on the Holiday in the Clinton era originated in the President's home state. All these papers, despite their specificity to a geographical area, give a strong indication of general King Holiday trends.¹⁴³ The diversity of newspaper sources offers a view into differing attitudes toward the Holiday from blacks, whites, northerners and southerners.

Structure

The thesis follows a chronological progression from 1968. Chapter One, 'Fighting to Desegregate the American Calendar', focuses on the Holiday campaign from 1968-1983. This provides the background to the Holiday and establishes themes to be developed throughout the entire thesis. Since the Commission was a politically appointed organization, its membership fluctuated according to the political cycle. Thus, subsequent chapters align with presidential eras. Chapter Two, 'Living the Dream', analyses the period between the 1983 King Holiday Act and the first national King Day celebrations in 1986. It examines the founding of the King Commission and its plans. The Commission developed a close working relationship with the Republican Party and based the inaugural celebration on King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, in order to ensure the Holiday's popular appeal. Chapter Three, 'Let Freedom Ring', examines the Holiday from 1986-1989, a period of Republican dominance in national politics. During these years in Reagan's second term, the federal government associated its own conservative values to King. Republicans used King to instil a colour-blind emphasis on US race relations and to commemorate the Bicentenary of the US Constitution, thereby promoting the timeless values enshrined in the nation's founding document. Chapter Four, 'The World House', examines the Holiday throughout the presidency of Republican George H. W. Bush, from 1989-1992. During this time, the federal government used King as a foreign policy symbol when global politics entered a period of great flux. As Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, Bush deployed King's image as a shining example of American individualism and freedom, ironically in stark contrast to the 1950s and 1960s, when conservatives derided King as a Communist sympathiser. This signified a dramatic shift in the projection of his image. The chapter examines Bush's career in relation to civil rights and seeks to understand how and why the Commission sought to shape King's legacy across the nation and around the globe. As King Day celebrations expanded at home, the chapter concentrates on the final campaigns to declare King holidays in all states.

The thesis then focuses on Holiday reforms during the Democratic Party's ascendancy in the mid-1990s. Chapter Five, 'The Drum Major', spans 1993-1995, the early years of Bill Clinton's

¹⁴³ Other important newspapers and magazines cited throughout: *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *The Oregonian*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Star Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *The Sun*, and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. International papers briefly used are the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Guardian*, *Toronto Star Newsday* and *The Times of India*.

presidency. During this period, the Commission became aligned with liberal civil rights movement veterans such as Representative John Lewis and Senator Harris Wofford (advisor to President John F. Kennedy), who were both Democrats in Congress. Holiday planners took inspiration from King's 'Drum Major Instinct' sermon and created a Day of Service dedicated to redressing economic inequality. This reform gave the Holiday an activist and collective emphasis, a development little noticed by historians. Chapter Six, 'The Decline and Fall of the King Commission', spans 1995-1996, the second half of Clinton's first term. Just as the Commission's future looked secure, it collapsed due to a generational conflict that involved Dexter Scott King, the son of Martin and Coretta. The resignation of Coretta from the closely related King Center and pressure from leading conservatives, newly dominant in a rare congressional Republican majority, led to the Commission's premature disbandment. In this period, a neoliberal economic agenda of privatisation, deregulation and spending reduction influenced King's legacy and stood in direct contrast to reforms inspired by the Drum Major. Finally, Chapter Seven, 'To the Mountaintop?', spans Clinton's second term (1997-2000), which included the first years of the post-Commission era. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the King Center managed the Holiday and the chapter concludes with a discussion of King's legacy at the twilight of the twentieth century.

The King Holiday was an invented tradition to which contemporary Americans could relate.¹⁴⁴ Destined to gloss over the tragedy of King's assassination by celebrating his birth, rather than formally mourn his assassination, it has had many critics. That the anniversary of King's assassination is an ordinary calendar day illustrates Americans' desire to focus on inspiration instead of pain.¹⁴⁵ Each presidential administration analysed in this study fostered a positive image of King and failed to engage with the tragedy of his death. However, despite the disappointment of some, the Holiday has paid homage to an African American leader with a celebration long sought by black Americans on the US calendar.

This thesis explores the theme of race relations in the US during the 1980s and 1990s through the prism of the Holiday. As civil rights movement veterans reach old age, civil rights historiography enters a new phase. The veterans' personal memories and oral testimony will become less available in future and collective memory, fostered by occasions such as the Holiday, will be how most Americans encounter King and the movement. Thus, it is necessary to understand

¹⁴⁴ Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1-14.

¹⁴⁵ Critics such as the SCLC president Joseph Lowery preferred to mark 4 April in commemoration of King. Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 272; Michael Dyson published *April 4*, to highlight King's assassination date, though he did not add a substantial new argument to his previous work. Dyson, *April 4 1968*; Dyson once recommended the Dream be furloughed to protect it from overuse Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 15-16; for more about the focus on inspiration in King memorialisation see Bruyneel, "The King's Body," 75-108.

the King Commission, which became the pivotal organisation devoted to shaping the nation's collective memory about King.

King's status was enhanced by the Holiday as he became the only American personally remembered in such a way; the Son of God and the discoverer of America (Columbus) were the other two remembered by name with a federal Holiday.¹⁴⁶ The Holiday's creation was controversial and opponents considered it ill conceived, yet King Day supporters knew it would elevate an African American pacifist to the highest plane of memorialisation. Opposition to and support for the Holiday was frequently divided along the colour line, a line King certainly hoped would have disappeared by the 1980s. However, Chappell's assertion that King Day provides "recurring leverage" to continue his "unfinished cause" appears valid.¹⁴⁷ The Holiday has shone a light on contentious issues, reaffirmed movement gains, and provided opportunities to correct, even if it has also enabled, misappropriations of King's legacy. The Holiday has been appropriated in a variety of liberal and conservative causes and used to launch many protests, including protests against the 1991 Gulf War and recently, in 2015, against police brutality.¹⁴⁸ While conservative politicians have used the Holiday to advance their agendas, their presence and influence were not so apparent in official King Day parades and marches. Conservatives sometimes received a hostile reception from black congregations and the streets remained the domain of movement veterans and heirs.¹⁴⁹ Parades created the space for liberals to advocate for gay rights, anti-nuclear, and anti-death penalty causes, as well as giving unions the opportunity to march in honour of King.¹⁵⁰ The Holiday also stimulated activism reminiscent of the civil rights movement in order to encourage state based King Holidays, especially in Arizona.¹⁵¹ In total, this activism kept King's message in mind and it is to the fight for King Day that this thesis turns.

¹⁴⁶ Elsie Scott, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen?," in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen? Conference* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2008), 34 min.

¹⁴⁷ Chappell noted that "in hearing so often that America had given them so much already, Mrs. King and others grasped that they could lose what they had gained. To set a King holiday as their new goal was to force America to keep the gains of the past in view, to reaffirm those gains in some way – to protect them, with ritual regularity, from misdeeds that could be done in the dark." Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 92.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Paulson, "New Generation Invokes Power of Protest at Martin Luther King Holiday Events," *The Age*, 20 January 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Adam Nagourney, "Giuliani, Trying to Mend Fences, Finds Hecklers in Harlem Church," *New York Times*, 21 January 1997, 1, B6.

¹⁵⁰ Scott Thurston and Ron Taylor, "A Mood of Protest Accompanies Floats, Bands at Holiday Parade," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 20 January 1987, D1.

¹⁵¹ Cathryn Creno, Brent Whiting, and Kim Sue Lia Perkes, "Thousands March For King," *Arizona Republic*, 21 January 1992, 1.

Chapter 1

Fighting to Desegregate the American Calendar: the Campaign for the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday (1968-1983)

Four days after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, Congressman John Conyers introduced legislation to the US House of Representatives to create a Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday.¹ Conyers, an African American Democrat from Detroit, believed that a federal holiday in King's name would be the greatest honour the nation could bestow on King. He telephoned Coretta Scott King and requested her approval (which he received) before presenting the legislation.² On the same day, Senator Edward Brooke, an African American Republican from Massachusetts, introduced a Senate joint resolution to designate King's birthday a memorial day.³ Although he did not seek a federal holiday, Brooke proposed an "annual occasion" with ceremonies, prayers and a presidential proclamation to honour King. He condemned violent uprisings that followed King's murder as "misguided and reckless" and instead suggested that "churches ... schools and homes" were the places of "proper tribute."⁴ These memorial gestures by Conyers and Brooke symbolised two divergent paths to honour King: one, an annual paid federal holiday; the other, a cultural tribute.⁵

Conyers was born the same year as King in 1929. He studied law at Wayne State University, worked for the United Auto Workers (UAW), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Michigan Civil Liberties Union prior to his election to the US House of Representatives in 1964. Conyers frequently met with King and SCLC activists in Detroit, and their last meeting took place in March 1968.⁶ He was a friend of the King family and

¹ The bill was sent to the Committee on the Judiciary on 8 April 1968, *A Bill to Designate the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., as a Legal Public Holiday*, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., HR 16510. 9187.

² "Conyers to Address Clark Student Meet," *Atlanta Daily World*, 12 February 1976, 2; "John Conyers, Jr. Biography," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* (United States Congress); John Conyers, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen?" in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen?* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2008), 18.45-20.00 min.

³ Edward William Brooke III, was a Republican Senator from Massachusetts (1967 to 1979). He was the "first African American elected to the Senate by popular vote." "Edward W. Brooke III Biography," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* (United States Congress); The resolution was supported by Senator John Cooper (R) from Kentucky, *Joint Resolution Designating January 15 of Each Year as Martin Luther King Day*, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 April 1968, 9227.

⁴ *Joint Resolution Designating January 15, 1968*, 9227.

⁵ Neither bill gained media attention, not even from the *New York Times*. The first mention in the *Times* was a report that Dr. Samuel L. Woodard of Temple University had proposed a holiday to honour King and "bind Americans together in this period of racial strife." "Dr King Holiday is Urged," *New York Times*, 7 April 1968, 58.

⁶ Conyers went with King to Grosse Point High School, Detroit. Conyers, "How Did it Happen?," 16-17.30 min; King visited the school on 14 March 1968, Grosse Pointe Historical Society, "Dr. Martin Luther King's 1968 Speech at

introduced Holiday legislation to Congress every year from 1968 until its passage in 1983 (with the exception of 1972). The King Holiday bill never made it past committee until 1979 and the Holiday campaign, from idea to realisation, spanned fifteen years and four presidencies.⁷ Throughout this period, King's supporters fought to preserve his legacy while conservative detractors attempted to undermine King's reputation and Black Nationalists condemned his commitment to nonviolent struggle.⁸

As a versatile but complex hero, King led a life open to interpretation by politicians and activists of all types. Throughout the Holiday campaign, supporters and detractors alike fiercely debated King's legacy. His memorialisation prompts three important questions: Why did the nation choose King, therefore, to honour with a Holiday? What was the Holiday's purpose? And how and why did opponents resist the Holiday? This chapter argues that Congress selected King because he represented African American life, symbolised unity, appealed to whites, was a contemporary hero and was perceived by liberals and moderates as having transcended political partisanship. The Holiday was also portrayed as an act of atonement for centuries of black oppression and was intended to commemorate the civil rights movement. Conservatives, however, opposed it with arguments that echoed southern resistance to the "heroic" phase of the civil rights movement.

The Holiday campaign became part of a larger struggle for racial equality in the 1970s, when the desegregation of workplaces and schools, and the enforcement of voting rights, were major civil rights goals.⁹ Heralded by President Johnson in 1965, affirmative action in the workplace and the busing of children to school districts, in an effort to end education segregation, were new movement tactics. Johnson had recognised that the legacy of slavery and racism was so great, the end of *de jure* segregation alone would not achieve racial equality.¹⁰ However, whites often resisted fiercely when integration threatened privilege or was perceived as expensive.¹¹ Yet, absent from these battles was King and his capacity to inspire and unite black and white Americans. As the fight for

Grosse Pointe High School," <http://www.gphistorical.org/mlk/>, accessed 14 April 2015; "John Conyers, Jr. Biography."

⁷ Conyers was Director of Education with the United Auto Workers (UAW), an Executive Board Member of the NAACP in Detroit, an Advisory Council Member of the Michigan Civil Liberties Union and General Counsel for the Detroit Trade Union Leadership Council, "Conyers to Address Clark Student Meet," 2; Don Wolfensberger, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay," in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen?* (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2008), 1; Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 93, 216n1.

⁸ When King was assassinated, there was already a direct challenge to nonviolent protest. Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) described nonviolence "a dying philosophy" that "outlived its usefulness." In Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954 - 1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 209-210.

⁹ Minchin and Salmond, *After the Dream*, 1-2.

¹⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Commencement Address at Howard University: 'To Fulfill These Rights,'" Howard University, 4 June, 1965, LBJ Presidential Library, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>, accessed 21 April 2016; Minchin and Salmond, *After the Dream*, 107-127, 139-143.

¹¹ King predicted that the financial cost of complete equality would spur white resistance, King *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 3-6; Minchin and Salmond, *After the Dream*, 81-82.

desegregation continued, a parallel trend to memorialise King gathered pace in an effort to revive his message for a divided nation, and to appropriately mourn his death.

This chapter chronicles the fight for the King Holiday and explains the sometimes competing motivations for its creation. While David L. Chappell, William H. Wiggins Jr. and Michael Eric Dyson have recounted the Holiday campaign in detail, in order to establish the background for this thesis it is necessary to outline and analyse the key moments in the fight for the Holiday.¹² An analysis of congressional committee hearings and the *Congressional Record* illustrates the motives of representatives and senators who voted for and against the Holiday; congressional committee reports recommended the establishment of the Holiday, but also revealed dissenting views. After Conyers' initiation, the Holiday's legislative milestones included congressional committee hearings in 1979, a House of Representatives debate in 1979, the mobilisation of massive public support in 1981, the 20th Anniversary of the March on Washington, and the final congressional debates in 1983. This chapter assesses those milestones and establishes the background for the Holiday's history. It also presents an analysis of the regional voting behaviour on the King Holiday bills in order to understand why King was honoured with a Holiday. However, in order to understand the campaign it is first necessary to grapple with the wider political context of the era. This context includes civil rights activists' turn from protest to electoral politics, the SCLC's fragmentation and the proliferation of progressive organisations, and the nation's overall shift from liberalism to conservatism.¹³

§

Urban violence afflicted many American cities in the mid-to-late 1960s and "black rebellions" occurred in Californian, midwestern and northeastern cities.¹⁴ In response, President Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, known as the Kerner Commission, after its chair Governor Otto Kerner. The Commission's February 1968 report concluded that America was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white – separate and unequal." The Commission warned that only a "compassionate, massive and sustained" commitment would avoid the polarisation of America and the "destruction of basic democratic values." It suggested that Americans needed "new attitudes, new understanding, and ... new will" to achieve racial integration.¹⁵ According to Manning Marable, a cause of the violence was

¹² Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 91-123; Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*: 137-151; Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 230.

¹³ Rustin, *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*: 111-122.

¹⁴ For example, Watts (LA), Detroit and Newark, in Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 90.

¹⁵ National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 1; National Governors Association, "Illinois Governor Otto

“unfulfilled ‘rising expectations’ among many blacks.”¹⁶ Although *de jure* segregation was illegal and black workers gained limited economic improvements, genuine equality remained elusive. Though black families benefitted from a two thousand dollar rise in median income, 27.9 percent of black families were in poverty by the end of the 1960s. Furthermore, non-white youth unemployment was 29.1 percent, and poor housing and education afflicted black communities.¹⁷ King’s assassination highlighted this inequality and sparked “black uprisings” in almost 130 cities, resulting in the death of forty-six people.¹⁸

The assassinations of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and King in 1968 shattered the nation’s progressive leadership. Their deaths, the urban violence and the domestic divisions caused by Johnson’s escalation of the Vietnam War became the backdrop for Richard Nixon’s election as president in 1968. African Americans, however, overwhelmingly voted for Democrat Hubert Humphrey, in preference to Nixon.¹⁹ Academic opinion about what followed varies; Harvard Sitkoff argues that King’s death completed the disintegration of the middle ground in the civil rights cause while C. Richard Hofstetter, who conducted a political survey in 1968, noted there was a quick disengagement by African Americans in the political system.²⁰ That disengagement appeared short lived, as African Americans heeded Bayard Rustin’s call to run for elected office.²¹ Between 1969 and 1975, the number of black men who held political office tripled to 2,969 and the number of black women in office was 530, a five-fold increase. Most were middle class and from desegregationist organisations that promoted integration, like the NAACP and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).²² Though Sitkoff argues that the civil rights centre disintegrated, Stephen Tuck’s more recent scholarship argues that the movement proliferated and achieved many gains.²³ For example, President Nixon’s hostility to the movement spurred the founding of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in 1971.²⁴ The CBC prioritised issues of importance to African

Kerner,” University of Illinois Press, http://www.nga.org/cms/home/governors/past-governors-bios/page_illinois/col2-content/main-content-list/title_kerner_otto.html, accessed 14 April 2015.

¹⁶ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 91.

¹⁷ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 91; Even King observed, in 1968, that equality was “assiduously avoided.” Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*, 4.

¹⁸ Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*: 221.

¹⁹ Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1969) 163-64, 228-29, in Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 95-96, 110.

²⁰ Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*: 221; Richard C. Hofstetter, “Political Disengagement and the Death of Martin Luther King,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1969): 178.

²¹ Rustin, *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*: 118-122.

²² In 1969, there were 994 black men and 131 black women who held political office throughout the nation and by 1975, there were 18 blacks in Congress, 281 state legislators or executives, and 135 mayors. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 117-118.

²³ Tuck, “‘We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off,’” 641.

²⁴ A Democratic Select Committee of nine black congressmen was formed in 1969 as a precursor to the CBC, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 119; Susan Webb Hammond, *Congressional Caucuses in National Policy Making* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 46.

Americans, such as the King Holiday, and aimed to influence the Democratic Party to ensure black voters were not taken for granted.²⁵

After her husband's murder, Coretta Scott King emerged as an influential activist and shaped his legacy. Raised in Marion, Alabama, Coretta was a talented singing student on a scholarship at the Boston Conservatorium when she met her future husband, a student at Boston University. The two married in 1953 and Coretta converted from the Methodist faith to Baptist.²⁶ She did not want to return to the South, but did so at her husband's insistence and she sacrificed her promising singing career when he became pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Alabama, and his activism escalated.²⁷ Undervalued in her own right, Coretta propagated a philosophy of nonviolence similar to her husband's and claimed that they "never had serious differences of opinion about racial matters or economics."²⁸ She wrote, "Martin's work must go on ... because his task was not finished."²⁹ Coretta frequently emphasised King's role as "the leader" of the movement and used her status to promote his legacy through the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.³⁰

On 15 January 1969, Coretta announced her plan to build "a living memorial" to King. The King Center plan included a library, museum, two academic institutes and King's tomb.³¹ Coretta established the Center between King's birth home and the Ebenezer Baptist Church, on Auburn Avenue, Atlanta.³² As the main commercial street in the heart of the most prestigious African American business and residential area in the South, "Sweet Auburn" Avenue was historically one of the wealthiest black streets in the nation and the home of middle class black Baptist life.³³ On "Sweet Auburn", Coretta "linked together a King Shrine Area ... that pilgrims could visit," a

²⁵ The CBC's 'Black Declaration of Independence' stressed, "The new political mood permeating Black America makes it imperative that the Democratic Party address itself to the hopes, aspirations, concerns and rights of Black Americans – if that Party expects to continue to receive the support of black voters." Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 126; see also Tuck, "'We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off,'" 645.

²⁶ Branch, *Parting the Waters*: 101; Scott King, *My Life*: 88-89.

²⁷ Lawrence D. Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 90-107.

²⁸ Scott King, *My Life*: 75.

²⁹ For biographies on Coretta Scott King see Laura McCarty, *Coretta Scott King: A Biography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009); Octavia Vivian, *Coretta: The Story of Coretta Scott King* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); Crawford, "Coretta Scott King and the Struggle for Civil and Human Rights: An Enduring Legacy," 106-117; Scott King, *My Life*: 340-341.

³⁰ Hereafter abbreviated to King Center or the Center, with American spelling; Coretta Scott King, "Lessons From the Past, Directions For the Future," 25 July 1985, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0004, Box 3: Speeches of Commission Chairperson Coretta Scott King, 1985-1995, Folder: Speeches, Remarks and Addresses, Nov 1983-Sep 1985, 2.

³¹ The two institutes Coretta spoke of were to be based at Atlanta University, with an Institute of Afro-American studies and an Institute for Nonviolent Social Change. James T. Wotten, "Memorial Center at Two Sites Will Honor Dr. King in Atlanta," *New York Times*, 16 January 1969, 30.

³² King was born in a bedroom of a Queen Anne house at 501 Auburn Avenue, Atlanta, Georgia on 15 January 1929, Branch, *Parting the Waters*: 39; King lived there for a decade, see Eskew, "Exploring Civil Rights Heritage Tourism," 313.

³³ Colin Campbell, "City Not Taking Care of Auburn," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 14 January 1996, D1.

window onto King's youth and the once segregated city of Atlanta.³⁴ Coretta insisted that the Center would be "no dead monument" and the two institutes she planned were to be an Institute of Afro-American studies and an Institute for Nonviolent Social Change.³⁵ The Center soon initiated a King Peace Prize and held conferences on nonviolence.³⁶ Coretta hoped this 'living' memorial would foster King's activism and its 'living' concept was consistent with the Holiday's eventual tone.

At this early point, King Day rituals developed in Atlanta; these rituals formed the template for the eventual federal Holiday ceremonies. They began with a commemorative service in Ebenezer that both Coretta and Ralph Abernathy attended. Martin Luther King III placed a wreath at his father's grave and Rosa Parks spoke at Ebenezer, as did Representative Conyers and Theodore Hibbler, a Memphis sanitation worker who participated in the 1968 strike during which King died. The congregation sang 'We Shall Overcome', residents drove cars with headlights switched on and an African American state senator introduced a King Holiday bill for Georgia.³⁷ Those in attendance at the service also participated in a ground breaking ceremony for a nearby low rent housing project to be named after King. Many of these gestures and services, such as the wreath laying, use of headlights and speech making were repeated as rituals on subsequent occasions of King's birthday.

As the King Center grew in stature, Coretta's relations with the SCLC leadership became fraught. She was elected to the SCLC board on 13 April 1968, but her assertiveness apparently "caused incredible tension."³⁸ According to Andrew Young, the SCLC expected Coretta to remain passive while they used her presence for fund raising. Young indicates that "the men in SCLC were incapable of dealing with a strong woman."³⁹ That problem even stretched back to King's time as leader. According to Tuck, African American women "sought to spotlight women's issues during the 1960s," but King was often unresponsive. He preferred to work with men.⁴⁰ In the words of

³⁴ Eskew, "Exploring Civil Rights Heritage Tourism," 310.

³⁵ Wotten, "Memorial Center at Two Sites," 30.

³⁶ McCarty, *Coretta Scott King*: 62.

³⁷ Wotten, "Memorial Center at Two Sites," 30.

³⁸ McCarty, *Coretta Scott King*: 58.

³⁹ Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America*: 479; Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, eds., *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Viki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Kathryn L. Nasstrom, "Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, Women's Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 253-289.

⁴⁰ Tuck, "'We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left off'," 649.

activist Dorothy Cotton, King and his colleagues were “male chauvinists.”⁴¹ There were also different priorities between Coretta and the SCLC. In 1969, Coretta used King’s birthday to publically celebrate his life, but made only a brief subdued appearance on the anniversary of his death, when she laid a wreath at his tomb. In contrast, Abernathy and the SCLC used 4 April to bring public attention to King’s unfinished agenda. They attended an anti-Vietnam War protest, sponsored a voter registration drive and marched in Memphis, Selma, and New York.⁴² This activism honoured King by continuing his work. Without King, however, serious divisions within the SCLC emerged. In 1969, the SCLC protested with striking black hospital workers in Charleston, South Carolina. According to Young, though successful, the Charleston strike signalled the “end of the direct-action phase of the movement” and the “end of an era” for SCLC.⁴³ Young, like others, doubted Abernathy’s ability to command authority like King and left the SCLC for electoral politics.⁴⁴

As the SCLC fragmented, the scope of black activism widened. Out of the SCLC split, Jesse Jackson emerged to become one of the most prominent black activists. Born into poverty in South Carolina, Jackson rose quickly in the movement.⁴⁵ He formed People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) in Chicago, an outgrowth of the SCLC’s Operation Breadbasket initiative that applied economic pressure to companies that failed to hire black staff.⁴⁶ This northern and urban based endeavour departed from the SCLC’s southern, mostly rural, base. Supported by a few Republicans, Breadbasket facilitated black economic empowerment and to some resembled a black capitalist endeavour.⁴⁷ In the seventies, using PUSH as a foundation, Jackson created a Rainbow Coalition, the name of which was first heard at the Poor People’s Campaign.⁴⁸ It was a coalition of blacks, workers, liberal urbanites, Hispanics, women’s rights groups, students and environmentalists, which Jackson used to propel activism.⁴⁹ Despite his success, however, civil rights veterans mistrusted Jackson. He alienated colleagues with his theatrics and one incident – his alleged appearance on television dressed in clothes stained with King’s blood – outraged many.⁵⁰

⁴¹ Keith Graham, “I Have a Dream: King Melded Diverse Groups of Egos, Talents Into A Strong Team,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1986, S10.

⁴² Alex Coffin, “Honor King Memory, Allen Asks Atlantans,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 April 1969, 1, in Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 53.

⁴³ Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America*: 493-501.

⁴⁴ Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America*: 502-506.

⁴⁵ Jackson joined the SCLC in 1966, Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 13, 75, 207; Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge*: 427; For more on the importance of Jackson, see Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 124-147.

⁴⁶ Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 3, 255.

⁴⁷ Republicans supporters included Gerald Ford and Nelson Rockefeller. See Bernard Lafayette in Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 256.

⁴⁸ The name Rainbow Coalition was “first sounded” at the SCLC’s 1968 Poor People’s Campaign. Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 240.

⁴⁹ Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 16.

⁵⁰ Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 228-236; see Chappell for an extensive analysis of Jackson’s bloody shirt, Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 138-143, 223-227n38-43.

The emergence of Black Power in 1966 had divided the movement and these tensions intensified after King's death. The more conservative NAACP and Urban League were challenged by increasingly radical and younger black organisations like SNCC, CORE and the Black Panthers – all had different methods to “win” black freedom. In spite of these divisions, one event can be defined as the most coordinated moment in black politics, the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana, 1972. To Marable, Gary represented “the zenith not only of black nationalism, but of the entire black movement during the Second Reconstruction.”⁵¹ The Convention marked and institutionalised the turn from protest to electoral politics for most black organisations.⁵² It represented an attempt to “build a black united front” and was the “largest black political convention” in US history. Significantly, the Convention established the National Black Political Assembly. The Assembly's mission was to help blacks get elected as local officials and mayors, and to state legislatures and the US Congress.⁵³

In the context of this shift from protest to electoral politics, the King Holiday campaign made a promising start. On 3 January 1969, Ralph Abernathy proposed that King's birthday become a national holiday. Aware that the political climate was changing, he couched his proposal in the context of president-elect Richard Nixon's desire for “national unity.”⁵⁴ Despite their differences, by 1971 the SCLC and Coretta's King Center had collected three million signatures for a petition to Congress in support of the Holiday. Abernathy led a mule to the Capitol bearing the petition, which he gave to Congressman William F. Ryan. Representative Conyers then attempted to legislate the Holiday again, his previous efforts having failed to progress past committee.⁵⁵ The petition's size indicates massive early public support for the holiday campaign.

Holiday activists, black and white, coordinated a serious campaign in the early 1970s and formed two committees. First, the Harlem based Citizens Committee for Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday opened its headquarters on Lenox Avenue.⁵⁶ Howard Bennett, the labour chair of the New

⁵¹ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 120-121.

⁵² Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 117-123.

⁵³ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 120-121; see also Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics*: 85-130.

⁵⁴ “Dr. King's Birthday Sought as Holiday,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1969, 33.

⁵⁵ The *New York Times* reported the petition as having eight million signatures, in Andelman, “Most Cities Will Ignore,” 19. Yet, most estimates have the figure at three million signatures, e.g. “3 Million Petitions,” 2; House of Representatives, *Debate to Make Dr. Martin Luther King's Birthday, January 15, a Permanent National Holiday*, 92nd Cong. 1st sess, 22 January 1971, 156; “3 Million Petitions,” 2; McCarty, *Coretta Scott King*: 66.

⁵⁶ The Citizens Committee for Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday was based at 339 Lenox Avenue. Bayard Rustin was linked to Bennett and wrote a short article advocating for the Holiday (as Executive Director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute). He argued that King deserved the honour because “he was the symbol of racial reconciliation and if the races in America are not reconciled with each other this nation will not survive.” Unlike “the romantic and often suicidal notions of many so-called revolutionaries and in the narrow world of conservatives,” King “saw that democracy was not a sham but a precious and fragile form of government and that American society, despite its terrible injustices, could be changed through struggle.” Bayard Rustin, “Dr. King's Legacy,” no. 1 National Citizens Committee For a Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday, <http://www.avoiceonline.org/assets/txu-cbc-33-a-f7-13/txu-cbc-33-a-f7-13.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2015.

York NAACP and a “confidant” of influential black leader, A. Phillip Randolph, led the committee.⁵⁷ Second, the National Citizens Committee (NCC) was formed in late December 1970.⁵⁸ An organisation with more influential contacts, the NCC membership included sixteen congressional representatives and seven US senators, as well as members of the clergy, union leaders, business representatives and artists. Some notable members included Coretta Scott King, future presidential candidates George McGovern and Ted Kennedy, and African American representatives Shirley Chisholm of New York, William Clay of Missouri, and John Conyers.⁵⁹ The committee wanted to fill the void left by King’s death with a Holiday dedicated to nonviolence and racial equality. Its efforts received favourable coverage in African American newspapers, with the *Atlanta Daily World*, *New York Amsterdam News* and *Pittsburgh Courier* all quoting extensively from a Conyers press release:

Martin Luther King’s prophetic voice is gone ... and those of us who believed in his ideals of non violence, justice and racial harmony are left to continue their advocacy. We believe Dr. King was right when he rejected the theory that violence and racism are inherent in our society.⁶⁰

Support in the black press for a King Holiday had always been strong. As early as 1969 the *New York Amsterdam News* editorialised, “We can think of nothing more binding in a country now torn asunder by racial hates and distrust, than for January 15 to be declared a national holiday.”⁶¹

The *New York Times*, however, was sceptical about the holiday proposal. It published a brief, indifferent, report about the idea and later revealed its negative opinion about school children taking a King Holiday.⁶² School students were early leaders in the fight for a Holiday, with student boycotts during 1969 in the New York locations of Cedarhurst, White Plains, Newburgh, Westchester and Mt. Vernon, all of which attracted media attention.⁶³ Students demanded a King

⁵⁷ The *New York Amsterdam News* credited Bennett with collecting millions of signatures from the state of New York in support of a Holiday. Bennett presented the signatures to Representatives Conyers and Chisholm. J. Zamgba Browne, “First to Urge King’s Day,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 October 1983, 1.

⁵⁸ John Conyers, “National Committee For King Holiday Announced,” in King FBI File (1970). Reel 15: 105; “National Committee For King Holiday Announced,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 24 December 1970, 2; This National Committee seems to have evolved from the Harlem based Citizens Committee. Bennett is listed as National Coordinator on Rustin’s flier for the National Committee, Rustin, “Dr. King’s Legacy”.

⁵⁹ King’s fellow activists were also on the national committee: Abernathy, Rustin, Dr. Benjamin Spock, Whitney Young, Rev. Walter Fauntroy and A. Phillip Randolph. “Committee for National King Holiday Announced,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 January 1971, 8.

⁶⁰ “National Committee Announced,” 2; “Committee for National King Holiday Announced,” 8; “National King Day Committee,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 January 1971, 40; Conyers, “National Committee Announced.”

⁶¹ Editorial, “MLK Day,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 18 January 1969, 16.

⁶² UPI, “Dr. King Holiday Urged,” *New York Times*, 18 December 1970, 55.

⁶³ “A School Holiday in Westchester to Honor Dr. King,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1969, 34; “Mt. Vernon School Opens After Sit-In,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1969, 19; James Sterba, “U.F.T. Aide Scores City Plan to Stem Disorders in Schools,” *New York Times*, 18 March 1969, 31; “600 Walk Out of 3 Schools in Newburgh

Holiday and a symbolic gesture of observance on Malcolm X's birthday. When New York City closed schools in honour of King in 1975, the *Times* maintained its scepticism and editorialised that "it is supremely ironic for the city to celebrate this day – of all days – by closing down the schools." Instead, the *Times* argued schools ought to use 15 January to "emphasize his [King's] aims and his ideals" and then quietly resume "his work ... of education."⁶⁴

African Americans created "quasi-legal" King holidays, by not going to work on 15 January.⁶⁵ These "spontaneous and mostly informal affairs" evolved into official negotiated holidays with businesses, and labour unions were early advocates for the right of employees to celebrate the Holiday.⁶⁶ The Local 144 of the Hotel, Hospital and Nursing Home Employees Union struck an agreement in 1969, while the District 65 National Distributive Workers declared its members would take a holiday regardless of what employers thought.⁶⁷ Some unions, such as Council 73 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, and the New Jersey Civil Service and State Employees Associations won the right to a holiday by court action. Union support increased when the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) instructed workers at its offices to take the day off in 1980.⁶⁸ Despite the formation of the NCC and the increase in local campaigns, progress toward a national holiday was uneven. Each January, local and state holidays were often at the mercy of court decisions and granted by the whim of state governors.⁶⁹

Many cities and states did respond to this early phase of the campaign and establish official King holidays. St. Louis proclaimed one of the first when Mayor Alfonso J. Cervantes designated a

Demonstration," *New York Times*, 1 April 1969, 41; "Schools in City Will Celebrate Dr. King's Birthday as Holiday," *New York Times*, 17 April 1969, 31; "Negro Students Present Demands," *New York Times*, 20 April 1969, 69.

⁶⁴ "Dr. King's Holiday," *New York Times*, 15 January 1975, 42.

⁶⁵ Although from a later period, the sentiment expressed by one man in 1982 captured the attitude of many African Americans: "In the black community, it is a holiday," said Danny Bakewell of the Brotherhood Crusade. "We're not waiting for the white folks to declare it as such; we celebrate it." Even so, "we will continue to work for a national holiday." Lynn Simross, "Support Growing for King Holiday," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 January 1982, G1.

⁶⁶ Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*: 137-138.

⁶⁷ The Local 144 of the Hotel, Hospital and Nursing Home Employees Union of the Service Employees International Union struck an agreement, in Arnold Lubasch, "\$125-A-Week Pact Won in Hospitals," *New York Times*, 4 October 1969, 36; Peter Kihss, "Union to Observe King's Birthday," *New York Times*, 8 January 1970, 27.

⁶⁸ The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) instructed workers at its offices to take the day off in 1980, "Union Honors Dr. King by Declaring a Holiday," *New York Times*, 12 January 1980, 25.

⁶⁹ Council 73 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees representing workers in "state mental institutions," and the New Jersey Civil Service and State Employees Associations appealed to the New York State Supreme Court for the holiday, and to the surprise of the *Times* was granted the day off in a decision that was made on the day before King's birthday. In Trenton, the State Supreme Court gave 61,000 "state employees a paid holiday tomorrow in commemoration of the birth of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." in Walter H. Waggoner, "King's Birthday Ruled a Holiday," *New York Times*, 15 January 1975, 115; In New York Governor Byrne declared that 15 January would be a holiday for state employees. In contrast, the New York State Senate "refused to consider a bill making that date a mandatory legal holiday." However "contracts between the state and a number of unions representing 31,000 state employees provided for it to be a holiday" and the Governor "said he considered himself bound by these contract provisions, which were upheld in a court suit last year." See "Date of King's Birth is Declared Holiday for State Workers," *New York Times*, 10 January 1976, 56.

city holiday in 1971.⁷⁰ In that year, nine states observed a holiday, six major cities closed their schools and the city of Atlanta declared a Holiday.⁷¹ Illinois created the first state holiday by legislation in 1973 and the Governor of Massachusetts designated 15 January as a state holiday in 1974.⁷² These were encouraging signs, but some official local holidays, especially in the South, were contradictory. For example, in Fairfax County, Virginia, an official King-Lee-Jackson Holiday was declared by appending King's name to an existing holiday in honour of Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.⁷³

The roots of state based King Holidays were a web of interlocking traditions and celebrations. Designated by legislatures or governors' decrees they could be announced, approved, withdrawn or reinstated on an *ad hoc* basis. Likewise at the city and local level. Yet, by the 1970s, King Holidays were observed with increasing frequency. By January 1975, Maryland had a Holiday and Conyers noted that Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, New York, Tennessee, Washington and the District of Columbia all officially honoured King.⁷⁴

§

One impediment to the Holiday campaign was a lingering suspicion among conservatives about King's loyalty to the nation. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and its surveillance of King fostered this suspicion. In the wake of Nixon's resignation in 1974, congressional investigations into intelligence activities uncovered the full extent of an FBI vendetta against King. Senator Frank Church, a Democrat from Indiana, revealed that the Bureau had attempted to sabotage King and the movement throughout the sixties.⁷⁵ Less well known is that the Bureau continued its campaign against King even after his assassination.⁷⁶ The FBI viewed passage of holiday legislation as a

⁷⁰ "St. Louis Honors Dr. King," *New York Times*, 10 January 1971, 69.

⁷¹ The six cities to close schools were: New York, Newark, Washington, Baltimore, Seattle, and St. Louis, in "Atlanta Declares King's Birthday a Legal Holiday," *Atlanta Daily World*, 10 January 1971, 1.

⁷² Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project, "King National Holiday," *Martin Luther King, Jr. Encyclopedia* The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_king_national_holiday/, accessed 14 April 2015; "King Holiday Designated," *New York Times*, 9 July 1974, 79.

⁷³ Laurie Johnston, "City Plans Ceremonies to Mark Martin Luther King's Birthday," *New York Times*, 15 January 1973, 32.

⁷⁴ Pricilla Painton and Howard Pousner, "Across the Nation, Novel Ways Found to Remember King," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1986, 1, 20; John Conyers, Congressional Record, *The Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday Bill*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 23 January 1975, 1245; Again, in 1977 Conyers claimed that eleven states "have set aside his birthday as a time of formal observance." John Conyers, Congressional Record, *The Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday Bill*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 2 February 1977, 3439.

⁷⁵ Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, "Supplementary Detailed Staff Reports on Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans Book III," (Washington D.C.: U.S. Senate, 1976), 181-185.

⁷⁶ For accounts of FBI opposition to the Holiday see Daniel Fleming, "Martin Luther King, Jr and the FBI" (Masters, University of Melbourne, 2007); for accounts of the FBI surveillance of King, see Michael Friedly and David Gallen, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The FBI File* (New York: Carroll and Graff Publishers, Inc., 1993); David Garrow, *The FBI*

potential “national calamity” due to what it termed King’s “communist connections” and “personal escapades.”⁷⁷ In response to SCLC demonstrations in 1969, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sent Nixon a letter documenting the alleged “communist influence on King” and his “highly immoral personal behavior.”⁷⁸ Hoover referred to King’s contact with left-leaning advisors and extra-marital affairs, in order to sabotage the Holiday campaign. The Bureau conducted detrimental briefings about King to members of the Judiciary Committee as they considered holiday legislation, and forwarded a dossier to Vice President Spiro Agnew and to Attorney General John Mitchell, via Dr. Henry Kissinger (National Security Affairs).⁷⁹ Nixon was receptive to Hoover’s criticisms of King. When James Brown met Nixon in 1972, he requested a national King Holiday, but “Nixon refused, saying that Dr. King would not want Nixon to exploit his memory for electoral gain in the coming [1972] election.”⁸⁰ This rational merely appears a convenient excuse from Nixon to do nothing. While there has been much academic focus on the surveillance of King during his lifetime, little has been written about the Bureau’s opposition to the Holiday. Yet, it continued until Hoover’s death on 2 May 1972.⁸¹ Ultimately, Senator Church forced the FBI to admit it had no evidence King was a communist or had been influenced by the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).⁸² These allegations continued to surround King’s reputation, but the FBI’s admission enabled politicians to dismiss these accusations when they reappeared in the future.

President Ford’s attitude toward King and the Holiday is harder to ascertain. Ford, a Michigan Republican and Minority Leader of the House, reluctantly backed the Fair Housing Act of 1968 in the wake of King’s assassination. Ford called for a day of mourning for King, but this fell short of explicit support for a Holiday.⁸³ However, though Ford had sympathy for King’s legacy, there is no evidence he supported a federal King Holiday.⁸⁴ The Democratic Party, on the other hand, declared its intention to establish a holiday in 1976.⁸⁵ Jimmy Carter’s election to the presidency that year intensified the Holiday campaign and prompted Coretta to express confidence Carter would

and *Martin Luther King Jr.: From “Solo” to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981); Gerald D. McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People’s Campaign* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Kenneth O’Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960 - 1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Kenneth O’Reilly, *Nixon’s Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

⁷⁷ G.C. Moore, “King FBI File,” February 1970, reel 14: 1169.

⁷⁸ J. Edgar Hoover, “King FBI File,” 23 January 1969, to Richard Nixon, reel 14: 561; Hoover “King FBI File,” 3 March 1969, reel 14: 585.

⁷⁹ M.A. Jones, “King FBI File,” 18 March 1969, reel 14: 633; Hoover “King FBI File,” 19 June 1969, reel 14: 683; G.C. Moore, “King FBI File,” 22 January 1969, reel 14: 563.

⁸⁰ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 93, 216n2.

⁸¹ Fleming, “Martin Luther King, Jr and the FBI,” 51-67.

⁸² Activities, “Church Committee, Book III,” 185.

⁸³ Jerald F. terHorst, *Gerald Ford* (London: W. H. Allen, 1975), 93-94, 108-109.

⁸⁴ In Ford’s autobiography there was no mention of King, Gerald R. Ford, *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (London: W. H. Allen, 1979); nor was there a mention of King in Richard Reeves, *A Ford, Not a Lincoln* (London: Hutchinson, 1976).

⁸⁵ The *Times* reported that the Holiday was a goal included in the 1976 Democratic Party platform, Terence Smith, “President, in Atlanta, Asks Congress to Vote Holiday for Dr. King,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1979, 1.

legislate a federal King Day.⁸⁶ In Memphis, the city of King's murder, the Democratic Party poignantly and formally endorsed a King holiday during its 1978 mid-term conference.⁸⁷

1979 Push for the Holiday

In 1979, the Holiday became an issue in the Democratic presidential primary contest between Carter and Ted Kennedy.⁸⁸ According to Chappell, the Holiday was a "symbolic prize in the struggle between" Kennedy and Carter "for control of the Democratic Party."⁸⁹ Both needed to win votes from African Americans in order to win the nomination and presidency.⁹⁰ Kennedy committed himself to the Holiday cause – an important announcement due to his position as chair of the Senate's Judiciary Committee – which was responsible for hearings into the legislation.⁹¹ Two days later, Carter received the King Peace Prize in Atlanta and called on Congress to designate King's "birthday a national holiday."⁹² In his State of the Union speech, Carter cited King's "commitment to human rights, peace, and nonviolence" as defining characteristics of "one of our nation's most outstanding leaders."⁹³ Carter had not always been so supportive of the Holiday and as Governor of Georgia had "declined to support" a state holiday with the argument that the federal government should lead on the issue.⁹⁴ Though Atlanta had a King holiday, Georgia was slow to support the idea even with Carter as president, largely because the state legislature was "white dominated" and preferred to celebrate holidays devoted to Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Confederate General Robert E. Lee.⁹⁵

In 1979, the fiftieth anniversary of King's birth, the US had nine federal holidays. Of those, only two were dedicated to individuals: Columbus Day and Christmas Day.⁹⁶ To create long weekends for workers and reduce disruption to industrial production caused by mid-week holidays, Congress rationalised the nation's calendar in 1968 to create Monday holidays. Days powerfully identified with a specific date such as Christmas Day, however, remained unchanged.⁹⁷ The Monday Holiday Act of 1968 combined Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays (12 February and 22 February respectively) into one celebration to create Presidents' Day. Though the legislation did not formally remove Washington's name from the holiday, Presidents' Day never again occurred on

⁸⁶ Wayne King, "Coretta King Uneasy Over the Selections for Carter Cabinet," *New York Times*, 13 January 1977, 15.

⁸⁷ Adam Clymer, "Democrats, Under Pressure, Vote to Praise Carter Budget Priorities," *New York Times*, 11 December 1978, 1.

⁸⁸ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 94-95.

⁸⁹ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 95.

⁹⁰ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 95.

⁹¹ Wayne King, "Kennedy to Seek a Holiday Marking Dr. King Birthday," *New York Times*, 13 January 1979, 8.

⁹² Smith, "President in Atlanta," 1.

⁹³ President Jimmy Carter, "State of the Union" 1979 cited in Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *Report Together With Minority Views* 96th Cong., 1st sess., 23 October 1979, 2.

⁹⁴ Howell Raines, "Pressure Rises for Day in Georgia Hailing Dr. King," *New York Times*, 10 January 1979, 12.

⁹⁵ The Lee-Davis celebrations cost of \$12 million, Raines, "Pressure Rises," 12.

⁹⁶ *Report With Minority Views*, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, 1979, 6.

⁹⁷ *Monday Holidays Debate*, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., 9 May 1968, 12584.

Washington's birth date.⁹⁸ The other federal holidays were New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. Federal holidays are exactly that – they apply only to federal government employees; neither state nor local government employees receive federal holidays, nor do employees in the private sector. King Holiday advocates knew, however, it was “customary for private and state employers” and governments to align their calendars with the federal government.⁹⁹ Accordingly, they hoped a federal King Holiday would encourage states, local governments and private sector employers, to follow their lead.

Though strong public support for the Holiday had existed since the early 1970s, as evidenced by the aforementioned petition, Congress still needed persuading. Conyers reintroduced legislation for a King Holiday to the House in 1979 and Senator Birch Bayh, a Democrat from Indiana, introduced a Senate version.¹⁰⁰ After Carter and Kennedy gave their support to the Holiday, Congress held joint hearings on 27 March and 21 June to consider the bill. These hearings provided a stage to debate King's merits.¹⁰¹ Senator Bayh acknowledged that a Holiday was not a “panacea for the nation's ills,” however the time had come to appreciate that a “black citizen has made a significant enough contribution to society to be recognized as a national holiday figure.” One way of “recognizing full citizenship” of the African America community was a holiday and Bayh further noted the need for minority youth to have “role models” so they can live “within the system.”¹⁰² A majority on the Senate Judiciary Committee “strongly” recommended the Holiday because King's “unique accomplishments” made him worthy of the honour. His legacy was such “that persons of all colors can strive to attain the universal goals of freedom and equality” and setting aside a day to honour him would publicise the cause of racial justice.¹⁰³ According to the majority, King's nonviolent method “strengthened the American ideal of Government responsive to its people” and proved the nation's ability to correct inequities within a democratic framework.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service believed a holiday would be an “appropriate testimonial to an extraordinary individual” that would “underscore the nation's continuing

⁹⁸ “George Washington's Birthday,” National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/washington/>, accessed 14 April 2015; C. L. Arbelbide, “By George, IT IS Washington's Birthday!,” *Prologue Magazine* (Winter 2004) National Archives, accessed 14 April 2015.

⁹⁹ *Report With Minority Views*, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, 1979, 2.

¹⁰⁰ HR15 and S25, see Wolfensberger, “The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay,” 2.

¹⁰¹ These hearings have been analysed in Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 59-61; Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 274-75; Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 287-290; Wiggins Jr., *Oh Freedom!*: 134-177.

¹⁰² Joint Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate and the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service House of Representatives, *Martin Luther King Jr., National Holiday*, 96th Cong., 1st Sess., 27 March and 21 June 1979, 40; The Senate Judiciary Committee found allegations King was subversive as meritless, Committee on the Judiciary, *Report Together With Minority Views on S25*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 1 August 1979, 4.

¹⁰³ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 4.

commitment to alleviate the invidious effects of discrimination and poverty.” These assessments of King were based on his work to ensure equality in employment, education and housing.¹⁰⁵

Unanimous support, not unexpectedly, remained elusive and a minority of four Republican Senators, including arch-segregationist Strom Thurmond of North Carolina, Paul Laxalt of Nevada, Orrin Hatch of Utah, and Alan Simpson of Wyoming, dissented from the majority.¹⁰⁶ Thurmond had a long history of opposing racial integration, even though he had fathered a child to his family’s black maid.¹⁰⁷ He ran as a States’ Rights presidential candidate in 1948 and continued to frustrate civil rights initiatives, including the King Holiday legislation, throughout his career. Senate opposition to the bill was centred on five points: economic cost; existing holiday traditions; debate over King’s historic importance; state holiday alternatives; and a federal day of observance. First, the minority argued that the “economic cost” to the government would be \$195 million paid to federal employees for a day off in an inflationary economy. Second, the “existing holiday” tradition argument was based on the fact that only Christ, Columbus and, according to the minority, Washington – despite the 1968 reforms – had federal holidays named in their honour. As Dr. Elsie Scott notes, granting King a memorial equal to the son of God, the man who “discovered” the Americas (Columbus), and the man who and founded the nation (Washington), seemed “blasphemous” to the authors of the minority report.¹⁰⁸ To the dissenters, the other remaining six federal holidays recognised events “of such magnitude that they transcend regionalism and *special groups or cultures* [italics mine].” Implicitly, by denying King’s broad appeal they sought to define him as relevant only to the African American community as a “special group or culture.” The dissenters argued King did not transcend the cause of “civil rights for black Americans” and was therefore irrelevant to the majority of Americans.¹⁰⁹

The third argument against the Holiday concerned King’s doubtful “place in history.” This concern originated in allegations King was unworthy of unique adulation. Opponents attempted to damage King’s reputation by reviving charges he had been traitorous because of his alleged communist sympathies. Drawing on the discredited FBI allegations, several submissions at the hearings asserted that King was a socialist, or at the very least a fellow traveller of communists.¹¹⁰ The minority argued that King’s anti-Vietnam War stance, his advocacy for “Communist China’s” UN membership and his anti-nuclear activism were such controversial and subversive positions as

¹⁰⁵ *Report With Minority Views*, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, 1979, 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Meg Kinnard, “Strom Thurmond’s Mixed-Race Daughter Dies at 87,” *The Washington Post*, 4 February, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/strom-thurmonds-mixed-race-daughter-dies-at-87/2013/02/04/660e074e-6f3d-11e2-8b8d-e0b59a1b8e2a_story.html?tid=a_inl, accessed 7 March 2016; “Strom Thurmond,” in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

¹⁰⁸ Scott, “The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: How Did it Happen?,” 34 min.

¹⁰⁹ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 11-12.

¹¹⁰ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 9-20.

to cast doubt on his patriotism. Because King “aroused the emotions of the American people,” time would have to “temper” those emotions before his place in history could be properly judged. Opponents insisted that King had “not preserved beyond reproach his place in history.”¹¹¹ The fourth and fifth points of opposition related to the Holiday’s structure. The “state holiday” argument was based on the notion that national holidays did not exist in the US because Congress only legislated for federal government and District of Columbia workers. Therefore, public holidays were the responsibility of each state and the minority argued the states ought to be left alone to declare them if they wished. Finally, the “national day of observance” argument favoured a memorial day dedicated to King, instead of a Holiday.¹¹² This alternative, first proposed by Senator Brooke in 1968, was present throughout the debate. It enabled opponents to concede the point that King was worthy of remembrance, but to then claim that due to the previously mentioned doubts a more appropriate honour was a memorial day of lesser importance.¹¹³ An unpaid memorial day, however, was unacceptable to Holiday advocates who wanted the prestige of a paid holiday.¹¹⁴ Though the minority conceded King made an “outstanding contribution ... to the cause of civil rights for black Americans,” such phrasing confined King’s influence to “black Americans.”¹¹⁵ A second minority report, authored by opponents, from the House Committee reached near identical conclusions.¹¹⁶

Questioning King’s reputation was typical of a pattern noted by Derek H. Alderman, who studies the phenomena of naming streets after King. Alderman explains that three important factors determine whether a street is named after King: legitimacy, resonance, and hybridity. Alderman argues that successful commemorations must concern a legitimate historical figure, have resonance with the contemporary public and be hybrid enough to appeal to more than one group.¹¹⁷ Whether King embodied these three factors was doubtful, but his supporters vigorously maintained he did. On 13 November 1979, the House debated the Holiday bill for a mere forty minutes. The proposed

¹¹¹ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 12.

¹¹² *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 18-19.

¹¹³ For individual views of Thad Cochran (MS) and Alan Simpson (WY), see *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 20.

¹¹⁴ Martin Tolchin, “House Set Back a Plan to Make Dr. King’s Birthday U.S. Holiday,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1979, 1.

¹¹⁵ *Report With Minority Views - S25*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1979, 12.

¹¹⁶ In the House, opponents first argued that the Holiday would only be a symbolic gesture and therefore not worth the cost. Second, they asserted it would be untraditional to commemorate King in such a way since he was merely a “private citizen” and not even Jefferson, Lincoln or any of the Roosevelts had so been honoured. House detractors were also unconvinced that King’s contributions “were so unique as to merit the unprecedented recognition” of a Holiday. Third, federalism preserved the rights of states to determine their own calendar and maintaining this states rights balance was considered more important. Fourth, the Representatives argued that a holiday would not reflect “objective thinking.” Such objective thinking, the minority insinuated, would lead one to conclude that King’s life was unworthy of such a distinction. As an alternative, the House minority report also suggested a federal memorial day complete with a Presidential proclamation ceremony. *Report With Minority Views*, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, 1979, 7-8.

¹¹⁷ Alderman, “Street Names as Memorial Arenas,” 69.

15 January Holiday fell five votes short of the two thirds majority required (252 to 133) to pass without amendments under suspension of the rules (a procedure usually reserved for noncontroversial bills). Only one Republican, Ben Gilman of New York, spoke in favour. The bill was sent down to the House again on 5 December with the potential to pass with a simple majority, however it was vulnerable to amendment.¹¹⁸ The first attempt at passing the legislation, nonetheless, appeared promising.¹¹⁹

When the bill came to a vote, Chicago Republican Robert McClory proposed an amendment to make a Monday holiday. This moved the Holiday from 15 January to the third Monday in January, which conformed to the 1968 reforms. As Chappell notes, McClory argued the move would save taxpayers money and counter criticism that the holiday would hinder productivity. Having a fixed holiday to make a long weekend, rather than the annual confusion of a floating holiday, meant fewer midweek business closures and it allowed people more time to prepare for the for the day.¹²⁰ The amendment passed by a majority of 291 to 106 as 80 percent of Democrats and 45.5 percent of Republicans voted in the affirmative.¹²¹

At this point, it is necessary to define the regions of the US in order to analyse the vote. Ira Katznelson's definition of the South in the mid-twentieth century as a distinct "geography, marked not by slavery but by Jim Crow" is the most appropriate. He included Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. Katznelson notes that fifteen of these seventeen states "practiced chattel slavery on the eve of the Civil War" and that West Virginia (then part of Virginia) and Oklahoma "required racial segregation" until 1954, as did the other aforementioned states. Each state "prohibited interracial marriage as late as 1967," until the Supreme Court decided in *Loving v. Virginia* that such prohibitions were unconstitutional.¹²² The boundary outlined above only differs from that of the present Bureau of the Census by the inclusion of Missouri in the South. The census considers Missouri to be midwestern, whereas this

¹¹⁸ "Votes in Congress," *New York Times*, 18 November 1979, 58; Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 108; Wolfensberger, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay," 3; Avoice, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Bill," <http://www.avoiceonline.org/mlk/>, accessed 2011.

¹¹⁹ Based on a calculation of votes in the *Congressional Record*, this chapter presents a breakdown of voting by party and region. The calculations are based on House and Senate roll call votes and percentages have been rounded to the nearest .5 percent for readability and clarity. The roll call votes listed only surnames, so each surname was entered into the Congressional Biographical Database to identify each member by party and state. Some representatives and senators had slightly different party designations: Norman Lent, a Republican-Conservative; James Scheur, a Democrat Liberal; and Bruce Vento, Democrat Farmer Labor. They were counted as Republican and Democrats, respectively, due to the close nature of these odd parties to the major parties. See Appendix I.

¹²⁰ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 108-109, 218n29.

¹²¹ Thirty six representatives from both parties did not vote; 45 percent of republicans voted against and 9.5 percent of Republicans did not vote. See Appendix I: Table: 5th December – McClory (Monday) Amendment.

¹²² Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2014), 136-137.

thesis, due to the reasons outlined by Katznelson, does not. Apart from the South, the other regions of the US are defined as the Northeast, Midwest and West, in accord with the census.¹²³

For the McClory vote, the South provided the biggest slice of Democrat support: 34.5 percent of total Democrat ‘yes’ votes. In fact, 72 percent of southern Democrat representatives approved the holiday. The Democrats did, however, have more representatives in the South (104) than any other region. Of the Republicans, the biggest slice of support came from the Northeast at 38 percent. In fact, 76 percent of Republicans from the Northeast approved the Monday amendment. Of southern Republicans, however, 60 percent opposed the Holiday.¹²⁴

The House appeared to give strong endorsement to the Holiday, however it was not enough to prevent an amendment. Robin Beard, a conservative Republican “whose district included several white precincts of Memphis,” proposed an amendment to move the Holiday to the third Sunday of January.¹²⁵ Beard claimed this honoured King and was “sensitive to tremendous costs in productivity.”¹²⁶ The Sunday observance would be a memorial day, not a federal holiday, and “Republicans and southerners” voted 207 to 191 in favour of a weekend commemoration without pay.¹²⁷ The biggest shift came from southern Democrats. Fifty-two Democrats who voted ‘yes’ earlier switched in favour of Sunday, which equalled 24 percent of all Democrats who previously voted ‘yes’. Thirty-one southern Democrats changed from Monday to Sunday and twenty-two who voted against the Monday holiday voted for the Sunday.¹²⁸ That Larry McDonald, a fierce King critic, took the later course suggested that not all who voted for the Sunday amendment did so to honour King, but rather to sideline his legacy with the minimum recognition possible.¹²⁹

Of the Republicans, fifty-two of the seventy-four (70 percent) who originally voted for Monday switched to Sunday. Of the seventy-three who voted ‘no’ to a Monday, seventy voted for

¹²³ The Deep South is considered to be seven states: South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Georgia and Texas. The Upper South being Virginia, Tennessee North Carolina and Arkansas. “Confederate States of America,” in *The Encyclopedia of Southern History*, ed. David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 282-283; The editors of the encyclopaedia defined the South as all states and the District of Columbia where slavery was legal in 1860. Border states were Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri and Delaware, and though Oklahoma was not a state at the time of the Civil War, it is now considered of the South and it practised segregation, “Border Slave States,” in *The Encyclopedia of Southern History*, ed. David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 137; For the US Census Bureau map, see US Census Bureau, “Census Regions and Divisions of the United States,” http://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf, accessed 30 July 2015.

¹²⁴ Democrat representatives: 91 percent of West; 88 percent of Northeast; 77 percent of Midwest; and 72 percent of South voted yes. See Appendix I: Table: Democrat - % of How Region Voted – McClory; Republicans – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote – McClory.

¹²⁵ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 109, 218n29.

¹²⁶ Robin Beard, House of Representatives, *Designation of the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., As a Legal Holiday*, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 5 December 1979, H11569, 11575.

¹²⁷ “News Summary,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1979, B1.

¹²⁸ Two Democrats voted against both proposals: Sam Hall and Eligio De la Garza (Hispanic), both of Texas.

¹²⁹ McDonald was described as “uncontestably the most conservative member of Congress.” He was chairperson of the John Birch Society (which donated to his campaigns), a member of the National Rifle Association and an anti-abortion activist, among other conservative causes. He died in a plane crash after when a Soviet fighter plane attacked the commercial passenger flight he was on. Albin Krebs, “Rep. L.P. McDonald of Georgia Among the Americans Lost on Jet,” *New York Times*, 2 September 1983, 6.

the Sunday, while three voted ‘no’ to both. That the majority of Republicans who voted ‘no’ to a Monday then supported a Sunday holiday can be seen either as acknowledgement King deserved at least some recognition or as a cynical attempt to relegate memory of him to a forgettable Sunday. In this context, those who voted ‘yes’ to the Monday and ‘no’ to the Sunday were perceived as possessing better civil rights credentials. In response, the CBC rejected the Sunday amendment and withdrew the legislation.¹³⁰ Bronx Representative Robert Garcia stated: “If we couldn’t get a holiday” the CBC would not settle for “a commemorative day.” Due to failure in the House, the Senate’s bill did not proceed to a vote.¹³¹ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* wrote that “we deeply resent the insult presented Dr. King’s family and admirers by the House of Representatives” when it voted for a Sunday holiday. Despite, or perhaps because of, centuries of treating “black people as second-class citizens” the House voted for a “second-class holiday.”¹³²

§

Why did the Holiday campaign fail in 1979? One factor was that the difficult relationship between Jimmy Carter and the CBC inhibited the campaign’s progress. By May 1979, the President lost the support of Conyers and five other CBC members who alleged he had betrayed black voters. Their support went to Kennedy for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. Another factor was the lingering presence of Jim Crow in Congress, as southern representatives voted to limit the Holiday’s scope and thereby revealed their support to be fickle. After the 1979 setback, however, advocates still thought the Holiday was within reach and expectations were high that it would be established in 1980 because African American politicians developed a new network through which the CBC could communicate with constituents. Optimistic about this new Action Alert Communications Network (AACN), a reticular power structure of state black caucuses and elected officials, the CBC and the AACN applied pressure to forty representatives who voted against the holiday, 125 uncommitted representatives and 100 representatives from “Black districts.”¹³³

In contrast to the efforts of black liberals, a conservative movement gathered pace in the 1970s. As Allitt argues, this “conservative movement” was anti-communist, adhered to free market principles, and had traditional social and religious mores, all combined in opposition to statist liberalism.¹³⁴ The decline in white support for Democrats in the South since 1964, enabled

¹³⁰ Tolchin, “House Set Back,” 1.

¹³¹ Garcia was leader of the Hispanic Caucus and had close links to the CBC, Simon Anekwe, “Support Shown Garcia,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 5 September 1987, 4; Tolchin, “House Set Back,” 1.

¹³² Editorial, “Second-Class Treatment,” *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution*, 9 December 1979, 2B.

¹³³ Carmen C. Carter, “Caucus Fights for King Holiday Bill,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 December 1979, 2; Thomas A. Johnson, “Black Conferees Establish Network to Influence White Congressmen,” *New York Times*, 28 May 1979, 7.

¹³⁴ The “conservative movement came into existence” after World War II. Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 159.

Republicans to win in the region and by the late 1970s, Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan sought to attract suburban and white working class voters in traditionally Democratic areas.¹³⁵ Reagan fostered a conservative ideology and religious “organisations such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition brought out the vote for conservative candidates.”¹³⁶

Reagan exemplified conservative hostility to the civil rights movement. After winning the Republican presidential nomination, he visited the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Reagan echoed an old segregationist mantra with advocacy for states’ rights, which provoked liberal outrage since three civil rights volunteers were murdered there in 1964.¹³⁷ In the 1980 election, the conservative movement achieved its greatest triumph to date with the election of Reagan to the presidency. After his election, Reagan set about reshaping the American political landscape; his victory initiated a conservative ascendancy in the White House and the so-called Reagan Revolution.¹³⁸ Thus, Carter’s inability to secure passage of the Holiday legislation through Congress, even though Democrats controlled both it and the White House until late 1980, forced Holiday supporters to lobby and negotiate with Republicans.¹³⁹

1981-1983: Campaign Renewal

It appeared “quixotic” to continue the King Holiday campaign in the face of the electoral victory of the “most conservative president since 1928.”¹⁴⁰ The campaign nonetheless coalesced into a more unified and co-ordinated movement during 1981 and enjoyed mass support as pressure on Congress intensified with marches in honour of King that conjured memories of the ‘classical’ civil rights era. On 15 January 1981, days before Reagan’s inauguration, 250,000 supporters gathered in Washington DC on the National Mall and demanded a King Holiday. At the march, Stevie Wonder sang his song ‘Happy Birthday’, which explicitly advocated for a King Holiday.¹⁴¹ Wonder, who like Conyers hailed from Detroit, had been encouraged by the congressman to get involved and became a key supporter and organiser.¹⁴² The musician thought he could “act as a catalyst for a

¹³⁵ Joseph Crespino, “Ronald Reagan’s South: The Tangled Roots of Modern Conservatism,” in *Living in the Eighties*, ed. Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37-50.

¹³⁶ Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 1.

¹³⁷ Reagan echoed Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign, premised on opposition to the Civil Rights Act. Crespino, “Ronald Reagan’s South,” 37; Douglas Kneeland, “Reagan Campaigns at Mississippi Fair,” *New York Times* 1980, 11; James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Henry Schwerner, Civil Rights Memorial, “Civil Rights Martyrs,” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012).

¹³⁸ Democrats dominated Congress during the 1980s, but Republicans won “thirty two of thirty three state presidential elections.” Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 174; Troy Gil, “Ronald Reagan’s 100 Day Revolution,” in *Living in the Eighties*, ed. Vincent J. Cannato and Gil Troy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.

¹³⁹ Wolfensberger, “The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay,” 1.

¹⁴⁰ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 110.

¹⁴¹ Peter Noel, “Birthday Tributes to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 January 1981, 26; Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 191.

¹⁴² Conyers, “How Did it Happen?,” 21.25.

unification of the Black leadership” and toured with Gil Scott-Heron to promote the Holiday.¹⁴³ Two million more signatures were collected and seventeen states, plus Washington DC, commemorated King’s birthday in 1981. Another march was held on the Mall in 1982, albeit with a smaller attendance of twenty thousand people.¹⁴⁴ In January 1983, Wonder and the CBC decided to prioritise “legislative lobbying” with direct appeals to all members of Congress and they scheduled a 20th Anniversary March on Washington for August.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, resistance to the Holiday remained strong in some quarters, including among conservative African Americans.¹⁴⁶ In the black conservative journal *Lincoln Review*, marchers were portrayed as “angry” and the holiday as “unattainable.” King did not deserve the distinction and it was “better for him, and for us, that he be remembered and honored in our hearts, homes, and daily conduct.” Black conservatives appreciated King’s Christianity but they thought the Holiday campaign had become a platform to promote “a revival of militance and street violence as the most effective solution of achieving ‘economic equality’ and ‘social justice.’”¹⁴⁷ Even the *New York Times* remained sceptical of a Holiday. In late 1982, the *Times* editorialised that the proposal “seems inappropriate” especially when another “better proposal” was in the Senate – to erect a statue of King in the Capitol. The *Times* argued there were too many national holidays and it would be a questionable tribute to “a humble man.” The editorial claimed that a singular tribute to King, rather than to all African Americans, would demean “historical black figures” like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X. Far more appropriate, it argued, would be a day dedicated to all historical black figures, while the “Capitol statue would splendidly denote his [King’s] place in American history.”¹⁴⁸ Author of Afro-American history, William Sereale, replied in the *New York Amsterdam News* that the “notable drawback” of the statue was people would not know of its existence unless “constantly informed.” Sereale speculated that the statue proposal might “be an attempt to dilute strength from the King holiday efforts.” Incredulous that the *Times* expected politicians to honour all historically important black Americans, he asserted they had not so far deigned to honour even one. He also accused the *Times* of hypocrisy because even a “brief

¹⁴³ “Wonder Planning 2nd March on Washington,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 19 December 1981, 7; Scott-Heron, *The Last Holiday: A Memoir*: 236-292.

¹⁴⁴ Diane R. Powell, “King Birthday Rally Draws 20,000,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 30 January 1982, 1; “Wonder Planning 2nd March,” 7.

¹⁴⁵ Avoice Public Advocacy, “The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Bill”, <http://www.avoiceonline.org/mlk/>, accessed 15 November 2011.

¹⁴⁶ J.A. Parker testified against the Holiday in congressional hearings and argued it would “further exacerbate the effects of a color-conscious society at the expense of the color-blind society.” Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service *Proposals for a Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday*, 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 23 February 1982, 68-69; Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 113.

¹⁴⁷ Edward C. Smith, “Another View Honoring Martin Luther King,” *Lincoln Review* 3, no. 1 (1982): 68-69.

¹⁴⁸ The complete list of those historical black figures was: Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B DuBois and Malcolm X, Editorial, “How to Remember Martin Luther King,” *New York Times*, 10 December 1982, 34.

examination of the *Times* editorial page will show that they ignore or ridiculed the leadership qualities of many of our giants.”¹⁴⁹

Holiday advocates refocused their efforts and pointed to contemporary problems they hoped could be alleviated by honouring King. These problems were often caused by racism and poverty and were manifested with violence. According to Marable, “the black community experienced two distinct crises which threatened to pull apart its social fabric” in the 1980s. First, the “government’s retreat from equality and the consolidation of mass conservatism under the administration of Ronald Reagan.” Second, “the ordeal of the African American family, neighbourhood, cultural and social institutions, caught in the vise of violence, crime, social destruction and drugs.” Violence became endemic to the lives of the working poor and “the worst effects ... occurred within the black community.”¹⁵⁰ In contrast to this dystopia, Coretta’s utopian ambition for the Holiday was intricately connected to nonviolence. During testimony on 23 February 1982, Coretta argued that the Holiday “would be an ideal focal point for a new beginning toward a violence-free society, a national day of education on nonviolent ideals and methods for social progress.” A federal holiday would shape the destiny of the nation by honouring a nonviolent hero and it could “help this Nation to realize its destiny as the world’s leading model of justice and democracy, and the first nonviolent society in human history.” Recalling King’s ‘Dream’ of integration as “perhaps the clearest statement of the American dream ever articulated,” Coretta claimed that the “best reason” for the Holiday was that “America desperately needs nonviolent heroes and heroines.” She wanted youth to understand that violence was “doomed to failure” and argued “America needs this recommitment to nonviolence.” Coretta also claimed that “millions of Americans already celebrate” and eighteen states observed an “official holiday in honor” of her husband’s birthday. She asked, “When will Congress catch up with the people?”¹⁵¹

In 1983, Democrats still held the House majority and remained more amenable to the proposal than Republicans.¹⁵² Conyers reintroduced the legislation on 7 June, but in order to boost the re-election chances of Katie Hall, an African American Democrat from Indiana, the CBC “elevated” her to guide the bill through the House. Hall reintroduced the legislation with an explicit

¹⁴⁹ William Seraile, “Hypocrisy of New York Times,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 25 December 1982, 13; Seraile wrote, *Bruce Grit: the Black Nationalist Writings of John Edward Bruce* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003)

¹⁵⁰ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 188-190.

¹⁵¹ Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service *Proposals for Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., 23 February 1982, 11-12.

¹⁵² The 97th Congress had 242 Democrats, 192 Republicans and 1 Independent, Office of the Historian, “House of Representatives, 97th Congress (1981-1983),” Office of Art and Archives, <http://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/97th/>, accessed 15 April 2015; the 98th Congress had 269 Democrats and 166 Republicans, Office of the Historian, “House of Representatives, 98th Congress (1983-1985),” Office of Art and Archives, <http://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/98th/>, accessed 15 April 2015; Republicans held a Senate majority from 1981 to 1987; Democrats held a majority to 1995. Senate Historical Office, “Party Division in the Senate,” http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_tasers/partydiv.htm, accessed 22 April 2015.

clause to create an annual King Holiday on the third Monday of January.¹⁵³ On 2 August, the House debated the proposal and influential Democrats, such as Majority Leader Jim Wright of Texas and Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill of Massachusetts, spoke in favour of the bill, a reversal of the 1979 session when many senior Democrats failed to do so. Also notable were prominent Republicans such as Jack Kemp of New York (who voted against in 1979) and future Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia, who spoke in favour.¹⁵⁴ For the legislation to succeed, many Republicans had to reverse their opposition and some did so by invoking lofty national ideals and historic events. Kemp explained, "I have changed my position on this vote because I really think that the American Revolution will not be complete until we commemorate the civil rights revolution and guarantee those basic declarations of human rights for all Americans." He argued, "America is one nation, one people, one family, one country" and that "ending racial segregation through constitutional means is as important a contribution to this country and our American Revolution as holding the union together."¹⁵⁵ Gingrich explained that King's "birthday should be celebrated by all Americans as a demonstration of the virtues of freedom and a free society." He praised King's nonviolent religiosity and took comfort in the belief that the US had responded to King's challenge.¹⁵⁶ Another Republican and self-described fiscal conservative, Daniel Lungren of California, confessed to making a mistake in 1979 and reasoned that the civil rights movement was the "third great unique movement" in US history, after the Revolution and Civil War. King not only inspired Lungren, but made him aware that not all Americans shared equal rights.¹⁵⁷ For these Republicans, King symbolised integration and a successful civil rights movement that could be legitimately compared to other great events in the nation's history. When the House voted, a small majority of Republicans (88 of 164) voted with the overwhelming majority of Democrats (250 of 269) to pass the legislation 338-90.¹⁵⁸ For the Democrats, 88 percent of southern representatives voted 'yes', while 41.5

¹⁵³ Conyers had strong support with 176 cosponsors, including 10 Republicans. Hall had good support also, with 60 cosponsors, including 3 Republicans. Wolfensberger, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay," 5.

¹⁵⁴ Of senior Democrats, only the Democratic Whip, Rep. John Brademas (D-IN) spoke for the bill in 1979, Wolfensberger, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay," 6.

¹⁵⁵ Jack Kemp, *Debate on the Designation of the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., as a Legal Public Holiday*, 98th Cong, 1st sess., 2 August 1983, 22229-30.

¹⁵⁶ New Gingrich, *Debate on the Designation of the Birthday of King*, 1983, 22231-22230.

¹⁵⁷ Daniel Lungren, *Debate on the Designation of the Birthday of King*, 1983, 2229.

¹⁵⁸ On 2 August 1983, 93 percent of Democrat and 53.5 percent of Republican representatives voted in the affirmative. Thirty-five representatives who voted against in 1979 switched to vote yes (twenty six Republicans included). Wolfensberger calculates Republicans voted 89 to 77 in favour of the Holiday, a statistic at odds with my calculation that 88 Republicans voted in favour. However one Republican did not vote and Wolfensberger appears to have counted that person's vote in the affirmative column. Four Democrats did not vote. Wolfensberger, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay," 7; Avoice, "The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Bill" History; Steven R. Weisman, "Aides Assert Reagan May Shift to Support Holiday for Dr. King," *New York Times*, 7 August 1983, 20: Appendix I: Table 2 August 1983 – House.

percent of southern Republicans voted ‘yes’.¹⁵⁹ In total, approximately 45 percent of Republicans opposed the Holiday, their greatest opposition coming from the South and West (58.5 percent and 66 percent of southern and western representatives respectively).¹⁶⁰

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Why did the Holiday garner support among Republicans in 1983? When seeking votes, Conyers had gradually begun to talk to Republicans and found the most receptive was Jack Kemp.¹⁶¹ Elected to the House in 1970, Kemp first found fame as a star pro football quarterback in the 1960s. According to the *New York Times*, his two greatest political passions were “tax cuts to promote economic growth” and attracting more support for the Republican Party from “blacks and other minorities.” Kemp was committed to racial justice, albeit in a conservative way, and claimed to “care about the rights” of minorities.¹⁶² Another Republican in favour of the Holiday was Vice President George H.W. Bush. Neither Kemp and Bush wanted to advance too far ahead of their colleagues on the issue, but according to Conyers, an agreement was reached whereby if “we could get the bill through the House and the Senate, then the President would sign it into law.”¹⁶³

On 27 August 1983, soon after the House vote, an estimated 250,000 people attended the 20th Anniversary Mobilization for Jobs, Peace and Freedom. They commemorated the 1963 March on Washington and advanced a new progressive agenda that included support for an equal rights amendment, a nuclear freeze, gay rights and the King Holiday.¹⁶⁴ The *New York Times* reported that Andrew Young thought opposition to Reagan helped to coalesce the campaign and as a Democrat, he hoped it might lead to the President’s defeat at the next election.¹⁶⁵ Prior to Reagan’s election there had been no mass protests in Washington DC for the Holiday, so Young’s claim that opposition to Reagan stimulated the holiday fight seems credible.

Reagan opposed the Holiday as late as August 1983 and justified his stance in terms of cost and a reluctance to start a trend that might memorialise every group in society.¹⁶⁶ This was consistent with Reagan’s previous civil rights positions. He had been a “fierce” critic of King in the

¹⁵⁹ Democrats in regions other than the South voted yes in even higher numbers: Northeast, 96.5 percent; Midwest, 98 percent; West, 94 percent. See Appendix I: Table Democrat – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote – House 1983.

¹⁶⁰ Appendix I: Republican – What % of the Region Voted for and Against the Holiday – House 1983

¹⁶¹ Conyers, “How Did it Happen?,” 24.00-24.18 min.

¹⁶² Adam Clymer, “Jack Kemp, Star of Field and in Politics, Dies at 73,” *New York Times*, 3 May 2009, 1, 33.

¹⁶³ Conyers, “How Did it Happen?,” 24.20.

¹⁶⁴ Kenneth B. Noble, “Buses Roll into Capital With Rally Participants,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1983, 27; Black conservatives alleged that communists were involved in the march and noted Conyers had met with delegates of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, J.A. Parker, “The March on Washington: Who Did It Really Represent?,” *Lincoln Review* 4, no. 2 (1983): 3-8.

¹⁶⁵ Kenneth B. Noble, “March in Capital is Seen Spurring Vast Coalition,” *New York Times*, 29 August 1983, 12.

¹⁶⁶ “House Backs Holiday on Dr. King’s Birthday,” *New York Times*, 3 August 1983, 10.

1960s, and opposed both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, King as an individual seems to have made little impression on Reagan. In his extensive autobiography, published after his presidency, Reagan failed to mention King, Coretta or the Holiday even once.¹⁶⁸ Senate Republican Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, however, urged the president to change his mind and from 6 August, reports appeared in the press that indicated Reagan was “‘inclined’ to reverse his opposition,” which the *Times* framed as a “‘conciliatory political” gesture.¹⁶⁹ Given that Reagan vocally attacked the movement’s legacy and cut back on the food stamp program, for example, Baker reasoned that Reagan “could not afford to oppose a measure with such important symbolism.”¹⁷⁰ Chappell notes, “Reagan’s motives for switching to support of the holiday remain a source of mystery in the minds of some scholars.” He explained that Robert C. Smith, a Professor of Political Science, attempted “to get all Reagan’s papers on the holiday decision released” but without success.¹⁷¹ Reagan’s long-term opposition to the Holiday suggests that he eventually approved it only because it seemed inevitable and to veto the Act would have been politically unwise.

After indicating tacit support, Reagan still harboured strong personal reservations, which he expressed in a letter to Governor Mel Thomson of New Hampshire. Reagan wrote: “the perception of too many people is based on an image not reality. Indeed to them the perception is reality. We hope some modifications might still take place in Congress.”¹⁷² On 17 October, the *New Hampshire Union Leader* published the governor’s own doubts on its front page and on 22 October cited the exchange of letters between Reagan and Thomson. The Governor warned Reagan that if he failed to veto the Holiday, conservatives would think the President had “sacrificed principles” for votes.¹⁷³ All told, Reagan opposed the Holiday until it became clear Congress would approve it by a large majority, at which point he resigned himself to the political reality and became a lukewarm

¹⁶⁷ Jeremy D. Mayer, “Reagan and Race: Prophet of Color Blindness, Baiter of the Backlash.” in *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America’s Fortieth President* (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 2007), 71.

¹⁶⁸ Reagan’s autobiography, a 748 page epic, had no word either on Jesse Jackson, a potential opponent. Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

¹⁶⁹ Weisman, “Aides Assert Reagan May Shift,” 1.

¹⁷⁰ Weisman, “Aides Assert Reagan May Shift,” 20.

¹⁷¹ About the Reagan papers, according to Chappell, “twenty to twenty-six pages (out of 4, 811 pages on the subject known to exist) remain secret. [Robert C.] Smith, who believes the number is twenty-six, suggests that Reagan’s designated trustees are trying ‘to whitewash his record on race.’” Robert C. Smith, “26 Pages in the History of the Holiday,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 January, 2008, in Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 119, 220n51; A request during research for this thesis to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library for information about the King Holiday was replied to with the advice that the library’s holdings on the topic mainly concerned the Rose Garden signing ceremony in 1983. Ms Jennifer Mandel to Daniel Fleming, 16 July 2008, in author’s possession.

¹⁷² Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, and Kiron K. Skinner, eds., *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 634; Reagan sent the letter to Thomson on 3 October, Francis X. Clines, “Reagan’s Doubts on Dr. King Disclosed,” *New York Times*, 22 October 1983, 7.

¹⁷³ Mel Thomson, “Release the King Papers,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 17 October 1983, 1,15; “Thomson: Veto King Holiday Bill,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 22 October 1983, 3.

supporter: “Since they seem bent on making it a national holiday, I believe the symbolism of that day is important enough that I would – I’ll sign that legislation when it reaches my desk.”¹⁷⁴

First, the legislation had to pass the Republican dominated Senate. There, Senator Jesse Helms began a bitter decade-long personal crusade against the Holiday. Helms, who had previously worked as a conservative television journalist, was elected to Congress in 1972. He enjoyed a long political career, as a senator from North Carolina, and came to national prominence during the Reagan administration. According to biographer William A. Link, Helms was “the most assertive spokesman for modern conservatism in the Senate.” He was an “outspoken opponent of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and efforts to end Jim Crow segregation through federal intervention,” and “spoke for millions of southern whites who resented the rapid changes of the 1950s and 1960s.”¹⁷⁵ He continued to oppose the movement’s legacy, even as one stalwart segregationist changed tack.

Strom Thurmond’s elevation to the position of Senate President *pro tempore*, one who presides over the Senate in the absence of the Vice President, made apparent Jim Crow’s long influence.¹⁷⁶ Yet, even Thurmond moved with the times and reversed his opposition to the Holiday after he visited a historically black college in South Carolina and gauged audience support for the idea.¹⁷⁷ Helms remained forever opposed, however, and accused King of being a Communist and lobbied to have secret sections of King’s FBI file made public.¹⁷⁸ Those sections mostly concerned King’s infidelities and the identity of bureau informants.¹⁷⁹

Before the Senate vote, Howard Philips, leader of the right wing lobbying group Conservative Caucus, called for the release of the FBI files. Philips told a press conference that Reagan had “been co-opted by his advisers, who have told the president it’s politically dumb to buck the King holiday.” J.A. Parker, a black conservative from the Lincoln Institute, also spoke to the press and was reported as saying “most blacks oppose the holiday because ‘the jury’s still out whether King was a hero or villain.’” Parker claimed that “many blacks, like myself, can’t forget that while Americans were fighting and dying in Vietnam, King supported the North Vietnamese enemy.” An astonished *Charlotte Observer* journalist recalled, more sympathetically, that King had criticised

¹⁷⁴ “President’s News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Issues,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1983, B10; Robert Rothman, “Congress Clears King Holiday After Heated Senate Debate: Reagan Will Sign the Measure,” *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, 12 October 1983, 2175, in Wolfensberger, “The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay,” 8.

¹⁷⁵ William Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), ix-x, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Senate Historical Office, “President Pro Tempore,” US Senate, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/President_Pro_Tempore.htm, accessed 5 August 2015.

¹⁷⁷ Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson, *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 301.

¹⁷⁸ Helms later claimed his opposition was misunderstood. Jesse Helms, *Here’s Where I Stand: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2005), 161.

¹⁷⁹ George Church and Neil MacNeil, “A National Holiday for King,” *Time*, 31 October 1983, 32.

the US government “because blacks were being sent to fight and die in Vietnam ‘in extraordinarily high proportions.’”¹⁸⁰

After much pressure and an agreement to fast track tobacco legislation he sought, Helms dropped his filibuster, begun in early October, to allow debate and a vote.¹⁸¹ The *New York Times* then published an editorial more favourable toward the Holiday than any of its previous comments. It argued that there was “much more to black American history than Dr. King’s movement” but conceded the choice “seems to be a King day or nothing.” Though the *Times* did not explicitly endorse a holiday, King was deemed an appropriate subject of honour should Congress dedicate a holiday to an African American: “no one better symbolizes the contemporary struggle for racial justice and equality.” To the *Times*, King was worthy, if America could afford the holiday.¹⁸² This less than effusive endorsement suggests the Holiday was viewed with scepticism even by the liberal press.

The Senate debated the legislation on 18 and 19 October.¹⁸³ Helms clashed bitterly with Senator Kennedy after he circulated material related to King’s suspected communist links and infidelities, and made insinuations about Robert F. Kennedy’s role, as Attorney General, in the surveillance of King.¹⁸⁴ Helms passed a dossier on King to senators based on reconstituted FBI allegations.¹⁸⁵ His ideological ally, Senator East, a Republican from North Carolina, cited King’s 1967 ‘A Time to Break Silence’ speech (in which King denounced the Vietnam War and compared the US to Nazi Germany), to smear King as unpatriotic.¹⁸⁶ East suggested other people or causes were more deserving: National Equality Day on Lincoln’s birthday; National Civil Rights Day on James Madison’s birthday; or a “handicapped” rights day on Franklin D. Roosevelt’s birthday. As for symbolic emphasis on race relations, East argued that since new, though unspecified, black leaders were “on the political horizon” others might be more suitable as African American heroes and King might not “emerge as the dominant black figure” in American history.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ Sandy Grady, “The King Holiday: Opponents Try Reviving FBI Smear,” *Charlotte Observer*, 1 October 1983, 19.

¹⁸¹ Bill Arthur, “Helms Abandons Filibuster: Switch on King Day Spurs Tobacco Bill,” *Charlotte Observer*, 6 October 1983, 1, 14; “Helms Drops Fight Over King’s Holiday,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 8 October 1983, 3; A filibuster is an obstructionist tactic, usually of prolonged speech making designed to delay legislative action. Gregory Koger, *Filibustering: A Political History of Obstruction in the House and Senate* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁸² “A Day for Martin Luther King,” *New York Times*, 11 October 1983, 30.

¹⁸³ Hansen, *The Dream*: 215-216; See also Senate October 1983 debate; Wolfensberger, “The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday: The Long Struggle in Congress, an Introductory Essay,” 7.

¹⁸⁴ *Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday Debate*, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 5-20 October 1983, 28070.

¹⁸⁵ Senator Helms, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28070.

¹⁸⁶ East questioned whether King “ought to enjoy the stature of George Washington.” Senator East, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28092.

¹⁸⁷ Senator East, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28083, 28091-2; Senator Exon suggested that the economy and federal deficit was so bad that a holiday would bring economic turmoil, Exon, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28102-28103; Senator Humphrey suggested a memorial Sunday to eliminate the need for a paid holiday Senator Humphrey, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28341.

Led by Massachusetts Democrat Senator Kennedy, pro-Holiday senators argued King was a worthy black leader and highlighted his leadership on integration and reconciliation. Senator Mathias, a Republican from Maryland, asserted, “we are memorializing” King for his “reconciliation of the races.”¹⁸⁸ Mathias argued that a commemorative day for civil rights without King’s name, as proposed by East, would deprive the day of meaning for African Americans. King’s leadership “would be symbolically denied, if we divorced” his name from the holiday and that would “deprive the country of that symbolic recognition which the name of a black American would bring.”¹⁸⁹ Mathias argued King’s name had resonance and was vital to the Holiday’s meaning, since a generic civil rights day would not evoke the movement as vividly. Foreshadowing the Holiday’s focus on the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, Mathias claimed it was not until King articulated his Dream “that we finally ended the Civil War” and it was that “moment we try to recapture in memory.”¹⁹⁰ The idea that King’s words somehow ended a war in which the armies stopped fighting a century before, suggests the timeless ideals the Senators wanted to invoke. Mathias argued, the Dream must be remembered so “we do not slip back into the practices against which” King fought.¹⁹¹ Senator Kennedy likewise argued a Holiday would move America closer to the fulfilment of King’s “dream of liberty and justice.”¹⁹² He framed the Holiday as a tribute and argued that the “least we can do for King is to dedicate a day to him and the dream he had.”¹⁹³

The pro-Holiday Senators understood a day in honour of King would represent more than King alone. They argued it would reaffirm old American ideals because the civil rights movement was indispensable in attaining the Founding Fathers’ ideal of equality.¹⁹⁴ Kennedy asserted the Holiday would have an international impact as it would highlight to the world that America was not merely a geographical location “but a sense of justice and a set of ideals.”¹⁹⁵ Senator Heinz, a Republican from Pennsylvania, likewise argued that a Holiday would serve “to recall the gross injustices of the past” and enable a rededication “to creating a more perfect society where people are judged by ability and individual human worth.”¹⁹⁶ Senator Sarbanes, a Democrat from Maryland, argued King was one of the “greatest leaders in the ongoing struggle to achieve full equality for all citizens.”¹⁹⁷

King was deemed worthy of the Holiday for two additional reasons: he was a contemporary hero and seemingly nonaligned with a political party. Senator Robert Dole, a Republican from

¹⁸⁸ Senator Mathias, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28074.

¹⁸⁹ Senator Mathias, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28084.

¹⁹⁰ Senator Mathias, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28074.

¹⁹¹ Senator Mathias, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28343.

¹⁹² Senator Kennedy, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28083.

¹⁹³ Senator Kennedy, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28073.

¹⁹⁴ Senator Kennedy, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28094.

¹⁹⁵ Senator Kennedy, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28073.

¹⁹⁶ Senator Heinz, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28094.

¹⁹⁷ Senator Sabanes, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28352.

Kansas, countered East's proposal to memorialise other historical figures with the argument that King had wrought change in the lifetime of the senators and therefore a King holiday would be a generational statement.¹⁹⁸ Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a Democrat from New York, asserted King "was a political man, in the finest, noblest meaning of the term, but ... not a party person."¹⁹⁹ This concept of King as a figure who transcended politics was attractive and King himself once said, "I have come to think of my role as one which operates outside the realm of partisan politics."²⁰⁰ In reality, King was enmeshed in the nation's body politic through a life of activism. He opposed Barry Goldwater in 1964 and often worked closely with President Johnson.²⁰¹ King tried to maintain a façade of impartiality, but could not always do so.

Senators portrayed King as a patriot who ensured the US lived up to its constitutional values. In doing so, they followed a typical pattern of elite memorialisation, as described by Bodnar. Such an elite fosters "national unity and patriotism" and safeguards national power when selecting subjects worthy of memorialisation.²⁰² Senator Moynihan, for example, envisaged a King Day committed to the "celebration and honor of the American Constitution" because the "principle of constitutionalism was innate in the doctrine of nonviolence espoused by Dr. King."²⁰³ By linking King's philosophy of nonviolence to democracy and the Constitution, the senators hoped to reaffirm the existing US political and constitutional structures.

When Congress reformed the American Calendar during the Ninetieth Congress (1967-1968), nearly five hundred bills were presented that called for additional holidays and commemorative events.²⁰⁴ Other leaders, like John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, suffragist Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) and black nationalist Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), could have been memorialised. Yet, despite questions surrounding King's patriotism and character, and concern about cost, the Senate approved the Holiday by 78 to 22 votes, on 19 October 1983.²⁰⁵ Republicans outnumbered Democrats in the Senate, 55 to 45 respectively, so their support was essential; they voted 37-18 (67 percent) in favour, while Democrats voted 41-4 (91 percent) in favour. Seventy-two percent of southern Republicans and 89.5 percent of southern Democrats voted 'yes'. In other regions, 78 percent of northeastern, 69 percent of midwestern and 53 percent of western Republicans voted 'yes', while 100 percent of northeastern and western, and 78 percent of midwestern Democrats voted 'yes'. Republican opposition came from all regions: two votes in the Northeast; five in the

¹⁹⁸ Senator Dole, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28093.

¹⁹⁹ Senator Moynihan, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28096.

²⁰⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 559.

²⁰¹ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 340, 351, 357-358; August Meier, "On the Role of Martin Luther King," in *Black History: A Reappraisal*, ed. Melvin Drimmer (New York: Anchor Books, 1968), 443.

²⁰² Bodnar, *Remaking America*: 13.

²⁰³ Moynihan, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28096.

²⁰⁴ *Monday Holiday Debate*, 1968, 12584.

²⁰⁵ *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28380.

South; four in the Midwest; and seven in the West. Democrat opposition came equally from the South and West, with two opposing senators each.²⁰⁶

William J. Starosta analysed public opinion for and against the King Holiday as expressed in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* from 1968 to 1983. Of the 316 items in the papers that could be “construed as an endorsement or a statement of opposition to a national holiday for Dr. King,” Starosta found that positive references outnumbered negative each year except 1977, until 1981. After that point, the numbers levelled out as opponents became more strident.²⁰⁷ Starosta argued that the Holiday was “a ready-made ‘abstract ideological symbol’” that elicited symbolic racist arguments on the part of white critics. He states that “spiritualistic motives are seen to inspire many proponents ... while a racism of symbols stirs” many detractors.²⁰⁸ Starosta argued that “written between the lines” were “symbolic racist overtones” in the objections to King Day.²⁰⁹ Certainly there were racist overtones to the debate and the reasons cited in opposition to the Holiday echoed those used against the movement during the sixties. Senator Bradley, for one, claimed that Helms played “up to old Jim Crow.”²¹⁰ Reagan immediately diminished the victory of Holiday advocates by making a joke about King and Communism and admitting he would have preferred “a day similar to Lincoln’s birthday, which is not technically a holiday.” He then visited the notoriously exclusive Augusta Golf Club, in King’s own state of Georgia, a club that had no black members and where only two blacks had ever played in a tournament there.²¹¹

Ultimately, the campaign revealed a new “tactical advantage” for King supporters. It forced “those who sought to disparage, to minify, or to co-opt King’s legacy to fight in the open arena.” Hence, the “debate aired and immortalized the obsessive rants of right-wing King-haters, who rose up to expose King as a national villain, unworthy of the nation’s honor.”²¹² The New Hampshire

²⁰⁶ Appendix 1: Table: Democrat Votes, by Region – Senate 1983; Republican Votes, by region – Senate 1983

²⁰⁷ Starosta, “A National Holiday for Dr. King?,” 359-360.

²⁰⁸ Starosta found 316 items, spanning 1968 to 1983, and divided these into seven categories of support for King Day, ranging from: ‘Unbridled Enthusiasm’, ‘King as a Positive Symbol’, ‘Another Alternative, Perhaps?’, ‘Merely for Minorities’, ‘It Could be Costly, Jefferson Davis et al. Day’, and ‘Comrade King’. Starosta notes that not all items were exactly about the King Holiday, but he included those about memorialising King. As such he estimates that the arguments contained indicate which view the writer would have on the holiday because “each of these situations are interlinked with the arguments for the other. Each such argument bolsters or tarnishes the image of Dr. King in the public eye.” Starosta also acknowledges that the *Times* and *Post* were “elite papers” and that for logistical reasons rural and local thinking is underrepresented. Starosta, “A National Holiday for Dr. King?,” 363, 376-377.

²⁰⁹ Starosta suggested that northern whites were free of an “old fashioned racism”, but high on “symbolic racism” and made “abstract moral assertions about Blacks’ behavior as a group.” Starosta drew upon David O. Sears and John B. McConahay *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973) in John B. McConahay and Joseph C. Hough, “Symbolic Racism,” *Journal of Social Issues* 32, no. 2 (1976): 23-24, in Starosta, “A National Holiday for Dr. King?,” 372.

²¹⁰ Church and MacNeil, “A National Holiday for King,” 32; *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28360.

²¹¹ Juan Williams, “President Reluctantly Promises to Sign the King Birthday Bill,” *Washington Post*, 20 October 1983, 11; Church and MacNeil, “A National Holiday for King,” 32; Clines, “Reagan’s Doubts,” 7.

²¹² Representative McDonald, a Democrat from suburban Atlanta, led the opposition in the House. Other “right-wing King-haters” included Representative Ashbrook, Alan Stang, Julia Brown, and Karl Prussion Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 92-93, 96-112; Congressional Hearings *Martin Luther King Jr., National Holiday*, Joint Hearings Before

based *Union Leader* and *Sunday News*, though from a small state, illustrates how misinformation about King could be spread.²¹³ The *Union Leader* published an editorial by its owner, Nackey Loeb, during the Senate debate, that contained a quote from black conservative George Schuyler, who once claimed “King is a black Typhoid Mary.”²¹⁴ The paper honoured Representative Larry McDonald by posthumously reprinting a lengthy statement to the House in which he accused King of being “wedded to violence.”²¹⁵ The *Union Leader* was proud that New Hampshire politicians opposed the Holiday and approvingly quoted Senator Warren Rudman, a New Hampshire Republican, who claimed the Act created a national “day of divisiveness.” Rudman’s own legislation for a National Equality Day was defeated in the Senate.²¹⁶ The *Union Leader* denounced the Senate’s decision and claimed that Helms had been “victimized” by the media. In a 21 October editorial, journalist Jim Finnegan declared that New Hampshire voted for “truth” in a “demonstration of intellectual honesty” as opposed to Reagan’s “waffling on the issue.” Finnegan claimed that King supported the Viet Cong, vilified America, was out to get J. Edgar Hoover and provoked violence. In short, “to ignore the ‘other side’ of this man and declare a national holiday in his honor is to try to elevate a monstrous lie to the level of an eternal verity.”²¹⁷ According to Ralph de Toledano, Helms tried “to prevent this rape of the country’s dignity” but the Senate was “too intimidated to do anything but scurry away from charges that it is against King because he is black.”²¹⁸ Conservative columnist and segregationist James J. Kilpatrick, likewise wrote, “what we are witnessing now is an act of abject omission.” The media is as “silent as mummies in the tombs of the pharaohs” because most reporters and editors are “liberal to ultraliberal.” Kilpatrick alleged that, “King was buddy-buddy with well-identified communists” and attended Communist training school.²¹⁹

Despite efforts of conservatives and King-haters, the debate served to exonerate King of communist taint. The Holiday legislation marked the “transformation in the national perception of King and the civil rights movement ... King was no longer a suspected communist or a demagogue,

the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate and the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service House of Representatives, 1979, 32-90.

²¹³ J.W. McQuaid, “Dr. King, Leftists Linked in FBI Files,” *New Hampshire Sunday News*, 16 October 1983, 1, 27.

²¹⁴ Nackey Loeb, “A Black Typhoid Mary,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 18 October 1983, 1, 18.

²¹⁵ McDonald’s statement to House, 14 September 1981, in Editorial, “A Man of Peace?,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 18 October 1983, 1, 18.

²¹⁶ Thomas H. Gorey, “King Bill Seen as Divisive,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 19 October 1983, 1, 30.

²¹⁷ The editorial also claimed, in an inverse of historical reality, that King had launched a “get Hoover” campaign in which he tried to depict Hoover as senile.” Jim Finnegan, “NH Votes for Truth,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 21 October 1983, 19.

²¹⁸ Ralph de Toledano, “King Gets His Holiday,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 21 October 1983, 19; Tolendano was a “Sephardic Jewish immigrant whose conservatism was reflected in his bitter opposition to Stalinism.” Murray Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47, 58.

²¹⁹ James Kilpatrick, “Silence: King Questions Unanswered,” *Arizona Republic*, 18 October 1983, 25; Kilpatrick defined as a conservative in Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 192.

but a national hero.”²²⁰ Garrow and others powerfully rebutted the charges against King. One southern newspaper, the *Charlotte Observer*, devoted two pages to the issue of whether King was a communist or not, and concluded he was not.²²¹ Though the Church Report and Garrow’s *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* had already disproved the allegations, the Senate debate became the last national stage for those propagating this belief.²²² The tactics of Holiday opponents proved counterproductive. A *Charlotte Observer* editorial, from Senator Helms’ own state of North Carolina, argued, “Helms employs the discredited tactics of the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy: guilt by association; distortion and half-truths.” Rather, the *Observer* noted, “it is a tribute to Dr. King’s loyalty and his faith in the American system that he tried to change it instead of trying to overthrow it.” The editorial concluded that the legacy of King’s “record that matters is not the evidence of FBI snooping in his bedroom.” Instead, “The record that matters is written clearly in the history of the civil rights movement” which “purged our society of an evil that was a greater threat to the American way of life than any communist conspiracy.”²²³ The *Observer*’s publisher, Rolfe Neill, agreed with Helms that “we don’t need another taxpayer-financed day off.”²²⁴ However, Neill argued that Helms “dredged up long-discredited charges” and undermined “his own cause by framing an issue in terms that leave no room for responsible people to stand with him,” thus making “himself the issue.”²²⁵ The *Observer* then published a series of cartoons deriding Helms, including one that poignantly depicted King’s body lying on a balcony, as it did in Memphis, with “character assassination” written on his suit.²²⁶

²²⁰ Hansen, *The Dream*: 216.

²²¹ David Garrow, “Are the Smears Only Ignorant,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 October 1983, 3D; Richard Severo, “Dr. King and Communism,” *New York Times: No Link Ever Proved*, 22 October 1983, 7; Fred G. Folsom, “The File on Martin Luther King Jr.,” *Washington Post*, 2 November 1983, 23; Adam Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?,” in *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader, Theologian, Orator*, ed. David Garrow (New York: Carlson 1989), 301-309; Editorial, “Smear Campaign: The Charges Against King,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 October 1983, D2.

²²² The Conservative Caucus delivered a petition of 43,700 signatures to the White House objecting to the Holiday, though small compared to the pro-Holiday petitions. AP, “Reagan is Besieged Over King Holiday,” *Clarion-Ledger*, 21 October 1983, 3.

²²³ Editorial, “Smear Campaign: The Charges Against King,” D2.

²²⁴ The *Observer* publisher was Rolfe Neill. See Rolfe Neill, “Helms Vs. King: Bitter Debate About a Holiday,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 October 1983, 3D.

²²⁵ Editorial, “King Holiday?: Helms Discredits Own Cause,” *Charlotte Observer*, 5 October 1983, 14.

²²⁶ Marlette, “Character Assassination,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 October 1983, 3D; Other cartoons included, Marlette, “National Holiday Honoring Senator Jesse Helms: April Fool’s Day,” *Charlotte Observer*, 5 October 1983, 15; Marlette, “Hold Everything – I Got More on King,” *Charlotte Observer*, 20 October 1983, 23; Marlette, “And the Last Shall Be First,” *Charlotte Observer*, 21 October 1983, 19.

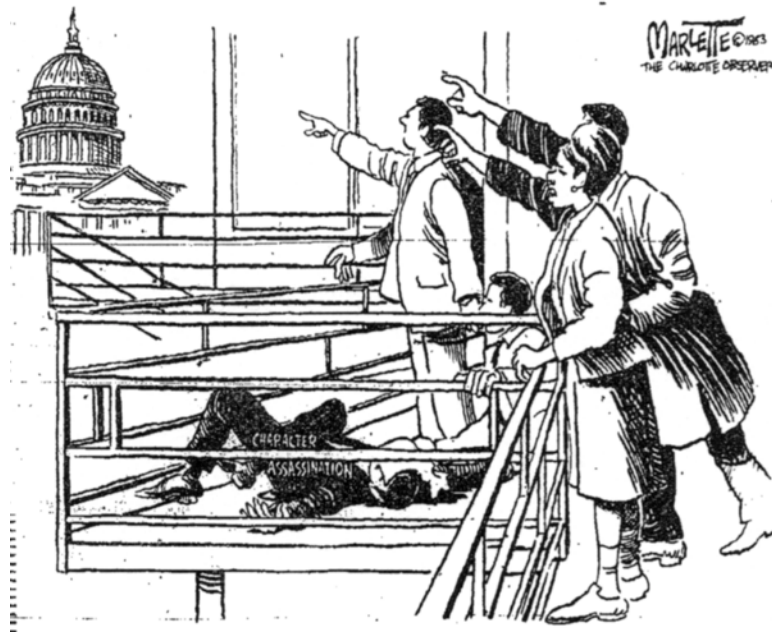


Figure 1: Character Assassination, *The Charlotte Observer*

Conclusion

The Holiday was accepted with a mix of enthusiasm, realism and fatalism in the South. The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* argued the Holiday was “needed to demonstrate that America recognizes and appreciates the role of blacks in this country.” The paper recognised that while “a national holiday for a black man won’t rewrite history or do away with lingering racism and discrimination ... it will serve as a statement that America does intend to continue moving toward a truly free and just society.”²²⁷ The *Birmingham News* editorialised that most Americans would have “mixed” feelings about the Holiday. People rightly remembered the Dream, but also King’s opposition to US conduct in the Vietnam War when he “portrayed this nation in terms that many fellow Americans have difficulty forgetting or forgiving.” The paper concluded, “In any event, the decision is made, and we hope that the American people will accept it in a positive spirit.”²²⁸ The western *Arizona Republic* published a more radical view, “To accept him as anything less than a revolutionary pacifist will mean that we are getting just another irrelevant plastic hero.”²²⁹

In the current historiography, the 1980s is typically characterised as a period of retreat for the Second Reconstruction.²³⁰ It is commonly accepted that as “blacks watched the erosion of the small gains, organizational energy became directed to the campaign to create a national holiday for King.”²³¹ The Holiday campaign refocused civil rights movement veterans and brought them into

²²⁷ Editorial, “A King Holiday at last?,” *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constituion*, 7 August 1983, 2C.

²²⁸ Editorial, “Honoring Dr. King,” *Birmingham News*, 21 October 1983, 12.

²²⁹ Colman McCarthy, “King: Pacifist Record Ignored,” *Arizona Republic*, 2 November 1983, 17.

²³⁰ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 147-215.

²³¹ Harry A. Reed, “Martin Luther King, Jr.: History and Memory, Reflections on Dreams and Silences,” *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 2 (1999): 164.

coalition with a younger generation in the fight to desegregate the American calendar. As the Kerner Commission once contended, America needed “new attitudes, new understanding, and above all, new will” to achieve racial integration and the Holiday campaign was a step in that direction.²³² Despite allegations against him, King possessed the qualities Alderman argues are required for memorialisation: legitimacy, resonance and hybridity. King’s ‘legitimacy’ derived from his charismatic leadership of, and ability to galvanise and mobilise, a movement that changed the nation. Liberals and conservatives, some of who once denounced King, accepted him as a reformer who was above party politics. His Dream resonated, as did the fact he was a contemporary of many lawmakers. King’s ‘hybridity’ also meant he appealed to a diverse array of Americans – from the working class to middle class, vernacular to elite, Democrat to Republican, black and white. Massive public demonstrations emphasised the high esteem in which King was held in the community and although opponents argued he only appealed to African Americans, Holiday advocates successfully connected King to ‘timeless’ American values like equality, freedom and justice. Champions drew favourable comparisons between the civil rights movement and epic historic events like the Revolution and Civil War. Honouring King was intended to strengthen the entire nation in accord with those values and in the tradition of those events. The Holiday’s ‘hybridity’ developed as it recognised both King and the civil rights movement. King Day represented an opportunity to bridge the nation’s racial divide and promote nonviolence, which Coretta viewed as particularly advantageous given the rising levels of violence within the black community and the nation as a whole.

For civil rights activists, the near absolute absence of African Americans in the national memorial landscape had to be redressed in order to reform that landscape, which they perceived as symbolically segregated as Jim Crow. In this respect, memorialising King broke barriers to the integration of African American and American history. As Alderman noted, it brought “official legitimacy” to King’s reputation and eventually served to encourage further memorialisation in King’s honour.²³³

African-Americans won the Holiday by taking the day off, regardless of whether it was official, and by having King Day written into employment contracts. The campaign was a grass roots effort that joined with legislators to pressure Congress into desegregating the federal calendar. In a significant sign of success, the movement forced a reluctant President to sign an Act he opposed. As seen, the reasons for Reagan’s last gasp support are unclear, though it seems likely to have been based on political realism and subsequently portrayed as a gesture of conciliation. Reagan eventually came to support the Holiday’s symbolism, but appeared resentful at having to do

²³² Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*: 1.

²³³ The majority of street naming in honour of King occurred after the establishment of the holiday, in Alderman, “Street Names as Memorial Arenas,” 72.

so. He became an apologist for those opposed to King's legacy and portrayed Helms as a man of integrity, in one notable press conference.²³⁴ Limited commitment to the Holiday was also displayed by the fact that the Holiday would cost an insignificant amount to the government, except in the form of wages to federal employees. King Day was a typically inexpensive act of acknowledgement from a majority white nation.

Throughout the campaign, King's critics highlighted his anti-militarist attitudes and assertion that the US was the greatest purveyor of violence in the 1960s. Yet, the campaign forced King's detractors into the open and then marginalised them.²³⁵ The argument that King colluded with communists fell back to far right politicians, or could be put aside. When asked for his view on the matter, Reagan commented that "we'll know in 35 years time," in reference to the secret sections of King's FBI file. Reagan's rehearsed line offended many, who felt he ought to have explicitly exonerated King, but the incident illustrates that conservatives were forced to put the issue to one side in the wake of defeat.²³⁶ The Holiday was law and the nation had to define King's legacy, a task that soon proved every bit as complex as the fight for King Day. The next chapter examines the ideological tussle that commenced in the lead up to the first King Holiday.

²³⁴ Clines, "Reagan's Doubts," 7.

²³⁵ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 180.

²³⁶ Clines, "Reagan's Doubts," 7; Interview of Daniel Gergen (White House Communications Director), 6 March 1989 in Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 461-462, 797n58.

Chapter 2

Living the Dream: A Colour-Blind Holiday (1984-1986)

Justice is pictured blind and her daughter the Law, ought to at least to be color-blind.

Albion Tourgée, 'Brief of Plaintiff in Error'¹

On 2 November 1983, President Reagan signed the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday into law. His signature was greeted with a “softly sung” yet triumphant rendering of the old civil rights anthem ‘We Shall Overcome.’² Reagan’s advisers had suggested the signing ceremony ought to be held at a predominantly black school. Holiday supporters rejected that idea, however, concerned it would create a perception that King Day was a black celebration rather than one for all “the people of America and the world.”³ Instead, Coretta, Holiday advocates and politicians, including Vice President George H. W. Bush, attended the ceremony in the White House Rose Garden.⁴ The dispute over where to sign the Act signalled the beginning of a long battle to make King Day an integrated celebration. Each speaker in the Rose Garden revealed how they intended to remember King. Reagan expressed a new found admiration that emphasised a colour-blind attitude to race relations and the virtues of American democracy. He stated, “Dr. King had awakened something strong and true, a sense that true justice must be colorblind.” He portrayed the nation as responsive to King’s message and “as a democratic people, we can take pride in the knowledge that we Americans recognized a grave injustice and took action to correct it.” Reagan acknowledged that “traces of bigotry still mar America,” but downplayed the continued existence of racism and the fact that millions of whites had resisted King when alive. The President also framed his admiration for King within a Christian ethos by urging Americans to “rededicate ourselves to the Commandments he believed in and sought to live every day.”⁵

The President’s remarks concealed a history of conflict with King during the 1960s. As a conservative from California, Reagan electrified the 1964 Republican convention with an

¹ Albion W. Tourgée, “Brief of Plaintiff in Error,” in *Landmark Briefs and Arguments of the Supreme Court of the United States: Constitutional Law*, ed. Philip B. Kurland and Gerhard Casper (Washington D.C.: University Publication of America, 1975), 19; Mark Elliott, *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgée and the Quest for Racial Equality from the Civil War to Plessy v. Ferguson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 284.

² Bill Arthur, “Reagan Signs Bill Creating King Day: Ceremony Draws Prominent Blacks and Politicians,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 November 1983, 7.

³ Jocelyn Stewart, “20 Years Later, King Holiday Holds True to Its Purpose,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 2006, 1.

⁴ Robert Pear, “President, Signing Bill, Praises Dr. King,” *New York Times*, 3 November 1983, 28.

⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Bill Making the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. a National Holiday,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Ronald Reagan* (United States Government Printing Office, 1983), 1529-1530.

endorsement of Barry Goldwater, who vehemently opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁶ He also supported the Vietnam War, which earned a public rebuke from King.⁷ Not long after, on the day King was buried, Reagan claimed that his death was the culmination of a trend that had begun “when we began compromising with law and order and people started choosing which laws they’d break.” The implicit criticism of King’s activism, which centred on civil-disobedience against unjust laws, was clear.⁸

In contrast to that discord, the second prominent speaker in the Rose Garden, Coretta Scott King, depicted America as more democratic, just and peaceful because King “became her preeminent nonviolent commander.”⁹ Before the ceremony, she expressed her hope the new holiday would not only be a “black holiday,” but an integrated celebration. She thought King Day could be “a day of teaching nonviolent philosophy and strategy” and for “getting involved in nonviolent action for social and economic progress.”¹⁰ After the ceremony, in an editorial titled ‘Civil Rights: The Movement Moves,’ the *New York Times* portrayed King Day as part of a “pivotal transition” in an ongoing civil rights movement. The *Times* asserted that the Holiday conferred the “highest seal of public approval” on the movement and signified a “welcome milestone” in “the exercise” of civil rights. The editorial linked these civil rights to Jesse Jackson’s presidential candidacy, which demonstrated a “rising black capacity to claim a higher place on the national political agenda.”¹¹

The new Holiday, the tenth scheduled for the federal calendar, would be celebrated on the third Monday of every January, beginning in 1986. The third Monday of the year was the closest to King’s 15 January birthday.¹² Significantly, the Holiday legislation applied to federal employees only. State and local government employees, and private sector workers, had to gain their holiday from declarations by state governors, passage by state legislatures and agreements with employers. The official meaning of the new Holiday was unclear at first, since the Act did not formally define what it symbolised.¹³ In fact, the meaning of King Day was undefined in legislative terms until January 1984, when Representative Katie Hall proposed the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday

⁶ Lou Cannon, *Reagan*, (New York: Putnam, 1982), 107, 111.

⁷ King criticised Reagan’s support for the war: “When a Hollywood performer, lacking distinction even as an actor can become a leading war hawk candidate for the Presidency, only the irrationalities induced by a war psychosis can explain such a melancholy turn of events.” Martin Luther King Jr. “Domestic Impact of the War,” *African American Involvement in the Vietnam War: Speeches and Sounds*, http://www.aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_king03.html, accessed 5 May 2016.

⁸ Anthony Lewis, “The Real Reagan,” *New York Times*, 24 October 1983, 19.

⁹ Coretta Scott King, in Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Bill,” 1530.

¹⁰ Coretta Scott King, “How We Can Observe This Holiday,” *Washington Post*, 23 October 1983, C8.

¹¹ Editorial, “Civil Rights: The Movement Moves,” *New York Times*, 4 November 1983, 26.

¹² *An Act to Amend Title 5, United States Code, to Make the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. a Legal Public Holiday*, 98th Cong., 1st sess. (2 November 1983); Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence*: 24.

¹³ *An Act to Amend Title 5*.

Commission to define, organise and promote the Holiday.¹⁴ Hall told the House a commission would help the nation prepare a meaningful commemoration and Representative Garcia claimed it would ensure “appropriate ceremony, seriousness, and support” for King Day.¹⁵ Walter Fauntroy, an African American Democrat from Washington DC and former advisor to King, said the Commission involved no “sacrifice by American taxpayers” since it would receive no government funding.¹⁶ Congress then shaped the Holiday with a Commission Act that declared King Day “should serve as a time for Americans to reflect on the principles of racial equality and nonviolent social change espoused by Martin Luther King Jr.”¹⁷ The Commission’s purpose was to “coordinate efforts with Americans of diverse backgrounds and with private organizations in the first observance of the Federal legal holiday.”¹⁸ It would “encourage appropriate ceremonies and activities” across America and advise federal, state and local governments and private organisations on how to appropriately observe the Holiday. In essence, Congress established the Commission, approved by Reagan in August 1984, to provide ideological guidance and practical organisation. However, it received no federal funding and was due to disband in 1986.¹⁹

This chapter focuses on the Commission and its planning of a Holiday in honour of King. Both Reagan and the Commission quickly came to rely on King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech and this led to an inspirational, though not particularly substantial, celebration.²⁰ Such a focus occurred, in part, because Reagan wished to promote a colour-blind image of King in order to pursue his own conservative political agenda. Reagan did this with the appointment of black conservatives to the Commission. Though Coretta did not share Reagan’s motivations, she facilitated his agenda by minimising conflict situations and because she prioritised educating Americans about the philosophy of nonviolence, rather than pointing to existing racial inequalities.

From 1984 to 1986, the Commission planned the inaugural King Holiday. It organised an integrated celebration, albeit with an unspoken colour-blind emphasis. Though the colour-blind ideal had emerged as a liberal argument against racial segregation in the infamous *Plessy v Ferguson* 1896 Supreme Court decision, which paved the way for Jim Crow, by the 1980s it was a tenet for conservatives who wanted to downplay the need to actively redress racial inequality. Furthermore, conservatives used the colour-blind ideal to call for a winding back of civil rights movement gains. As Reagan co-opted King’s message, he appointed black conservatives to the

¹⁴ *An Act to Establish a Commission to Assist in the First Observance of the Federal Legal Holiday Honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 98th Cong., 2nd sess. (27 August 1984).

¹⁵ Katie Hall, House of Representatives, *Commission to Assist in the First Observance of the Federal Holiday Honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 98th Cong., 2nd sess., 24 July 1984, 20646-20647; Robert Garcia, *Commission to Assist*, House of Representatives, 1984, 20651.

¹⁶ Walter Fauntroy, *Commission to Assist*, House of Representatives, 1984, 20650; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 199.

¹⁷ *An Act to Establish a Commission*.

¹⁸ *An Act to Amend Title 5*.

¹⁹ *An Act to Establish a Commission*.

²⁰ The focus on the inspirational has been noted in other King memorials, see Bruyneel, “The King’s Body,” 75-108.

Commission who shaped Holiday planning to ensure King's radical challenge to economic inequality remained unacknowledged in official celebrations. These black conservatives, often selected for employment in other civil rights related agencies, propagated economic values that ran counter King's. They wanted to be integrated into, and to be successful within, a capitalist system that King believed oppressed African Americans.²¹ Their presence meant that the Commission sat awkwardly on an ideological divide, as they cherished values that jarred with those of civil rights veterans. However, if Coretta thought these advocates for capitalism could secure the Commission funding, she would have been disappointed as it received none from Congress and collected little from the business sector.

Previous literature about King Day has highlighted what is forgotten on the Holiday. Critiques suggest that King's radicalism as an activist and leader was obscured by a mild, glossy image that hindered the Holiday's ability to inspire social and political change. King's anti-militarism and condemnation of economic inequality were forgotten and he was portrayed as a mere liberal dreamer.²² This chapter explains how that happened. It examines the Commission's membership and the motivations of commissioners who, according to Coretta, were responsible for setting the tone of the Holiday.²³ This paper draws on minutes and transcripts of the Commission's meetings to offer an analysis of Holiday organising. It also analyses Coretta's speeches, as they offer the most comprehensive documentation of her thoughts and plans since the publication of her autobiography *My Life With Martin Luther King Jr.*²⁴ The chapter demonstrates that the Commission intended to create an inclusive Holiday designed to appeal to as many Americans as possible and that Coretta viewed King Day as an opportunity to further her husband's unfinished agenda. However, with the rise of mass conservatism, she needed to compromise in order to propagate King's legacy and encourage a nationwide celebration.²⁵

The Commission evolved from the King Center and absorbed its philosophy and language. Coretta encouraged the Commission because she wanted "large numbers" to participate in a "uniform celebration."²⁶ A federal employee on secondment to the King Center, Lloyd Davis,

²¹ Tourgée, "Brief of Plaintiff in Error," 19; Angela D. Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now?: Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 48-52.

²² Dyson, *April 4 1968*: xii.

²³ "King Holiday Commission Holds First Meeting, Names Chairperson, New Members," 5 October 1984, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence - Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Media Coverage/ Announcements and Press Releases/ October 1984-March 1987.

²⁴ Good biographies about Coretta have been authored, but they focus more on her work with the King Center than the Commission. Vivian, *Coretta*; McCarty, *Coretta Scott King*.

²⁵ For more on the rise of mass conservatism, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000) 324-474; Allitt, *The Conservatives*.

²⁶ Coretta Scott King, King Commission, "Proceedings," 8 April 1992, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 27-023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990 - May 1993, Folder: Transcript of Proceedings, April 1992 82.

suggested a commission to organise celebrations. According to Coretta, Davis “put the proposal together ... from which the real legislation was drawn after some amplification or revisions.”²⁷ Congress accepted Davis’s ideas and, according to Coretta, “put it in their language.”²⁸ An African American sociology graduate, Davis had studied for a Masters in Social and Industrial Relations at Loyola University. After founding the *Atlanta Inquirer* in 1960, which reported on “racial tensions, sit-ins, and protests,” he became a senior advisor to the federal Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. In the late 1970s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sent Davis to the King Center and by 1986-87 he was the Center’s Vice President for Government Affairs and International Affairs. He was later promoted to Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer positions.²⁹ Not only the Commission’s “architect,” Davis directed the King Center during most of the 1980s.³⁰ Coretta wanted him to serve as the Commission’s Executive Director, because he understood how “government works,” and in that role he became the pivotal organiser of the inaugural King Day.³¹ Significantly, Davis was also a Republican.³²

The Holiday presented an opportunity for national reflection on two important ideals: “racial equality” and “nonviolent social change.” No other space on the American calendar encouraged these values.³³ From these two defining concepts, Coretta and Davis embraced “nonviolent social change” as the prime focus of the Holiday. While “racial equality” was intrinsic, they were reluctant to make race the Holiday’s prime focus. With Coretta’s guidance, Davis and the Commission portrayed the Holiday as a day for all Americans. When “racial equality” was considered it was done so with an integrationist attitude, as the Commission sought to develop a holiday not easily stereotyped as black.

The first Holiday presented the Commission with an opportunity to shape the historical image of King and articulate his values. It did this with the presence of black conservatives as Commissioners. Coretta’s motivations differed from these conservatives: she had no desire to minimise the extent of entrenched racism, yet her insistence that King Day was not a black holiday

²⁷ King Commission, “Special Commission Meeting,” 23 May 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 7: Commission-Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: Special Commission Meeting/ May 1995, 86-87.

²⁸ Coretta Scott King, “Proceedings,” 8 April 1992, 82.

²⁹ Jocelyn Stewart, “Lloyd Davis, 79; A Principle Architect of Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 September 2007, B8; “Lloyd Davis, Proponent of King Holiday,” *Washington Post*, 19 September 2007, B7; King Commission, “‘A Dream Realised’, Annual Report,” 30 June 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005 Box 2: Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: Annual Report on the MLK, Jr. Federal Holiday (King Week “86”)/ January 1985-June 1986, 17; AP, “Lloyd Davis, 79, King Holiday Activist,” *New York Times*, 21 September 2007.

³⁰ Burchman “Proceedings,” 8 April 1992, 80; “Davis, Proponent of Holiday,” B7.

³¹ “Special Commission Meeting,” 23 May 1995, 85-86.

³² Davis wrote: “As a Republican, I am especially grateful for such leadership and support.” Lloyd Davis, “Letter to Robert H. Michel (House Minority Leader),” 13 March 1989, 97-0020, Box 4: Coretta Scott King Commission Chairperson: Incoming Correspondence, January 1990-September 1995, Folder: Coretta Scott King: Outgoing, March 1989.

³³ For an authoritative account of the American Calendar see Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*.

dovetailed with the Republican agenda of downplaying the need for ongoing civil rights initiatives. This meeting of divergent interests was possible not only due to Republican's wilful distortion of King's legacy, but because King himself had been a fluid figure, not easy to categorise. He was radical, but also "mainstream" – particularly at the height of his leadership in 1963-1964. Thus, in the 1980s he was not be the sole preserve of any one group, despite the protestations of writers who analyse the Holiday with a pure civil rights agenda in mind.

Commission Membership

The Commission held its first meeting on 28 September 1984, in the US Capitol. Coretta was "unanimously selected chairperson."³⁴ Its first responsibilities were to finalise the selection of commissioners, establish offices in Washington DC and Atlanta, and create a media-friendly message.³⁵ The President, Speaker of the House and President *pro tempore* of the Senate appointed four commissioners each from the Executive, House and Senate. These appointments ensured the President and Congress maintained a substantial influence on the Commission; considering Reagan's conservatism and the fact that the President *pro tempore* was former segregationist Strom Thurmond, their influence appears to validate liberal critiques that the Holiday was co-opted by conservatives.³⁶

The Commission Act stipulated there would be thirty-one Commissioners. These included Coretta, two additional King family members, and two representatives from the King Center. The King family was represented by Yolanda, the King's eldest child, and Christine King Farris, Martin's sister. Yolanda was twenty-nine, a playwright, actor and director of the Center's cultural affairs program.³⁷ King Farris held a BA in Economics and an MA in Education, and at the time was Vice Chair and Treasurer of the King Center.³⁸ The King Center appointed Andrew Young and Jesse Hill Jr. Young had once been "dubbed Martin's 'middle class' assistant" and the SCLC's "in-

³⁴ At the time, Coretta was President of the King Center, see "King Holiday Commission Holds First Meeting, Names Chairperson, New Members," 5 October 1984, 1.

³⁵ The Oversight Committee was suggested by Anne O'Connell, the secretary/treasurer, in King Corporation, "Meeting of the Directors of the Martin Luther King Jr Federal Holiday Corporation," 25 March 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, National Archives and Records Administration, Atlanta, 97-0008 Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984 - 1990, Folder: Commission/ Committee Meeting/ March 1985, 2.

³⁶ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 110; Thurmond had been a staunch segregationist, as indicated by his States Rights presidential candidacy in 1948. Elected to the Senate as a Democrat in 1954, he switched to Republican Party in 1964. "Strom Thurmond."

³⁷ Yolanda had a Bachelor degree in Theatre and African-American Studies and a Master of Fine Arts, from Smith College, Massachusetts, and New York University. She acted as Rosa Parks in *King*, a TV mini series about her father. Douglas Martin, "Yolanda King, 51, Actor and Dr. King's Daughter, Dies," *New York Times*, 17 May 2007; King Encyclopedia, "Yolanda King," King Institute, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_king_yolanda_denise_1955_2007/, accessed 4 September 2010.

³⁸ King Farris eventually became Associate Professor of Education at Spelman College, Atlanta. King Encyclopedia, "Christine King Farris," http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_farris_willie_christine_king_1927/, accessed 4 September 2010.

house conservative.”³⁹ A Congregational minister in an organisation dominated by Baptists, he supported Coretta’s quest to define a role apart from SCLC.⁴⁰ Young’s successful post-1968 career included election to the US House as a Georgia Democrat (1973-1977) and an appointment as US Ambassador to the UN by Carter. Like Davis, Young had also served as Vice President for International Affairs at the King Center.⁴¹ Jesse Hill Jr. was Chairman of the Board of Directors at the King Center, President of Atlanta Life Insurance Company and the first black President of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce. He had raised money for the movement during the 1950s and 1960s and funded voter registration drives in Georgia after 1965.⁴² Though Young was more involved in the day-to-day operations of the movement, both were moderate middle class civil rights advocates, and, like Yolanda and King Farris, neither represented the King the Radical.

Reagan appointed four commissioners: Clarence Pendleton, Rosslee Douglas, Lawrence Davenport and George W. Armstrong. All were black conservatives closely aligned with the Republican Party and eschewed the movement’s collectivist tradition. Pendleton, in particular, was hostile to “the liberal orthodoxy on civil rights.” In the 1970s, he headed the San Diego Urban League, a branch of the National Urban League civil rights group, but later renounced his self-described “bleeding-heart liberalism” to support Reagan’s 1980 presidential campaign. Pendleton was the only one of 150 Urban League officers to support Reagan and he was subsequently appointed Chairman of the Civil Rights Commission. The first African American to hold the position, he promoted individual rights over collective rights, in keeping with Reagan’s philosophy. Pendleton shocked the movement when he denounced programs of great significance to most civil rights activists: busing, affirmative action, and a raft of welfare programs. The Civil Rights Commission suffered a massive funding cut from \$11.6 million to \$7.5 million in 1986 during his tenure, as Congress reduced its financial commitment to the organisation.⁴³ As a result, Pendleton was greatly admired by fellow black conservatives at the *Lincoln Review*.⁴⁴

³⁹ Young, *An Easy Burden*: 515; Peter Ling, “Manhood at the SCLC,” in *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Peter Ling and Sharon Monteith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 125.

⁴⁰ Young, *An Easy Burden*: 279.

⁴¹ After resigning as ambassador, Young was subsequently elected to become Mayor of Atlanta (1981-1990), “Andrew J. Young, Jr.,” in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; “King Holiday Commission Holds First Meeting, Names Chairperson, New Members,” 5 October 1984.

⁴² “King Holiday Commission Holds First Meeting, Names Chairperson, New Members,” 5 October 1984, 2; Barton Myers, “Jesse Hill,” Georgia Humanities Council, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1918>, accessed 10 August 2015; Myers, “Jesse Hill”. Hill also assisted Young in his 1972 Congressional campaign, Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America*: 513.

⁴³ John T. McQuiston, “Clarence M. Pendleton, 57, Dies; Head of Civil Rights Commission,” *New York Times*, 6 June 1988, D12; Pendleton claimed to have once been a “liberal Democrat” and to have attended the March on Washington James Alexander Jr., “I Have a Dream: King is Assured of Major Place in World History,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1986, S12.

⁴⁴ J.A. Parker, “The Legacy of Clarence Pendleton,” *Lincoln Review* 8, no. 4 (1988): 1-8; Clarence M. Pendleton, “Affirmative Action and Individual Freedom,” *Lincoln Review* 7, no. 1 (1986): 23-25.

Reagan also appointed Rosslee Douglass, the first African American woman in his administration, to the Commission. Douglass headed the Office of Minority Economic Impact in the Department of Energy, a position made possible in part due to political connections with James B. Edwards, the Secretary of Energy and former Governor of South Carolina. It was no coincidence that her husband was a black Republican columnist, Earl Douglass, whose articles were published in the conservative *New Hampshire Union Leader*, which vociferously opposed the Holiday.⁴⁵ Lawrence Davenport was federal Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education when appointed to the King Commission.⁴⁶ He had been an Associate Director of ACTION (Domestic and Anti-Poverty Operations), Vice President for Development at the Tuskegee Institute (1972–74) and had worked for President Nixon on education councils.⁴⁷ And George W. Armstrong was Associate Director in the Office of Presidential Personnel in the White House and a director at the US Department of Health and Human Services.⁴⁸

While Reagan selected from the Republican dominated executive, the Commission Act required congressional appointments to be evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.⁴⁹ The House selected Katie Hall of Indiana and William H. Gray III of Pennsylvania, both African American Democrats, Ralph Regula of Ohio and James Courter of New Jersey, both white Republicans.⁵⁰ The later two had an inconsistent voting record on King Holiday legislation; both voted for the Monday and then Sunday amendments in 1979. The Senate selected Democrats Ted Kennedy and Ernest Hollings, of South Carolina, and Republicans Bob Dole of Kansas and Charles Mathias, who had helped draft the 1964 Civil Rights Act.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Once Earl Douglass died, William Loeb (owner of the *Union Leader* at the time) tried to find employment for Rosslee within the Reagan administration. The University of South Carolina, "Rosslee Green Douglas Papers, 1938-2003," (The University of South Carolina, 2004); "Remembering Earl Douglas," *Lincoln Review* 1, no. 2 (1979): 97-99.

⁴⁶ White House, "Nomination of Lawrence F. Davenport To Be an Assistant Secretary of Education," American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42905>, accessed 12 July 2013.

⁴⁷ For a discussion about the issues confronting African American appointees in the Reagan administration see, Timothy D. Schellhardt, "Minority Malaise," *Wall Street Journal*, 13 June 1983; The two education councils were the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education and on the National Advisory Council on Equality of Educational Opportunity, in White House, "Nomination of Lawrence F. Davenport To Be an Associate Director of ACTION," American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43725>, accessed 17 September 2009.

⁴⁸ Ronald Reagan, "Appointment of Two Members of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports," (The American Presidency Project, 7 July, 1986), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=37563&st=George+W.+Armstrong&st1=#axzz1qqh1ZTOF>, accessed 1 September 2015.

⁴⁹ *An Act to Establish a Commission*, 2.

⁵⁰ "Katie Hall," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; "William H. Gray III," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; Representative Hoyer recommended that Hall be added as a member of the Commission, Steny Hoyer *Commission to Assist*, House of Representatives, 1984, 20649; Biography of Ralph Regula at "Ralph S. Regula," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; Biography of James Courter "James A. Courter," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

⁵¹ Biography of Ted Kennedy "Edward Kennedy," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; Biography of Ernest Hollings "Ernest F. Hollings," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; Biography for Robert J Dole "Robert J. Dole," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; Adam Clymer, "Charles Mathias, Former US Senator, Dies at 87," *New York Times*, 25 January 2010, B18.

The remaining fourteen appointments were Commissioners-at-Large, drawn from a wider scope of American society. A Nominations Committee comprised of Davenport, Pendleton, Dole, Kennedy and King Farris suggested potential Commissioners-at-Large.⁵² An example of their considerations can be seen in discussions on 9 November 1984. After Pendleton suggested Coretta become the Commission's chairperson, discussion turned to the Commissioners-at-Large.⁵³ Coretta highlighted the need to appoint a broad range of people. She told the committee that "we could get strong criticism if we do not include Indians, Hispanics, Youths, Labor, Religious and Civil Rights groups – all of whom are cited in legislation, although not necessarily mandatory."⁵⁴ Another exchange, however, revealed the committee's conservative approach. When Coretta suggested Judy Goldsmith, President of the National Organization of Women, as a potential commissioner, Davenport opposed her appointment with the argument that "Goldsmith would not be accepted by some men." Davenport argued that "getting women in business, as opposed to a women's group, would be better."⁵⁵ Senator Dole, who did not attend, sent Sheila Bair to the meeting as his proxy. Bair suggested Dorothy Ridings of the League of Women Voters "would be more neutral," while Andrea Young, Kennedy's proxy, suggested the committee "look for a prominent woman in business," such as Rosalynn Carter. Pendleton then suggested businesswomen Barbara Proctor, Mary Kay and eventually Joan Kroc, of McDonald's, who the committee finally endorsed.⁵⁶ Though none was ultimately appointed, the discussion illustrates a tendency to avoid activists.

The Commissioners-at-Large who were eventually selected came from civil rights, labour, business, legal, ethnic, religious, education, sporting and entertainment backgrounds.⁵⁷ They included: Joseph Lowery, President of SCLC; Mario Obledo, President of the League of United Latin American Citizens (1983-1985); Murray H. Finley, President of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union of America and Peter V. Ueberroth, head of Major League Baseball.⁵⁸ At the pinnacle of his fame, having organised the profitable Los Angeles Olympics, *Time* magazine had

⁵² "King Holiday Commission Holds First Meeting, Names Chairperson, New Members," 5 October 1984, 2.

⁵³ Nominations Committee, "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0026, Box 10: Executive Director's Office, Commission Committee Files, 1984-1996/Native American Rights-Public Relations, Folder: Nominations Committee, 1.

⁵⁴ "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, 2.

⁵⁵ "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, 5.

⁵⁶ "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, 6.

⁵⁷ Other suggestions in the Nominations Committee meeting of 9 November included: Hall, Lowery, Findley, Futrell, Stevie Wonder, and Governor Thompson, "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, 5.

⁵⁸ King Commission, "Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Delivers Oath to Members of King Holiday Commission," 16 September 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005 Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence - Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Media Coverage/ Announcements and Press Releases/ October 1984-March 1987, 6; King Commission, "Press Release," 13 January 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005 Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence - Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Media Coverage/ Announcements and Press Releases/ October 1984-March 1987, 2; "Former LULAC President Receives Nation's Highest Civilian Award," 13 January 1998, LULAC, <http://www.lulac.net/advocacy/press/archive/obledo.html>, accessed 15 April 2015; Robert McG. Thomas Jr, "Murry H Finley, Labor Leader For Textile Workers, Dies at 73," *New York Times*, 2 August 1995, B11.

recently deemed Ueberroth its 'Man of the Year' (1984) for overseeing the Games.⁵⁹ The magazine characterised the "irrepressible high spirits of Ueberroth's free enterprise" as an embodiment of Reagan's America.⁶⁰ Three commissioners represented the legal profession: Dr Edward Hirsch Levi, a Republican and the first Jewish US Attorney General; Edward Jefferson, Chairman at DuPont chemical company; and Jewel LaFontant, an African American lawyer and first female Deputy Solicitor General (1973-1975). As a Republican, LaFontant seconded Nixon's nomination as the party's presidential candidate in 1960, though she had been a member of CORE and the NAACP in Chicago.⁶¹ The Commission's religious representatives were: Clair Randall, former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches (NCC); and James P. Shannon, a progressive Roman Catholic Bishop in the 1960s until he resigned in 1968 over *Humanae Vitae* (the encyclical that prohibited most birth control).⁶² Shannon went to Selma in 1965 at King's invitation and publically opposed the Vietnam War.⁶³ Mary H. Futrell, former President of the National Education Association (NEA),⁶⁴ Greg Moore (NAACP) and Stevie Wonder, who organised concerts to promote the Holiday, were also appointed. Finally, two more politicians completed the Commission: Representative Mickey Leland, a Democrat from Texas and Republican Jim R. Thompson, Governor of Illinois.⁶⁵ Thompson became Vice Chair of the Commission and in his capacity as Governor was responsible for organising state King commissions and lobbying

⁵⁹ "Press Release," 13 January 1985, 3; *Time* was impressed that he made a \$215 million profit from an event that was previously loss-making, Lance Morrow, "Feeling Proud Again," *Time*, 7 January 1985, 6.

⁶⁰ Morrow, "Feeling Proud Again," 6; likewise, Kathryn Jay writes "Ueberroth was widely celebrated as the living embodiment of a new ethos of capitalist success" in Kathryn Jay, *More Than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 181.

⁶¹ "Edward G. Jefferson, 84, Chief at DuPont, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 11 February, C13; "Press Release," 13 January 1985, 3; Eric Pace, "Jewel Lafontant-Mankarious, Lawyer and US Official, Dies," *New York Times*, 3 June 1997.

⁶² As early as 1978, the NCC supported the holiday, Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 287; "Reluctant Dissent: The James P. Shannon Story," <http://vimeo.com/22425610>, accessed 6 April 2012.

⁶³ Mary Rourke, "James Patrick Shannon, 82; Former Bishop Took Liberal Stances that Angered Vatican," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 September 2003; In the 1980s he was an executive director of General Mills Foundation and headed various philanthropic organisations, "Press Release," 13 January 1985, 3.

⁶⁴ "Mary Futrell," Institute for Public History, University of Virginia, <http://www.virginia.edu/publichistory/biographies/mf.html>, accessed 12 July 2013.

⁶⁵ Evidence that Leland was a commissioner derives from a 1985 letterhead that lists all commissioners, Coretta Scott King, "Letter to Len Biegel," 27 September 1985, 97-0026, Box 10: Commission Committee Files 1984-1996, Folder: Public Relations. There is also a 29 July 1985 meeting, where Leland's name is called during the role call of commissioners, King Commission, "Report of Proceedings," 27 June 1988, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, Folder: Business Meeting: Report of Proceedings/ June 1988, 3. For biographical information on Leland, see "George 'Mickey' Leland," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; Leland voted for the Monday and against the Sunday amendments in 1979.

recalcitrant states to establish a holiday.⁶⁶ Lastly, Coretta insisted that Lloyd Davis be appointed the Commission's Executive Director.⁶⁷

One other significant figure, though not a Commissioner, was HUD Secretary Samuel Pierce. He provided the Commission office space in Washington DC and administrative support.⁶⁸ Pierce, an African American and New York based lawyer who once defended the movement in *Sullivan v New York Times Co*, was the only black person appointed to Reagan's cabinet and only the fifth in history to serve in that capacity.⁶⁹ He was so passive he earned the sobriquet 'Silent Sam' and even Reagan failed to recognise his own cabinet member when they were once introduced.⁷⁰ Despite this, in a 'Behind the Scenes' report, Davis later acknowledged that "supreme credit" for "Federal involvement [in the Holiday] must go to" Pierce, who by his "own initiative became the Administration's coordinator for Federal support and involvement."⁷¹

The conspicuous absence of nearly all King's activist colleagues highlighted the Commission's moderate to conservative balance. Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, John Lewis and Hosea Williams were all left out. If anyone could have conveyed the essence of King's radicalism, it would have been these activists. Abernathy complained most bitterly about his exclusion.⁷² He was especially close to King and said, we "marched from Montgomery to Memphis ... and he died in my arms but I guess I wasn't good enough to be on the planning commission." Abernathy later asserted, "nobody was more qualified than me to serve" and thought he ought to "have been the top person on the Commission" instead of being "passed over for a bunch of people who never even marched a day with Dr. King." The Commission curtly replied, since it "had no money and only a short time ... we had to rely on people that, while they believed in what Dr. King stood for, had clout and constituencies." Jim Karantonis, director of the Commission's Washington office, stated that "appointment to the commission wasn't a reward for past service, it was a ticket for hard work." Some of the Commissioners had "raised the money and organised the support for us," which

⁶⁶ "Press Release," 13 January 1985, 1-3; "Meeting of the Directors of the Martin Luther King Jr Federal Holiday Corporation," 25 March 1985, 1; Davis noted, the "White House says we have to set up state commissions." He then suggested "Governor James Thompson (IL), and President, State Council of Governments would be a good person to narrow things down." "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, 5.

⁶⁷ Coretta suggested that Davis be the Executive Director, "Minutes of Federal Holiday Nominating Committee Meeting," 9 November 1984, 6.

⁶⁸ King Commission, "Summary Report of the Chairperson," 29 July 1985, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023 Box 1: Commission /Committee Meetings, May 1985-March 1986, Folder: Agenda/ Meeting/ Media Taping/ July 1985, 6.

⁶⁹ Sullivan was also implicated in an FBI plot to diminish King's influence and replace King as the movement leader, see Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.*: 104-106, 260n8; Victor Navasky, "The FBI's Wildest Dream," *The Nation* (1978): 716-718; Anthony Marro, "Lawyer is Identified as FBI's Candidate," *New York Times*, 10 June 1978, 8.

⁷⁰ AP, "Cabinet Aide Greeted by Reagan as 'Mayor'," *New York Times*, 19 June 1981, 17.

⁷¹ Lloyd Davis, "'Behind the Scenes' Report of the Staff Vice President for Government and International Affairs," 25 April 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0016, Box 1: Speeches, Guest Speakers and Biographical Data 1980 - 1990, Folder: Board of Directors Meeting, Behind the Scenes, 1.

⁷² Connie Green, "2 King Aides Visibly Absent From Activities," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 18 January 1986, 10.

justified their selection. This rebuttal not only derided Abernathy's loss of influence, but conveniently omitted the fact he had campaigned for the Holiday since the 1960s.⁷³ The most likely explanation for Abernathy's omission was the poor personal relations between him and Coretta.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, as the first Holiday loomed, the Commission's decision to exclude him seemed a public relations and ideological blunder.⁷⁵

One could argue the Commission's strength was a broad membership appointed for its ability to mobilise constituencies into celebration. The Commission's argument that organising civil rights marches required different skills from those needed to coordinate a Holiday may have been legitimate. The Holiday relied on symbolism, however, and without members who represented King's radical activism, as Abernathy did, there were few Commissioners capable of countering misappropriations of King's legacy. Though Republicans such as Mathias and Lafontant saw merit in liberal positions on race, they were not radical and the Commission's centrism became significant as Reagan attempted to redefine the debate about race relations away from collective rights to individual rights.

Reagan appointed black conservatives not only to the Commission, but also to his executive.⁷⁶ This appeared a beneficial result of the movement's assault on employment discrimination, yet many appointees vehemently disagreed with their civil rights movement predecessors and contemporaries. Therefore, while the influence of the movement came to fruition in the 1980s with the enhanced role of African Americans in national governance and administration, the right to hold diverse and even opposing views on civil rights issues led to conflict between black conservatives and black liberals. For conservatives, integration and the realisation of King's 'Dream' meant acceptance into the free market system and its attendant ideology – the power of the individual. For liberals, integration meant the achievement of economic and racial equality through more collective means. In this heated debate, King's image became a flashpoint.⁷⁷ Reagan's cohort of black conservatives voiced provocative and counterintuitive ideas that attacked a so-called "civil rights establishment." As Angela Dillard notes, black conservatives depicted this establishment as an alliance of liberal organisations like the NAACP and SCLC and they attempted to co-opt King's Dream. In essence, black conservatives accused liberals of betraying King's legacy and believed themselves the best hope of retrieving the Dream through "assimilation, individualism, and free-market capitalism." Black conservatives approved of the pre-

⁷³ AP, "Abernathy Feels Snubbed by National King Panel," *Anchorage Times*, 16 January 1986, 1, 8; "3 Million Petitions," 2.

⁷⁴ Young, *An Easy Burden*: 478-479.

⁷⁵ AP, "Abernathy Feels Snubbed," 1, 8.

⁷⁶ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 197-198; Michael L. Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 4.

⁷⁷ For a discussion on the appropriation of King by black conservatives and their selective use of his words, see Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals*: 85-89.

1965 movement, which they claimed espoused goals “within a limited constitutional framework.” The post-1965 movement, however, was too radical for their liking.⁷⁸ Dowd Hall similarly argues that the 1963 March on Washington “came at the height of what figures in the dominant narrative as the good, color-blind movement.”⁷⁹ On that occasion, the Old Right “had been on the wrong side of the revolution”, however the New Right had since “eschewed old-fashioned racism” and positioned “itself as the true inheritor of the civil rights legacy.” ‘Colour-blind’ conservatives focused on the movement’s “dominant narrative” and insisted that colour-blindness meant “the elimination of racial classifications and the establishment of formal equality before the law.” This “ideal of formal equality” eschewed affirmative action as reverse discrimination based on skin colour and conservatives used the rhetoric of King’s Dream to support their views.⁸⁰ Specifically they employed King’s line, “I have a Dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”⁸¹ Conservatives asserted this was proof King would have opposed affirmative action. If Republicans had to speak about the sixties in any manner less than derogatory, they preferred to refer to the years of 1960-1963, a period Bernard Von Bothmer labels as the “good sixties.” This period coincided with the presidency of John F. Kennedy (latter day conservatives respected his anti-communism), the peak of King’s fame as a nonviolent dreamer, and it preceded the counterculture movement. According to Von Bothmer, conservatives thought of 1964-1974 as the “bad sixties” – “a time of urban riots, antiwar protests ... crime, drug abuse, and social unrest.”⁸² These “bad sixties” happened to correspond with King’s radical years.

Reagan’s appointments to the Commission reflected his ‘colour-blind’ attitude towards race relations. As Michael L. Ondaatje illustrates, Reagan’s administration aligned itself with black conservatives who opposed civil rights movement solutions to ending racial discrimination.⁸³ These intellectuals advocated for economic self-help, free enterprise, neo-liberal social welfare and education reforms, and they attacked affirmative action.⁸⁴ Reagan appointed African Americans opposed to conventional civil rights wisdom to key positions. The abrasive Pendleton and Clarence Thomas, appointed to the Equal Opportunity Commission, are two prominent examples. Pendleton advised blacks who integrated to “learn the rules of white corporate society and play the game.” To

⁷⁸ Dillard, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner Now?*, 49, 62-63.

⁷⁹ Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement,” 1252.

⁸⁰ Hall defined the New Right as “an alliance of corporate power brokers, old-style conservative intellectuals, and ‘neoconservatives’ (disillusioned liberals and socialists turned Cold War hawks), in Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement,” 1236-1237.

⁸¹ Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 219.

⁸² Bernard Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties: The Use and Abuse of a Decade from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 2-3.

⁸³ It was not just intellectuals, as black businessman, “Ward Connerly, chose King’s birthday to announce the beginning of a nationwide crusade to destroy affirmation action,” Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals*: 85.

⁸⁴ Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals*: 1-9.

him, affirmative action was racist because, “you don’t make up for the past-you can only go forward.” When it came to civil rights, he mostly saw limitations: “civil rights laws won’t make you educated. They won’t make you rich. And they won’t make you socially acceptable. [They] will make you free.” But “in order to take advantage of the opportunities that come with freedom you have got to be prepared.”⁸⁵

The Lincoln Institute for Research and Education was founded to study policy affecting the black middle class and it supported black conservatives. It aimed to re-evaluate liberal “theories and programs” that had allegedly failed or “have been harmful to the long-range interest of blacks.” The Institute proposed “pro-private enterprise views on vital public policy issues to policy makers at the local, state and federal levels.”⁸⁶ The *Lincoln Review*, launched with the idea that blacks have “to break with the coalitions of the past,” became the Institute’s mouthpiece. It asserted that “black middle America is establishing a standard in all areas of our society which will serve as a ‘model’ to those who have not yet been motivated to compete in America’s economic, social and political society.”⁸⁷ One *Review* author, Dan Griswold, described King as “an incompetent administrator” and alleged, “more than once he appeared to have backed down” and lose “touch with the mainstream of the civil rights movement.” In contrast to liberals who argued King’s post-1965 years were vital, conservatives in the *Review* argued that his “last three years ... were not so successful.” Somewhat derisively, one writer noted that, “we can glimpse the world of King’s dream, where religion, nationality and race don’t separate men from the minds, hearts and hamburger stands of other men.”⁸⁸

Allitt writes that after 1965, conservatives thought, “America, ideally, should now have become a colorblind society.” President Johnson’s administration disrupted this expectation as “federal agencies began to interpret the laws in a color-conscious way, creating affirmative action programs to give preference to African Americans.” Conservatives denounced affirmative action for prioritising group rights over individual rights, which added to their suspicion that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was an outrageous attempt by the government to control the lives of citizens. Rather than march on Washington or redress discrimination with affirmative action, conservatives asserted that blacks would benefit most by earning the respect of whites, as Booker T. Washington once urged. They believed that “conservative economic reform would benefit the whole population, blacks included, far more than targeted efforts to aid them.”⁸⁹

Conservatives in the 1980s could not ignore King’s legacy, especially after the Holiday was declared, so they claimed as much of it as possible. Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig

⁸⁵ Juan Williams, “The Harsh Message for Blacks from Clarence Pendleton,” *Washington Post*, 12 June 1988, C07.

⁸⁶ Cover-notes, *Lincoln Review*, Vol 4 No. 2 Fall 1983.

⁸⁷ J.A. Parker, “A New Era,” *Lincoln Review* 1, no. 1 (1979): 2.

⁸⁸ Dan Griswold, “The Last Black Leader, Review of King: A Biography,” *Lincoln Review* 1, no. 3 (1979): 77-80.

⁸⁹ Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 192-194.

argue that Reagan shifted the civil rights debate to one of collective versus individual rights. Specifically, Reagan used “King’s words to argue that equality of opportunity in the US had already been accomplished” and “that individuals – rather than the government – now had to take responsibility” for further civil rights progress. Reagan depicted King and Rosa Parks in ways “that overlooked how they acted in concert with others ... to gain governmental or systemic change” and he de-emphasized remaining inequities and praised “individual efforts to secure civil rights, as if collective and/or institutional change were completely irrelevant.” His agenda included dismantling civil rights laws that King campaigned for and the “elimination of government intervention in employment, education, and other arenas.”⁹⁰ Bostdorff and Goldzwig contend that Reagan ascribed values to King that were anathema to his activism. The President’s appointments of black conservatives to the Commission support Bostdorff and Goldzwig’s argument. Each of these conservatives held federal positions concerned with civil rights, but they were closely aligned with the Republican Party and believed in its individualistic ethos. For these black conservatives, racial integration meant integration into the capitalist system and embracing the ideology of individualism, a system and ideology King consistently criticised.⁹¹

Theme Selection

The Commissioners were sworn in on 14 January 1985, a year before the first Holiday.⁹² Afterward, fourteen committees were established, each co-chaired by two Commissioners.⁹³ Of the fourteen, the two most important were the Executive Committee and the Management Oversight Committee. The Executive Committee, led by Coretta, would act on behalf of the Commission between major meetings.⁹⁴ The Oversight Committee was formed to act when the Executive Committee or full commission could not meet. Its members were Coretta Scott King, Thompson, Hill, Armstrong, Douglas, Regula, and Obledo. Its first duty was to organise staff for the Washington DC and Atlanta offices.⁹⁵ In a document titled ‘Implementing the Act’ more committees were proposed: Public Relations; National Special Events; Legislation; Fund Raising

⁹⁰ Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, “History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Reagan’s Rhetorical Legacy,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2005): 661, 671.

⁹¹ King Jr., “Drum Major Instinct,” 260-267; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 537-538, 708-709n14n20.

⁹² “Press Release,” 13 January 1985.

⁹³ King Corporation, “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Corporation,” 14 January 1985, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008, Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984 - 1990, Folder: Commission Meeting - January 1985, 1-6.

⁹⁴ King Commission, “Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission,” December 1984, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008 Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Legislative Mandate - December 1984, 10.

⁹⁵ The Oversight Committee was suggested by Anne O’Connell, the secretary/treasurer, in “Meeting of the Directors of the Martin Luther King Jr Federal Holiday Corporation,” 25 March 1985, 2.

and Education.⁹⁶ On 22 April, more committees were established in the following fields: civil and human rights; labour; entertainment; religion; business and industry.⁹⁷ This committee network mirrored the Commissioners areas of expertise and attempted to draw support for the Holiday through their contacts. A staff director, administrative officer, director for state programs and a research assistant needed to be hired, and a public relations specialist and liaison to the White House could also be seconded. A separate non-profit 501c corporation, with a membership almost identical to the Commission, was established to manage donations and finances.⁹⁸

Throughout 1985, Coretta's intentions for the Holiday became clear. She announced that Americans ought to fly the flag for the first Holiday to emphasise King's patriotism and asserted that King Day "should not be just a black holiday."⁹⁹ Coretta wanted to "revive the non-violent revolution" and "question established values." Her motives clearly differed from Reagan's, however Coretta's proclamation (often repeated) that the Holiday should not be a black holiday dovetailed with the President's public statements regarding 'colour-blindness' in public policy. Likewise, it was unclear how the Commission could encourage non-violent revolution without the inclusion of King's former activist colleagues.¹⁰⁰

With Coretta's guidance, in fact, the Commission went to considerable lengths to ensure that the Holiday conformed to traditional American themes. Dennis argues that successful national holidays in the US:

Express universal American themes (independence and national birth, liberty, democracy, opportunity), while they simultaneously (and without apparent contradiction) express the particular hopes and dreams of

⁹⁶ A Library committee was also proposed and the Legislation committee was established to "complement the Federal Holiday legislation," in "Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," December 1984, 10-12.

⁹⁷ Commissioner Davenport moved a motion to establish Sports committee, King Commission, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," 20 May 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008, Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Committee Meeting/ May 1985, 4; "Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," December 1984, 10-12; 24 June a federal agency and employee committee was established, King Commission, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," 24 June 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008, Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Committee (Commission) Meeting/ June 1985, 2.

⁹⁸ It is not always clear from the minutes where the Commission ends and where the Corporation begins. For example, the minutes of certain meetings are sometimes headed as Commission and Corporation meetings (e.g. 18 September and 24 October 1985; 2 January and 23 June 1986). The Commissioners were members of the corporation, however, so the meetings often covered issues of concern to both organisations.

⁹⁹ Charles Taylor, "Nation Pays Tribute to King; Holiday Commission Installed," *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 January 1985, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Karen Harris, "Commission Gives Pointers on Celebrating King Holiday," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 December 1985; Taylor, "Nation Pays Tribute," 1.

Americans both individually and within groups that are defined ethnically, religiously, racially, regionally, or by class or gender.¹⁰¹

The Commission sought to connect King to these themes and to link his legacy to the American Revolution, the Constitution and individualism, while simultaneously promoting the relatively new American ideals of racial integration and nonviolent social change. In part, this was to be facilitated by the selection of a promotional theme for the Holiday.

Two promotional themes for the inaugural Holiday were initially considered.¹⁰² The first, “Honoring America’s Drum Major for Justice,” was based on King’s ‘Drum Major Instinct’ sermon, a call to service and warning against egoism.¹⁰³ This theme highlighted King’s dedication to public service, but his tone was stern rather than inspiring and the sermon compares the US to the Roman Empire in its decline. King was scathing of US involvement in the Vietnam War and declared, “we are criminals” who have “committed more war crimes almost than any nation in the world.” He also denounced personal materialism and an economic culture that encouraged people to live beyond their means.¹⁰⁴ At a time when Reagan encouraged personal wealth creation, consumerism and remilitarisation, a theme derived from King’s anti-materialistic and anti-militaristic sermon, with an inherent critique of the Republican economic agenda, was politically unacceptable. Holiday planners likely did not want to draw attention to King’s controversial speeches, since opponents had so recently used his strident criticism of US involvement in the Vietnam War to allege King’s disloyalty. Furthermore, conservatives may have seen a celebration that drew attention to King’s post-1965 speeches as divisive. As Hansen argues, “Poverty and Northern segregation still existed in the early 1980s, and it was easier to ignore King’s speeches and campaigns on these issues than it was to admit that King would have been dissatisfied with the unfinished state of his crusades.”¹⁰⁵ To acknowledge the unfinished nature of King’s agenda, the Commission would have had to contradict the President, an unlikely scenario since many Commissioners were his allies. The second proposed theme was “Honouring America’s Pre-eminent Nonviolent Commander.” According to the Commission, this acknowledged that the US was more democratic and peaceful because King became its “nonviolent Commander.”¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, the Commission rejected both themes for reasons that remain opaque since no documentary record of any further debate exists. The search for a theme continued.

¹⁰¹ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 282.

¹⁰² “Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission,” December 1984.

¹⁰³ A traditional definition of a Drum Major is that of a marching band leader. King gave the sermon to his congregation on 4 February 1968 in the Ebenezer Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue, Atlanta. King refers to Jesus Christ to outline how the instinct can be transformed into the “good instinct” in King, “Drum Major Instinct,” 259-267.

¹⁰⁴ King, “Drum Major Instinct,” 259-265.

¹⁰⁵ Hansen, *The Dream*: 219.

¹⁰⁶ “Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission,” December 1984, 2.

On 11 February 1985, the Commission established a theme committee, chaired by Andrew Young.¹⁰⁷ An advertising executive, Albert Nellums, suggested they ought to establish a “theme to be followed” in subsequent years, “unique to this holiday and yet in keeping with the man we are honoring.”¹⁰⁸ In a meeting with Commissioners in March, Young explained that the theme should be concise and “susceptible of media development.” He outlined four new possibilities: “Continuing the American Dream”; “Continuing the American Revolution”; “Reconciliation”; and “Unity through Nonviolence.”¹⁰⁹ There is little archival material of the debate about these themes, yet it is worth examining each in order to further our understanding of how and why Holiday planners selected the theme they did.

“Continuing the American Dream,” brought to mind the most popular aspects of American culture. The American Dream was based on the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”¹¹⁰ King himself explained, in a commencement address at Lincoln University in 1961, that “America is essentially a Dream, a dream as yet unfulfilled. It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities and of all creeds can live together as brothers. The substance of the dream is expressed in” the “sublime words” of the Declaration of Independence.¹¹¹ Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* similarly defined the American Creed as based on the “dignity of the individual”, “fundamental equality of all men” and on “certain inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity.” The Creed was written not only in the Declaration, but the Preamble to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.¹¹² Popular understanding of the American Dream, however, did not always focus on substantial definitions. The American Dream, the “pursuit of happiness,” was also seen as a license to celebrate the “right to buy.” It signified a middle class consumer and ownership culture and the dream of upward mobility; the American Dream signified that a person had the right to improve their position in society, to get ahead and move up, with commercial success.¹¹³ Given that King criticized unchecked consumerism and excessive self-

¹⁰⁷ King Commission, “Resolutions Adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting,” 11 February 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008, Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Executive Committee Meeting/ February 1985, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Albert L. Nellum, “Memorandum from Albert Nellum,” 13 December 1984, 97-0023, Box 10: Commission Committee Files 1984-1996, Folder: Public Relations/4 of 5.

¹⁰⁹ King Corporation, “Meeting of the Directors of the Martin Luther King Jr Federal Holiday Corporation,” 25 March 1985, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008, Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Commission/Committee Meeting/ March 1985, 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 38.

¹¹¹ Martin Luther King Jr., “The American Dream,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 208.

¹¹² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), 3-4

¹¹³ Cullen, *The American Dream*: 38, 59-61, 121.

promotion, the American Dream was not the most appropriate theme.¹¹⁴ The Commission was tasked with developing a Holiday that reflected on King's values and the American Dream was not unique to him. King had his own 'Dream' and he had also become disenchanted with the 'American Dream,' and spoke of it less after 1963 due to his dismay at white America's resistance to change.¹¹⁵

"Continuing the American Revolution" was similarly problematic. It linked King to the Revolution and implied connection with Presidents Washington and Jefferson. True, King often compared the movement to the Revolution in order to inspire resistance to Jim Crow and legitimise the movement as a "revolution to 'get in' rather than to overthrow."¹¹⁶ This appropriately grand theme was also discarded. Independence Day already commemorated the Revolution and since King's reputation was, in part, founded on the notion he remedied the Revolution's failings on racial matters, the theme was insufficient. It was derivative and did not convey the fact that King acted in concert with the civil rights movement.¹¹⁷

The third suggestion, "Reconciliation" was more reflective in tone and more appropriate to King. In *Stride Towards Freedom*, King defined reconciliation as the endpoint of the nonviolent method. Nonviolence aimed to convert one's opponent, rather than inflict defeat, and such conversion would lead to "redemption and reconciliation" in the "beloved community." King believed black and white needed to reconcile to create this beloved community, so a theme based on the concept of reconciliation was in keeping with the Holiday's mandate. So was the fourth suggested theme, "Unity Through Nonviolence." King's philosophy of nonviolence had unity among "men" as the end goal and such a theme could facilitate the propagation of nonviolent philosophy.¹¹⁸ None of these, however, was selected.

After preliminary consultations with advertising agencies, the Theme Committee proposed a new possibility: "Living the Dream." On 22 April, the Executive Committee discussed the proposal and agreed to recommend it to the entire Commission.¹¹⁹ On 20 May, Coretta explained to the Commission that "Living the Dream" signified a celebration of King's "life and dream" and reaffirmed American ideals of freedom, justice, opportunity, love, family, the American spirit and

¹¹⁴ King "Drum Major Instinct," 259-267.

¹¹⁵ Cullen, *The American Dream*: 127.

¹¹⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 124; Martin Luther King Jr., "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," in *A Testament of Hope*, 58.

¹¹⁷ Nash, *Race and Revolution*: 25-56.

¹¹⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, (London: Gollancz, 1959), 96-102.

¹¹⁹ Martin Luther King Executive Committee, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, "Minutes of the Executive Committee," 22 April 1985, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008 Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Committee Meeting/April 1985, 2-3.

world peace.¹²⁰ Derived from King's most famous speech at the movement's high point in 1963, the Commission hoped the focus on the Dream would inspire celebration among the greatest number of Americans.¹²¹ The Commission liked Living the Dream because it suggested to Americans that they could bring King's Dream to life. It was "poignant" and evocative of "positive memories of ... King's life and times while conveying hope and vision" for the future.¹²² It is doubtful that any other of King's speeches or sermons would have had the same power because his 'Dream' speech was his most original and significant contribution to American oratory. His post-1965 speeches were problematic for the Commission: 'Beyond Vietnam' was loaded with scorching criticism of the US in Vietnam, the 'Drum Major' sermon was unpalatable to Reagan conservatives, and 'I See the Promised Land' exhibited a preoccupation with his own death. The later also announced economic boycotts against white financiers, Coca Cola and other companies – in direct contrast to the business friendly policies of the Reagan administration.¹²³ With Coretta's approval, Commissioner Claire Randall moved that "Living the Dream" be "adopted as the basic meaning" of the Holiday. Seconded by Cheryl Wallace (proxy for Hollings), the motion was enthusiastically carried.¹²⁴

Once the theme was agreed upon, the Commission moved swiftly to propagate its message. Coretta wrote to the Advertising Council and expressed concern that "Americans will not have the faintest idea of how to celebrate" the Holiday, nor would they know "who is supposed to celebrate" or how to celebrate.¹²⁵ The Commission sought the advice of a public relations firm, to meet the need to promote the message with a national advertising campaign.¹²⁶ Coretta wanted to convey to the public that 'Living the Dream' expressed the "message and inspiration Dr. King generated

¹²⁰ Coretta Scott King, in King Commission, "Summary Report of the Chairperson," 20 May 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008, Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990, Folder: Committee Meeting/ May 1985, 5-6.

¹²¹ A period dubbed as the 'good sixties' by Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 2.

¹²² King Commission, "Public Relations Plan of Action," 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0026 Box 10: Commission Committee Files 1984-1996, Folder: Public Relations/ 3 of 5, 4.

¹²³ Martin Luther King Jr., "A Time to Break Silence," in *A Testament of Hope*, 231-244; King Jr., "Drum Major Instinct."; Martin Luther King Jr., "I See the Promised Land," in *A Testament of Hope*, 279-286.

¹²⁴ Present at the meeting was Coretta, Lloyd Davis, Diana Aldridge of Gray and Company who reported on behalf of the Public Relations Committee, Commissioner Davenport, Ofield Dukes (a public relations counsellor), Mr Stacey Mobley, representing Commissioner Edward Jefferson (Business and Industry), Ms Raven Knighten, representing Vice-Chair Thompson (State Holiday Commissions), Theresa Cropper, representing Commissioner Wonder, Jim Karantonis, Ms Clayola Brown, Clifton Smith representing Mayor Barry, Regula, Davenport, Futrell, Mobley, King Farris and Coretta Scott King, in "Minutes of the Meeting of the Martin Luther King, Jr, Federal Holiday Commission," 20 May 1985, 4.

¹²⁵ Coretta Scott King, "Letter to Robert Keim," 29 August 1985, 97-0026, Box 10: Commission Committee Files 1984-1996, Folder: Public Relations/3 of 5.

¹²⁶ The four firms were Burson-Marsteller, Marc Apter Gray and Company, Rubicam and Ofield Dukes. The latter specialised in minority affairs, see King Commission, "Report of Proceedings," 20 May 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 1: Commission/ Committee Meetings/ May 1985-March 1986, Folder: Report of Proceedings/ May 1985, 40-41.

among Americans” and that the Holiday was for “people of all races, religions, classes, and stations in life [to] put aside their differences.”¹²⁷

The decision to focus on King’s Dream seems in hindsight an obvious one to make. Inspirational and media friendly, the theme portrayed King at the height of his popularity. As Eric J. Sundquist argues, King had become synonymous with the Dream. The theme also echoed the King Center’s mission to be a living memorial. With the decision made, the Holiday’s tone became clearer, although according to Sundquist there was no consensus at the time on what King’s Dream actually meant.¹²⁸ Yet, King’s unique Dream and contribution to American ideals was one in which all citizens can “live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by content of their character.” Religious tolerance was essential and King hoped “Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants” would join together.¹²⁹ Unlike his later speeches, the Dream speech sought to inspire the US to fulfil its creed.

It is critical to recognise that the Dream theme omitted key aspects of King’s philosophy. Hansen argues that excessive focus on the Dream in the 1980s limited acknowledgement of King’s legacy to “issues that were matters of history” and areas where there was general agreement that King’s work was complete. Thus, while most agreed that racial segregation was immoral, King’s anti-militarism and condemnation of economic inequality were ignored.¹³⁰ The theme glossed over the full scope of King’s activism, and academic concern about the misappropriation of his legacy is warranted.

Indeed, King’s own books illustrate what was omitted by a focus on the inspirational. In *Why We Can’t Wait*, for example, King advocated for a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged (modelled on the GI Bill) in order “to transform the conditions of Negro life.” He argued, “such a bold approach” would also help the white poor and precipitate a “decline in school dropouts, family breakups, crime rates, illegitimacy, swollen relief rolls and other social evils.”¹³¹ In *Where Do We Go From Here?* King outlined his vision of a national minimum wage, legislation to protect welfare and tenant union members, advocated for affirmative action, for a social and economic Bill of Rights, and government housing subsidies.¹³² King consistently prioritised social and economic equality and these constitute his unfinished agenda.¹³³

¹²⁷ Coretta Scott King, in “Summary Report of the Chairperson,” 20 May 1985, 5-6.

¹²⁸ Eric J. Sundquist, *King’s Dream: The Legacy of Martin Luther King’s I Have a Dream Speech* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 2-3.

¹²⁹ King Jr., “I Have a Dream,” 217.

¹³⁰ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 219.

¹³¹ King Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait*: 151.

¹³² King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 193-202; For an examination of how King used the concept of equality, see Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1997).

¹³³ Dyson, *I May Not Get There*; Vincent Harding, “Beyond Amnesia: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Future of America,” *The Journal of American History*.

It is accepted by academics that King reset his compass and entered a radical phase after 1965. He grappled with an unstable and changing political centre caused by the success of the civil rights movement, Johnson's faltering War on Poverty and the escalation of the Vietnam War. King struggled with the emergence of the Black Power Movement and the Black Panthers.¹³⁴ Though he understood the appeal of Black Power, he condemned it as a slogan with overtones of "black domination" that excluded others from the integrationist struggle.¹³⁵ Long a critic of free market economics, in the words of Adam Fairclough, King also "expressed his political beliefs far more frankly and explicitly in private than he did in public."¹³⁶ In a private letter to Coretta, King wrote "I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic." Though "not so opposed to capitalism that I have failed to see its relative merits," King thought "capitalism has outlived its usefulness," especially as it "brought about a system that takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes."¹³⁷ King had also professed concern "about unemployment, slums and economic insecurity," as early as 1948 when a student at Crozer College.¹³⁸ Alerted to economic injustice at school and university, these aspects of King's outlook were dormant during the fight for desegregation, but as William M. King argues, his revolutionary consciousness re-emerged after the Selma protests in 1965.¹³⁹ King expressed doubts about capitalism, but he clearly rejected Marxist materialism in favour of Christian spirituality.¹⁴⁰ He continued to advocate within the boundaries of the US Constitution (using it to support his campaigns), displayed reluctance to defy federal court orders, and eschewed the Black Nationalist preference for armed self defence.¹⁴¹ King always adhered to nonviolence, as it satisfied his intellectual quest to "eliminate social evil."¹⁴²

Inspired by Gandhi's Satyagraha, nonviolence provided the method through which King infused "the love ethic" into the black freedom struggle.¹⁴³ He cultivated nonviolence "as a way of life" and defined its six aspects: courage, understanding, resistance, suffering, *Agape* and justice.

¹³⁴ The Black Panthers were founded in October 1966 and took their emblem from the Lowndes County Freedom Organisation. For the Panthers ten point platform and program see Clayborne Carson et al., eds., *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* (New York: Viking, 1991), 345-347.

¹³⁵ King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 23-66 ("black domination," 31).

¹³⁶ Fairclough, "Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?," 302.

¹³⁷ Carson, *Martin's Dream*: 206.

¹³⁸ Carson, *Martin's Dream*: 180.

¹³⁹ William M. King, "The Reemerging Revolutionary Consciousness of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," *The Journal of Negro History* 71, no. 1/4 (1986).

¹⁴⁰ Fairclough, "Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?" 306.

¹⁴¹ Meier, "On the Role of Martin Luther King," 444.

¹⁴² King studied at Boston University for a PhD in theology and became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama. Branch, *Parting the Waters*: 90-93, 111-114.

¹⁴³ Satyagraha means truth force (satya is truth, agraha is force/firmness). Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth* (London: Penguin, 2001), 291-292; Eknath Easwaran, "Preface to the Vintage Spiritual Classics Edition," in *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne, *Spiritual Classics* (New York: Vintage, 2002), xxiv-xxvi; King joined Gandhi's method to Christ's, Matthew, "The Sermon on the Mount," in *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (London: HarperCollins Religious); Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958), 90-91.

Based on an active mind and spirit, nonviolence sought to secure an opponents' understanding by awakening their moral senses. King believed that the conversion of oppressors, not their defeat, to the cause of racial integration would enable redemption, reconciliation and the "creation of the beloved community," an interracial and ecumenical society. Nonviolent resisters targeted evil, rather than individuals who perpetrated evil, and they endured suffering without retaliation. Resisters rejected internal violence with a refusal to hate their opponents because, as King explained, that would "intensify the existence of hate in the universe." King asserted that only love could defeat violence and he used the Greek New Testament to explain three definitions of love: *Eros* (romantic love); *Philia* (friendship); and *Agape* (love of all others for their own sake). *Agape*, the foundation of King's faith in nonviolence, made no distinction between friend or enemy and recognised "all life is interrelated."¹⁴⁴ *Agape* enabled King to confront his adversaries while he acknowledged their shared humanity, and it underpinned his strategy to desegregate the United States. Cornell West argues *Agape* represented the radical King whose "fundamental motif was radical love."¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, "the radical King was neither Marxist nor communist," but understood "the role of class analysis in his focus on poor and working people." For West, "Radical love sits at the center of the radical King."¹⁴⁶

When the black citizens of Montgomery, Alabama, turned to King to lead its famous bus boycott, he responded by directing his first nonviolent campaign.¹⁴⁷ Combining his Christian faith with Gandhi's method, he and the citizens of Montgomery forged a template of protests, boycotts and court actions to racially integrate the city, then the South and the nation. King used this template in every civil rights campaign until his assassination. Though often successful, some historians challenge the efficacy of nonviolence. Tuck illustrates how violence in the form of race riots frequently "forced concessions from the state at least as often as did nonviolent demonstrations."¹⁴⁸ Likewise, controversial historian Thaddeus Russell in *A Renegade History of the United States* argues that violence in Birmingham prised open the segregated South and enabled King to portray himself as the moderate alternative to violence.¹⁴⁹

Fairclough perfectly illustrates the conundrum of defining King's radicalism. Although "King adopted a much more radical stance during the last two years of his life ... he never seemed to

¹⁴⁴ King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*: 96-101.

¹⁴⁵ West, *The Radical King*, xv.

¹⁴⁶ West, *The Radical King*, xiii, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence*: 108-145; Branch, *Parting the Waters*: 128-137.

¹⁴⁸ Tuck, *We Ain't What We Ought to Be*: 5.

¹⁴⁹ Thaddeus Russell, *A Renegade History of the United States* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 316-323; Thaddeus Russell, "Why I Got Fired From Teaching American History," *Huffington Post* (19 October 2010), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/thaddeus-russell/fired-teaching-american-history_b_767172.html, accessed 15 April 2015.

wander very far from the political mainstream.”¹⁵⁰ In a perceptive 1965 essay, August Meier likewise noted activists in the movement criticised King “for a tendency to accept compromise.” Meier argued CORE deserved credit for pioneering nonviolent direct action, twelve years before the Montgomery bus boycott, and that since 1960, SNCC was “the real spearhead of direct action.”¹⁵¹ Rivals claimed that King kept his arrests to a minimum and Meier observed that “Democratic presidents and their emissaries” influenced him. Though “ideologically committed to disobeying unjust laws and court orders,” he generally followed “a policy of not disobeying Federal Court orders.” In practice, King compromised with the “white bourgeois political and economic Establishment.” Meier judged him a “Conservative Militant” with a combination of “righteousness with respectability” as the foundation of his success.¹⁵² King provided “catharsis for the white listener” and gave “white men the feeling that he is their good friend, that he poses no threat to them.”¹⁵³ His compromises kept open the channel of communication between activists and the white community. Meier argued King made the “nonviolent direct action movement respectable” even though many activists thought ‘respectability’ would blunt the movement. However, Meier asserted that was necessary: “American history shows that for any reform movement to succeed, it must attain respectability. It must attract moderates, even conservatives to its ranks.”¹⁵⁴

Viewed as a moderate influence, or the movement’s “vital center,” as Meier claimed, the SCLC became “the most cautious, deliberate and ‘conservative’ of the direct action groups because of King’s leadership.” This enabled the SCLC to be a bridge between activists and “conservative civil rights groups” like the NAACP and the Urban League.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, “King would be neither respected nor respectable if there were not more militant activists on his left” such as CORE and SNCC.¹⁵⁶ Without them “King would appear ‘radical’ ... rather than ‘moderate’.”¹⁵⁷ Meier concluded that King did not dominate the movement or its activist wing and “in this context, traits that many activists criticize in King actually function not as sources of weakness, but as the foundations of his strength.”¹⁵⁸

Meier wrote in 1965, after Selma, and his words ring with criticism and insight. The essay’s timing was important for civil rights literature; it was published in the year that demarcated the end of the ‘classical’ civil rights movement and the rapid American escalation of the Vietnam War.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁰ Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?,” 301.

¹⁵¹ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 443, 447.

¹⁵² Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 443-444.

¹⁵³ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 446.

¹⁵⁴ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 448.

¹⁵⁵ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 449.

¹⁵⁶ SNCC satirically called King “De Lawd.” Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 450.

¹⁵⁷ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 449.

¹⁵⁸ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 454.

¹⁵⁹ The massive escalation of US fighting in the Vietnam War occurred in 1965-66 as President Johnson authorised a deployment of 431,000 soldiers by 1967. The Vietnamese Tet Offensive in 1968 is considered to be the turning point,

King still had to negotiate with forces similar to those he dealt with from 1955 to 1965 and he remained in the middle of the civil rights organisations, with the NAACP to his political right and SNCC to his political left. As SNCC evolved from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to the ironically termed “Non-Student Violent Non-Coordinating Committee” under the influence of Stokely Carmichael, King became more progressive.¹⁶⁰ However, he did not embrace the cultural Afro-centrism of Black Power, nor did he advocate socialisation of industry, as one would expect of a Marxist.¹⁶¹

For most of King’s public life, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* favourably portrayed him as a moderate, as did news magazines.¹⁶² Richard Lentz analysed depictions of King in *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *U.S. News & World Report* and argued they presented him as a useful symbol during the 1950s and the 1960s. At key moments, the magazines portrayed him as a centrist who steered between segregationists like Bull Conner in Birmingham and radicals like SNCC and CORE.¹⁶³ *Time* and *Newsweek* portrayed him as a “prophet of moderation” and even the conservative *U.S. News* found King useful “as a symbol when an alternative black leader or group looked more threatening.”¹⁶⁴ In comparison with SNCC, CORE, the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers, King seemed moderate.¹⁶⁵ Some conservatives denounced him for allegedly violating Christian tradition by refusing to submit to the law of the land. Yet, Allitt writes: “if white conservatives had found King unsettling, they were terrified of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and H. Rap Brown.”¹⁶⁶ King’s central position between radicals and conservatives in the black freedom struggle, therefore, left his political reputation open to interpretation and appropriation from either side.

King’s post-1965 activism, however, gained him a reputation among scholars as a radical. Garrow’s extensive research shows that away from public scrutiny King explored the ideas of democratic socialism.¹⁶⁷ At an SCLC retreat in Frogmore in November 1966, he displayed awareness that the legislative and judicial victories of the movement had not made much impact on the day-to-day lives of many blacks, particularly in northern urban ‘ghettos.’ King acknowledged that “something is wrong with capitalism” and that he was seeking to fundamentally change the economic status quo; he thought of using the phrase “socialized democrat” and described himself as

when much of American public opinion changed from support to opposition to the war. George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 4th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 171-223, 224-268, esp 181.

¹⁶⁰ Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 447-448.

¹⁶¹ Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 47-83.

¹⁶² Meier, “On the Role of Martin Luther King,” 453.

¹⁶³ Richard Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 103.

¹⁶⁴ Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King*: 31, 39.

¹⁶⁵ Lentz, *Symbols, the News Magazines, and Martin Luther King*: 102.

¹⁶⁶ Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 193.

¹⁶⁷ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 591-592, 716-717n19.

advocate of “democratic socialism.”¹⁶⁸ Such complexity makes King’s post-1965 politics difficult to define with certainty, especially since he died young, at thirty-nine years of age, during a transitional stage.¹⁶⁹

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At a King Day planning conference on 25 July 1985, Coretta stated that the “holiday must be substantive as well as symbolic.” It needed to teach “nonviolent philosophy and strategy” and encourage people to get “involved in nonviolent actions for social and economic progress.” She praised Gandhi for proving that revolution could occur without violence and, in a pivotal passage, asserted that the commemoration of her late husband could assist the US to “realize its true destiny as the global model for democracy, economic and social justice, and as the first nonviolent society in human history.”¹⁷⁰ Such a transformation required the dissemination of nonviolent philosophy and strategy, and the Holiday provided an “opportunity to get people, particularly young people, involved and committed.” She urged, “we must convince our young people that you don’t have to carry a gun to change history.”¹⁷¹ Coretta delivered a second speech on the same day during which she suggested, “no other holiday serves as a focal point for encouraging improved race relations. This holiday can help unify Americans in the spirit of Martin’s dream.” She demanded a “suspension of all governments [sic] of military patrols, war games and other maneuvers” on King Day. At a local and interpersonal level, Coretta said “we are asking for peace and nonviolence in our homes and families, in our relationships and in every aspects [sic] of our personal lives.”¹⁷² Coretta’s idealism led her to believe the Holiday might foster peace abroad and within the nation, and social change within American homes and neighbourhoods.

Such extraordinary idealism, while worthy, abutted difficult realities in American society. Therefore, it is possible to credibly argue that the Holiday could not achieve such wondrous results. Marable, for example, highlighted the dire state of Black America, which had deteriorated for many since King’s death. While Marable acknowledged that the US was “more thoroughly integrated in terms of race relations than at any previous point in its history,” he argued that the Reagan

¹⁶⁸ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 537-538, 708-709n14, 20; Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?,” 302.

¹⁶⁹ Tuck writes King is “invoked by all sides of the political spectrum.” Stephen Tuck, “King of All Nations,” *New York Times*, 15 January 2012.

¹⁷⁰ This speech was at Freedom Hall to a Planning conference for state Holiday representatives at 1pm, Coretta Scott King, “Lessons From the Past: Directions for the Future,” 25 July *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0004, Box 3: Speeches of Commission Chairperson Coretta Scott King, 1985 – 1995, Folder: Speeches, Remarks and Addresses by Coretta Scott King/ November 1983 - September 1985, 1, 5.

¹⁷¹ “Lessons From the Past: Directions for the Future,” 25 July 4.

¹⁷² Coretta Scott King, “The Meaning of the Holiday,” 25 July 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0004 Box 3: Speeches of Commission Chairperson Coretta Scott King, 1985-1995, Folder: Speeches, Remarks and Addresses by Coretta Scott King/ November 1983 - September 1985, 2-3.

administration mounted a massive assault on the interests of working class and poor black Americans. The abandonment of affirmative action in federal contracts for firms employing less than 250 people and the devaluing of federal civil rights agencies had such an enormous impact on African American communities, that Reagan “expanded poverty in America.”¹⁷³ Marable thought movement leaders’ beliefs that racial confrontation had been reduced after integration were flawed as desegregation contributed to the perception that “racial discrimination and conflict no longer existed.” A perception emerged that the movement had succeeded and thus, when black leaders spoke out against contemporary injustice “their complaints were easily dismissed as anachronistic, self serving rhetoric.” Though the civil rights movement vanquished Jim Crow, black and white Americans practised “interaction without understanding,” and embedded in the political economy was a “formidable system of racial domination” which employed the “language of fairness and equality while simultaneously eroding the gains achieved by blacks during the Second Reconstruction.”¹⁷⁴ Reagan’s administration communicated opposition to civil rights “without employing vulgar racist rhetoric or programs that specifically discriminated against blacks, Latinos or other racial minorities.” And Republicans attempted to cultivate the support of middle class African Americans such as Clarence Thomas, who had been vocal about the limitations of Democrats. Such middle class blacks reasoned that if Americans as a whole became ideologically conservative, pragmatic African Americans needed to “align themselves with the more influential bloc.”¹⁷⁵ Against these developments, what good was a Holiday for the African American community?

Preparing the First Holiday

It is worth looking at the Commission’s plans to understand what it hoped to achieve. Leading up to the Holiday there were commission meetings in May, June, July, September and October 1985. Coretta made important speeches at the National Press Club, the United Nations, and before Washington’s diplomatic corps. At the National Press Club on 18 September 1985, she explained that for the first time the US was “honouring a peacemaker, a messenger of nonviolence.” She emphasised that under King’s leadership “the greatest social change in the history of this country

¹⁷³ African American elected officials increased from 100 to 7,000 and African Americans in colleges and educational institutions quadrupled, and black business profitability increased. The Republican assault, however, consisted of weakening the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), destroying the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program, closing the National Consumer Co-operative Bank, reducing the Food Stamp program by \$2 billion, reducing the Guaranteed Student Loan program, and Child Nutrition and Neighbourhood Self Help programs, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 176-179, 182.

¹⁷⁴ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 185-187.

¹⁷⁵ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 194-197.

occurred.”¹⁷⁶ In order to propagate nonviolence, the Commission urged all Americans to sign a pledge card and commit to “Living the Dream” by:

Loving, not hating,
Showing understanding, not anger
Making peace, not war.¹⁷⁷

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. FEDERAL HOLIDAY COMMISSION

PLEDGE CARD

In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and work, I pledge to do everything that I can to make America and the world a place where equality and justice, freedom and peace will grow and flourish.

On January 20, 1986, I, _____
commit myself to living the dream by: _____ (Name)

**Loving, not hating,
Showing understanding, not anger,
Making peace, not war.**

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Figure 2: A 1986 Pledge Card – note that King appears white

The inculcation of a nonviolent philosophy was to occur with the pledge, and by teaching students about King and his philosophy. The Commission issued a booklet for teachers to help them conduct a ‘Learn-a-Bration’, that is “a celebration” where those involved talked “about the life of Dr. King and what he represented.” The Commission developed the ‘Learn-a-Bration’ for elementary, secondary and post-secondary students.¹⁷⁸ The Commission also attempted to introduce a new nomenclature to encourage Americans to use the language of nonviolence and requested “that participating military units not display arms during Holiday events.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Coretta Scott King, “Remarks by Coretta Scott King National Press Club Luncheon “ 18 September 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005 Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Speeches, Remarks and Addresses by Coretta Scott King, Nov 1983-Sept 1985, 3-4.

¹⁷⁷ “Remarks by Coretta Scott King National Press Club Luncheon “ 18 September 1985, 8-9.

¹⁷⁸ King Commission, “Meeting of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission (and Corporation),” 29 July 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 1: Commission/Committee Meetings, May 1985-March 1986, Folder: Agenda/ Meeting/ Media Taping/ July 1985, 38.

¹⁷⁹ King Commission, “Report of Proceedings,” 24 October 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 1: Executive Director’s Office, Commission/Committee Meetings, May

Coretta used her prominence and political influence to promote what the sociologist Amitai Etzioni describes as an integrative holiday, but one not exclusive to any group or ethnicity. It could integrate black and white Americans, and integrate nonviolence into the American way of life to inspire “social change.” There were obstacles, however, to the realisation of these goals. The pledge, for example, was focused mostly on peace, love and understanding. Race went unmentioned, except perhaps in oblique references to equality and justice. Furthermore, the image of King on the above pledge card, which was extensively reproduced on Commission publications, in fact appears to be more white than black, except for a shadow under his cheek and jaw. Even more significant, was the Reagan administration’s apathy, exhibited by a lack of funding. Some states were “apt to delegate” the Holiday “to the human relations committee” or Department on Black Cultural Affairs, which the Commission thought of as an indication the day was viewed as a “black holiday.” Sixteen states had not established state holidays at all.¹⁸⁰ Another obstacle to the Holiday’s ability to effect social change was it lasted only one day. The Holiday could highlight issues, however it would leave the US structurally unchanged, perhaps leaving only a temporary emotional effect on those already committed and sympathetic to the values it sought to encourage. Etzioni concedes that while holidays may be integrative and create “communal bonds” for some members of society, they may conversely “undermine the societal integration” of others.¹⁸¹ Not everyone may be, or indeed wish to be, integrated by the values espoused by Holiday advocates.

From May 1985, the Commission became concerned about funding as the limitations of organising a vast holiday with thousands, rather than millions, of dollars became apparent.¹⁸² Though it was known from the outset that Congress would not allocate money, there were high hopes the private sector would meet the Commission’s financial needs. By June, however, Coretta complained of the Commission’s “meagre funds” and noted that instead of receiving pro-bono offers of assistance from businesses, her organisation found little help.¹⁸³ Two major efforts were made to reach out to the private sector. Senator Dole and Edward Jefferson sent a letter to America’s two hundred most prominent CEOs and former Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and Jesse Hill Jr. sent another. Despite their efforts, by July they were floundering because “the response has not be [sic] overwhelming.” The Commission set out to raise one and a half million dollars, but “the money is not coming in as we hoped it would.”¹⁸⁴ By September, however, the finances had slightly improved. Dole and Jefferson’s efforts eventually raised \$123,000, though Hill

1985-March 1986 Folder: Federal Holiday Commission-Corporation, October 1985, 75-76; King Commission, “Report of Proceedings,” 24 June 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 1: Commission/Committee Meetings, May 1985-March 1986, Folder: Report of Proceedings/ June 1985, 13.

¹⁸⁰ “Report of Proceedings,” 20 May 1985, 56-58.

¹⁸¹ Etzioni, “Toward a Theory,” 57.

¹⁸² “Report of Proceedings,” 20 May 1985, 6.

¹⁸³ “Report of Proceedings,” 24 June 1985, 44-45, 95.

¹⁸⁴ “Meeting of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission (and Corporation),” 29 July 1985, 29.

and Katzenbach raised little. The Commission was also trying to come to an agreement with McDonald's and Kellogg's corporations for promotional purposes, and scheduled a business round table in order to solicit donations, but there was deep disappointment with the private sector's lack of generosity.¹⁸⁵ Business indifference seems not to be due to lack of money, as the government reduced corporate taxes to only 28 percent during the same period.¹⁸⁶

The Commission met regularly in Washington DC throughout 1985 to plan the Holiday.¹⁸⁷ Coretta began each meeting with a summary of recent activity and directed the meetings. Davis usually submitted a report on the practical steps being taken towards the Holiday and Commissioners, or their representatives, reported on their committee areas.¹⁸⁸ Aside from the poor fundraising,¹⁸⁹ another problem became apparent. Coretta noticed that attendance by most Commissioners was inconsistent and some cases they never bothered to attend at all. By June, Coretta expressed a wish to have "other Commissioners here that I think would be of some help."¹⁹⁰ The Commissioners who attended the most meetings were Coretta, Davenport, Douglass and Moore. Others who attended regularly included Thompson and Regula while the rest made very few or no appearances.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

Though black liberals in Congress proposed the establishment of the King Commission to organize the Holiday, this chapter argued that as Reagan appointed conservatives to the Commission liberal

¹⁸⁵ King Commission, "Report of Proceedings," 18 September 1985, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 1: Commission/ Committee Meetings, May 1985-March 1986, Folder: Report of Proceedings, September 1985, 12, 15; "Report of Proceedings," 24 June 1985, 11, 69-71.

¹⁸⁶ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 203.

¹⁸⁷ The meetings that occurred until January 1986 included: four Commission/Corporation meetings, one Commission only meeting, three Executive Committee meetings, one Oversight Committee meeting, and one Corporation Directors meeting. See Appendix II: 1986 List of Commissioners and Attendance.

¹⁸⁸ Meetings usually began with a prayer, discussion of previous minutes, roll call, statement by Coretta and then Davis, followed by discussions of issues and committee reports. For typical examples of meetings see "Report of Proceedings," 20 May 1985, 1-12; "Report of Proceedings," 24 June 1985, 1-20.

¹⁸⁹ Davenport was one of the first to exhibit concern with fundraising, see "Report of Proceedings," 20 May 1985, 21. However, this concern was more widespread and intensified in the later half of 1985, when it became apparent that business was not donating to the Commission in large amounts. Coretta complained of "meager funds" and spoke of the need for more commissioner participation, "Report of Proceedings," 24 June 1985, 95, 99; Commissioner Randall noted, "we are beginning to see the money is not coming in as we hoped it would." "Meeting of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission (and Corporation)," 29 July 1985, 29.

¹⁹⁰ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," 24 June 1985, 99.

¹⁹¹ The commissioners who attended the most meetings were: Coretta, who attended all; Davenport who attended six (he also sent a proxy for two); Douglass who attended seven; and Moore who attended seven meetings. The commissioners who attended regularly included Thompson and Regula. Those who made little effort included senators Dole and Kennedy, who sent proxies three and two times respectively. Lowery attended once, Obledo attended once and sent a proxy twice, and Finley sent a proxy three times. Those who never attended, but sent a regular proxy were Ueberroth, who sent a proxy four times, and Wonder, who sent a proxy five times. Those non commissioners who attended regularly included Davis (all), Karantonis (staff) eight times, Burchman three times and Brackley five times. Mayor Barry sent a representative three times. Those Commissioners who never attended were: Hall, Levi, Pendleton, Shannon, Armstrong and Courter. See Appendix II: 1986 List of Commissioners and Attendance.

and radical influences on the Holiday were curbed. As a result, the Holiday focused on King's inspirational message and though Coretta's motivations differed from the conservatives, her plans dovetailed with theirs. The appointment of Davis, a Republican, as the Commission's Executive Director position was astute, but Coretta and the Commission had little choice but to work with Reagan and within the constraint of poor funding. In that context, efforts to minimise confrontation and protest, and to downplay King's blackness, were made in order to attract a mass audience. That suited Reagan and enabled Coretta to concentrate on teaching nonviolent philosophy. However, while she wanted a substantial Holiday, leaving Abernathy and other activists off the Commission undermined that aim. Similarly, her assertion that the US could become the world's first nonviolent society was a claim of such enormous magnitude that, as will be seen, inevitably failed to live up to expectations.

Given the Commission's mandate to represent Congress, it is unsurprising there were ideological divisions. Ultimately, Coretta became its most influential force, based on her authority as King's widow and on her ability to shape his legacy with an authoritative interpretation of his philosophy. Though she often found the participation of commissioners to be inadequate, the Commission invented a King Holiday tradition.¹⁹² When planning the Holiday, the Commissioners realised they were setting the tone for future observances and hoped that the events and rituals established in the first Holiday would be carried forth in the future. Coretta hoped to inculcate nonviolence and Eskew argues she "deserves credit for the memorialization of the movement that propagates a new ideology of tolerance in America." She "codified the ritual whereby nonviolence would be recalled through ceremonies celebrating diversity in America."¹⁹³ Coretta hoped to bring the past alive and although impossible to resurrect King, it was possible to invoke his Dream and to work toward completion of his unfinished agenda. New rituals in the form of ecumenical services, a wreath laying ceremony, parades, and gestures like switching on car head lights and raising the flag were encouraged. There was a conscious attempt to provide "continuity with the past" on a "constructed and formally instituted" Holiday.¹⁹⁴ It is the first King Day celebrations and rituals, the attempted realisation of the Commission's plans that are the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁹² Hobsbawm defined, an "invented tradition" as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1; Matthew Dennis argues the Holiday was an invented tradition, as defined by Hobsbawm, Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 258.

¹⁹³ Eskew, "Coretta Scott King," 344.

¹⁹⁴ Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1.

Chapter 3

Let Freedom Ring: Celebrating in the Reagan Era (1986-1989)

On the day of atonement you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his family.

Leviticus 25:10

Celebrated on 20 January 1986, the first Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday occurred almost eighteen years after King's assassination.¹ His birthday had been observed annually in Atlanta since 1969 and the inaugural national Holiday maintained continuity with those previous commemorations. It also established the template for traditions beyond Atlanta and across the nation. This template, which mixed celebration and mourning, centred on Atlanta and brought national prominence to the South's foremost city. Furthermore, celebrations focused on King's Dream, which formed the fundamental basis for King Day during the entire Reagan period.

This chapter aims to analyse the first and subsequent King Holidays during Reagan's second term, from 1986-1989. It seeks to understand how the American people celebrated and is a study of the Commission's strategy to engage Americans with King's legacy. Most academic literature focuses on the fight for the Holiday, so little has been written about how Americans celebrated the occasion. Instead, civil rights literature about the 1980s has been pre-occupied with an attempt to understand the divergent fortunes of the black middle class and working class.² Knowing how King's legacy was shaped and co-opted by a conservative elite, however, develops our understanding of that era and how the civil rights movement was interpreted.

Throughout, this chapter argues that official Holiday rituals celebrated a narrow definition of King that emphasised fidelity to the Constitution and a philosophy of individualism. Poor financing, a lack of business support and a presidential administration that vigorously promoted conservatism forced the Commission to adopt such definitions. Rather than transform America into a nonviolent society, as Coretta hoped, the Commission attempted to create an uncontroversial, but popular, Holiday. After the inaugural King Day, for which only 14 percent of employers granted workers the day off, according to one survey, the Commission linked the Holiday to the upcoming Bicentennial of the American Constitution in an attempt to increase participation and add substance to

¹ William E. Schmidt, "Nation Pauses to Remember King, Led by a Huge Tribute in Atlanta," *New York Times*, 21 January 1986, B6.

² Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 182-194.

observances.³ Having failed to thwart the Holiday, conservatives could not ignore it. They fostered a new conservative orthodoxy that elevated the importance of King's pre-1965 activism by arguing that King "made his mark ... not by being a countercultural rebel" but "through his oratory and politics."⁴

Despite its co-option, however, Americans, especially African Americans, celebrated the Holiday enthusiastically in local ceremonies. These frequently emphasised King's connection with places and people, as civil rights veterans spoke of their personal experiences of working with or meeting him. In the South, the Holiday stimulated the installation of statues and the construction of memorials. And despite the Commission's formal discouragement of civil disobedience, activists used the Holiday to advance a progressive agenda that may not have been unwelcome to Coretta. Opposition to the Holiday, though no longer as near to the mainstream, remained fierce in some quarters and the Commission noticed celebrations were less integrated than it hoped.

Despite King's activism and that of his disciples, *de facto* racial segregation still existed in the US on a large scale. During the 1980s, the level of poverty increased and by the end of the decade thirty-three million Americans lived below the poverty line.⁵ Much of this poverty was racialised and segregation remained a reality for millions. Poor working class "African Americans lived in overwhelmingly segregated neighborhoods," cut off from good schools, employment opportunities and financial stability. Further, seventy-one percent of poor African Americans lived in poor inner-city neighbourhoods, separated from income creating labour markets. The flight of wealth from the inner-city contributed to a geographic and cultural separation of the poorer black working class from the black middle class, which made inner-city black neighbourhoods less economically diverse.⁶

In the context of residential segregation and economic inequality, bitter conflict between blacks and whites remained a reality in the mid-1980s as "hundreds of racially motivated acts of harassment and violence occurred throughout the country."⁷ In one infamous instance, a white man, Bernhard Goetz, shot four black youths on a New York subway train in 1984, fearing they were about to rob him. Goetz earned praise from some New Yorkers, as well as condemnation.⁸ Two

³ King Commission, "Living the Dream," Summer 1994, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, 10.

⁴ Adam Wolfson, "The Martin Luther King We Remember," *Public Interest* Summer, no. 152 (2003): 41; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, quoted at the beginning of Wolfson's article, is considered a neoconservative in Allitt, *The Conservatives*: 206.

⁵ William W. Goldsmith and Edward J. Blakely, *Seperate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 31; Mark Robert Rank, *Living on the Edge: The Realities of Welfare in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 12.

⁶ Goldsmith and Blakely, *Seperate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities*: 48, 51; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 188.

⁷ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 183.

⁸ Michael W. Brooks, *Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 190.

more infamous incidents shocked Americans: a racially motivated attack at Howard Beach in New York (December 1986); and Ku Klux Klan aggression in Forsyth County in Georgia (January 1987).⁹ The latter of these two incidents, as will be explained in this chapter, directly affected the King Holiday.

Marable thought the nation was more integrated during the 1980s than at any other time in its history. He added, however, that Americans practiced “interaction without understanding.”¹⁰ Attempts to bridge the racial divide were fraught and often met deep resistance as many conservative whites and white supremacists opposed King Day. The former opposed it passively, thinking of it as a black celebration and therefore not necessary to observe. Newspaper reports examined in this chapter confirm that blacks formed the majority of participants in Holiday celebrations, especially in the South where the majority of blacks lived. The fact that most businesses would remain open on King Day and that certain states refused to give their employees a day off, revealed the slow pace of acceptance for the Holiday. Furthermore, white supremacists, buoyed by a Klan resurgence, remained virulent in their opposition.¹¹ By the inaugural Holiday, racialised poverty, segregation and ethnic violence ensured that King’s agenda remained unfinished. This chapter therefore analyses how the guardians of King’s legacy attempted to promote his agenda in a divided nation.

A Festive Mood

In October 1985, the Commission announced the program for the first Holiday. ‘King Week’, already an annual festival in Atlanta, would precede King Day.¹² Events were scheduled from Sunday 12 January to 20 January 1986, beginning with an interfaith service in Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church on Auburn Avenue.¹³ The Commission planned more prestigious national events in Washington DC on 16 January and Atlanta on 20 January.¹⁴ They were designed to attract the attention of national leaders and included a congressional tribute, the unveiling of a King statue in the Capitol (16 January), and an official national parade on the Holiday. Other notable events included a tribute in the Georgia Capitol with the Governor (15 January), a ‘Salute to Greatness Dinner’, a symposium on world hunger (18 January) and the Conference Against Apartheid (19 January). On King Day, an ecumenical service, peace prize award, wreath laying

⁹ Robert D. McFadden, “Black Man Dies After Beating by Whites in Queens,” *New York Times*, 21 December 1986, 1; AP, “White Protesters Disrupt ‘Walk for Brotherhood’ in Georgia Town,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1987, 24.

¹⁰ Marable, *Race, Reform, Rebellion*, 182, 187.

¹¹ Marable, *Race, Reform, Rebellion*, 171-175.

¹² Peter Scott, “King Birthday Plans Taking Shape,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 2 January 1986, E9.

¹³ Reflecting the desire to reach as many Americans as possible, readings from the Upanishads, the Torah, the Gospel and Koran were heard, Pricilla Painton, “Big Bethel Celebrates Life of King in Sermon, Song,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 13 January 1986, 1.

¹⁴ “Summary Report of the Chairperson,” 29 July 1985, 6.

ceremony, national march and televised three-city night time concert were planned.¹⁵ In addition to the federal celebration, thirty-four states had a Holiday in 1986. Thirty-one used the third Monday in January, Delaware and Maryland celebrated on the 15 January and Indiana celebrated early on 31 December. The inaugural federal Holiday stimulated the creation of state King Holidays and eleven celebrated their first: California, Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin.¹⁶ To organise these state celebrations, the Commission formed a Committee on State Holidays, which helped establish state King Holiday commissions. By 1986, thirty-six states had such a commission.¹⁷

The Federal Commission wanted a popular, but non-commercial celebration.¹⁸ It offered Americans advice on how to honour King, from symbolic gestures to an ideological message. It stated the Holiday was to acknowledge family unity, freedom and the “good works of black Americans.” Citizens were advised to fly the national flag, sign the pledge of nonviolence and turn car headlights on (a traditional sign of mourning that people used on King’s birthday in 1969).¹⁹ Churches were encouraged to ring bells, hold interfaith services and conduct classes about King. The Commission also defined what was unacceptable: “advocacy of single issues, such as planned parenthood, specific forms of protest, such as civil disobedience, and personalized attacks on individuals, organisations, or nations” were discouraged.²⁰ Though these prohibitions may have ensured a controversy free and bipartisan Holiday, they gave credence to the critiques of liberals and the left that the inaugural King Day lacked substance.

On the Holiday, the congregation attending the ecumenical service in the Ebenezer Baptist Church included Vice President Bush, South African anti-apartheid activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rosa Parks, senators and representatives.²¹ The Commission invited Reagan, however he declined to attend.²² Coretta criticised Reagan for not attending: “It’s disappointing, to say the

¹⁵ A public schools teach-in day also occurred on 14 January, Pricilla Painton, “Fly the Flag: MLK Day Organizers Urge,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 29 October 1985, 17; “Report of Proceedings,” 24 June 1985, 10-14.

¹⁶ Painton and Pousner, “Across the Nation,” 1, 20.

¹⁷ Gov. James Tompson, John Carlin (Gov. of Kansas) and Willie Brown (Speaker of California General Assembly) were co-chairs of the Committee on State Holidays. Information on this committee is found in a copy/draft of the 1986 Annual Report. The letter of transmittal for the report is dated as 1984, but this is certainly a misprint. A timeline in the letter ends in January 1986. King Commission, “Report II,” 27 August 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Executive Correspondence (Report II)-August 1984, Ch V.

¹⁸ For example, though King Week began on 12 January there was a half time tribute to King at the Freedom Bowl football match on 11 January, Scott, “King Birthday Plans Taking Shape,” E9.

¹⁹ On King’s Birthday in 1969 in Atlanta “hundreds of automobiles and trucks moved with headlights burning, another symbol of tribute to Dr. King.” Wotten, “Memorial Center at Two Sites,” 30; On Black Solidarity Day (day before election day in 1969) driving with car headlights on was one ritual, Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power*: 35.

²⁰ Harris, “Commission Gives Pointers,” 1D; “The Meaning of the Holiday,” 25 July 1985, 2-3.

²¹ Howard Pousner, “National Leaders Pay Tribute to King,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 21 January 1986, 1.

²² “Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission,” 24 June 1985, 14; Coretta Scott King, “Letter to Ronald Reagan,” 8 November 1985, 97-0004, Box 3: Speeches of Commission Chairperson Coretta Scott King, 1985-1995, Folder: Speeches, Remarks and Addresses by Coretta Scott King, November 1983-September 1985.

least.”²³ In an indication of the Holiday’s potential to highlight contemporary political issues, Senator Kennedy reflected on “how much we miss” King “in our continuing effort to advance his cause” and end apartheid in South Africa. Likewise, Archbishop Tutu, the King Peace Prize winner, connected King’s legacy with the anti-apartheid fight.²⁴ At noon, excerpts of the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech were replayed on eight thousand radio stations across the nation and at the ecumenical service’s conclusion the congregation sang, ‘We Shall Overcome.’ Coretta and Bush then laid a wreath at King’s tomb,²⁵ one of the few signs of mourning on a day characterised as having a “festive mood.”²⁶ In the afternoon, the national march wound its way through Atlanta. Coretta led, followed by 280 groups, while an estimated 500,000 people watched from the sidelines.²⁷ Just as blacks ascertained the boundaries of their freedom with emancipation parades in the North during the eighteenth century, they did so again with a massive parade through Atlanta streets in the South.²⁸

Large numbers celebrated King Day in many places across the nation. Sixty thousand people marched in San Francisco, as did 10,000 down Martin Luther King Boulevard in Los Angeles.²⁹ Denver Colorado organised the “Martin Marade,” a combined march and parade with food for two thousand people.³⁰ And the *Arizona Republic* published a front page picture of five thousand people marching down a Phoenix street, past the state Capitol. It reported the scene was “reminiscent of the ‘60s, that heady era when protest was the norm” and that “the tone of the march was one of jubilation.” The *Republic* noted that marchers held banners that proclaimed: “Time to pause and honor the cause”; “Never forget what the King died for”; and “The dreamer slayed, but not the dream.”³¹

The Holiday received front page coverage in major newspapers across the nation. The *New York Times* featured a photograph of Bush, Coretta and Dexter Scott King laying the wreath at King’s tomb, with an article titled: ‘Nation Pauses to Remember King.’ The *Times* portrayed an idealised Holiday and reported that in Atlanta and “cities across the country church bells tolled,

²³ John Carman, “Reagan’s Response to Holiday Disappointing to Mrs. King,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 9 January 1986, B1.

²⁴ Pousner, “National Leaders,” 1.

²⁵ King Commission, “Report of Proceedings,” 4 March 1986, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 1: Commission/Committee Meetings, May 1985 - March 1986, Folder: Federal Holiday Commission, Proceedings-March 1986, 38-39. Schmidt, “Nation Pauses to Remember,” B6.

²⁶ Margaret Knox, “Festive Mood Marks King Events Around State,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 21 January 1986, 7.

²⁷ Schmidt, “Nation Pauses to Remember,” 1; Martin Luther King III, Desmond Tutu and Mayor Andrew Young also headed the parade, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 1.

²⁸ White, “‘It Was a Proud Day’,” 31.

²⁹ AP, “Parades, Protests Mark First King Holiday Observance,” *Clarion-Ledger*, 21 January 1986, 1.

³⁰ Painton and Pousner, “Across the Nation,” 20.

³¹ “The Fallen Honored,” *Arizona Republic*, 21 January 1986, 1; “5,000 March in Phoenix to Honor Memory of Fallen Civil-Rights Leader,” *Arizona Republic*, 21 January 1986, 2.

choirs sang and citizens paused to remember.”³² The *Washington Post* featured two front page articles focused on Atlanta and Memphis.³³ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* highlighted the ecumenical service and described its congregation as composed of “warriors from non-violent campaigns.”³⁴ The *Journal Constitution* reported that Atlanta was a “tale of two cities,” because the Holiday was observed with uneven enthusiasm. Downtown, where government employees worked, was empty and in the “black Southside,” cars were driven with headlights on out of respect. Beyond the Perimeter [a circular road around inner Atlanta], however, businesses remained open and few companies gave their employees the day off.³⁵ The unevenness of celebration that typified Atlanta can also be noted in other places, as can conflicts with existing holiday traditions, particularly in the South.

The South

Celebrations were widespread and enthusiastic across the South, where the majority of King’s activism took place and where most African Americans lived.³⁶ Civil rights memorials, like a seven-foot statute of King in Birmingham, Alabama, were unveiled and three hundred people gathered for a remembrance service at the Lorraine Motel, Memphis, where a saxophonist played ‘Amazing Grace’ on the balcony where King died.³⁷ The celebration of King’s life sometimes sat awkwardly with commemoration of his death, even with the best of intentions. The African American Mayor of Wabbaseka, George Barnes, led a “contingent of high school students and citizens on a 125 mile bus trip to the Lorraine Hotel.” With unintended irony he said, “I thought it would be nice to go up to Memphis and see where he was slain.” Barnes reasoned, most people aged under twenty did not know much about King so to “stand on the site where he was killed, would be not only a tribute to Dr. King but also a tribute to the children. It will help keep the dream alive.”³⁸

The Holiday created other unusual situations. In Montgomery, Alabama, five hundred African Americans gathered to hear a reading of Governor George Wallace’s Holiday proclamation.³⁹

³² Schmidt, “Nation Pauses to Remember,” 1.

³³ The page one photo was of Coretta, Martin Luther King III, Tutu and Andrew Young, Courtland Milloy, “At a Seedy Motel in Memphis, A Dream Goes Unrealized,” *Washington Post*, 21 January 1986, 1; Kathy Sawyer, “National Celebration Marked by Calls for Apartheid’s End,” *Washington Post*, 21 January 1986, 1.

³⁴ Pousner, “National Leaders,” 1.

³⁵ Jim Auchmuty and Connie Green, “A Sampling of How New Holiday Was, or Was Not, Celebrated,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 21 January 1986, 7.

³⁶ The majority of African Americans (53 percent of 30 million) lived in the South. The fewest (9 percent), lived in the West, while 19 percent lived in the Northeast and Midwest, respectively. US Census Bureau, “Census Questionnaire Content, 1990 CQC-4,” <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cqc/cqc4.pdf>, accessed 2 May 2016, 2.

³⁷ Courtland Milloy, “Memphis Motel Where King Died Eludes Conversion to a Memorial,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1986, 6; Auchmuty and Green, “A Sampling,” 7.

³⁸ Painton and Pousner, “Across the Nation,” 20; For identity of Barnes, see Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, *Black Elected Officials: A National Roster 1990* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1991), 65.

³⁹ Auchmuty and Green, “A Sampling,” 7.

Wallace, once a virulent white supremacist, had recanted his racism after enlargement of the black franchise. He sought forgiveness for his racism and won 90 percent of the African American vote in Alabama's 1982 election.⁴⁰ Even if Wallace had been merely opportunistic, his public conversion revealed the extent of change in the South after the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black voter enrolment increased dramatically; in Alabama, for example, it rose from 19.3 percent to 61.3 percent of blacks between 1965 and 1969.⁴¹ White politicians ignored black voters at their peril and those who heeded black concerns were more likely to retain power. In Selma – site of Bloody Sunday – two white city councillors joined black councillors to vote in favour of the Holiday. The council approved a candlelight march to the famous Edmund Pettus Bridge and one councillor affirmed the affinity many felt with King, by saying, “I did not know Lincoln, Lee or Washington,” however “I did know Dr. King.”⁴² In Mississippi, tribute was paid to King at the Old Capitol Museum, an act unthinkable a generation earlier.⁴³ Thousands also gathered in Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham, to witness the unveiling of the aforementioned King statue and to hear A.G. Gaston, a prominent black businessman, urge the City of Birmingham to build a civil rights museum. The City also sponsored a march to City Hall, which had closed, along with schools, banks and the courthouse, out of respect for King.⁴⁴

Generally, the Holiday received favourable coverage in southern newspapers from Alabama, North Carolina and Mississippi. These papers had more than likely gained an increasingly integrated readership as southern blacks exercised their voting rights.⁴⁵ As such, the papers praised King's Dream while wrestling with the mythology of Robert E. Lee. The papers frequently reproduced King's image and discussed the meaning of his life and inclusive message. A *Birmingham News* editorial claimed King Day to be more than an occasion “for black Americans. It is a day on which we all can celebrate the ways in which ... King ... made us more free.”⁴⁶ Typical of many articles that emphasised a local connection to King, the *Birmingham News* recalled the movement's local influence and King's ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail.’⁴⁷ The *Charlotte Observer* published a map that highlighted where King had been at significant moments in the Carolinas’

⁴⁰ Wallace sought personal forgiveness from John Lewis, E.D. Nixon, Ralph Abernathy and Coretta Scott King, Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 461; Wendell Rawls Jr., “Wallace Cast in Unfamiliar Role as the Liberal in Alabama Governor Race,” *New York Times*, 16 October 1982, 30; Carter, *The Politics of Rage*: 13, 463-4.

⁴¹ Lawson, *Black Ballots*: 331, 341.

⁴² Frank Sikora, “‘Moving Forward,’ Council OKs King Holiday for Selma,” *Birmingham News*, 14 January 1986, 4.

⁴³ Jimmie Gates, “Mississippi Children Lack Knowledge of King,” *Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, 19 January 1986, B1.

⁴⁴ “City to Unveil King Statue Monday,” *Birmingham News*, 19 January 1986, 10; Dave White, “Parade of Pride Fills Streets Once Walked in Fear,” *Birmingham News*, 21 January 1986, 1; Gaston was a long time movement supporter and “one of Alabama's few black millionaires” in the 1960s, Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989), 240.

⁴⁵ Lawson, *Black Ballots*: 329-352.

⁴⁶ Editorial, “King Made Us All More Free,” *Birmingham News*, 15 January 1986, 14.

⁴⁷ Dave White, “From Past Images of Turmoil, King Rest In Many Memories,” *Birmingham News*, 19 January 1986, 1, 8.

civil rights movement history.⁴⁸ Mississippi's *Clarion Ledger* editorialised that he "did, perhaps, more than any other to prick the conscience of America on the issue of race" and acknowledged "this state was such a major battlefield in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s."⁴⁹ In a typical portrayal of King at this time, though not typical of the South during his life, the editorial reflected that his "was a voice of moderation and reason in a time of high emotion." Also common was the reflection that "the nation, and particularly Mississippi, have made great strides toward fulfilling those dreams, although there remains much to be done." The Holiday "will serve as an annual reminder of how far we've come, and how far we have to go."⁵⁰

Those who wanted to celebrate King but were not permitted sometimes defied authorities. One common manifestation was school absenteeism, both in Georgia and beyond. In Clayton County, Atlanta, absenteeism was double the usual rate, particularly in areas of more black students. At Plaquemines Parish High, Louisiana, the entire student body of 485 black students was absent, a notable act of defiance as the school board refused to recognise the Holiday.⁵¹ Since the student body was entirely black, even the assistant principal thought their protest "justified." Birmingham too noted a high rate of school absenteeism and in the West, thirty students in Portland, Oregon began a five day fast to protest racial discrimination.⁵² Some civil rights activists also sought to use the day as a platform for dissent. Joseph Lowery, President of the SCLC, urged passage of legislation for housing, employment and training initiatives, as well as nuclear disarmament.⁵³ Most newspaper headlines emphasised the Holiday's celebrations, however some indicated awareness the day could enable protest. The Mississippi *Clarion-Ledger*, for example, headlined an article with 'Parades, Protests Mark first King Holiday Observance.'⁵⁴ Not all protests, however, were liberal in orientation.

Robert E. Lee and Southern Holidays

The new Holiday did not sit comfortably with southern holiday traditions. Alabama and Arkansas awkwardly joined King's birthday to that of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, and Virginia established a King-Lee-Jackson Day, which also commemorated Confederate General Thomas

⁴⁸ John Minter, "King's Dream: His Message of Pride Inspires Charlotteans," *Charlotte Observer*, 12 January 1986, 1, 12; Al Phillips, "Martin Luther King in the Carolinas," *Charlotte Observer*, 12 January 1986, 1.

⁴⁹ Editorial, "Prophet of Change: King Holiday Serves as Annual Reminder," *Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, 19 January 1986, 4G.

⁵⁰ Lee Byrd, "King's Vision Gave Hope to Millions," *Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, 19 January 1986, 1G.

⁵¹ Auchmutey and Green, "A Sampling " 7; see also Schmidt, "Nation Pauses to Remember," 1.

⁵² Mike Oliver and Patsy Place, "Absences at Area School's Attributed to King Holiday," *Birmingham News*, 21 January 1986, 14; AP, "Parades, Protests," 1.

⁵³ Dave White, "Lowery Cites Threats to Progress in Civil Rights," *Birmingham News*, 21 January 1986, 1.

⁵⁴ AP, "Parades, Protests," 1.

“Stonewall” Jackson.⁵⁵ Other states had odd arrangements. Louisiana celebrated on the third Monday in January, but only in even-numbered years. In odd-numbered years, the governor could trade King’s birthday for Huey Long’s, Confederate Memorial Day, or another optional holiday. In South Carolina, state employees could choose to take King’s birthday, Confederate Memorial Day, Lee’s birthday or that of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Kentucky established a Monday King Holiday, but only for the “legislature and employees of the state’s judiciary system,” while Memphis confronted a different dilemma. The 4 April had been a municipal holiday in memory of King’s assassination, but eventually the city followed the federal lead and declared the third Monday in January an official holiday.⁵⁶

Despite extensive celebrations, however, hostility greeted the Holiday from some not unexpected quarters. North Carolina’s White Patriots Party joined with white supremacists from Georgia, Alabama and Florida, to form a 325 person march through Raleigh, North Carolina. Beneath dozens of Confederate flags and behind a massive banner that exclaimed, “Abolish the King Holiday”, white supremacists rallied at the state Confederate monument.⁵⁷ Glenn Miller, their leader, insisted they would not honour a “black communist,” especially if decreed by the “Jew-ruled federal government.”⁵⁸ The Ku Klux Klan also marched in Pulaski, Tennessee, where the Klan was founded. Their anti-King march attracted an estimated two thousand spectators, plus fifty black counterdemonstrators, and as usual they accused King of being a communist.⁵⁹

The rallying point for these opponents was the Robert E. Lee Holiday. Falling on 19 January, the former Confederate general’s birthday closely followed King’s and in some southern states both men were scheduled to be honoured on the same day.⁶⁰ Among whites, Lee’s legacy in the South had been as highly esteemed as King’s was among blacks, yet both stood at odds along the colour line. Advocates from both sides met this coincidence with trepidation. The Sons of Confederate Veterans worried the King Holiday would overshadow Lee’s birthday, while on the other hand, a civil rights activist complained that “we did not want to share the day and we certainly did not want to share it with a man who did so much to keep the Confederacy alive.” Realising that civil rights memorialisation challenged Confederate memorialisation, the Sons of Confederate Veterans clung to the vestiges of their preferred history by praising Lee’s “leadership,” “integrity,” “character,” and

⁵⁵ Virginia’s contradictory celebration lasted until 2001, when the state created a Holiday devoted solely to King. Morello, “Out of the Confederacy’s Shadow,” 1.

⁵⁶ Painton and Pousner, “Across the Nation,” 1, 20.

⁵⁷ Bruce Henderson, “White Supremacists Across South Gather,” *Charlotte Observer*, 19 January 1986, 2C.

⁵⁸ Hunter James, “Racists March to Protest Day Honoring King,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1986, 20.

⁵⁹ Dana Beyerle, “Klan Rallies in Tenn. to Protest King Holiday,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1986, 3; The march verified “the growing national influence of White Patriots’ leader Glenn Miller of Angier,” Henderson, “White Supremacists,” 2C.

⁶⁰ James, “Racists March,” 20.

military prowess. They intended to mark Lee's birthday with a dinner, but planned no integrated activities and they celebrated their hero apart from King Holiday celebrants.⁶¹

Southern newspapers that favoured the King Holiday were conflicted by the King-Lee dilemma. They agreed King deserved adulation, but were reluctant to abandon the Lee mythology. Like the Sons, the *Birmingham News* defined Lee in sympathetic terms as a "gentleman's gentleman," praised his temperament and depicted him as a "great conciliator."⁶² When Mississippi attempted to establish a King Holiday, the *Clarion-Ledger* grappled with the fact that the state had honoured Lee since 1910. The paper published an editorial, 'King-Lee Salute', that asserted both men could be celebrated on the same day. It advocated for a state King Holiday since "the ardor with which Mississippians marked the national holiday honouring King ... is ample evidence of the place King has in the hearts and aspirations of so many citizens of the state." Furthermore, since Mississippi "has the largest percentage of black residents of any of the 50 states" it made sense. However, since "people of other races as well as ... blacks" honoured King, a "double designation" for him and Lee may not be a "huge contradiction." The editorial reasoned that Lee "was neither Southern firebrand nor slave owner" and had devoted himself "to the reconciliation of Northerners and Southerners." Therefore, "a co-celebration would tend to draw the races closer together, giving them a common rallying point."⁶³ Less sympathetically, Bennie Ivory, the African American managing editor of the *Jackson Daily News* (published within the *Clarion Ledger*), noted Lee fought a violent war to overthrow the federal government and lost, whereas King fought for peace using nonviolence, with success. Ivory noted that Mississippi already had two other holidays dedicated to confederate heroes: Confederate Memorial Day and Jefferson Davis' birthday.⁶⁴

The defence of Lee's reputation occurred as white supremacists fought a bitter battle to preserve Confederate symbols and a segregated memorial landscape. As Brundage notes, "white southerners who venerate the Confederacy have responded to attacks on Confederate symbols by portraying themselves as an embattled minority whose heritage has been unfairly and illegally suppressed."⁶⁵ Confederate flags, statues, songs and commemorative days were under threat of repudiation, so the Southern National Party (SNP) organised a petition, in the *Clarion Ledger*, to protest banishment of the Confederate battle flag from the University of Mississippi. The SNP cited the University of Southern Mississippi's ban of the tune Dixie as evidence of southern identity's

⁶¹ Rick Bragg, "King, Lee Followers Will Share a Holiday," *Birmingham News*, 18 January 1986, 1, 8.

⁶² Bragg, "King, Lee Followers Will Share," 1, 8; Editorial, "Remembering King," *Birmingham News*, 19 January 1987; Editorial, "The Great Conciliator," *Birmingham News*, 19 January 1987.

⁶³ Editorial, "King-Lee Salute: Why Not Declare a Joint State Holiday," *Clarion-Ledger*, 22 January 1986, 6; Jimmie Gates, "Monday is King Day Despite State Calendar: Combined Holiday for Lee and Rights Leader Still Sought," *Clarion-Ledger*, 19 January 1986, 1.

⁶⁴ Confederate Memorial Day was on the last Monday in April; Jefferson Davis' birthday celebration on the first Monday of June. Bennie Ivory, "A State Holiday Honoring King Wouldn't Cost Mississippi a Cent," *Clarion-Ledger*, 19 January 1986, G1.

⁶⁵ Brundage, *The Southern Past*: 334.

demise, and asked: “Do Southerners have no right to their ROOTS?” They warned, “If this fight is not won, Confederate monuments and symbols throughout the South will be in jeopardy.”⁶⁶ On that point, they were not incorrect and Mississippi eventually approved the King-Lee Holiday in 1987.⁶⁷ Not yet a complete repudiation of Confederate symbolism, it illustrated the changing nature of commemoration in the South.

Reflections After the First Holiday

As planning for the 1987 Holiday commenced, the Commission reflected on the successes and failures of the first. Commissioners seemed satisfied and Coretta thought the first Holiday a success; she stated it was “observed in the spirit of what we understand.”⁶⁸ Coretta acknowledged, however, that the Commission “deliberately de-emphasized some of the conflict situations that ... would inhibit” participation.⁶⁹ This de-emphasis of conflict situations explained, in part, why some activists found the Holiday so dissatisfying. Some within the Commission were cognizant of the criticism and one associate, Rev. Brackley, acknowledged that, “there was an appearance of a shallowness in the first observance.”⁷⁰ Looking to the future, Davis hoped to use the Holiday as a platform for Coretta to speak out on relevant issues such as the state of the Civil Rights Commission, minority set asides and Klan enlistment in the military.⁷¹ In October 1986, the Capitol Historic Society and the King Center hosted a conference titled ‘Martin Luther King Jr.: The Leader and the Legacy.’ Scholars and activists convened in the Senate Caucus Room to debate how best to remember King and the *Journal of American History* published a special edition of the conference papers.⁷² Daynes notes that “nearly every speaker ... mentioned the King myth.”⁷³ However, Vincent Harding’s essay ‘Beyond Amnesia’ best encapsulated the sentiment of civil rights activists;

⁶⁶ Advert, “Battle for the Battleflag at Ole Miss,” *Clarion-Ledger*, 19 October 1983, 4B.

⁶⁷ Dan Davis, “Legislature OKs Holiday for King, Lee,” *Clarion-Ledger*, 16 January 1987, 1.

⁶⁸ “Report of Proceedings,” 4 March, 16.

⁶⁹ King Commission, “Report of Proceedings,” 23 June 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 2: Commission/Committee Meetings/ June 1986-November 1986, Folder: Full Commission Meeting/Agenda, 90.

⁷⁰ Rev. Brackley comment in, “Report of Proceedings,” 23 June 1986, 35; Brackley served as the Commission’s accountant. “Report of Proceedings,” 24 June 1985, 23.

⁷¹ “‘Behind the Scenes’ Report of the Staff Vice President for Government and International Affairs,” 25 April 1986, 5.

⁷² “‘Behind the Scenes’ Report of the Staff Vice President for Government and International Affairs,” 25 April 1986, 4; David Thelen, “A Round Table: Martin Luther King, Jr.: Introduction,” *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 436-437; The authors and their themes were: David Garrow (Spirit of Leadership), Clayborne Carson (Charismatic Leadership), James H. Cone (the Third World), Nathan Huggins (Charisma and Leadership) and Vincent Harding (Amnesia and the Future). Cornel West also presented a paper titled ‘The Religious Foundations of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Thought,’ but it was not published in the JOAH, see Harding, “Beyond Amnesia,” 476n16.

⁷³ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 142; For a discussion on this conference, see Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 300-302.

they were concerned that an excessive focus on the Dream encouraged “national amnesia” about King’s challenging legacy.⁷⁴

King’s former colleagues spoke out against the tendency sanitise King’s legacy. Julian Bond complained that the Holiday seemed “to focus almost entirely on ... King the dreamer” and not the “challenger of the economic order,” the antiwar and anti-apartheid activist. Wyatt Tee Walker, a Birmingham campaign veteran, warned against an “oversentimental and romantic” view of King and Jesse Jackson derided the media’s projection of King “as a nonthreatening dreamer.” Jackson perfectly summed up this group’s concern with the comment, King “was not assassinated for dreaming.”⁷⁵ In contrast, Andrew Young accepted romanticism as inevitable and argued Congress “voted for Martin’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech” when it legislated the Holiday. Young expressed pleasure that Reagan now praised King: “It never bothers me to see somebody come around.” Republican Newt Gingrich joined the debate to counter an accusation by Jackson that Reagan exhibited a degree of hypocrisy by celebrating King. Gingrich commented, “No one can claim Dr. King. He transcends all of us.”⁷⁶ And, in one prescient comment, sociology Professor Marion J. Levy Jr. wrote to the *New York Times* and proposed the nation “declare the holiday a ‘day on,’ rather than a ‘day off.’” Levy proposed that Americans ought to “work on that day” and “each of us who is above the poverty line ... send that one day of wages” to a King holiday fund.⁷⁷ In an opinion piece titled ‘King Deserves a Real Holiday’, in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Claude Lewis, who knew King, quoted extensively from King’s ‘Drum Major Instinct’ sermon and urged that the Holiday not be allowed to “degenerate into a national embarrassment” like Presidents’ Day.⁷⁸ In the criticisms by Jackson and suggestions of Levy and Lewis, among others, the seeds of eventual change to the Holiday were planted.

Despite concern King Day lacked substance, the nation celebrated an African American hero on a scale not witnessed before. One million nonviolence pledge cards were returned to the King Center, confirming that the Commission’s promotion of nonviolence reached many.⁷⁹ The Holiday created an opportunity to continue King’s unfinished agenda and even Americans who had to work commemorated King in small ways, for example, by watching documentaries.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the Holiday facilitated protest against South Africa’s apartheid regime, an issue Marable argued

⁷⁴ Harding, “Beyond Amnesia,” 468-476, esp 469; For a discussion of academic literature about King, see Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 187-222.

⁷⁵ Eric Harrison, “Jackson: Remember King as More Than a Dreamer,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 January 1986, 17; see also Jesse Jackson, “Required Reading: On Dr. King’s Birthday,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1986, B10.

⁷⁶ Robin Toner, “Saving a Dissenter From his Legend,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1986, 24.

⁷⁷ Marion Levy Jr., “A Tangible Tribute to Dr. King’s Memory,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1986, 22.

⁷⁸ Claude Lewis, “King Deserves a Real Holiday: The Drum Major,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 January 1986, 7. m, z.

⁷⁹ “Report of Proceedings,” 4 March 1986, 9.

⁸⁰ Auchmutey and Green, “A Sampling “ 7.

provided an “outstanding” example “of black political resistance” in the 1980s.⁸¹ According to Tuck, the Free South Africa Movement (FSAM) “evoked memories of the civil rights movement” with its grass roots support in the churches, on campus and among unions.⁸² Efforts to establish state Holidays made progress and by March 1987, legislation pended in Hawaii, New Mexico, North Carolina and seemed likely to pass in Nevada. North Dakota had enacted legislation, but it would be 1989 before legislation was likely in Wyoming, New Hampshire or Idaho. There were no notable efforts in Montana, South Dakota or Texas.⁸³

Commission Extension – 1986

The Commission Act stipulated the Commission would disband on 20 April 1986.⁸⁴ As late as March it was unclear whether it would continue, though the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* quoted a statement by Davis that, “It would be a shame to lose the momentum.”⁸⁵ Coretta attempted to persuade Reagan and Congress that more time was needed to institutionalise the Holiday under the Commission’s guidance.⁸⁶ Supported by Charles Z. Wick, Director of United States Information Agency (USIA), they found bipartisan support.⁸⁷ Due to these lobbying efforts, Congress extended the Commission for three years until 20 April 1989 and expanded the number of Commissioners-at-Large from fourteen to twenty-three.⁸⁸ This expansion was to ensure the organisation was “more

⁸¹ Following Reagan’s re-election in 1984, “a core of black progressive activists mapped out a strategy to attack the administration’s links with apartheid South Africa,” Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 210.

⁸² Pressure built upon Congress and it imposed sanctions on South Africa in 1986, the same year as the first King Holiday. Stephen Tuck, “African American Protest During the Reagan Years: Forging New Agendas, Defending Old Victories,” in *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies*, ed. Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies (2008, Palgraveconnect), <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9780230616196>, 16 September 2015, 119-125.

⁸³ In Helm’s own state of North Carolina, the House overwhelmingly passed King Day legislation (38 to 12) and seven Republicans voted yes in the Senate. King Commission, “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 23 March 1987, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 3: Commission/Committee Meetings, December 1986-October 1987, Executive Committee Meeting: Report of Proceedings – March 1987, 13-14, 24.

⁸⁴ *An Act to Establish a Commission*.

⁸⁵ Pricilla Painton, “King Holiday Backers Hope to Keep Commission Alive,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 28 January 1986, 16.

⁸⁶ Coretta Scott King, Letter of Transmittal to the President, the President of Senate, and Speaker of the House “Report II,” 27 August 1986; “Report of Proceedings,” 4 March 1986, 18-20.

⁸⁷ “‘Behind the Scenes’ Report of the Staff Vice President for Government and International Affairs,” 25 April 1986, 3; For a biography on Wick and information about his time at the USIA, see Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 400-406.

⁸⁸ Representative Ralph Regula was central to extending the Commission’s lifespan, as well as Representatives Conyers and Kemp, Senator Kennedy and Walter Fauntroy. “Report of Proceedings,” 23 June 1986, 6-7; *An Act to Provide for the Continuation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission Until 1989, and for Other Purposes*, S.2319, 99th Cong. 2nd sess. (1 May 1986); King Commission, “1988 Annual Report,” January 1988, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta 97-0005, Box 2: Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: 1988 Annual Report, 72.

representative” of “American society” and because there “were a number of individuals ... who felt slighted” when left out last time, perhaps a veiled reference to Abernathy.⁸⁹

A turnover of Commissioners occurred in June 1986: Jefferson, Randall, Levi, Shannon, Armstrong and Douglass all resigned.⁹⁰ The turnover forced change to the Commission’s executive, Governor Thomas Kean of New Jersey became Vice Chairperson, and Lawrence Davenport became Secretary and Treasurer.⁹¹ Representative Jack Kemp from New York became a new commissioner and Agriculture Secretary Richard Lyng was considered because, according to Coretta, he had “released the strongest anti-discrimination order I’ve ever seen in government.”⁹² Coretta recommended cabinet officers to Reagan, but it was “his decision,” and the Commission made suggestions to the House and Senate. Some inactive commissioners were encouraged to “graciously leave,” but could not be forced out.⁹³ Notable new commissioners, among others, were: Rev. Ralph Abernathy; Rev. Hosea Williams (SCLC); Rev. Benjamin Hooks (NAACP); Marion Barry, Mayor of Washington DC; Mitch Snyder, from Community for Creative Nonviolence (CCNV); Thomas Swan, President of the US Student Association (USSA); and Charles Z. Wick (USIA). Katie Hall and John Conyers were offered honorary directorships of the Corporation, the Commission’s financial counterpart, and Lloyd Davis was reappointed Executive Director.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ “Report of Proceedings,” 23 June 1986, 7; The excuse was that there were not enough “slots” for 1986, but more could be appointed for 1987, in “Report of Proceedings,” 4 March 1986, 7-8.

⁹⁰ King Commission, “Minutes of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission and the Federal Holiday Corporation, Monday,” 23 June 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0008 Box 1: Commission and Committee Meetings 1984-1990 Folder: Committee - Commission Meeting/ June 1986, 1-2; Douglass left the federal government, “Report of Proceedings,” 23 June 1986, 7-11, 51-58.

⁹¹ Governor Thompson left to run for re-election, King Commission, “Report of Proceedings,” 17 July 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 2: Commission/Committee Meetings, June 1986 – November 1986, Folder: Federal Holiday Commission/Corporation: Report of Proceedings, July 1986, 67-68; see National Governors Association, “New Jersey Governor Thomas H. Kean,” http://www.nga.org/cms/home/governors/past-governors-bios/page_new_jersey/col2-content/main-content-list/title_kean_thomas.html, accessed 2015 17 April; Davenport was then Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, US Department of Education, “Report of Proceedings,” 17 July 1986, 2.

⁹² About Lyng’s appointment, his name was misspelt “Linkago” in the proceedings, but with the annotation “CHECK”, in “Report of Proceedings,” 17 July 1986, 69; for Lyng profile, see United States Department of Agriculture, “Former Secretaries - Richard Lyng,” http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=FORMER_SECRETARIES, accessed 17 April 2015; Lyng is listed as a Commissioner on a memorandum, King Commission, “Memorandum to Commissioners and Executive Committee,” 18 December 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence – Media Coverage, 1984 - 1987, Folder: Media Coverage/Announcements and Press Releases, October 1984 - March 1987, 1; “Report of Proceedings,” 17 July 1986, 69.

⁹³ The White House had to replace Douglas and Armstrong by 16 September for the swearing in ceremony, “Report of Proceedings,” 17 July 1986, 70, 73.

⁹⁴ Marion Barry was elected Mayor of Washington DC in 1978; Mitch Snyder was a spokesperson for “the poor and homeless” and member of CCNV, “a non-hierarchical religious community” that provided “food, shelter, medical care, and clothing to approximately 2,000 people per day.” Thomas R. Swan Jr. replaced Moore as Commissioner and as President of the US Student Association (USSA), which represented 350 campuses. Others appointed included: James Kerrigan (Trailways CEO); Michael Pelavin (National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council); Albert L. Nellums (A.L. Nellum and Associates and former member of the King Center Board of Directors); Rev. T. J. Jemison (President of National Baptist Church); Dr. Arie Brouwer, (National Council of Churches); and Jack Kent Cooke; King Commission, “Letter of Notification,” 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0002, Box 1: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Incoming Correspondence 1983-1990, Folder: Coretta Scott King - Letter of Notification of Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission Selection – 1986, 2; King

Several new commissioners symbolised King's activism more than those who departed. On 23 June 1986, Davis commented that many new commissioners were "people that would have been probably appointed to the Commission last year had there been enough positions provided for in the legislation. Regrettably hindsight is a great thing." He mentioned Abernathy's name first.⁹⁵ In a 31 July press release, the new commissioners were described as "close to Dr. King and the civil rights movement and others who have since followed in his footsteps by serving the poor and homeless, fighting against apartheid and racism."⁹⁶ Of the new commissioners, Abernathy and Williams were two of King's closest allies, Barry had opened SNCC's Washington DC office and Hooks represented the nation's oldest civil rights organisation, the NAACP. As a spokesperson for the poor and member of "a non-hierarchical religious community," Snyder had committed himself to ending the economic inequality King despised and Swan maintained the historic connection between the movement and students.⁹⁷

There was an effort to ensure the Jewish community was represented on the Commission. Michael Pelavin, of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, was appointed even as relations between African American and Jewish communities reached a low point in the eighties.⁹⁸ Though they shared a "history of discriminatory treatment," with the advent of Black Power and affirmative action, relations between the two groups frayed.⁹⁹ Added to this were two incidents involving former King aides: Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson. The first occurred when Young met with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in an unauthorized capacity as Ambassador to the UN; the second, when Jackson offended Jews in 1984 by describing New York pejoratively as 'Hymie-town.'¹⁰⁰ Despite such difficulties, or perhaps because of them, the Commission sought to maintain a multicultural coalition.

Commission, "Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Delivers Oath to Members of King Holiday Commission," 16 September 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence – Media Coverage 1984 - 1987, Folder: Media Coverage/ Announcements and Press Releases – October 1984 - March 1987, 1-7; "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 7, 10, 51-58; King Commission, "King Holiday Commission Announces New Commissioners," 31 July 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence – Media Coverage 1984 - 1987, Folder: Media Coverage/ Announcements and Press Releases – October 1984 - March 1987, 1-2. Lloyd Davis, "Letter to Katie Hall," 25 August 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0002, Box 3: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis Folder: Correspondence From Lloyd Davis to Others – 1986 - 1987.

⁹⁵ "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 55-56.

⁹⁶ "King Holiday Commission Announces New Commissioners," 31 July 1986, 1-2.

⁹⁷ "King Holiday Commission Announces New Commissioners," 31 July 1986, 1-2; "Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Delivers Oath to Members of King Holiday Commission," 16 September 1986, 1-7; "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 7, 10, 51-58.

⁹⁸ "Report of Proceedings," 17 July 1986, 71; Harrison, "Jackson: Remember King as More Than a Dreamer," 17.

⁹⁹ Huey L. Perry and Ruth B. White, "The Post-Civil Rights Transformation Between Blacks and Jews in the United States," *Phylon* 47, no. 1 (1986): 56-59; For a discussion of Jewish view of quotas, Dillard, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Now?*, 58; Steven F. Lawson, *Civil Rights Crossroads: Nation, Community, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 154.

¹⁰⁰ Perry and White, "The Post-Civil Rights Transformation Between Blacks and Jews in the United States," 58-59 Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 343.

Bicentennial of the Constitution

The Commission sought to increase the popularity of the Holiday by deepening the connection between King and traditional American symbols. The 1987 Bicentennial of the Constitution provided a good opportunity to do so and the 'Living the Dream' theme was expanded to include the line: "Let Freedom Ring ... let it ring for universal peace with justice, human rights, social and economic progress for all people."¹⁰¹ The phrase Let Freedom Ring derived from the peroration of King's 'I Have a Dream' speech, when he repeatedly exclaimed "let freedom ring" across the nation. The Commission wanted to "tie the theme" to Philadelphia's Liberty Bell, the Revolution and capture the "imagination of Americans."¹⁰² Each state had a replica Liberty Bell and Davis wanted bell-ringing ceremonies in every state to be broadcast across the nation.¹⁰³

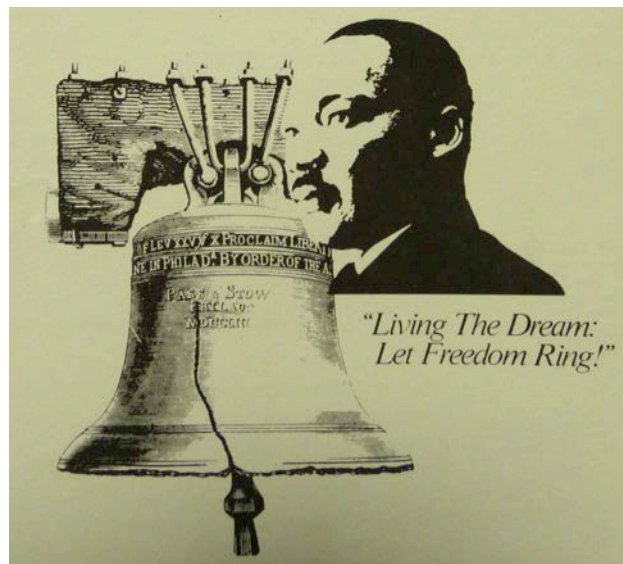


Figure 3: Commission logo for King Day 1987.¹⁰⁴

The Commission explained the expanded theme would make the Holiday "more substantive" because it encompassed the Bell, the Bicentennial and the Dream.¹⁰⁵ Davis acknowledged a need to

¹⁰¹ Lloyd Davis, "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 77; King Commission, "Living the Dream: Let Freedom Ring! is King Holiday 1987 Theme," 5 September 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission* NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence – Media Coverage 1984 - 1987, Folder: Media Coverage/ Announcements and Press Releases – October 1984 - 1987, 1-2.

¹⁰² King repeatedly exclaimed "let freedom ring" in King, "I Have a Dream," 220; "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 79-80.

¹⁰³ President Truman had a replica bell made for each state to raise war bonds for the Second World War, "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 80-82; Fifty-four Liberty Bells were forged for all states and territories, Gary B. Nash, *The Liberty Bell*, Icons of America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 155-156; Davis appears to have developed the concept and Coretta approved because it gave a "broader dimension for many people" to join, "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 87.

¹⁰⁴ Cover picture, King Commission, "Report on the Observance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday, January 19, 1987," 1987, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Executive Correspondence (Report II, Items X Labor Committee - XIII Legislative Committee).

say more about King's beliefs and unfinished agenda because "we did not do that with ... depth and precision last year."¹⁰⁶ A Freedom Trail was also planned, which Jim Karantonis (Director of the Washington Office) explained was "a symbolic and literal monument" to King. To join the Trail, a person had to do three things: remember, celebrate and act. Karantonis wanted Americans to remember King, celebrate the Holiday and take some action in King's "true spirit." A Freedom Trail map and brochure illustrated important civil rights locations and taught nonviolent techniques such as "sit-ins, wait-ins, kneel-ins" that were used to "break the barriers of segregation." Karantonis stated the Freedom Trail ought to encourage "people to actually do things," so King Day would be "more than just a remembrance." The map came with a printed "unfinished agenda" phrased in the slogans: "Shelter the homeless"; "Feed the hungry"; "'No' to Drugs and Alcohol"; "Make peace, not war"; and "The right to vote." In addition, the trail promoted uniformity, as the Commission wanted "symbols of national unity, "so King Day looked" like a national holiday rather than "fragmented" celebrations around the country¹⁰⁷ Other national events included a federal tribute and diplomatic reception in Washington DC, the ecumenical service, peace prize ceremony and parade in Atlanta. The Commission also planned a new national ceremony in Philadelphia: ringing of the Liberty Bell.¹⁰⁸

As the US prepared for the Bicentennial, Congress founded a Bicentennial Commission on the Constitution and allocated it twelve million dollars.¹⁰⁹ The King Commission was impoverished by comparison and this caused considerable envy; Coretta "wished our holiday Commission enjoyed the millions of dollars in Federal support" allocated to celebrate the Constitution.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the Bicentennial organisation was more generously staffed with seventy-eight employees compared to seven.¹¹¹ Such an enormous disparity in the funds and staff for two federal organisations served to illustrate the greater reverence accorded to the Revolutionary era, compared to the more recent and ethnically controversial civil rights era. It highlighted how King's legatees still had to fight for the Holiday to be accorded equal respect compared to other American festivals. Despite complaints that the King Holiday had cost too much money, which led to the King

¹⁰⁵ "Living the Dream: Let Freedom Ring! is King Holiday 1987 Theme," 5 September 1986, 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ "Report of Proceedings," 23 June 1986, 78.

¹⁰⁷ King Commission, "Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission and Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Corporation Meeting," 16 September 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 2: Commission/Committee Meetings, June 1986 – November 1986, Folder: Federal Holiday Commission and Corporation Meeting/Minutes, 44-50.

¹⁰⁸ "Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission and Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Corporation Meeting," 16 September 1986, 42-43.

¹⁰⁹ The Bicentennial Commission was founded on 29 September 1983 and was terminated 31 December 1991, Federal Register, "Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution," United States Government, <https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/commission-on-the-bicentennial-of-the-united-states-constitution>, accessed 17 April 2015; The Commission was allocated \$12 million by Congress, "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 23 March 1987, 33.

¹¹⁰ Coretta Scott King in "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 23 March 1987, 15.

¹¹¹ O. H. Laster, "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 23 March 1987, 86.

Commission's underfunded condition, Congress willingly financed Constitutional celebrations to the order of millions.

There were opportunities to collaborate, however, and the King Commission planned a conference to highlight King's impact on the Constitution.¹¹² It also recommended that the Holiday be used "to launch the Bicentennial Celebration" and made a conscious attempt to identify King with the Revolution.¹¹³ Indeed, King himself had used the Revolution to claim legitimacy for the struggle, with reference to black participation in the fight against Britain.¹¹⁴ For King, Birmingham was the movement's Bunker Hill, the "fuse" that "detonated a revolution."¹¹⁵ He characterised the "American racial revolution," however, as a "revolution to 'get in' rather than to overthrow the system because African Americans wanted a "share in the American economy, the housing market, the educational system and the social opportunities."¹¹⁶

The Commission used the Bell to signal King's affinity with the Constitution.¹¹⁷ Gary Nash describes the Bell as "a near sacred totem" and "an accomplice in revolutionary politics."¹¹⁸ Its tolling marked "the road to revolution" and summoned citizens to hear the Declaration of Independence.¹¹⁹ The opening of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 occasioned even more tolling.¹²⁰ The Bell had other historic connections, particularly important to African Americans – it became a symbol for abolitionists in the nineteenth century and the Commission highlighted this past.¹²¹ King himself laid a wreath at the Bell in 1959 for the eighteenth observance of National Freedom Day, to commemorate Lincoln's signing of the Thirteenth Amendment. The Bell had other deep connections to the movement; in 1963, CORE staged a sit-in at its base and another occurred in 1965.¹²² Samuel Pierce rang the Bell on the 1987 Holiday and it became an ongoing tradition, especially after Rosa Parks rang it the following year.¹²³

¹¹² "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 23 March 1987, 33; The USIA also connected King to the Constitution. "AmParts lecturers included the Chairman of the Pennsylvania Democratic Party, who spoke on Martin Luther King and the U.S. Constitution to audiences in Africa." Cull, *The Cold War and the USIA*: 468 nNA RG A1 (1066) USIA Historical Collection Subject Files, Box 142, file; Bicentennial, 1976 [sic] USIA fact sheet, March 1987.

¹¹³ "Living the Dream: Let Freedom Ring! is King Holiday 1987 Theme," 5 September 1986, 1.

¹¹⁴ King posited the African American experience in the Revolution: "Negroes were with George Washington at Valley Forge" and the "first American to shed blood in the revolution ... was a black seaman named Crispus Attucks." King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*: x.

¹¹⁵ King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*: 124-125.

¹¹⁶ King Jr., "Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom," *A Testament of Hope*: 58.

¹¹⁷ Liberty Bell was named by William Lloyd Garrison in 1837; King Commission June 86, 97-0023, Box 2, 86.

¹¹⁸ Nash, *The Liberty Bell*: IX, 13.

¹¹⁹ Nash, *The Liberty Bell*: 14-17.

¹²⁰ Nash, *The Liberty Bell*: 20.

¹²¹ Nash, *The Liberty Bell*: 35-58; The Commission reprinted the quote on the Bell and the biblical passage (Leviticus 25:10) it derived from. King Commission, "Annual Report on the 1992 Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday," 1992, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 2: Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: 1991 Annual Report, 1992 Annual Report, 20.

¹²² Nash writes that "wreath-laying at its foot was even more important in pointing to the nation's uncompleted agenda." Nash, *The Liberty Bell*: 164-168.

¹²³ Photo of Pierce, Vanessa Williams, "Liberty Bell Call Goes To All The Land," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 January 1987, 1,7; Photo, "Rosa Parks and Liberty Bell," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1988, 1; on 14 January 1986, the

While these connections of King to the Bicentennial made sense, they also threatened to submerge the Holiday's meaning. It remained at risk of co-option by an elite conservative historical interpretation.¹²⁴ Using King to reanimate America's "old democratic creed" was worthy, but connecting him to such historic symbols formed an elite and conservative King image.¹²⁵ For example, in one presidential proclamation Reagan asserted that King's leadership "took anchor in ... the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution." The President implied that, "the work of justice and freedom continues, but its goal is less distant, its hardships more tolerable, and its triumph more sure."¹²⁶ Such an easy optimism and denial of the hardships of daily life for African Americans stood in contrast to the vision of early Holiday advocates who intended to honour a black man and impart the concepts of nonviolence and racial equality, not to highlight a Revolution that forsook black Americans.¹²⁷

A Mood of Protest

The celebratory feel of the inaugural Holiday gave way to increasingly prominent protests on subsequent King Days. From 1987 to 1989, the final years of Reagan's presidency, both elite commemoration and vernacular activism characterised the Holiday. The second King Holiday fell on 19 January 1987 and there were more reports of protests. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that the National March and Parade in Atlanta had "a mood of protest" and participants included Abernathy, the Georgia State University Gay Student Alliance, death penalty opponents, anti-nuclear Physicians for Social Responsibility and unionised workers, plus 200,000 spectators.¹²⁸ That groups such as death penalty opponents marched in the official parade indicates a relaxation of the prohibition on single issue advocacy.

The mood of protest was due, in part, to the Ku Klux Klan, which had halted a remembrance of King in Forsyth County, Atlanta, the previous week.¹²⁹ Parade participants and spectators both

day before King's birthday Desmond Tutu rang the Bell. Though not part of that year's formal Holiday celebrations, Tutu's gesture and active participation in other Holiday ceremonies perhaps formulated an idea within the Commission to use the Bell. Photo, "Liberty Bell Visitor," *Charlotte Observer*, 15 January 1986, 2; King Commission, "Report of Proceedings - Executive Committee Meeting," 5 February 1987, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 3: Commission/Committee Meetings, December 1986 - October 1987, Executive Committee Meeting: Report of Proceedings, 44; For a list of King Holiday Liberty Bell ringers see Philadelphia Martin Luther King Jr. Association for Nonviolence, "Former National Bell Ringers," <http://www.philadelphiamlk.org/Pages/FormerNatlBellRingers.aspx>, accessed 17 April 2015.

¹²⁴ Bodnar, *Remaking America*: 13-20.

¹²⁵ Wolfson, "The King We Remember," 8.

¹²⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Proclamation 5760--Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, 1988," (12 January 1988) Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/011288c.htm>, accessed 17 April 2015.

¹²⁷ King claimed that a "movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution." Thus, the "summer of 1963 was a revolution because it changed the face of America." King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*: 119-128, esp 127; For a discussion of King's Dream and the concept of revolution, see Hansen, *The Dream*: 216-217.

¹²⁸ Thurston and Taylor, "A Mood of Protest Accompanies Floats, Bands at Holiday Parade," D1.

¹²⁹ The resurgence of the Klan happened during the 1970s and early 1980s Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 202.

chanted anti-Klan slogans.¹³⁰ The Klan presence in Forsyth spurred a subsequent counter march through the county, led by Hosea Williams.¹³¹ That march revived the movement tactic of protesting in a near all white neighbourhood to highlight racism. Twenty thousand marched and Williams claimed there was more unity among the black leadership than any time since 1963.¹³² Among King's former colleagues, Williams had also been one of the Holiday's most strident critics. He claimed it a waste of money to "buy a float when guys are begging for bread" and he complained that money raised for the Holiday furthered the cause of black elites instead of the poor. Alternatively, he encouraged service to the poor by providing soup kitchens and his involvement in the Forsyth march pointed to the potential of King Day activism.¹³³

During Reagan's final years as President, protests around the nation invoked King's legacy. In the 1988 parade in Atlanta, banners advocated for South African freedom, against the death penalty and for gay rights.¹³⁴ As an alternative to festivity, the SCLC organised a soup line and bed-in for the homeless.¹³⁵ In January 1989, anti-nuclear demonstrators, arrested for their protest at a power plant, picketed the Hampton District Court on King Day. They advocated for a state Holiday and refused to enter the court for their scheduled hearing. The demonstrators informed the court clerk that "we are unable to appear out of deference to the memory" of King.¹³⁶ In Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Baltimore, Chicago and New Orleans, activists in the National Homeless Union tried to claim empty houses owned by the Veterans Administration, while sanitation workers and the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) rallied to save jobs on the Holiday.¹³⁷ A school that refused to close was picketed in 1989 and Temple University students protested because the university refused to cancel classes for the Holiday.¹³⁸ The press focused on these protests: the *Charlotte Observer* headlined an article with, 'Activists to protest classes on King Day' and the *New York Times* headlined an article with,

¹³⁰ Thurston and Taylor, "A Mood of Protest Accompanies Floats, Bands at Holiday Parade," D1.

¹³¹ The racially motivated murder in Howard Beach, New York, in December 1986 was a fresh controversy. "Report of Proceedings - Executive Committee Meeting," 5 February 1987, 35.

¹³² "Report of Proceedings - Executive Committee Meeting," 5 February 1987, 37-39.

¹³³ Williams had led marches in Forsyth County on King Holidays, to protest against racism in the white neighbourhood. Michelle Hiskey, "Williams Lashes Out: Rights Activist Accuses 'Black Elites' of Misusing King's Birthday," *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 16 January 1990, D1; The SCLC had sponsored a soup kitchen and sleep in to highlight the plight of the homeless in 1988, Michelle Hiskey, "Homeless, Hungry Honor King's Dream," *Atlanta Journal*, 15 January 1988, D3.

¹³⁴ Dick Buerkle and Amy Wallace, "Martin Luther King Day, 200,000 watch King Day Parade Despite the Rain," *Atlanta Journal*, 19 January 1988, 6.

¹³⁵ Hiskey, "Homeless, Hungry Honor King's Dream," D3.

¹³⁶ John Hart and Associated Press, "King Day Sparks Civil Disobedience in Hampton, Keene," *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 17 January 1989, 1.

¹³⁷ Vanessa Williams, "Homeless Enter an Empty House in King's Memory," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 January 1987, 2B.

¹³⁸ Reid Kanaley, "King Day Protest at High School," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 January 1989, B1-B2; Huntly Collins, "Boycott at Temple Finds Few Takers," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 January 1989, B1-B2.

'Protests, Politics and Deep Emotion Mix as New York Honors Dr. King.'¹³⁹ The *Times* reported that three thousand people in an "interracial coalition of churches, labor unions, schools and civil rights groups, joined by a number of politicians marched through lower Manhattan."¹⁴⁰

Protests did not occur everywhere and their importance could be downplayed. The *Washington Post*, for example, described King Day in the nation's capital as having no agenda, nor "special foods, gifts or football games." Though some "began the morning with prayer breakfasts and church services," others made no special observance even as they acknowledged "the occasion had a somber, reverent quality."¹⁴¹ The suggestion here seems to be that the Holiday had yet to find its *raison d'être*. Editorials and articles reminisced about King and connected him to American traditions.¹⁴²

A Black Holiday

After the second Holiday, Coretta was pleased because "people are doing what we asked them to do." She claimed the "tradition is setting in" and the Holiday was "institutionalized."¹⁴³ Coretta thought the Holiday was "more substantive by dealing with the issues of our day, and applying Martin's example." Alluding to Howard Beach and Forsyth, she warned: "we must face up to the national climate in our nation which is breeding a new and often more violent form of racism."¹⁴⁴ The racist and apathetic reaction by some, however, illustrated the difficulty of creating an integrated celebration.¹⁴⁵ Even with elite support, racial tension undermined the Holiday, while also proving its necessity.

The Commission worked to ensure King Day was not viewed as a black Holiday. In 1987, Coretta repeated an earlier warning: "it's one thing to struggle for a national holiday, and another thing to celebrate it appropriately, and yet still another to maintain its integrity over the years." She said "we must continue to be on guard against those who would make the holiday a black holiday." Coretta stated that although holidays are about celebration, "Martin's day is also a day of remembering, but it is even more than that. It must be a day of service."¹⁴⁶ The Commission found it difficult to integrate ceremonies and Davis observed that 1987's national parade was "too much

¹³⁹ David Treadwell, "Nation Observes King's Birthday With Parades and Services," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1988, 1, 4.

¹⁴⁰ Joyce Purnick, "Protests, Politics and Deep Emotion Mix as New York Honors Dr. King," *New York Times*, 19 January 1988, B1.

¹⁴¹ Leah Y. Latimer and Sue Anne Pressley, "Observances Vary on a Young Holiday; King's Dream a Goal for Many," *Washington Post*, 20 January 1987, 1.

¹⁴² Editorial, "King's Day: His Words Guide, Inspire Us Still," *Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, 18 January 1988, 6; Rhonda Richards, "City Parade Helps 'Keep Dream Alive'," *Clarion-Ledger/Jackson Daily News*, 17 January 1988, 1.

¹⁴³ "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 5 February 1987, 13-15.

¹⁴⁴ "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 23 March 1987, 13, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Etzioni, "Toward a Theory."

¹⁴⁶ Lena Williams, "Most of U.S. Will Honor Dr. King, But Some Still Dispute the Holiday," *New York Times*, 18 January 1987, 1, 24.

of a black Parade.” In order to make it integrated, he thought the Commission needed more money, which was not forthcoming.¹⁴⁷ In 1988, as in previous years, the 200,000 spectators of the national parade were predominantly black and this trend had been noted in other places, such as Birmingham.¹⁴⁸

The Commission had good reason to emphasise the Holiday’s universality. Dwyer argues that civil rights memorialisation often consigns African American commemorations to black locations. This makes sense if such places signified important sites and moments in movement history. Nonetheless, situating memorials in historically African American neighbourhoods tended to reinforce old divisions and risked portraying the memorials as important only to African Americans.¹⁴⁹ Alderman likewise notes that streets renamed after King usually thread through historic black neighbourhoods.¹⁵⁰ Given this tendency, the Commission had to fight for an integrated Holiday that could not be ignored.¹⁵¹ The Commission’s concern about this remained an ongoing preoccupation. According to Coretta, an active minority wanted to “kill” the Holiday or at least wanted it to “appear to be simply a black holiday.”¹⁵² Davis constantly reiterated the need for the federal government to avoid typecasting the occasion as a black holiday, as he believed too many government agencies did. He suspected that only African Americans, not “other American employees”, were seconded to serve the Commission and complained this attitude affected media and business alike.¹⁵³

Coretta and Davis may have been too insistent, however, that King Day was not a black or African American holiday. Such an attitude, perhaps a ‘colour-blind’ attitude, meant they were at odds with the majority of African Americans who celebrated King Day precisely because it honoured a black person.¹⁵⁴ To downplay the significance of King’s blackness put them at odds with those, such as Senator Mathias, who had insisted it was vital for the nation to have a black American hero.¹⁵⁵ Coretta and Davis were nonetheless correct in their perception that the executive viewed King Day as a black holiday. As seen in Chapter Two, Reagan’s appointees to the Commission were from areas of government viewed as intrinsic to African American welfare, such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Minority Office in the Energy

¹⁴⁷ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 5 February 1987, 47.

¹⁴⁸ Buerkle and Wallace, “Martin Luther King Day, 200,000 watch King Day Parade Despite the Rain,” 6; Eugene Morris, “Service Urges a Renewal of King’s Dream,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 January 1988, 1; White, “Parade of Pride,” 1.

¹⁴⁹ Dwyer, “Location, Politics, and the Production,” 33.

¹⁵⁰ Alderman, “Street Names,” 90.

¹⁵¹ The Commission received support from the press, see Editorial, “On King Day, Teach Kids,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 January 1992, 10.

¹⁵² King Commission, “Proceedings,” 8 January 1990, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Proceedings, January 1990, 34.

¹⁵³ “Proceedings,” 8 January 1990, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Thelen and Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past*: 147-162.

¹⁵⁵ Mathias, *King Holiday Debate*, 1983, 28083-28084.

Department and the Civil Rights Commission.¹⁵⁶ HUD Secretary Samuel Pierce, an African American, was also considered so important that Davis claimed “there would be no Commission” without his support because he made office space and equipment available.¹⁵⁷ Pierce’s tenure at HUD, however, became problematic when he became the subject of protests during 1988 because “appropriations for low-income housing” had been cut from \$33.5 billion to \$15.1 billion a year and HUD “virtually stopped building new housing projects.”¹⁵⁸ Pierce also “allocated federal funds for low-income housing to Republican consultants and corporate interests,” and allegedly allowed a two to four billion dollar fraud.¹⁵⁹ These “scarce funds” for the poor “were funnelled to wealthy real estate developers and Republican Party donors.”¹⁶⁰ Pierce’s mismanagement of HUD allowed corruption to flourish.¹⁶¹

Business, Industry and the Commission.

The Holiday was widely observed, but the Commission encountered difficulty in encouraging business participation. In 1988, the *New York Times* reported only 13 percent of collective bargaining agreements included a King Holiday and that less than 20 percent of businesses closed. Coretta continued to lobby the business community, but by 1989, only 17 percent of employers granted employees a day off.¹⁶² Furthermore, the Commission had great difficulty in finding someone to chair its Business and Industry Committee. Coretta hoped a chairperson would develop a ‘How to Celebrate’ manual to help business observe the Holiday “without commercialization, and a loss of revenue.” No-one volunteered, so she remained “concerned that the American business community has been slow to recognize the Holiday on a large scale.”¹⁶³ Some had been optimistic about the Holiday’s potential impact on commerce and Karantonis claimed that, “Business will not go on as usual” on King Day.¹⁶⁴ Wall Street briefly paused on the Holiday, which slowed the stock market, and the Federal Reserve and major banks closed. Coca Cola gave its three thousand Atlanta employees the day off, while Georgia Power and Delta Airlines gave employees the choice to use a

¹⁵⁶ The federal department most associated with the Holiday was HUD, which was in charge of low income housing, often in historic black neighbourhoods. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 197-198.

¹⁵⁷ King Commission, “Proceedings,” 6 December 1988, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, Folder: Federal Holiday Commission, December 1988, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Bill Dedman, “Activists Picket Residence of HUD Secretary,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 2 May 1988, 6.

¹⁵⁹ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission,” 24 June 1985, 10-11; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 197-198.

¹⁶⁰ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 206-207.

¹⁶¹ Philip Shenon, “Samuel R. Pierce Jr., Ex-Housing Secretary, Dies at 78,” *New York Times*, 3 November 2000.

¹⁶² Lena Williams, “Holiday for Dr King Gaining Wider Observance,” *New York Times*, 15 January 1988, 10; “Report of Proceedings,” 27 June 1988, 40.

¹⁶³ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 23 March 1987, 16-17.

¹⁶⁴ Painton and Pousner, “Across the Nation,” 20.

vacation day or personal day to honour King.¹⁶⁵ However, it was a long battle and the King Holiday still had to fight for more recognition.

Fund raising remained a constant concern and several factors conspired to create difficulties. The Commission initially estimated it needed \$1.5 million per year to operate, but revised the amount down to \$300,000, and then \$298,000, when obvious it could not raise that much.¹⁶⁶ Without a Business and Industry Committee chairperson to conduct negotiations with companies, encourage advertising and product sales, the Commission struggled.¹⁶⁷ Senator Dole had been unable to raise new funds during 1986, as financial resources were devoted to political campaigns, and Ralph Regula thought 1987 would “be dominated by the Bicentennial.” He anticipated 1988 would be better for fundraising, but appropriate funding remained elusive.¹⁶⁸ Davis complained that people were appointed to the Commission in the hope they would raise money, but “once they get appointed and take the oath ... the one thing they’re not interested in is raising money.”¹⁶⁹

Pendleton became most outspoken about the issue of funding. To the press, he claimed a lack of philanthropy among blacks caused the fundraising difficulties.¹⁷⁰ Implying King’s vision had been realised, he said “the dream has already been satisfied” and “the dream gets confused with the memory.”¹⁷¹ Pendleton expressed embarrassment at what he defined as the parsimoniousness of the black community and his analysis insinuated that African Americans themselves were responsible for their own financial deprivation, rather than a government that failed to ensure the financial viability of the Commission or the community as a whole.¹⁷² Due to the funding drought, Pendleton suggested the Commission become a committee solely devoted to fundraising.¹⁷³ With unintended irony, he explained “there are people who benefit from having their name on your letter head who contribute absolutely nothing.”¹⁷⁴ Pendleton proved his own point: “I am not a fundraiser” and “would never put myself as a volunteer to be one.”¹⁷⁵ In addition, he had an extraordinarily

¹⁶⁵ Painton and Pousner, “Across the Nation,” 20.

¹⁶⁶ “Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission and Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Corporation Meeting,” 16 September 1986, 26-27.

¹⁶⁷ “Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission and Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Corporation Meeting,” 16 September 1986, 23.

¹⁶⁸ The Executive Committee met on 6 October 1986 and engaged in a lengthy financial discussion. King Commission, “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 6 October 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 2: Commission/Committee Meetings, June 1986 – November 1986, Folder: Executive Committee Meeting, Report of proceedings – October 1986, 15, 27, 48-49.

¹⁶⁹ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 6 October 1986, 23-24.

¹⁷⁰ Pricilla Painton, “Setbacks Plague Planners 11 Weeks from King Holiday,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 3 November 1985, 12.

¹⁷¹ Pricilla Painton, “King Center Struggles to Serve as Memorial and Meet Social Needs,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 17 January 1986, 1.

¹⁷² Painton, “Setbacks Plague Planners 11 Weeks from King Holiday,” 1, 12.

¹⁷³ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 6 October 1986, 16-17; One fundraising endeavour was a Time Capsule with a miniature Liberty Bell, which people would pay to have their name inscribed on paper wafers placed inside, Burchman, in “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 6 October 1986, 18.

¹⁷⁴ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 6 October 1986, 25.

¹⁷⁵ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 6 October 1986, 30.

regressive attitude toward the financial difficulty of an organisation dedicated to an African American hero: "I don't know why we should be ashamed ... black people have been hustling for years. I don't know why they should be ashamed to say we're doing a little begging here and a little over here."¹⁷⁶ The King Center originally covered financial losses, but had no intention to sustain the Commission "financially and otherwise" over the long term.¹⁷⁷

In reaction to the low fundraising, Davis expressed frustration:

One of our problems is we have never been able to get anybody to chair a fundraising committee and it got so bad that we just decided to abolish a committee called 'fundraising' and have a 'business and industry committee' which we have not been able to get anybody to chair.¹⁷⁸

That committee was supposed to get "companies to recognize, [and] support the Holiday with their employees" and use products to advertise the Holiday. However, Davis could not find "one business person willing to chair" the committee and even the commissioners would not "touch it with a ten-foot pole."¹⁷⁹ The inability to find such an important committee chair reflected "racist budgetary practices" that Dwyer argues hampered funding of the King Historic Site in Atlanta.¹⁸⁰ The Commission attempted to involve big businesses, like Safeway and IBM, and though it received \$394,454 in donations and \$500,000 of pro-bono services this did not cover costs.¹⁸¹ After enthusiasm from the inaugural celebration abated, new finance remained difficult to obtain.¹⁸²

The Commission found itself in this position due to the initial opposition of Helms and fellow conservatives. According to Davis, to expedite the Commission's establishment, Coretta made a compromise with Congress to forgo federal funding on the understanding it would be forthcoming soon after.¹⁸³ Helms had promised to "oppose establishment of the Commission" if funded, so "members of the Congress ... assured Mrs King that they would see that there was private financing

¹⁷⁶ "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 6 October 1986, 31.

¹⁷⁷ King Commission, "Joint Meeting of Executive Committee and Special Fund-Raising Committee," 7 January 1987, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 3: Commission/ Committee Meetings, December 1986 - October 1987, Joint Meeting of Executive Committee and Special Fund Raising Committee – January 1987, 7.

¹⁷⁸ "Joint Meeting of Executive Committee and Special Fund-Raising Committee," 7 January 1987, 11.

¹⁷⁹ "Joint Meeting of Executive Committee and Special Fund-Raising Committee," 7 January 1987, 18.

¹⁸⁰ See also "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 6 October 1986, 4-7; See also Hollings about the King Center King Commission, "Executive Committee Meeting," 19 October 1987, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 3: Commission/Committee Meetings, December 1986-October 1987, Executive Committee Meeting/Oct; Dwyer, "Location, Politics, and the Production," 35.

¹⁸¹ "Joint Meeting of Executive Committee and Special Fund-Raising Committee," 7 January 1987, 21; "'Behind the Scenes' Report of the Staff Vice President for Government and International Affairs," 25 April 1986, 3.

¹⁸² Burchman claimed "all we need is money," in "Joint Meeting of Executive Committee and Special Fund-Raising Committee," 7 January 1987, 22.

¹⁸³ "Executive Committee Meeting," 19 October 1987, 80.

available to compensate for the absence of Federal funding.”¹⁸⁴ Coretta recalled this advice not to be concerned about funding. However, “when the time came, there was no leadership and no effort” to obtain public funding.¹⁸⁵ Private finance then proved hard to obtain, as Davis highlighted. Commissioners Dole, DuPont, Jefferson and Levi all tried but “our intelligence tells us ... that some of their efforts in reaching out to the private sector was cut off.” Davis realised that if “the majority leaders of the Senate ... one of our biggest corporations and the former President of the University of Chicago ... could not raise several million dollars” then it would always be difficult and especially “tough with counter-activity to discourage contributions.”¹⁸⁶ This counter-activity most likely came from Helms.

A new effort commenced to obtain funding in 1987. Congressman Mervyn Dymally introduced legislation to appropriate an annual amount of \$300,000 for educational programs to “institutionalize the memory of Dr. King” and the Commission lobbied for an extension to its term.¹⁸⁷ Congress scheduled a hearing, however Helms again opposed a two year extension and “money being given to the Commission.”¹⁸⁸ At this point, the Commission considered an application for permanent status to be the best way forward.¹⁸⁹ One unidentified speaker suggested the Commission should be extended first and then funding should be applied for.¹⁹⁰ But Davis cautioned, “we have gone through this process several times, starting with the establishment of the Commission.”¹⁹¹ Coretta remained “leery of coming back again, without at least some understanding ... behind the scenes because every last one of them made that [funding] commitment to us.” As that prior funding commitment came to nought, Coretta did not want to extend the Commission without a promise of funds.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ Lloyd Davis, King Commission, “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, 28.

¹⁸⁵ Coretta Scott King, “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 33-34.

¹⁸⁶ Lloyd Davis, “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 35-36.

¹⁸⁷ Although funding remained prohibited by the original legislation, Dymally proposed that \$300,000 be made available so the Commission could fund education aimed American youth, “Executive Committee Meeting,” 19 October 1987, 66, 80-81; Dymally later sought a provisional appropriation of \$500,000 but the full amount was never allocated due to opposition from Senator Helms and Republican members on the Judiciary Committee. King Commission, “Record of Proceedings,” 24 October 1988, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, Folder: Report of Proceedings, October 1988, 16-18; “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988; Joyce Mendes-Cole represented Congressman Dymally on the Commission, “Report of Proceedings,” 27 June 1988, 8.

¹⁸⁸ The hearing was to coincide with King Day and Senators Fuller and Kennedy were expected to introduce a Senate companion bill. “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 20-21.

¹⁸⁹ Given “we were in the position of having a Bill [for funding] out there for a Commission that was going to basically die,” the Commission was advised it would be on “firmer ground ... if Senator Conyers introduced” a bill for a permanent Commission. Timing was important because “if it came to the next hearing, there would be no Commission to use the money.” “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 22.

¹⁹⁰ “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 25.

¹⁹¹ “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 28.

¹⁹² “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 34.

Non-functioning commissioners became another major concern by 1987. Davenport wanted to “strip the commission of our dead wood” because some “have not been represented in person, or by someone else since they were appointed.”¹⁹³ However, an alternative view was that the Commissioners were “the cream of the crop,” so it would be better to keep them for their influence alone.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, according to Coretta, even the most “loyal and dedicated Commissioners” had become inactive due to preparations for the upcoming presidential election.¹⁹⁵ Davis explained that “one of our problems is that we have four appointees that are made by the President ... and we don’t have any say.” Likewise, the Commission had no “control” over congressional appointments.¹⁹⁶ Coretta acknowledged the need to “tighten up on the attendance” and “get a new set of Commissioners” because “we simply cannot afford to have a passive, non-active, and unsupported group of Commissioners. Regrettably, we have far too many.”¹⁹⁷ In 1988, the committed Ralph Regula, who attended “every meeting” replaced Governor Kean as vice chair.¹⁹⁸ Three new Commissioners were also sworn in: Senator John C. Danforth, a Republican from Missouri, Rev. Patricia McClurg (National Council of Churches) and Samuel Brookfield (UN Business Council). Pendleton’s position had also become vacant, due to a fatal heart attack that felled him while he peddled an exercise bike.¹⁹⁹

To revitalise the Commission, John Conyers sponsored new legislation to make it a permanent body with an annual appropriation of \$300,000. On 2 August 1988, Dymally presided over a hearing by the Post Office and Civil Service Committee into the matter and increased the appropriation to \$500,000.²⁰⁰ The Reagan administration indicated “it supported the legislation” and the House voted for a permanent Commission with \$500,000.²⁰¹ Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee failed to support the legislation, however, and only three Republican senators co-sponsored the bill, which spelt its doom. Though the precedents of the Bicentennial Commission’s \$13 million, and the US Holocaust Memorial’s \$2.1 million, were cited in the

¹⁹³ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 5 February 1987, 55.

¹⁹⁴ The person who made this suggestion is unknown. In the record they are noted as ‘Unidentified Voice,’ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 5 February 1987, 62.

¹⁹⁵ King Commission, “Report of Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 8 December 1987, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, Folder: Executive Committee Meeting, December 1987, 22.

¹⁹⁶ “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 5 February 1987, 58.

¹⁹⁷ Coretta thought the education, library and peace committees were all industrious, “Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting,” 23 March 1987, 10-11, 16, 95.

¹⁹⁸ “Report of Proceedings,” 27 June 1988, 2-5.

¹⁹⁹ Two others recommended were Dave Stern, National Basketball Association (NBA) and Dr Charles Knapp (President, University of Georgia). “Report of Proceedings,” 27 June 1988, 29-31, 37; Pendleton died on 6 June 1988, McQuiston, “Clarence M. Pendleton, 57, Dies.”; Parker, “The Legacy of Clarence Pendleton,” 1-8; Ronald Reagan, “Statement on the Death of Clarence Pendleton,” *Lincoln Review* 8, no. 4 (1988).

²⁰⁰ “Proceedings, Executive Committee Meeting,” 7 March 1988, 58; “Record of Proceedings,” 24 October 1988, 16; Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, *A Bill to Make Permanent the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, 100th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 August 1988.

²⁰¹ “Record of Proceedings,” 24 October 1988, 31.

attempt to leverage funding, Helms resisted making the Commission a permanently funded body.²⁰² The Commission met on 6 December 1988, the last time it did during Reagan's presidency, without an extension or financial appropriation and unsure of its future as it was due to expire in 1989.²⁰³

Conclusion

From 1986 to January 1989, the Commission fashioned new ceremonies and drew on past traditions to celebrate a new Holiday. These included the ecumenical services, a national march and programs designed to propagate nonviolence and racial equality. The result was a celebration that, while far from realising Coretta's earlier ambition to make the US the world's first nonviolent society, satisfied her overall. However, there were problems. The Holiday was widely celebrated but only included in a minority of collective bargaining agreements and businesses were reluctant to observe it. The use of traditional imagery also risked losing sight of King's real legacy. It made sense to align King with symbols of the Revolution, such as the Liberty Bell, and the Bicentennial of the Constitution was therefore fortuitous. However, there was a major problem with that approach. The Commission had so little funding it had to join forces with the Bicentennial celebration. The Commission therefore reinforced the new conservative orthodoxy that King's true value was derived from the period when he focused his protests on winning constitutional rights. King's post-1965 appeal for economic equality and denunciation of rampant individualism were sidelined and the Commission facilitated that process.²⁰⁴ The Holiday celebrations were also less integrated than hoped, as seen by the reports of parades and ceremonies being attended mostly by African Americans. This was partially due to financial neglect by the federal government and private sector, leaving the Commission little to spend on organising integrated activities.²⁰⁵

Coretta did not publically criticise the Commission. However, in its meetings she complained about the poor attendance record of some Commissioners, which seemed to concern her more than their ideology. Coretta also expressed frustration at the lack of funding by both Congress and business. The Holiday's capacity to promote racial equality was compromised by the failure to integrate celebrations more completely. This served to illustrate Marable's observation, quoted early in this chapter, that Americans practised interaction without understanding. Certainly it was

²⁰² The three Republican senators were: David Durenberger of Minnesota, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, and Lowell Weicker of Connecticut. The Senate legislation was for a five year extension and an appropriation of \$300,000, "Record of Proceedings," 24 October 1988, 16-18.

²⁰³ "Proceedings," 6 December 1988, 12-31.

²⁰⁴ King Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct."

²⁰⁵ Lee Atwater, "Lee Atwater's Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy," *The Nation*, <http://www.thenation.com/article/170841/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy#>, accessed 1 September 2015.

difficult at times for African Americans to celebrate King's legacy with whites. As one man complained, "we don't want to share the holiday."²⁰⁶

As Reagan finished his presidency, whether the Commission would continue remained to be seen. Race relations remained a vital political issue and Jesse Jackson's 1988 candidacy for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination forged a new coalition of voters.²⁰⁷ In the Democratic primary, Jackson came second behind Dukakis. Seven million voters, including 12 percent of whites, cast their primary vote for Jackson.²⁰⁸ In the presidential election itself, Vice President Bush campaigned before a backdrop of strong economic figures: economic growth averaged 4.5 percent, unemployment rate 5.6 percent and inflation 4.0 percent.²⁰⁹ Bush won and his victory signalled the continuation of free market style of conservatism, even as he expressed a desire to build better relations with the African American community. Bush brought a new attitude, if not policies, to the White House and Coretta hoped that he would support the Commission and the Holiday.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Bragg, "King, Lee Followers Will Share," 1, 8.

²⁰⁷ Jackson came first in fourteen primaries and caucuses, second in thirty-six, and had 1,200 delegates at the Democrats' Atlanta Convention. Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 212.

²⁰⁸ Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*: 14.

²⁰⁹ When Bush started as President, the economy grew by 3.5 percent and unemployment was 5.3 percent, see Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 141-144.

²¹⁰ "Proceedings," 6 December 1988, 28.

Chapter 4

The World House: President George H. W. Bush and the King Holiday (1989-1992)

We have inherited a large house, a great “World House” in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.

King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*

Communism’s collapse in Eastern Europe, beginning in 1989, precipitated a quick end to the Cold War and signified the apparent triumph of liberal capitalist democracy.¹ The stalemate that dominated international relations since 1945 finally ended and the diminished threat to the US opened the way for a renewed focus on domestic issues. A great opportunity arose to prioritise neglected domestic issues and many US citizens hoped resources might be redirected towards the resolution of long term problems like homelessness, drug abuse and gun violence.² Simultaneously, pressure to dismantle apartheid in South Africa led to the demise of the world’s last openly white supremacist government.³ Fighting apartheid had been a cause of deep concern to civil rights activists and marked a contentious divide between conservatives and liberals. Conservatives resisted any imposition on trade, while liberals favoured economic sanctions designed to force democratic reforms and an end to institutionalised racial discrimination.⁴ This had a resonance to those who fought segregation in the South.

Democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe eased US fears about Communism. In this context, President Bush invoked King’s legacy to advocate for human rights abroad and to project an image of the US as a democratic and tolerant nation.⁵ International events soon influenced the King Holiday’s domestic evolution. Bush used King’s image as an international icon and even

¹ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 265.

² Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 145.

³ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*: 268-271; For a discussion on peace efforts in El Salvador, Angola, Cambodia and the Middle East during the Bush presidency, see Steven Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration: In Search of a New World Order* (London: Cassell, 1999), 129-152.

⁴ Francis Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions: African Americans Against Apartheid, 1946-1994* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 12-13, 138-156; Lewis V. Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995), 93-136.

⁵ Glenn Eskew argues depicting the ideals of racial tolerance and universal human rights were used for commercial success and tourism at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Eskew, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute,” 60.

conservatives agreed that the late civil rights leader was a worthy national symbol.⁶ When Communist power in Eastern Europe and China came under threat, Bush depicted King as an exemplar of the art of protest in order to encourage resistance to Communism. This redefinition contradicted the 1960s conservative view of King, when he was demonized as a fellow traveller of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). Bush differentiated himself from Reagan with his support of the King Holiday and he used it to denounce racism at home, in an attempt to cultivate a better relationship with the wider African American community.

This chapter evaluates the differences and similarities between the way Bush, Coretta and the Commission defined King's legacy during the period between 1989 and 1992. It includes a study of international and state King Day observances in order to illustrate that the scope of the Holiday was expanded during the Bush administration. The chapter argues that three major international events influenced the Holiday in this period: the sudden resolution of the Cold War, US military action in the Persian Gulf War and the collapse of apartheid in South Africa. US political debate on racial issues was dominated by Supreme Court nominations and affirmative action – issues King would have been passionate about – together with the campaign to institutionalise the King Holiday in all states.⁷

Most academics argue that Bush's policies on race and foreign affairs were consistent with Reagan's.⁸ Marable noted that Bush ignored the final years of King's career as a critic of unfettered capitalism and the Vietnam War, and Dowd Hall associated Reagan and Bush together as part of a long backlash against the civil rights movement.⁹ This view is maintained in work that briefly analyses the Holiday, such as Bernhard Von Bothmer's *Framing the Sixties: The Use and Abuse of a Decade from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush*. Von Bothmer argues that Bush substituted the "1960s radical" King with "a convenient and unthreatening textbook icon." Central to this reimagining of King was a myth that the US had transcended its racist history and thus "government activism in race relations" was unnecessary.¹⁰ As we have seen, this critique of Bush is near identical to that made of Reagan. Von Bothmer nonetheless perceived a critical difference between the two Presidents' representations of King: unlike Reagan, Bush portrayed King as an anti-communist.¹¹ This insight suggests that the Bush presidency ought not be viewed as an

⁶ Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 111.

⁷ Augustus J. Jones Jr., "Kinder, Gentler? George Bush and Civil Rights," in *Leadership and the Bush Presidency: Prudence or Drift in an Era of Change?*, ed. Ryan J. Barilleaux and Mary E. Stuckey, *Praeger Series in Presidential Studies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992), 177-190.

⁸ Borstelmann argued that Bush's election signalled "a continuation of Reagan's policies regarding racial issues and foreign affairs," Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*: 263; Bostdorff and Goldzwig, "History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.," 685.

⁹ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 201; Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1239.

¹⁰ Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 93.

¹¹ Von Bothmer astutely used Bush's speeches and writings, produced for occasions associated with the King Holiday, as evidence to support his contentions, Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 107-112.

addendum to Reagan's. Thomas Borstelmann's *Cold War and the Colorline* offered only two pages on Bush and the Cold War; his major observation was that Bush "viewed racial issues as only a minor aspect of the least interesting part of his job: domestic politics."¹² Borstelmann's analysis of this subject is too slight given Bush's central role at the end of the Cold War and the near concurrent demise of apartheid. Likewise, Daynes only briefly assessed Bush on race relations and while William C. Berman devoted more consideration to Bush's record on that issue, both overlooked the President's involvement with the Holiday.¹³ Marable too devoted little analysis to Bush and the Holiday, except to note that the President claimed it celebrated King's greatness.¹⁴ Finally, Augustus J. Jones Jr., in a study of Bush's civil rights record, concludes that Bush followed Reagan's example, but also "adopted the language and repeated the goals of the civil rights movement." Using Bush's own words, Jones Jr. argues that the new president had a "kinder and gentler" approach to civil rights, despite a "record of ambivalence" on the issue.¹⁵ The historiography on Bush, King Day and international relations is thus limited in the scope of debate. It is worth developing this field in order to illustrate how the Holiday reflected changing US politics at home and abroad at the Cold War's end.

The transition from Reagan to Bush meant that the responsibility for King Day passed to a President more outwardly committed to it than his predecessor. Despite continuities between the two Presidents, Bush brought changes to King Day that deserve further scrutiny. He sought to define the Holiday as more than a black celebration and also found King to be a useful icon when promoting his foreign policy, which he defined as the New World Order. Bush's foreign policy seemed similar in spirit to King's imagined World House, however it needed to be enforced by military action, as exemplified by the Gulf War, rather than nonviolence.¹⁶ The convergence of the New World Order and King's legacy eventually led Coretta Scott King to make a strident denunciation of US foreign policy and domestic economic inequality. She reminded Americans that King had opposed the Vietnam War and argued that he would have protested the US intervention in the Gulf War. Coretta questioned why the nation's wealth was spent so easily on the military, but not on schools.¹⁷ It is to an analysis of the Holiday during the Bush presidency that the chapter now turns.

¹² Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*: 264.

¹³ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 138-139; Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 196.

¹⁴ "Bush Says Racism Won't Be Tolerated," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 January 1990, in Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 200-201.

¹⁵ Jones Jr., "Kinder, Gentler?," 189-190.

¹⁶ King "borrowed" the World House metaphor from white preacher J. Wallace Hamilton. Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources*, (New York: Free Press, 1992), 3-6.

¹⁷ Coretta Scott King, "Style That Ended Segregation Also Helped Fell Berlin Wall," *Washington Times*, 18 January 1991, H5.

Bush and Civil Rights

During Bush's presidency, political commentators viewed his civil rights policies as both conservative and liberal. On one hand, he continued Reagan's 'colour blind' policy of appointing black conservatives to powerful federal positions. His nomination of the black conservative Clarence Thomas to replace the liberal African American Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court was interpreted as an effort to thwart affirmative action, since Thomas opposed race based employment quotas.¹⁸ Bush's conservatism was exhibited by support for Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988. In other respects, however, Bush projected a more centrist image and expressed a greater sympathy for African American concerns than Reagan.¹⁹ Whereas Reagan launched his 1980 presidential campaign in Neshoba County, Mississippi (where three civil rights activist were murdered in 1964), Bush used the 1990 Holiday to denounce racially-motivated bombings in Alabama and Georgia, bombings that killed a Birmingham judge and a Savannah based civil rights lawyer.²⁰ Though Bush often implied King's work was finished, as Von Bothmer notes, the President on occasions also asserted "there is much that remains to do."²¹ This contrasted with Reagan's usual depiction of a successful and finished movement. The two Republican presidents differed on race relations in other ways. Reagan championed "states' rights," whereas Bush had long been disenchanted with the phrase;²² Reagan pronounced that government was the problem not the solution, but Bush claimed to "not hate government."²³ In 1983, Reagan fuelled speculation that communists influenced King; Bush eventually invoked King's image to fight communism. Reagan only ever expressed reluctant support for the Holiday; but Bush supported it and the Commission.²⁴

Bush's past offers some clues as to why he adopted a different posture to Reagan in relation to the Holiday. George H. W. Bush was born to an old New England family in Massachusetts in 1924. He was educated at Phillips Academy, Andover, and Yale University, where he majored in

¹⁸ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 196, 201-202, 216-217.

¹⁹ Bush was a "more cautious and less visceral conservative than Reagan," Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*: 264; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 216.

²⁰ "Bush Meets With NAACP Chief, Cites 'Outrage' at Bombings," *Washington Post*, 10 January 1990, 17; Andrew W. Rosenthal, "President Assails Bombings in South," *New York Times*, 10 January 1990, 22.

²¹ Bombs were also sent to NAACP offices in Georgia, Alabama and Florida, Rosenthal, "President Assails Bombings," 22.

²² Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 200-1; "Bush Promises to Bring Bigots to Justice," *Orlando Sentinel*, 10 January 1990, 4; "Bush Ponders Texas Contest as US Watches," *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 October 1965, 7.

²³ Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum: NARA, 20 January, 1981), <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12081a.htm>, accessed 26 August 2015; George H.W. Bush, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans," (The American Presidency Project, 18 August, 1988), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25955>, accessed 26 August 2015.

²⁴ Conyers, "How Did it Happen?"

economics and graduated in 1948.²⁵ He moved to Texas in the same year and started an oil business two years later.²⁶ As a Republican and son of US Senator Prescott Sheldon Bush (Connecticut), Bush first ran for federal election in Texas during 1964 against Democrat Senator Ralph Yarborough, who was the “only Southern senator” to support the Civil Rights Act of 1964.²⁷ Bush campaigned against the Act because it was, in his words, “politically inspired” and “bad legislation in that it transcends the Constitution.”²⁸ Bush stated that he supported Goldwater “for the Presidency without qualification,” won the Republican primary, but lost the general election.²⁹

Bush remained active in Republican politics and developed a centrist persona throughout 1965. He warned against extremist infiltration of the Party by racist former Democrats and far-right John Birch Society members, but simultaneously criticised King’s activism.³⁰ Bush claimed that although it was “wrong to see two Negroes registered to vote in a county of some 13,000 Negro citizens,” it was “equally wrong” for King to “march in violation of a federal court order.” In the year of the Selma campaign, Bush asserted that King’s civil disobedience made it “easy to see where breaking federal court orders can lead to a total breakdown of our system of laws.”³¹ Bush later claimed, in response to urban unrest in 1966, that Americans “cannot condone law breaking and rioting.”³² His message resonated and he won election to the US House of Representatives in November 1966, though with only a small percentage of the black vote.³³

During two terms as a representative, Bush straddled both sides of civil rights issues. He voted for the integration-inspired Fair Housing Act of 1968, which “outraged the far right.”³⁴ However, he introduced an anti-riot bill after King’s assassination that aimed to ban rioters – most

²⁵ Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush* (New York: Viking, 2004); Majorie Hunter, “Gregarious Nominee for UN Post: George Herbert Walker Bush,” *New York Times*, 12 December 1970, 30.

²⁶ Prescott Bush was elected to the US Senate on 4 November 1952,”Prescott Bush,” in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*; “Bush Wins a Runoff For Senate in Texas,” *New York Times*, 7 June 1964, 69; George H.W. Bush and Victor Gold, *Looking Forward* (New York: Double Day, 1987), 45-48.

²⁷ “Bush Wins a Runoff For Senate in Texas,” 69; “Bush Victor in Texas GOP Senate Race,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1964, 3.

²⁸ Bush’s father voted for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Carter Hodding, “Not the End,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1991, 15; Phillips, *American Dynasty*: 135; Steven A. Holmes, “The Nation; When the Subject is Civil Rights, There are Two George Bushes,” *New York Times*, 9 June 1991, 1.

²⁹ Bush lost by 1,245,572 to 963,698 votes in “Lyndon Wins Texas’ 25 Votes: Carries Other Democrats Into State Office,” *Chicago Tribune*, 4 November 1964, B12; Gladwin Hill, “Yarborough Pins Hope on Johnson,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1964, 16; Bush depicted as Goldwater supporter, “Democratic Party Split is Making the Texas Senatorial Race a Toss-Up,” *New York Times*, 28 October 1964, 23; “Bush Victor,” 3.

³⁰ Former Democrat segregationists were given leadership positions in Texas counties and the Republican right wing accepted John Birch Society members, “Extremists Lose Texas G.O.P Test,” *New York Times*, 4 July 1965, 22; see also Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Inside Report: The Birchite Republicans,” *Washington Post*, 28 July 1966, 21.

³¹ “Bush Ponders,” 7.

³² Alan L. Otten, “Politics and People: Conservative Horse Race,” *Wall Street Journal*, 21 September 1966, 18.

³³ “Tower Wins Senate Race in Texas: Connally Elected Governor for Third Time,” *Chicago Tribune*, 9 November 1966, 4; Holmes, “Two George Bushes.”

³⁴ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, “Young Texas Congressman Bush Gets Nixon Look as Running Mate,” *Washington Post*, 5 June 1968, 5.

of who were African American – from federal employment.³⁵ In 1970, Bush ran for the Senate on a law and order platform.³⁶ Bush and his opponent, Democrat Lloyd Bentsen, were both considered conservative but Bush lost.³⁷ President Nixon then appointed Bush as US Ambassador to the UN and Republican President Gerald Ford subsequently appointed Bush to other important positions including Republican National Committee Chairman (1973-1974), Chief US Liaison Officer to the People's Republic of China (1974-1976) and Director of the CIA (1976-1977).³⁸ An unsuccessful Republican presidential nominee in 1980, Reagan selected Bush to be his Vice Presidential running mate.³⁹

Perhaps Bush's most notable deviation from Reagan on civil rights was his tacit approval of the King Holiday. Bush's initial support for King Day is difficult to establish, though there is some evidence that he offered his backing. The pivotal Holiday advocate, John Conyers, claimed Bush advocated behind the scenes for the Holiday during his term as Vice President. According to Conyers, however, Bush's support garnered no public notice because Bush felt unable to "break out" from behind Reagan's opposition and advocate for the day.⁴⁰ Yet, Bush made a rare appearance in the Senate to preside over the Holiday vote in 1983 and according to *Time* magazine, would have voted in the affirmative to break a deadlock if one eventuated.⁴¹ Bush's vote was ultimately unnecessary, but a perception that he supported the Holiday developed as his presence in the Senate and participation in subsequent Holiday activities indicated his approval. After passage of the Holiday legislation, Bush's support became more public and he attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Commission's Washington DC office.⁴² He also went to Atlanta to celebrate the inaugural Holiday.⁴³

In most instances, however, Bush closely aligned himself with Reagan on racial issues. He supported Reagan's veto of the 1988 Civil Rights Restoration Act, designed to ban institutions

³⁵ Aldo Beckman, "Looters Face Firing From Federal Jobs," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 April 1968, 1; "US Job Ban for Rioters Urged," *New York Times*, 12 April 1968, 18.

³⁶ The Democrats emphasised inflation and unemployment, R.W. Apple Jr., "Two Parties Pick Definitive Issues for Senate Race," *New York Times*, 13 September 1970, 1.

³⁷ R.W. Apple Jr., "Similarities Mark Texas Rivals: Bush Appears Ahead of Bentsen in the Senate Campaign," *New York Times*, 30 October 1970, 45.

³⁸ Martin Waldron, "Bentsen Defeats Bush in Texas Despite Massive Effort by Nixon," *New York Times*, 4 November 1970, 1; Hunter, "Gregarious Nominee," 30; Chairman of the Republican National Committee (1973-1974), Chief US Liaison Officer to the People's Republic of China (1974-1976), and Director of CIA (1976-1977), Phillips, *American Dynasty*: 7, 30-31.

³⁹ "George H. W. Bush," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

⁴⁰ Conyers, "How Did it Happen?."

⁴¹ Church and MacNeil, "A National Holiday for King," 32.

⁴² Joann S. Lublin, "Reagan is Courting Black Middle Class, But There is Little Evidence of Success," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 1985, 34; Bush showed respect for the King family by attending the funeral of Martin Luther King Sr. Dexter Scott King and Ralph Wiley, *Growing up King: An Intimate Memoir* (New York: Warner Books, 2003), 157.

⁴³ In 1992, Coretta praised Bush for helping him persuade Reagan to sign the Holiday into law, Cynthia Durcanin, "Presidential Visit: Blacks Send Bush a Message," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 18 January 1992, 1.

guilty of discrimination from receiving federal funds.⁴⁴ He asserted that after seven and a half years of loyalty, he was not about to oppose Reagan.⁴⁵ Yet, during his 1988 presidential campaign, Bush publically claimed to have also advised Reagan not to veto the Act. This political balancing act enabled him to maintain loyalty to Reagan, but also hint that he was sympathetic African American interests.⁴⁶

The most controversial aspect of Bush's election campaign, however, centred on race. A vicious controversy, heralded when Bush appointed Lee Atwater as campaign manager, characterised his effort to reach the White House. Bush and Atwater demonized the Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis over the crimes of Willie Horton, a black prisoner who raped and murdered a white woman when on furlough in Massachusetts, while Dukakis was governor of the state.⁴⁷ Atwater claimed, "If I can make Willie Horton a household name, we'll win the election." The National Security Political Action Committee, a group supportive, but supposedly independent, of Bush, funded and produced a television advertisement that linked Dukakis to Horton. The adverts were televised on a cable channel for twenty eight days and Bush only distanced himself from them three days before they were due to be taken off air. His campaign released a similar television advert that accused Dukakis of vetoing mandatory sentences for drug dealers and giving weekend furloughs to first degree murders, who then kidnapped and raped while out of prison. These latter adverts did not mention Horton, but the implications were clear. The advertising generated a bitter racial controversy that infused Bush's campaign and Jesse Jackson, among others, claimed the campaign stoked white fears about black men.⁴⁸

In his acceptance speech for the Republican presidential nomination of 1988, Bush portrayed himself as Reagan's natural successor and vowed to "complete the mission we started in 1980."⁴⁹ Without irony, he claimed America had "come far, but I think we need a new harmony among the races in our country ... we've got to leave the tired old baggage of bigotry behind."⁵⁰ Bush described his wish for a "kinder, gentler" nation, yet according to Marable "relied on many of the

⁴⁴ The Act was drafted to counter the Supreme Court's *Grove City College v. Bell* decision. John Robinson, "Senate Tightens Bias Curbs on US Funds for Institutions," *Boston Globe*, 29 January 1988, 1; AP, "Bush Backs Reagan's Rejection of Rights Bill," *Toronto Star*, 22 March 1988, 3.

⁴⁵ John Balzar, "Bush Supports Reagan's Veto of Rights Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1988, 1; "Bush Says He Supports President's Veto of Major Civil Rights Legislation," *Star Tribune*, 22 March 1988, 3.

⁴⁶ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Bush Veto Waffle Sinks Image," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 28 March 1988, 28; Thomas B. Rosenstiel, "Campaign '88 'Loser' in Rights Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1988, 6; Jesse Jackson, nonetheless, taunted Bush during the 1988 election for lacking leadership on civil rights. "Jackson Criticizes Bush on Veto," *New York Times*, 24 March 1988, 30; David S Broder, "Jackson Takes Aim at a 'Follower' Bush; Vice President Assailed as Silent on Drugs, S. Africa, Middle East," *Washington Post*, 24 March 1988, 19.

⁴⁷ Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 139-142.

⁴⁸ Jon Meacham, *Destiny and Power: The American Odyssey of George Herbert Walker Bush* (New York: Random House, 2015), 341-344.

⁴⁹ Coretta was in the audience for Bush's acceptance speech, as his guest, Bush, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination."; Carole Ashkinaze, "Bush's Veto Betrays Coretta Scott King," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 30 October 1990, 29.

⁵⁰ Bush, "Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination," xiv.

racially motivated methods” of Reagan and “benefitted from conservative and racist sentiment against blacks.”⁵¹ Despite noble sentiments, Bush stoked white fear of black violence in his speech by using law and order language to describe the economy: “there are millions of older Americans who were brutalized by inflation. We *arrested* it – and we’re not going to let it out on *furlough*.” In case listeners missed the connection, Bush then excoriated Dukakis for being soft on crime. He claimed “it is a scandal to give a weekend *furlough* to a hardened first degree killer.” Bush continued to smear his opponent, using law and order language that demonised the black community, all the way to election day and the White House.⁵²

As President, Bush acted to repair relations between Republicans and African Americans. He met with the CBC in the White House (Reagan never did) and took advice from the Nathan Group, a black political committee hired to attract black voters.⁵³ According to some reports, he also strengthened voting rights, fair housing enforcement and had a better relationship with civil rights groups than Reagan.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Marable declared Bush was “partially responsible for” a “brave, new world in race relations.” Though “more liberal” than Reagan, Bush pursued a similar “strategy of promoting ‘black conservatives’ into positions of public prominence at the expense of African American group interests.”⁵⁵ A perception developed that there were “two George Bushes” on civil rights issues.⁵⁶ Despite wanting to attract black voters, Bush vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1990.⁵⁷ The Act would have compelled companies accused of discrimination to disprove their hiring policies were responsible for discrimination.⁵⁸ Bush claimed to be in favour of the Act, though not if it was a “quota bill.”⁵⁹ After Congress passed the Act, Bush vetoed it as he feared businesses would unofficially “adopt quotas in hiring and promotion” in order to avoid legal trouble. He became only the third president to veto a civil rights bill since the Civil War (the others were Andrew Johnson and Reagan).⁶⁰ Bush claimed the Act would have introduced the “destructive

⁵¹ Bush, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination.”; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 200.

⁵² Bush, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination,” 3, 6.

⁵³ Holmes, “Two George Bushes,” 1.

⁵⁴ Michel McQueen, “Besides Congress’s Fight over a Civil-Rights Bill, There’s a Battle of the Bushes: George vs. George,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 April 1991, 18.

⁵⁵ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 216.

⁵⁶ Holmes, “Two George Bushes,” 1; McQueen, “Battle of the Bushes,” 18; Anthony Lewis, “Who is George Bush?,” *New York Times*, 26 October 1990, 35.

⁵⁷ Cynthia Durcanin, “Gulf War Threat, Arizona Vote Cast Shadow as King Week Starts,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 13 January 1991, D1.

⁵⁸ The Act was designed to challenge the Supreme Court decision in *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio* (1989). In *Wards Cove*, the Court had determined in cases of workplace discrimination that the onus was on employees to prove a company’s policies were discriminatory, rather than require companies to disprove their policies were discriminatory. Michale Isikoff, “Congress at Work Reversing Top Court; New Act Would Expand Employees’ Rights to Sue for Discrimination,” *Washington Post*, 26 February 1990, 9.

⁵⁹ Myron S. Waldman, “Tinkering With Rights Bill Congressmen Say Changes Should Dispel White House ‘Quota’ Fears,” *Newsday*, 18 May 1990.

⁶⁰ Nancy Mathis, “Civil Rights Measure Approved by House,” *Houston Chronicle*, 4 August 1990, 5; The Senate passed the Act, 65-34 (2 votes short of veto proof) and House 272-154 (12 votes short) “Bush Should Sign the Civil Rights Restoration Bill,” *Newsday*, 1 October 1990, 48; Vernon E. Jordan noted, “Bush is benefiting from simply not

force of quotas into our national employment system.”⁶¹ Bush’s contradictory stances exposed fissures between liberal and conservative Republicans. Conservatives supported the veto, but later denounced the President when he eventually signed a revised Civil Rights Act of 1991.⁶² Bush opposed the Act for so long that conservatives viewed his eventual approval as a cynical attempt to avoid being associated with David Duke, a former Klansman and Republican candidate for Governor of Louisiana, who also opposed the Act.⁶³ Conservatives thought Bush surrendered to the civil rights lobby with an unprincipled decision.⁶⁴ Sceptics proposed an alternative reason to explain Bush’s eventual approval: his veto would have been overturned.⁶⁵ Bush allocated federal resources to fight racism more vigorously than his predecessor did, however he was motivated at least as much by political convenience as principle. Republicans knew they needed to win over “a substantial number of minorities” from the Democrats if they were to win the House of Representatives, or control of many state legislatures. This required “a tactical shift in racial rhetoric and, to a lesser extent, substantial programmatic support.”⁶⁶

Commission Renewal – 1989

One avenue for Bush to indicate his support for black concerns was to support the Holiday. The King Holiday Commission was due to expire in 1989 and Bush supported its renewal, as did Lee Atwater, who became “instrumental in the passage” of the Commission Extension Act.⁶⁷ Before passage of the Act, the House conducted hearings in which supporters discussed the Commission’s future and its role in organising the Holiday. In this forum, US foreign relations officials revealed

being Ronald Reagan.” Barbara Vobejda, “Jordan Warns of a ‘Firestorm’ Over Civil Rights,” *Washington Post*, 20 May 1990.

⁶¹ “President Vetoes Bill on Job Rights,” *New York Times*, 23 October 1990, 1.

⁶² Barry Bearak and David Lauter, “1991 Rights Bill a Return to Earlier Paths of Bias Redress Race Relations,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1991, 1.

⁶³ William Raspberry, “Duke Pushes Bush Over the Cliff,” *The Oregonian*, 1 November 1991, D11.

⁶⁴ Bush claimed to support affirmative action, see TRB, “So, He’s Also the Affirmative-Action President,” *The Sun*, 28 November 1991, 27; George F. Will, “White House Has Surrendered to Civil Rights Lobby,” *Star Tribune*, 23 December 1990; “So It’s Quotas After All?,” *Richmond Times - Dispatch*, 19 December 1990, 8.

⁶⁵ Bush would “rather have a civil rights bill he could sign than to hitch his political wagon to hard-core bigots,” Raspberry, “Duke Pushes Bush,” D11; William Raspberry, “Bush, Civil Rights and the Specter of David Duke,” *Washington Post*, 30 October 1991, 23; Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 155-156.

⁶⁶ Bush’s sympathy was also manifested by increased budgets for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and traditionally black colleges and universities Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 201.

⁶⁷ King Commission, “Living the Dream,” Fall 1991, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Living the Dream Newsletter 1992-1996, 8; *An Act to Make Permanent the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, HR 1385, 101 Cong., 1st sess. (23 January 1989); Coretta requested Bush’s support by letter. After congratulating Bush on his “most successful Presidential Inaugural,” she came to her point. Coretta wrote, “We did not have sufficient support from Republicans in the Senate to move the legislation out of the Judiciary Committee in the Senate before the 100th Congress adjourned.” Therefore, “We ask for your support.” Coretta also requested Bush’s permission to appoint Atwater as a Commissioner-at-large. She wrote, “Lee represents a generation which would readily embrace Martin’s teachings and work, if given the opportunity.” Coretta Scott King, “Letter to President Bush,” 25 April 1989, 97-0020, Box 4: Coretta Scott King, Incoming Correspondence (January 1990-September 1995), Folder: Coretta Scott King: Outgoing, April 1989; For Atwater’s own controversial views on racial politics, see Atwater, “Lee Atwater’s Interview”.

the way in which they utilised King's image abroad to advance US interests. The United States Information Agency (USIA) emerged as a enthusiastic advocate and Mark Blitz, its Associate Director, claimed that the Agency used the Commission to help carry out programs abroad. These programs "demonstrate to important foreign audiences that the United States is a country based on equality, in which change is possible through peaceful and democratic means." Blitz claimed that the US "stands as a model worthy of emulation for peoples of many countries which discriminate against some of their citizens" and that the Holiday demonstrated "we, as a country, believe in the principles Dr. King defended." Blitz noted that abroad the USIA had broadcast appearances by Coretta. The agency enhanced the Commission's international reach and participated in ceremonies in Jerusalem and Calcutta where streets were named after King. The USIA organised seminars, exhibits and film screenings by US missions in honour of King.⁶⁸ The State Department also encouraged the Extension Act and Clarence E. Hodges, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and head of the Commission's International Affairs Committee, claimed that his overseas travels made him aware of the international acceptance of King and "need for the Commission as it relates to organizations and governments world wide." Hodges supported the Act "in the interests of peace, justice, and the broad advancement of human rights."⁶⁹

The House of Representatives voted to make the Commission permanent, but to Coretta's regret "it was necessary to compromise this position with the Senate and accept a five year extension" to 20 April 1994. Convinced "the Commission should be permanent,"⁷⁰ Coretta believed it had been forced to accept a mere extension by "conservative forces in the Senate."⁷¹ Congress also made funding possible. The Commission expected to receive \$300,000 a year to educate the public about King.⁷² No great sum to begin with, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act deducted 20

⁶⁸ *A Bill to Make Permanent the King Commission*, Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, 21-22.

⁶⁹ *A Bill to Make Permanent the King Commission*, Committee on Post Office, 16.

⁷⁰ King Commission, "Testimony of Coretta Scott King, Lloyd Davis and Leonard Burchman," 19 February 1991, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Staff Meeting, February 1991, 84; "Proceedings," 8 January 1990.

⁷¹ Coretta Scott King, "Letter to President Clinton," 15 March 1993, 97-0003, Box 4: Legislative Papers 1993-1999, Folder: King Center Staff Correspondence (2 of 3) 1993-1994; see also, King Commission, "Talking Points For Meeting With the President," 1993, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta 97-0003, Box 4: Legislative Papers 1993-1999, Folder: King Center Staff Correspondence (2 of 3) 1993-1994; The Extension Act nevertheless removed a clause to terminate the Commission, which cleared the way to possible permanent status at a later date. Coretta was also made a life member, with her position to be filled by "a member of the family surviving" if she vacated. *An Act to Make Permanent*, in King Commission, "Goals and Objectives for 1991-1994 (Draft)," *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0001, Box 1: Executive Director's Office, Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, Goals and Objectives 1991-1994 "Draft".

⁷² The Commission was first granted the right to claim funding in 1987 in a bill designed to allocate \$300,000 for the 'development of educational programs' relating to King. The programs were to educate the youth of the nation and money was to be appropriated for 1988 and 1989, see *A Bill to Provide for the Development of Educational Programs Relating to the Contributions of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., H.R. 2173.

percent – as it did from most government spending, in order to reduce federal debt – to reduce the amount to \$240,000.⁷³

While the Senate voted 90-7 in favour of extending the Commission's tenure, it still harboured King opponents who forced compromise. The Senate approved by 96-0 an amendment sponsored by Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia, and cosponsored by Jesse Helms, prohibiting the Commission "from conducting any training on how to engage in non-violent social protest or civil disobedience."⁷⁴ Helms, who first raised concerns about this issue, argued the federal government, as represented by the Commission, had "no business encouraging protest movements."⁷⁵ He referred to the Commission's annual reports and Freedom Trail in order to argue that the Commission had attempted to train students to engage in protest activities.⁷⁶ The amendment forbade the Commission from using congressional funds, office space or personnel to train for, direct or encourage "the organization or implementation of campaigns to protest social conditions" and "any form of civil disobedience."⁷⁷ Since civil disobedience was central to King's nonviolent activism, this restriction had potentially serious consequences in regard to the meaning of the Holiday. The Commission discussed the restriction on nonviolent protest and decided to omit any language promoting civil disobedience from its new publications.⁷⁸

The Age of Democratic Revolution

Bush's inauguration overshadowed the 1989 King Holiday.⁷⁹ Inaugural preparations coincided with King Day and gave the new President an opportunity to foster the harmonious race relations he claimed to want. The *New York Times* published an image of Bush meeting with black conservatives from the American Bicentennial Presidential Inaugural African American Committee. Bush told them "bigotry and indifference to disadvantage will find no safe home," and he praised King as a hero who "realised a great nation's noble promise."⁸⁰ Bush sent a letter to Ebenezer

⁷³ King Commission, "Proceedings," 10 April 1990, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990 - May 1993, Folder: Proceedings, April 1990, 19; The Gramm-Rudman-Hollings (GRH) Act was introduced when the federal deficit had grown to two hundred billion dollars per year by 1985. The plan was to reduce the deficit by reducing government spending in order to balance the budget by 1991. The GRH Act was later amended to aim for a balanced federal budget by 1993. It was eventually superseded by the Tax Reform Act of 1986, which post-dated the 1981 Tax Act, and was later replaced by the Budget Reconciliation Act (BRA) of 1990. Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 121.

⁷⁴ CR-Senate: *To Authorize Funding for the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, 101st Cong., 1st sess, 2 May 1989, S4586-S4589, S4600.

⁷⁵ *To Authorize Funding*, 1989, S4587.

⁷⁶ *To Authorize Funding*, 1989, S4587.

⁷⁷ *An Act to Make Permanent*.

⁷⁸ "Report of Proceedings," 19 June 1989, 33, 67; "Report of Proceedings," 19 June 1989, 67.

⁷⁹ "George H.W. Bush."

⁸⁰ Jacqueline Trescott, "Sharing King's Dream; Bush Pledges to Work for Racial Equality," *Washington Post*, 17 January 1989, B2; Sean Cronin, "Bush Pledges to Keep King's Dream Alive," *Irish Times*, 17 January 1989, 5; Maureen Dowd, "Bush Says the Dream of Dr. King Will Be a Vision for his Tenure," *New York Times*, 17 January 1989, 1.

Baptist Church in which he pledged to work “for the strict enforcement of civil rights as well as for absolute equality for all Americans.”⁸¹ This commitment to protect existing civil rights was notable for the absence of newly proposed civil rights legislation, and the dedication to “absolute equality” suggested a ‘colour blind’ philosophy.⁸² Bush’s conservative inclinations meant he shunned progressive methods such as affirmative action to remediate social, economic and ethnic disadvantage. Nonetheless, Jesse Jackson gave the keynote sermon during the Holiday ecumenical service and stated that Bush had already met more black leaders “in the first two months of transition than Mr. Reagan met with for eight years.”⁸³

Celebrations in New York and Washington DC were more diffuse than in Atlanta. The *New York Times* featured a mass in a Newark Catholic Church, which indicated respect for King across Christian denominations.⁸⁴ In Harlem, former SCLC Chief of Staff Wyatt Tee Walker warned that the Holiday only brought white and black together superficially, but afterwards people “went back to business as usual in white racist America.”⁸⁵ In Washington DC, Mayor Marion Barry spoke to hundreds of people gathered at the King Library and lamented the rate of homicide in the district, while Reverend H. Becher Hicks Jr. of the Metropolitan Baptist Church told his congregation that a new generation of black children did not “know anything about why we’re here” and did not care about King.⁸⁶

On the other hand, not all King celebrations were solemn. In Washington DC, jazz concerts, essay contests and fashion shows were held. Howard University hosted a “Salute in Jazz” to King (to shun commercialisation of the Holiday) and Rev. Shuttlesworth attended a workshop on movement songs at the National Museum of American History. Sweet Honey and the Rock, a black women’s acapella ensemble dedicated to addressing civil rights issues, performed a musical celebration and the Hyatt Hotel hosted a King fashion show.⁸⁷

During the Bush presidency the Holiday became increasingly connected to events beyond US borders, a development Coretta had long hoped for. In 1986 she suggested King Day ought to be observed with a global ceasefire and even lobbied the UN to encourage the suspension of all

⁸¹ Patrice Gaines-Carter, “Nation Heeds King’s Dream, Life; Bush, Barry Vow to Work for Change,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 1989, D1.

⁸² Hall argues the New Right embraced an “ideal of formal equality” and “insisted that color blindness – defined as the elimination of racial classifications and the establishment of formal equality before the law – was the movement’s singular objective, the principle for which King and the *Brown* decision, in particular, stood.” Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement,” 1237.

⁸³ Marable also credited Bush with meeting more black leaders than Reagan, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 200; Cynthia Durcanin, “Jackson Blisters Reagan: Hits Civil Rights Record in his King Day Speech,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 January 1989, 1.

⁸⁴ “Dr. King is Honored on His 60th Birthday,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1989, 1.

⁸⁵ Ari L. Goldman, “A Day Off Is Not the Dream, Disciple of King Says,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1989, B3.

⁸⁶ Gaines-Carter, “Nation Heeds King’s Dream, Life; Bush, Barry Vow to Work for Change,” D1.

⁸⁷ Charles Elder, “Range of Celebrations Set to Honor King,” *Washington Post*, 12 January 1989, J3.

military patrols and war games on the day.⁸⁸ Coretta campaigned to have the Holiday recognised abroad, meeting with foreign diplomats, the State Department and the USIA. The latter emerged as a valuable conduit that projected King's image to the world. Charles Z. Wick, USIA director, supported the Commission and continued the Agency's tendency to invoke King's image as a symbol of the US.⁸⁹ The 1963 March on Washington, for instance, "fitted easily into the USIA approach to civil rights" as it attempted to dispel Soviet propaganda regarding US racism. The USIA fostered the impression – often misleading – that the federal government and the movement were working together, when in fact Washington usually followed the movement's lead.⁹⁰ More than twenty years later, the US government once again found King to be a useful symbol.

The most obvious use of King's legacy abroad occurred in South Africa. There, US Ambassador Edward Perkins unveiled a bust of King at the US Embassy in Pretoria.⁹¹ In an affront to that nation's racist regime, Perkins commissioned the bust for the Embassy grounds and quoted King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' at the dedication ceremony. A career diplomat and the first African American Ambassador to South Africa, Perkins was appointed by Reagan in 1986.⁹² When the President was equivocating on anti-apartheid policy, his advisors suggested sending a black ambassador to South Africa.⁹³ According to Ambassador Perkins, he had "direct orders from President Reagan ... to dismantle apartheid without violence." Perkins asked for and was "given the rare leeway of making policy on the ground."⁹⁴ Once in South Africa, he received a hostile reception from President P.W. Botha but made a concerted effort to meet black leaders and citizens.⁹⁵

King himself had been very aware of the anti-apartheid campaign in South Africa, not least because his ideological inspiration, Gandhi, had undertaken his first nonviolent campaigns for social change there.⁹⁶ According to George M. Houser of the American Committee on Africa, King believed "there was a special relationship between black America and Africa" because the liberation struggles in sub-Saharan Africa were an inspiration to the civil rights movement and King

⁸⁸ Coretta Scott King, in "Summary Report of the Chairperson," 20 May 1985, 5-6; "Universal King Holiday Sought," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 December 1986, 3; "The Meaning of the Holiday," 25 July 1985, 2-3.

⁸⁹ "Proceedings," 8 January 1990, 17.

⁹⁰ Cull, *The Cold War and the USIA*: 212.

⁹¹ Trescott, "Sharing King's Dream," B3; Gaines-Carter, "Nation Heeds King's Dream, Life; Bush, Barry Vow to Work for Change," D1; Edward J. Perkins and Connie Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 433.

⁹² Perkins and Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace*: 2-3; Cronin, "Bush Pledges to Keep King's Dream Alive," 5.

⁹³ Perkins and Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace*: 250.

⁹⁴ Perkins and Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace*: 4, 256-260.

⁹⁵ Perkins and Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace*: 285-288, 289-330.

⁹⁶ Penderel Moon, *Gandhi and Modern India* (London: The English Universities Press, 1968), 15-50; Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community*: 7-24, esp 9.

believed that the struggle for freedom was international.⁹⁷ King went to Africa twice: First for Ghana's independence in 1957 and second, to Nigeria in 1960. South Africa refused King entry in 1966. King called for an international boycott of South Africa, but apartheid's viciousness forced even he to question nonviolence's effectiveness. South Africa responded to the smallest acts of nonviolence with such brutal violence that King claimed to understand why anti-apartheid activists resorted to sabotage.⁹⁸ To King, the "tragedy of South Africa" was not just apartheid, but that "the racist government ... is virtually made possible by the economic policies of the United States and Great Britain."⁹⁹

The anti-apartheid movement made frequent connections to King and the Holiday.¹⁰⁰ At the ecumenical service in 1986, Senator Kennedy lauded Desmond Tutu as the "Martin Luther King of South Africa." Both Kennedy and Bush (when the latter was Vice President) publically denounced the apartheid system on King Day¹⁰¹ and African delegates to the UN requested that King's birthday become a UN Holiday.¹⁰² Though anti-apartheid leaders struggled with King's absolute commitment to nonviolence, many considered him both a hero and martyr. In South Africa, King's reputation remained high and his birthday was celebrated, despite the white government.¹⁰³ A week-long celebration was planned for 1990 with a ceremony in Johannesburg to honour South Africa's black opposition leaders.¹⁰⁴

In 1990, President Bush deployed King's image in an attempt to influence the direction of South African politics. During a press conference on 12 February, Bush urged South African resistance leader Nelson Mandela to "adopt the nonviolent tactics of Martin Luther King." Bush declared "we've always advocated nonviolence," yet maintained his disapproval of economic sanctions against South Africa on the premise they were counterproductive and threatened South African and US jobs. Bush held this view, despite the fact that King, as pointed out earlier, thought South Africa's "racist government" was supported by the economic policies of the US and the

⁹⁷ George M. Houser, "Freedom's Struggle Crosses Oceans and Mountains: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Liberation Struggles in Africa and America," in *We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Peter J. Albert and Ronald Hoffman (New York: Pantheon Books and the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1990), 182.

⁹⁸ Houser, "Freedom's Struggle Crosses Oceans and Mountains," 185, 190-191; see also James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," *The Journal of American American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 455-467.

⁹⁹ King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 173.

¹⁰⁰ For more on King and South Africa, see Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community*: esp 123 for passage about King Holiday and Desmond Tutu.

¹⁰¹ Pousner, "National Leaders," 1.

¹⁰² Shun P. Govender, Director of the Belydende Kring (Confessing Circle) of the Dutch Reformed Churches in Cape Town, wrote, "You may have your national holiday ... we have King as our tomorrow." Govender, "We Shall Overcome," 235; AP, "Parades, Protests," 1, 8.

¹⁰³ Cynthia Durcanin, "Reflecting on the 'Dream' Mrs. King: Spend More on Social Programs," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 15 January 1990, 1; Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community*: 112-116.

¹⁰⁴ Cynthia Durcanin, "Celebration Shadowed by Violence: King Day Speakers Mark Political Gains Amid Rise in Racism," *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 16 January 1990, 1.

UK.¹⁰⁵ Though Bush agreed with Mandela's goal of a society free of racism, he quoted King in an appeal to all South Africans to renounce "violence and armed struggle."¹⁰⁶ Mandela rejected Bush's appeal and the two leaders never resolved this disagreement.¹⁰⁷ King's legacy nonetheless proved a useful tool that whites and blacks could unite behind internationally. South African President, white nationalist F.W. de Klerk, invoked King as he prepared to meet Secretary of State James Baker. At Washington DC's reflecting pool, de Klerk expressed admiration for King's "dream for an America of justice and harmony through nonviolence." He added: "The words and deeds of ... Dr King still ring out to us all."¹⁰⁸

The anti-apartheid struggle similarly influenced King Holiday celebrations in Atlanta, particularly when the national parade and march were divided into two separate events in 1992. The parade, held on the Saturday, evolved into a more "entertainment-orientated" celebrity event.¹⁰⁹ The march on King Day, however, became more solemn, politically orientated and attracted 100,000 spectators, few of them white. As Grand Marshall, Winnie Mandela, wife of Nelson Mandela, led "the more serious political" march.¹¹⁰ Her role became controversial, however, as she had been sentenced to six years jail over the death of a fourteen-year-old black activist and it emerged that she had once delivered a speech promising to torture and kill traitors to black South Africans.¹¹¹

Bush also projected a patriotic image of King as Communist rule in China and Eastern Europe came under threat. In response to the 1989 pro-democracy protests in China, he pronounced, "we revere the model of Martin Luther King for his peaceful protest and so I might suggest a familiarization with that for the people in China." Whether Bush most intended his message for the government of China, or the already peaceful protesters, or both, it is significant that a Republican president invoked King to advise a Communist nation.¹¹² In doing so, Bush devised a way in which a Republican president could honour King without offending the far right. Republicans could co-opt King in the fight against communism. Bush later used King's image to project a favourable impression of the US to the USSR in a New Year's greeting for Soviet television. In the greeting,

¹⁰⁵ King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 173.

¹⁰⁶ George H.W. Bush, "Excerpts From President's New Conference on World Issues," *New York Times*, 13 February 1990, 14.

¹⁰⁷ "Bush-Mandela Clash Over Arms," *Times of India*, 27 June 1990, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Tisdall, "De Klerk Thoughts Turn to Dr. King," *Guardian*, 24 September 1990, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Holly Morris, "King Week 1992: Thousands Brave Cold for Parade, Glimpse of Stars," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1992, C1; The Parade had a virtually all-black audience of fifty thousand. Cynthia Durcanin, "King Week 1992: Winnie Mandela," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 19 January 1992, C1.

¹¹⁰ The parade and march were separated to "stress the importance of marching in the Civil Rights Movement." Cynthia Durcanin, "King Day '92, Remembering the Dream: Civil Rights Leaders From Around the World Joined Thousands of Atlantans," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 21 January 1992; Durcanin, "King Week 1992," C1; "Intown This Week: King Week '92 Marks 7th National Holiday," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 9 January 1992, E1; The King Week theme was "Where Do We Go From Here? Nonviolence: A Blueprint for Life," "King Week '92," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 11 January 1992, L21.

¹¹¹ Durcanin, "King Week 1992," C1; Perkins and Cronley, *Mr. Ambassador: Warrior for Peace*: 313-314.

¹¹² Timothy McNulty, "President Calls For Restraint," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 May 1989, 5; David Lauter, "Won't Be 'Stampeded' on Response to Soviets: Bush," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1989, 1.

Bush favourably referred to King and “a new world of our own making.”¹¹³ In this way, Bush effectively repudiated the claims of those who asserted King had been a fellow traveller of the Communist Party. In a sign of changing times, the Moscow city government dedicated a week of observances in honour of King. A public square and street where the US Embassy was located were named after him and there was a jazz concert and seminar on human rights in his honour.¹¹⁴ This portrayal of King as an anti-communist marked a change for Republicans, but nonetheless continued the trend of minimising his criticism of capitalism.¹¹⁵

Coretta and the Commission made connections to King and anti-communism. Meeting in June 1989, soon after the Tiananmen Square massacre in China, Commissioner Regula told the meeting that the protests in China “were probably an outgrowth of the nonviolent change” and “message of Dr. King.”¹¹⁶ The Commission met again in November when revolutions in Eastern Europe dominated international relations and Coretta portrayed King as an inspiration for the movements in China and Poland.¹¹⁷ The concept of King as an inspiration for international change deeply influenced the 1990 Holiday. Coretta spent King Week claiming that the pro-democracy movements had “deep roots” in the pulpit of the Ebenezer Baptist Church.¹¹⁸ She was proud the *Washington Post* had credited King with inspiring millions to nonviolence saying, “We see men and women everywhere laying claim to Dr. King’s legacy around the globe.” Coretta claimed that in nations like Hungary, Poland, East Germany, South Africa and the Soviet Union, “people are marching peacefully and nonviolently in protest against an old order.”¹¹⁹ Not to be outdone, the conservative *Washington Times* published an article by Bush; Von Bothmer later described the article as “Bush’s most extensive reconstruction of King.”¹²⁰ Bush invoked King as a triumphalist symbol of freedom and the free market, citing King’s belief that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Von Bothmer observed that Bush “stressed the relevance of conservative Republican principles for African Americans.” These principles included a claim by Bush that “free markets work.” Von Bothmer argues that Bush attempted to “transform King from a radical critic of American racism to a critic of communism and – by extension – a champion of capitalism and free

¹¹³ “New Year’s Greetings Between Nations,” *Washington Post*, 1 January 1990, 17.

¹¹⁴ Scott King, “Style That Ended Segregation,” H5; King Commission, “Annual Report on the 1991 Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday,” 1991, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 2: Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: 1991 Annual Report, 1992 Annual Report, 62.

¹¹⁵ King had read Marx and while he rejected Communist materialism he had also rejected unregulated capitalist materialism, a point Bush did not acknowledge. Fairclough, “Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?,” 301-309.

¹¹⁶ This was the first meeting of 1989 for which there is a record in the archive. Joe Biden may have been present or awarded a certificate of appreciation, “Report of Proceedings,” 19 June 1989, 22-24.

¹¹⁷ King Commission, “Record of Proceedings,” 28 November 1989, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 4: Commission/Committee Meetings, October 1987-December 1989, Folder: Proceedings, November 1989, 6-8.

¹¹⁸ Durcanin, “Reflecting on the ‘Dream’,” 1.

¹¹⁹ “Proceedings,” 8 January 1990, 30-31.

¹²⁰ Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 111-112.

markets.”¹²¹ In this way, we can clearly see that King’s legacy was used not only as bridge for reconciliation between conflicted ideologies and nations, but also projected as an image of triumphant capitalism. Coretta, however, “likened the events in Eastern Europe” to the early civil rights movement and the message that emanated from King’s pulpit, but declined to promote Bush’s free market agenda.¹²²

In 1990, Shen Tong, a twenty-one year old student from China, led the National Parade as Grand Marshall.¹²³ Introduced to King’s writings at school in China, Tong was inspired to study in the US. He believed that nonviolent “principles will win in the end,” in China.¹²⁴ Newspaper articles in the US associated the Holiday with both China and Eastern Europe.¹²⁵ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* noted the inherent irony that ‘We Shall Overcome’ had become an anthem for the downfall of Communism, after conservatives had for years accused the movement of being subverted and influenced by Communists.¹²⁶ The *Washington Times* published an article by Coretta, in which she attributed the origins of the “political earthquakes” in Eastern Europe, China and South Africa to the civil rights movement “led by” King: “the same philosophy and methods of non-violence that we used to break down the walls of segregation also have torn down the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain.”¹²⁷

In *Where Do We Go From Here?*, King used the metaphor of a “World House” to explain his global view. Humanity had inherited a house that all ethnic and religious groups had to share, since people must “live with each other in peace.”¹²⁸ To King, ethnic and ecumenical harmony in the house was inhibited by racism and economic exploitation, the source “of the international complications” of his generation.¹²⁹ Coretta drew parallels between King’s World House and Bush’s New World Order. She told the Commission she took “comfort in knowing that the World House concept that Dr. King envisioned is closer than ever, as paraphrased by President Bush’s recent statement of a new world order in the making.”¹³⁰

¹²¹ George H.W. Bush, “Color or Character: How Will Our Children Be Judged?,” *Washington Times*, 12 January 1990, H2, cited in Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 110-111, 265n96.

¹²² Larry Copeland, “Global perspective put on events commemorating King’s birthday,” *Atlanta Journal*, 5 January 1990, B1.

¹²³ Larry Copeland, “Thousands to March in King Holiday Parade, Celebration is 1st Televised Nationally,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 13 January 1990, D8.

¹²⁴ Larry Copeland, “King Inspired Him, Chinese Student Says,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 14 January 1990, D1.

¹²⁵ Copeland, “Global perspective,” B1.

¹²⁶ John Head, “‘The Dream’ in the 90s: Still a Long Way Yet to Go,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 15 January 1990, 11.

¹²⁷ Coretta argued that “organized non-violent action is the only strategy that has produced tangible social progress.” Scott King, “Style That Ended Segregation,” H5.

¹²⁸ King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 167.

¹²⁹ King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 173.

¹³⁰ The Commission had reverted back to a quarterly meetings, rather than annual, “Proceedings,” 3 October 1990, 7.

There were, however, considerable differences that Coretta may not have felt at liberty to point out to her bi-partisan Commissioners. According to Steven Hurst, Bush's New World Order was intended to be a multi-lateral/multi-national commitment to "order, peace, democracy and free trade" that would respond to international aggression in cooperation with the UN.¹³¹ The vision sounded noble, but Coretta was more hopeful than realistic in thinking the New World Order, built as it was on the Persian Gulf War in 1991, revived King's ideal of the 'World House.' It is reasonable to say that significant differences existed between the World House and the New World Order. King argued that the survival of the World House depended on "finding an alternative to war and human destruction" and decried the fact that "wielders of power" called for peace, yet refused "to do the things that make for peace." History was "replete" with conquerors who "came killing in pursuit of peace,"¹³² and Bush demonstrated he was prepared to go to war, in the name of peace.

The Persian Gulf War stimulated peace protests on the Holiday.¹³³ King Week began in Atlanta with the traditional interfaith service where celebrant Rev. Earl Moore said that Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Christians came together "in the interest of peace while under threat of war."¹³⁴ That year, Holiday celebrations were a notable absence from the front page of the *New York Times*, overshadowed by the Gulf crisis.¹³⁵ In addition, controversy erupted over military participation in Holiday events. Coretta liked to engage ideological adversaries, so invited the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, to lead the national parade as an honorary Grand Marshall.¹³⁶ Though the role was ceremonial, the SCLC condemned the invitation as inappropriate, since Powell was likely to command the US military in war. Powell's career clashed with King's nonviolent principles, yet, as one of the most famous African Americans of the era, many viewed him as the embodiment of black achievement and as politically neutral.¹³⁷ Powell did, in fact, respect King and placed a portrait of him (given by Coretta) in his office.¹³⁸ Therefore, in terms of race relations, he was an obvious choice to lead the parade. However, his acceptance of the efficacy of military force combined with the imminence of war made him a controversial selection and the episode illustrated how difficult the Commission found it to make a popular and relevant celebration loyal to King's

¹³¹ Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration*: 129.

¹³² King Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here*: 181-182.

¹³³ The schedule of events for 1991: Sunday, an interfaith service; Monday, White House Proclamation Ceremony; Tuesday, MLK Teach In Day and Federal Employees Tribute; Friday, Georgia State Commission Tribute; Sunday, 'State of the Dream Address' & World Prayer Day; Monday, Interfaith Breakfast, Ecumenical Service, National Parade, see "Schedule of Events for King Week," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 13 January 1991, D6.

¹³⁴ Gayle White, "1,700 Gather to Kick Off King Week," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 January 1991.

¹³⁵ "Front Page," *New York Times*, 21 January 1991, 1.

¹³⁶ Cynthia Durcanin, "Powell to lead King Parade: Invitation Raises Question of Conflict," *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 29 November 1990 1990, E1.

¹³⁷ Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*: 264.

¹³⁸ Karen De Young, *Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 181.

values. Though the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* urged Powell to lead the parade, he eventually declined, not wanting to “detract” from the celebration.¹³⁹

The impending war generated dissent and many recalled King’s opposition to the Vietnam War.¹⁴⁰ Bush had also signed the Commission’s pledge of nonviolence in 1986 and the media reported on the fact he would break that pledge if he ordered armed conflict.¹⁴¹ The deadline for Iraq to retreat from Kuwait exacerbated the controversy. A deal between the US and USSR led the UN to declare King’s birth date of the 15 January the deadline. If Iraq did not withdraw by then, war would ensue.¹⁴² The ultimatum outraged Coretta; she believed it revealed disdain for King’s pacifism. Coretta reiterated King’s opposition to war, echoing his critique of militarism. She argued the “war against Iraq will still be wrong,” regardless of its scheduled start.¹⁴³ In Coretta’s annual ‘State of the Dream’ speech, she criticised Bush and denounced the looming war as “another misguided attempt to make the U.S. the world’s policeman.” Coretta criticised the government for spending fifty-five cents of every tax dollar on the military, but only two cents on education, and argued the nation’s school children and three million homeless suffered most from militarism.¹⁴⁴ In a *Washington Post* article on 15 January, Coretta argued that the UN ought to focus on peace and that war would disproportionately impact African Americans who had higher enlistment rates in the military.¹⁴⁵ The press noticed the juxtaposition of celebrating a man of peace while preparing for war. The *Birmingham News* published two articles titled, ‘Anti-War Tone Marks King Observance’ and ‘King Day Festivities Anti-War, Pro-Mayor.’¹⁴⁶ And, the *Charlotte Observer* urged Americans to ‘Remember His Commitment to Peace.’ The *Observer* editorialised that, “We are at war, ostensibly to liberate another people in another part of the world. Sadly, though, we have neither liberated nor redeemed ourselves.”¹⁴⁷

¹³⁹ Powell’s spokesperson acknowledged the debate about his involvement influenced the decision, “March, Gen. Powell, March!,” *Atlanta Journal*, 3 December 1990, 8; Cynthia Durcanin, “Powell Says No to King Parade,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 15 December 1990, C1.

¹⁴⁰ Colman McCarthy, “The Terrible Toll of a Gulf War,” *Washington Post*, 13 January 1991, F2; Courtland Milloy, “Patriotism in the Face of Inequality,” *Washington Post*, 15 January 1991, B3; King Jr., “A Time to Break Silence.”

¹⁴¹ Lynne Duke, “At Martin Luther King Center, A Stinging Irony is Felt,” *Washington Post*, 16 January 1991, 14.

¹⁴² The US wanted to set a deadline for the use of force to liberate Kuwait. If not set for a time early in the year “a combination of Ramadan and the deteriorating climate could postpone any military action for a year.” Soviet leader President Gorbachev wanted the date to be 31 January, the US wanted an earlier date, possibly 1 January. France suggested to split the difference and the UN Security Council decided on 15 January as the date for to withdraw from Kuwait or else force would be used. Consideration of the political situation in the USSR also played a factor, as the US could not be sure it would have as favourable an ally as Gorbachev (his leadership was under threat) if the UN waited too long. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 228-234.

¹⁴³ Durcanin, “Gulf War Threat,” D1.

¹⁴⁴ Cynthia Durcanin, “King Week 1991: Missiles Not Part of “Dream,” King’s Widow Says,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 21 January 1991, D1.

¹⁴⁵ Coretta Scott King, “A Deadline and a Birthday,” *Washington Post*, 15 January 1991, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Justin Fox, “Anti-War Tone Marks King Observance,” *Birmingham News*, 14 January 1991, 1; Steve Visser, “King Day Festivities Anti-War, Pro-Mayor,” *Birmingham News*, 22 January 1991, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Editorial, “Honoring Martin Luther King,” *Charlotte Observer*, 21 January 1991, 11.

State Holidays

The Holiday's influence expanded not just abroad, but across the nation. The years from 1986 saw a steady increase in the number of state holidays.¹⁴⁸ By 1990, forty-six states honoured King with a holiday (exceptions included Arizona, Montana, New Hampshire and Idaho).¹⁴⁹ Though most states observed King Day in order to promote racial harmony, the day clashed with a negative trend in race relations on home soil. Resistance to the Holiday occurred in areas with "few black residents."¹⁵⁰ During the Bush era, campaigns to create a King Holiday continued in states that did not have a state based Holiday; these campaigns were bitterly fought.¹⁵¹ It is worth focusing on two of the most controversial: Arizona and New Hampshire.

In Arizona, in 1986, a political fight raged after Holiday legislation failed to pass, by one vote. Phoenix, the state capital declared a city holiday, but the Arizona state legislature greeted Governor Bruce Babbitt's advocacy for a state King Holiday with silence. Consequently, Babbitt, a Democrat, issued an executive order to create the Holiday for state employees.¹⁵² When he relinquished the governorship after two terms, incoming Governor Evan Mecham, a Republican, announced that "as a first act" he would rescind the order. With an African American population of only three percent, many in Arizona approved of the decision. Nicholas O. Alozie argues that older and conservative white Arizonans, rural residents and followers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, were less likely to support the Holiday than whites with higher socio-economic status and education, or the young, liberal and urban. Alozie also suggests that "symbolic racism" was the real reason many opposed the Holiday. If King Day symbolized black progress, whites resisted out of a fear of losing privilege.¹⁵³ Mecham's actions, however, precipitated a boycott of Arizona that cost an estimated \$18 million in lost "convention and hotel bookings." According to Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., (United Church of Christ's Commission on Racial Justice) other states saw

¹⁴⁸ By 1987, ten states did not officially celebrate, including Montana, Texas and North Carolina. Four territories, however, observed the day. Williams, "Most of U.S. Will honor Dr. King," 1, 24; By 1988, forty three states celebrated, with the exceptions of Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Wyoming (in North Carolina, a Republican Governor established the holiday for every second year). Williams, "Holiday for Dr King Gaining Wider Observance," 10; By 1989, all states except Arizona, Idaho, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota and Wyoming celebrated. James Barron, "Sea to Sea, North and South, King Is Honored," *New York Times*, 17 January 1989, B8.

¹⁴⁹ Copeland, "Thousands to March in King Holiday Parade, Celebration is 1st Televised Nationally," D8; North Dakota, however, observed a Holiday without pay in 1990, King Commission, "Living the Dream," Spring 1990, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Living the Dream Newsletter 1987-1994, 10.

¹⁵⁰ Williams, "Holiday for Dr King Gaining Wider Observance," 10.

¹⁵¹ "NH Students Protest Lack of King Holiday," *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 16 January 1990, 1.

¹⁵² "The Fallen Honored," 1; "5,000 March in Phoenix," 2; King Commission, "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 9 December 1986, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta 97-0023, Box 3: Commission/ Committee Meetings, December 1986 - October 1987, Folder: Executive Committee Meeting: Report of Proceedings/Minutes - December 1986, 14.

¹⁵³ Alozie, "Political Tolerance Hypotheses," 7, 11-13.

the cost to Arizona and quickly attempted to establish King Holidays. Texas and New Mexico held their first observances in 1988.¹⁵⁴

The Commission drafted a resolution to condemn Mecham's behaviour. One paragraph prompted an internal debate. The resolution read: "whereas Governor Mecham's proposed action to rescind the executive order of Governor Babbitt has caused considerable concern to many blacks, and other minorities, and whites ... his actions *are racially motivated* [my italics]." ¹⁵⁵ The resolution urged Mecham to reconsider and to support future legislation, "consistent with the national mood." Leonard Coleman (Commissioner Kean's proxy) moved the motion,¹⁵⁶ but Commissioner Kemp wanted to remove the phrase "racially motivated," in order to give Mecham a "chance to come back off" his position and support the Holiday. Kemp generously suggested Mecham might have a reason other than racism to cancel the Holiday and with that in mind, Coleman amended the motion. However, one unidentified speaker defended the original wording noting that Mecham's actions "*are* racially motivated" because the Governor's "statement was extremely provocative when it appeared in the press." The speaker made a suggestion to "change the word 'are' to 'appearing to be' and let him [Mecham] justify for himself." The motion was carried with the change.¹⁵⁷

This alteration is a small example of the Commission's timidity in dealing with contemporary politics and illustrates that in order to maintain bipartisanship, the Commission softened its stance. Commissioner Kemp, a future Republican Vice Presidential candidate, appreciated the different wording and praised the Commission for its bipartisanship. The Commission's Vice Chair, Governor Kean, planned to speak with Mecham at a governors' conference and to contact governors in all states without a Holiday in order to persuade them to allow state based Holidays.¹⁵⁸

Arizona's rejection of a state Holiday attracted far right support. White Supremacists travelled to Phoenix to celebrate the defeat of the Holiday and to "abolish Kingism."¹⁵⁹ Hostility to the Holiday was replicated elsewhere and King Day derided as a day to appease African Americans. In Bradley, Illinois, a small town fifty-three miles South of Chicago, the mayor stated that King "was a great man for black people," but since Bradley had only "five or six blacks," he asked, "why should

¹⁵⁴ Williams, "Holiday for Dr King Gaining Wider Observance," 10.

¹⁵⁵ Alozie, "Political Tolerance Hypotheses," 1-2; "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 9 December 1986, 15.

¹⁵⁶ "Executive Committee Meeting," 19 October 1987, 4; for Coleman's identity, see "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 23 March 1987, 12.

¹⁵⁷ "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 9 December 1986, 19.

¹⁵⁸ "Report of Proceedings: Executive Committee Meeting," 9 December 1986, 19-20.

¹⁵⁹ Durcanin, "Gulf War Threat," D1.

we close down services for the other 11,995?”¹⁶⁰ Perceptions that the Holiday was for blacks only endured and similar opposition occurred at state and local level around the country.¹⁶¹

The Arizona campaign remained a priority for civil rights activists. In Phoenix, five thousand people celebrated King’s birthday in defiance of the state governor in 1992.¹⁶² The Governor’s intransigence attracted wide spread attention and Public Enemy, one of the most popular and politically aware rap groups of the era, dramatized Arizona’s failure to hold a King Holiday with their song, ‘By the Time I Get to Arizona.’ It caused a sensation on debut: “when the whole state’s racist/ Why want a holiday, F—k it cause I wanna ... call me the trigger man/ looki lookin’ for the governor ... I’m singin bout a King/ They don’t like it.” Conservatives and even liberals denounced Public Enemy’s rap as a violent fantasy in defence of a man of peace. Chuck D, the group’s leader, counter-claimed that the accompanying “video allows blacks to see themselves ‘as having some sort of importance’.”¹⁶³

Reaction against a state Holiday continued simultaneously in New Hampshire. The state and its one major newspaper had long opposed the Day. In 1986, the *Union Leader* decried the “demagoguery and political opportunism of the moment” exhibited by those who wanted a state Holiday.¹⁶⁴ On 21 January, following the inaugural federal Holiday, the *Union Leader* claimed on its front page that “King Day was declared a national holiday for all the wrong reasons.” It was a “hysterical drive to atone for all past wrongs,” a “rallying point and justification for black militancy,” and the result of the “racist intimidation of the organised mob.” Indeed, “New Hampshire citizens need not feel guilty for declining to observe ... King Day. Instead we should feel proud for having resisted the racist intimidation of the organized mob.”¹⁶⁵ Many of these themes were repeated the next three years and invoked a sense of white victimisation. A January 1988 *Union Leader* editorial argued, in a not so subtle reference to Rosa Parks, that King Day “strikes us as discrimination just as bad as that which made a black lady sit in the back of a bus.” The Holiday was:

supposed to be a rallying point for civil rights, but it is civil rights only in a very selective sense. It concentrates on the rights of blacks but ignores the rights of Indians on reservations, Orientals new to our ways, the

¹⁶⁰ Richard Matthews, “The MLK Holiday: Who Really Needs it the Most?,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 3 January 1991, 8.

¹⁶¹ Alozie, “Political Tolerance Hypotheses,” 2.

¹⁶² Durcanin, “King Day ‘92,” 1; “The Fallen Honored,” 1; “5,000 March in Phoenix,” 2.

¹⁶³ Mike Smith, “Celebrity Buzz: Simon Says Threats Won’t Stop His Tour,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 9 January 1992, D2; Public Enemy, “By the Time I Get to Arizona,” in *Apocalypse 91 ... The Enemy Strikes Back* (New York: Def Jam Recordings, 1991).

¹⁶⁴ Jim Finnegan, “Legislature Ignorant?,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 14 January 1986, 21.

¹⁶⁵ Nackey Loeb, “On the King Holiday: No NH Guilt Complex,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 21 January 1986, 1, 8.

inconvenient elderly, the embarrassingly indigent, the overtaxed working stiff, or the white man looking for a job.¹⁶⁶

The paper's owner, Nackey Loeb, continued to repeat the long discredited FBI allegations and argued that, "King Day was foisted on us by a loud gaggle of black extremists, bleeding-heart liberals who want us to be forever ashamed, and vote seeking politicians. It honors one group and thus discriminates against the rest."¹⁶⁷

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Scholars often argue that King's opposition to the Vietnam War was downplayed or forgotten on the Holiday. In some conservative circles, however, it never was. Despite the fact that Bush used King in the fight against communism, some continued to recall King's opposition to the War in order to tarnish his reputation. In a January 1989 editorial, the *Union Leader* attacked the idea of a state holiday. It thought New Hampshire's state Holiday advocates were "deliberately trying to erect a monument to intellectual dishonesty – a sneaky endorsement of King's radicalism that they could not otherwise obtain." The *Union Leader* claimed that state Holiday proponents sought an "official stamp of approval of his hate relationship with America." They were portrayed as "intellectually dishonest" because they did not differentiate between "King's positive achievements ... and his defilement of GIs fighting and dying in Vietnam as rapists, degraders of children – the moral equivalent, according to King, of the Nazis."¹⁶⁸ Attitudes like this must, in part, explain the reluctance of the Commission to emphasise King's radicalism and its efforts to minimise conflict situations. Although the *Union Leader's* rhetoric demonstrated a desperate last stand, it happened in a state where the King Holiday had yet to be established.

The *Union Leader* relentlessly focused on King the Radical when there was another way to use his legacy. The political career of King's own niece, Alveda King, suggested other possibilities. The daughter of Rev. A.D. King, Alveda was a business professor at Atlanta Metropolitan College and a former Democrat state representative in Georgia, from 1979 to 1982. She became increasingly conservative however and later claimed King was a Republican. Alveda formed an anti-gay and pro-school choice stance as used King's legacy to oppose abortion and advocate for

¹⁶⁶ Nackey Loeb, "Day of Discrimination," *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 18 January 1988, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Loeb, "Day of Discrimination," 1.

¹⁶⁸ Jim Finnegan, "Why Not Be Honest?," *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 16 January 1989, 23; see also Editorial, "Point of Order!," *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 16 January 1989, 23.

‘Christian values.’ A born again Christian, she claimed to want to “restore faith in the civil rights movement.”¹⁶⁹

Conservatives also used other issues in an attempt to thwart the development of the King Holiday. A new revelation undermined King’s reputation in 1990 when scholars revealed he had plagiarized sections of his PhD.¹⁷⁰ The *New York Times* described his plagiarism as a “lamentable revelation” which “hardened the position” of opponents “who felt he was too flawed to honor with a holiday.” The *Times* itself, declined to condemn King harshly because his “contribution to reshaping the world towers over revelations of borrowed paragraphs in a student thesis.”¹⁷¹ Likewise, columnist Courtland Milloy in the *Washington Post* asserted that, “King was not murdered because of what he wrote on a college paper.” Rather, “he was assassinated because of what he stood for.”¹⁷² King’s infidelity to Coretta, long known but not often spoken about, proved another awkward issue. Initially discovered by the FBI, the issue had been smothered under court ordered suppression. It was a factor in the 1983 Holiday debate, but most people ignored the issue and preferred to highlight King’s achievements. The issue ceased to be newsworthy until Ralph Abernathy’s 1989 autobiography *And The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, in which he wrote about King’s affairs.¹⁷³ Though these revelations of plagiarism and infidelity may have diminished King’s reputation in the eyes of those who wished for a pure hero, and they were used by some who opposed his legacy, ultimately they failed to halt the progress of the Holiday.

By 1992, New Hampshire relented to public pressure and declared a Civil Rights Day on the third Monday in January. One contributing factor may have been the fact that New Hampshire’s black population had increased by 80 percent since 1980, the highest gain of any state.¹⁷⁴ King’s name was not used to designate the day, however, so it was in a sense, a ‘colour blind Holiday.’¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Ken Fosskett, “The Conservative King: Critics Say She Twists the Legacy of her Slain Uncle,” *Atlanta Journal - Atlanta Constitution*, 18 January 1998, C1.

¹⁷⁰ Durcanin, “Gulf War Threat,” D1; The revelations prompted a new round of scholarship on King, the results of which were published in “Becoming Martin Luther King, Jr. – Plagiarism and Originality: A Round Table,” *Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991): 11-123; In regard to King and the plagiarism issue, at one point Clayborne Carson claimed “the media blew it out of proportion” and “King was careless, but he wasn’t a plagiarist.” Courtland Milloy, “Let King Rest in Peace,” *Washington Post*, 22 November 1990, J1; see also, Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 123-133; Jonathan Rieder, *The Word of the Lord is Upon Me: The Righteous Performance of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 1-20; Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 160-174; Miller, *Voice of Deliverance*; Fredrik Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom!: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Sundquist, *King’s Dream*.

¹⁷¹ Editorial, “Martin Luther King’s Moral Authority,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1991, 16.

¹⁷² Milloy, “Let King Rest,” J1.

¹⁷³ Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*: 470-473; Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 150-160; David Garrow, “The Misguided Sanitizing of King’s Image,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 22 October 1989, H1-2.

¹⁷⁴ US Census Bureau, “Census Questionnaire Content, 1990 CQC-4,” 2.

¹⁷⁵ Jim Finnegan, “It’s Civil Rights Day,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 20 January 1992, 23; In 1999, New Hampshire’s legislature approved a holiday named after King to begin in 2000, Carey Goldberg, “Contrarian New Hampshire To Honor Dr. King, at Last,” *New York Times*, 26 May 1999, 24. Arizona passed a King Holiday by referendum in November 1992, Art Thomason, “This Time, State Welcomes Spotlight Upon King Day,” *Arizona*

This fulfilled the ambitions of those, such as Senator Warren Rudman, who in 1983, had wanted to separate King's name from the Federal Holiday.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, once established, anti-abortion campaigners scheduled hearings to discuss the abortion issue on the first Civil Rights Day.¹⁷⁷ Like New Hampshire, Arizona also established a King Holiday after years of protests. After many failed legislative attempts, Arizona became the only state to establish a King Holiday by referendum, which it did in November 1992.¹⁷⁸

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During the Bush administration, the King Commission enjoyed a relatively secure period as the Holiday's scope expanded. The Commission survived as it offered something no other organisation did. Coretta explained the difference between it and the King Center. The Center's "outreach is very slow," she said, but "when you have a network like a commission, and it's mandated by the government, it makes it much easier to reach a lot of people."¹⁷⁹ In 1992, Coretta optimistically claimed, "we are going to move this Commission to even higher heights" and praised the harmony between the Commission and "the work that we're doing at the King Center" because "we complement each other."¹⁸⁰ The Commission's membership was refreshed annually, and during the Bush presidency there was a regular turnover of members.¹⁸¹ New Commissioners-at-Large, appointed for the 1990 Holiday, included: Lee Atwater (RNC), Ron Brown (DNC) and Rev. Jesse Jackson.¹⁸² Others appointed were: Martin Luther King III, Sister Catherine McNamee and Stewart

Republic, 17 January 1993, 1-2; Art Thomason, "King Day March Draws 10,000," *Arizona Republic*, 19 January 1993, 1, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Gorey, "King Bill Seen as Divisive," 1, 30.

¹⁷⁷ AP, "Abortion Bill Testimony to be Heard on King Holiday," *New Hampshire Sunday News*, 19 January 1992, 16.

¹⁷⁸ Thomason, "This Time, State Welcomes Spotlight," 1, 2.

¹⁷⁹ King Commission, "Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting," 25 September 1992, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Quarterly Meeting, September 1992, 27.

¹⁸⁰ "Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting," 25 September 1992, 28.

¹⁸¹ In 1989, Coretta requested that Bush appoint, with his executive selections, Jack Kemp (HUD), Constance Newman (Office of Personnel Management; Lauro Cavazos (Secretary of Education) and William J. Bennett (director of US Drug Program) Scott King "Letter to President Bush," 25 April 1989, 97-0020, Box 4: Coretta Scott King, Incoming Correspondence (January 1990-September 1995) Folder: Coretta Scott King, April 1989.

¹⁸² King Commission, "The 1990 Annual Report of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," 1990, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 2: Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: 1989 Annual Report, 1990 Annual Report, 7, 44; Commissioners reappointed to 1 June 1990 included: Coretta (Chair), Regula (Vice Chair), Abernathy, Barry, Brookfield, Burchman, Currey, Danforth, Dole, King Farris, Hill, Hollings, Hooks, Kean, Kemp, Kennedy, Yolanda King, Knapp, Lowery, McClurg, Nellum, Obledo, Sheinkman, Snyder, Stern, Ueberroth, Williams, Wonder, Young. For a lengthy discussion on the process of appointing Commissioners see "Report of Proceedings," 19 June 1989, 8-9, 73-82; the House designated Ron Dellums to succeed Dymally and Conyers to succeed Gray. Dellums succeeded Dymally "by design" because as Chair of the CBC he was "automatically" appointed. It became a tradition for some former Commissioners to become directors, so Dymally and Grey moved to the director's board. The House Republicans wanted Jim Courter to replace Jack Kemp, who had moved from a congressional to executive appointment (Courter was misspelt as Quarter), and Ardent E. Shenker, the new head of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, replaced his predecessor at the Commission, "Report of Proceedings," 19 June 1989, 80-81; in 1990 Bush named four presidential appointees: Lauro F.

Minton.¹⁸³ The Commission again refreshed its membership in 1991 with: Rep. Gary Franks (a Black Republican from Connecticut); Clayton Yeutter (RNC); Bob Martinez (Office of National Drug Control Policy) and William S. Sessions (FBI Director).¹⁸⁴ That the FBI Director was a Commissioner illustrated shifting perceptions of King, given that the FBI once thought him subversive. It was, however, the appointment of Franks, a black Republican who voted for Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court nomination, opposed affirmative action and the Civil Rights Act of 1990, that indicated the continuation of the trend to appoint black conservatives.¹⁸⁵

Conclusion

This chapter examined the relationship between President Bush, Coretta and the Commission to view the international influences on and the domestic expansion of the Holiday. It argued there was an important difference between Bush and Reagan as Bush redefined King as a symbol of anti-communism. Bush co-opted King as a conservative symbol and at times, that became a tense contradiction. Though King had avidly opposed militarism, Bush used the late leader's legacy to justify a foreign policy that required military interventions to maintain global order. The President also invoked King to advocate for capitalist orientated solutions to contemporary problems, which ignored King's more collectivist understanding of economics.

The chapter argued that international participation was more relevant to the Holiday during this time, especially with the end of the Cold War and pressure on the South African apartheid regime. Furthermore, Coretta used the Holiday to promote the idea that King inspired nonviolent revolutions around the world and this ingrained the image of King as a great leader, which appealed to Bush. This global use of King derived from the period of his greatest fame, when King delivered his 'I have a Dream' speech and strode the world stage with a Nobel Peace Prize. The Gulf War nonetheless enabled Coretta to reclaim King's critique of militarism and advocate for nonviolence.

Cavazos (Department of Education); William J. Bennett (Office of National Drug Control Policy); Constance B. Newman (Office of Personnel Management); and Jack Kemp (HUD), King Commission, "Living the Dream," Summer 1990, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, 8.

¹⁸³ Other new commissioners included, Rev. Richard Deats; Albert Fox; Paul Tagliabue (NFL) and Joe Velez. There were also new Honorary Directors: Yolanda King, Williams, Brookfield, Obledo, Marley, McClurg, Kean, and Barry, Jr., see "Proceedings," 3 October 1990, 11; Lee Atwater soon became critically ill and died from a brain tumour. "Proceedings," 10 April 1990, 2; Thomas B. Edsall, "GOP Battler Lee Atwater Dies at 40," *Washington Post*, 30 March 1991, 1.

¹⁸⁴ "Proceedings," 9 October 1991, 16.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Viles, "Connecticut Alderman Tries to Break 55-Year House Lockout," *Associated Press*, 27 August 1990, in "Gary A. Franks," in *History, Art and Archive* (United States House of Representatives); On 20 October 1992, Dexter Scott King was sworn in as a Commissioner, to replace his brother Martin Luther King III. Martin III had earlier replaced Yolanda; Donald Alexander, Stacy Layton, Dr. Carole Miller, Stewart Minton (Alan's father) were on the Operations Committee. Other appointments include David J. Stern, William Darnell, Leonard Burchman, John Cox (Delta and King Center Board), Joan Campbell of National Council of Churches (NCC), Keith Geiger of National Education Association (NEA). William S. Sessions was the Director of the FBI, King Commission, "Proceedings, Commission Meeting," 20 October 1992, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Transcript of Proceedings, October 1992, 8, 11, 14, 23.

As seen, Bush had an ambivalent record on civil rights. He often attempted to placate both sides of civil rights debates and he was not above using a racially charged election strategy in 1988. However, Bush also encouraged the Holiday and advocated for the Commission's extension, which enabled it to acquire congressional funding. Although Von Bothmer argues Bush propounded the myth that the work of the civil rights movement was complete, at times the President acknowledged that more work was necessary to foster ethnic harmony – a key example of this was his use of the King Holiday to express horror at the bombings in Alabama and Georgia. His eventual signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was also a concession that more work needed to be done to secure civil rights.

In 1992, Bush visited Atlanta, signed the King Day Presidential Proclamation and laid a wreath at King's tomb.¹⁸⁶ He acknowledged that even with "laws dedicated to colorblind America" there was "too much prejudice, racism and anti-Semitism." Americans, he asserted, "must pledge to root out bigotry wherever we find it."¹⁸⁷ His re-election had seemed a forgone conclusion after his leadership of the victorious Gulf War coalition made him highly popular.¹⁸⁸ However, in early 1992 the economy slumped, unemployment reached 7.3 percent and economic growth stagnated.¹⁸⁹ By the time of his visit, Bush's popularity in the South had declined due to economic recession. It was anticipated that few blacks would vote for him.¹⁹⁰ The beating of Rodney King and subsequent Los Angeles riot in April exposed Bush's hope of a 'kinder gentler' America as illusory. The plight of inner cities became a prominent presidential election issue and the Governor of Arkansas and Democratic Party candidate, Bill Clinton, blamed Republican neglect for the discord.¹⁹¹ Clinton defined himself as representative of a "third way" in politics, neither left nor right, and he focused on the economy during the presidential campaign. Democrats won Congress and the White House for the first time in twelve years.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Cynthia Durcanin, "Bush Honors the Memory of Dr. King: President Also Promotes his Job Training Program," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 January 1992, 1.

¹⁸⁷ Durcanin, "Presidential Visit," 1.

¹⁸⁸ Bush gained an approval rating of 90 percent from the Gulf War Victory, Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 153.

¹⁸⁹ Economic growth went from 2.5 percent in 1989, 1 percent in 1990, to -0.7 percent in 1991, Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 153.

¹⁹⁰ It was predicted that only fourteen percent of blacks would vote for Bush. A.L. May, "Campaign '92, President's Popularity Trumbles Across the South," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 January 1992, 1; Blacks voting for Republican presidential candidates reached levels of fifteen percent in 1976, twelve percent in 1980, nine percent in 1984, and ten percent in 1988, eleven percent in 1992 and twelve percent in 1996. Based on statistics in David A. Bositis, "Blacks and the 2012 Democratic National Convention," Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, <http://jointcenter.org/sites/default/files/Blacks%20and%20the%202012%20Democratic%20National%20Convention.pdf>, accessed 31 July 2015. 9

¹⁹¹ Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 157-158; for more on the LA riots see Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 223.

¹⁹² Clinton won forty three percent of the popular vote, Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 159-161.

Chapter 5

The Drum Major: A Day of Service (1993-1995)

On Sunday 4 February 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous ‘Drum Major Instinct’ sermon at the Ebenezer Baptist Church “on an unseasonably warm Sunday Morning.”¹ Based on the Gospel of *Mark 10:35*, King preached “everybody can be great” because “everybody can serve.”² This sermon differed from his ‘I Have a Dream’ speech in that it was delivered in the intimate surrounds of his small church before a familiar audience, whereas the Dream was for a national audience. Moreover, the sermon emphasised humility rather than the Dream’s grand and sweeping vision.³ King’s melancholy surfaced, however, as he ruminated on his own mortality and imagined his own funeral. King told the congregation that he did not want to be remembered for winning the Nobel Peace Prize and that his eulogist ought to proclaim he “tried to give his life serving others.” King elaborated that he preferred to be remembered as a drum major:

If you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won’t have any money to leave behind. I won’t have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.⁴

Two months later, a recording of the sermon was played at his funeral on 9 April 1968.⁵

This chapter is focused on the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday during the initial years of the Clinton Presidency (1993-1995). These years were unique in the Holiday’s history because for the first time a Democrat President, whose party also controlled Congress, oversaw celebrations. Inspired by King’s ‘Drum Major Instinct’ sermon, the King Commission, Congress and the

¹ Alexander Jr., “I Have a Dream: King is Assured of Major Place in World History,” S12.

² King preached that the instinct was a desire for attention and to be seen as a leader, but that Christ proved the instinct could be transformed into a “good instinct,” King Jr., “Drum Major Instinct,” *A Testament of Hope*, 259-267.

³ Fredrik Sunnemark argued King made Christ relatable to the congregation in the sermon because King aurally merged Christ’s earthly and spiritual realms to convey the message that since a grand spiritual being could achieve greatness by simple service, so could the humblest person. Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom!: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*: 42-3; Miller, *Voice of Deliverance*, 6

⁴ King’s confidants thought he was depressed in 1968, Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 598-604; King speaking about his own funeral, King Jr., “Drum Major Instinct,” 267; King “borrowed” the sermon from J. Wallace Hamilton, Miller, *Voice of Deliverance*, 1-6.

⁵ For more about the ‘Drum Major Instinct’ Sermon, see Rieder, *The Word of the Lord is Upon Me: The Righteous Performance of Martin Luther King, Jr.*; Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom!: The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*.

President used this window of opportunity to steer the Holiday's emphasis away from the Dream, toward the service ideal, so eloquently articulated by King. The change in emphasis between the two political eras is analysed with three key points in mind: Why did the Commission change the Holiday? What did the Commission change? What was the impact of the change?

Clinton's signature on the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 finalised the most significant reform to the Holiday since the Commission was established ten years earlier.⁶ The reform added to the Commission's mandate and made it responsible for the organisation of "service opportunities."⁷ Precise service activities were not legislated, but Commissioners suggested such opportunities could address contemporary problems by tutoring children, feeding the hungry and helping the homeless.⁸ The Act stipulated that the Commission ought to form a partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a new federal government bureaucracy, in order to organise such activities.⁹ The CNCS was authorised to finance service activities that would promote four main objectives: "understanding among racial and ethnic groups"; "nonviolent conflict resolution"; "equal economic and educational opportunities"; and "social justice."¹⁰ The first two of these objectives were in essence a reiteration of the Commission's original mandate.¹¹ However, the third objective – to promote "equal economic and educational opportunities" – was an idealistic attempt to recall King's challenging legacy. The inclusion of the "equal economic" opportunity principle, in particular, honoured King's condemnation of poverty.¹²

The development of an alternative King image, based on an ideal of collective leadership and developed with a collaborative effort, is the subject of this chapter. As Chapter Two explained, the 'Drum Major Instinct' sermon had been one possible source of inspiration for the inaugural Holiday before the Commission eventually selected the Dream theme.¹³ The Drum Major's message was no doubt too radical for endorsement during the Reagan-Bush era.¹⁴ In contrast, for the incoming

⁶ AP, "King Holiday is Linked to a Day of Service," *New York Times*, 24 August 1994, B7.

⁷ The previous mandate was to prepare "ceremonies and activities." This was a point made by Davis in King Commission, "Proceedings, Commission Meeting," 6 October 1994, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 6: Commission/Committee Meetings, June 1994-March 1995, Folder: Commission/Corporation Meeting, Transcript of Proceedings, October 1994, 19.

⁸ Coretta Scott King, "Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission Press Conference," 16 November 1993, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box: 2 Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: 1993 Annual Report, 1994 Annual Report; Jack Kemp, Prepared Statement for Committee on the Judiciary, *Hearing Before the Committee on the Judiciary: The King Holiday and Service Act of 1993*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., 13 April 1994, 6.

⁹ The CNCS was established in 1993 from an amalgamation of the Commission on National and Community Service and ACTION agencies. It was the evolution of a process that began when President George H. W. Bush signed the "National and Community Service Act of 1990," see CNCS, "Our History," <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/who-we-are/our-history>, accessed 22 April 2015.

¹⁰ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., HR 1933.

¹¹ The original 1984 mandate encouraged reflection on "the principles of racial equality and nonviolent social change espoused by ... King." *An Act to Establish a Commission*.

¹² *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*.

¹³ "Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," December 1984.

¹⁴ King Jr., "Drum Major Instinct," 259-267.

Democrat President, Bill Clinton, the sermon was entirely appropriate; King's emphasis on economic inequality, racial reconciliation and peace dovetailed with the president's political persona and priorities.¹⁵

Three main factors facilitated these important Holiday reforms: the personality and political needs of the President; recognition that the day had hitherto been celebrated by a minority of Americans; and the need to answer liberal criticism that King Day was superficial while also addressing conservative criticism that it was irrelevant. Throughout this chapter, I argue that a substantial attempt was made to memorialise aspects of King's legacy that belong, according to most scholars, to his post-1965 radical phase. Reforms were made in the hope that the energy of Americans could be harnessed on the Holiday in an effort to continue King's unfinished work. The Commission also hoped to stimulate activism and encourage an ongoing commitment to serving the poor throughout the year.

Scholars have written extensively about Clinton and King. Howard Zinn argued that King and Clinton "represented very different social philosophies." Where King abhorred capitalist excess, Clinton advocated on behalf of the market, and where King rejected violence, Clinton authorised it. Zinn accused Clinton of being "more interested in electoral victory than in social change" and the President's moving of the Democratic Party to the political centre "meant doing just enough for blacks, women, and working people to keep their support, while trying to win over white conservative voters."¹⁶ More sympathetic, Von Bothmer argues that Clinton understood King's "radical message of the latter 1960s," but "because the Right" had so effectively derided the mid-to-late sixties, Clinton "was forced to use King defensively, in connection with traditionally conservative themes." Although Clinton "enlisted King in support of an activist government," he also "used King to pursue conservative ends."¹⁷

Most scholars agree the Holiday ignored King's post-1965 radicalism before the Clinton presidency. Liberal historians such as Vincent Harding and Clayborne Carson, among others, argue that the Holiday rendered King a harmless icon.¹⁸ More recently, Harvard Sitkoff argued that the Holiday continues to airbrush King into a "moderate, respectable ally of presidents."¹⁹ There have been, however, challenges to the academic consensus. Dennis suggests the shift to service was made to encourage public participation on King Day. He notes that "since 1994, Americans have

¹⁵ Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 147.

¹⁶ Clinton would win white votes "with a program of toughness on crime, stern measures on welfare, and a strong military." Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2003), 644.

¹⁷ Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 149.

¹⁸ Harding was preceded in the media by Branch, "Uneasy Holiday," 22-27; Harding, "Beyond Amnesia," 468-476; Carson, "Reconstructing the King Legacy," 241; Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 1-8; Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*: 662; Reed, "Martin Luther King: History and Memory."; Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 140-141.

¹⁹ Harvard Sitkoff, *King: Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), xi-xiv.

used the occasion to organize gun buy-back programs, volunteer at food banks, refurbish schools ... and engage in other community activities with liberal political agendas.”²⁰ Dennis continues, “King and his holiday thus function as patron and resource for those on the American political left, as a hero not merely to remember but whose activism should be imitated.” Similarly Daynes argues that King the Radical was the only “viable national image” during the Clinton era, though he implied this image had not been adopted by Holiday organisers up to 1997.²¹

Most academics, however, reinforce the argument that King’s radicalism was trivialised or overlooked altogether. Francesca Polletta’s content analysis of the *Congressional Record* between 1993 and 1997 illustrated that within Congress, senators and representatives used King’s legacy to challenge the status quo during congressional debates. However, this usually occurred “on commemorative occasions ... without impact” on any legislation that might address contemporary problems.²² In particular, black representatives in the House depicted King’s legacy as one of “service rather than insurgency,” which echoed earlier arguments that his image had been diluted. Polletta further argues that the connection of the service ideal to King’s activism was “a rhetorical accomplishment rather than an obvious historical fact.”²³ As this chapter illustrates, however, connecting King to service was more than “a rhetorical accomplishment,” based as it was on his clearly articulated desire to be remembered for service. There is, therefore, a need to study the Day of Service in order to rectify a lack of understanding about this important change. Despite, or perhaps because of, the above consensus view, the Commission’s role in the Clinton era remains a relatively neglected area of scholarship.

This chapter challenges the consensus that King Day was superficial and disconnected from activism. Although each author who addressed the Holiday in the Clinton era – Polletta, Von Bothmer and Daynes – makes a significant contribution to scholarship about King’s legacy, they tend to imply that King’s memorialisation became detached from contemporary problems.²⁴ However, the opportunity to reshape King’s image afforded by the election of a Democrat president and majority in Congress enabled the Commission to renew its mandate. The origin and impact of

²⁰ Dennis, *Red, White and Blue Letter Days*: 270.

²¹ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 140-141.

²² Polletta counted 420 speeches, mostly “about legislation to extend” the Commission or to “commemorate King or the civil rights movement” with “memorials, commemorative coins, or congressional resolutions.” Democrats gave 84 percent of speeches that invoked King, Francesca Polletta, “Legacies and Liabilities of an Insurgent Past: Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr., on the House and Senate Floor,” in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts and Transformations in National Retrospection*, ed. Jeffery K. Olick (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003), 197-200.

²³ Polletta argued “congressional representations of King” assimilated him into a “pluralist framework by representing community service and institutional politics as the proper legacy of his activism.” Doing so enabled “elected officials and community volunteers,” as opposed to “extra-institutional activists,” to claim to be latter day “bearers of King’s dream.” Polletta, “Legacies and Liabilities,” 197, 209-210.

²⁴ Although Daynes thought King’s contemporary value was King’s radicalism, he did not analyse the Day of Service and the attempt to remember King the Radical. The Day of Service had been celebrated twice by 1997 and warranted more scholarly attention, Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 140-141.

this deserve further scrutiny because academic neglect of the Day of Service has encouraged a repetitive conclusion by scholars that King the Radical is almost never invoked in relation to the Holiday.

Democrats and the Commission, however, did attempt to reinvigorate King Day into an active celebration that drew from King's radical critique of economic inequality. By using the Drum Major image, Holiday reformers encouraged Americans to emulate King with simple deeds and they hoped to highlight and alleviate major problems of the era, such as crime, swelling prison populations, teen violence and gang warfare. In addition, there was recognition that King Day needed to be refreshed, as Davis noted, since some rituals failed to excite enthusiasm. In this light, reformers promoted community service as the answer to the Holiday's problems. To develop this new interpretation, I draw on transcripts of Commission meetings held in March 1993, June 1994 and October 1994, and examine significant Congressional hearings about the passage of the King Holiday and Service Act, in order to understand the aims of legislators who encouraged or opposed change. Before we understand the Holiday in the mid-1990s, however, it is important to place that era in context.

Clinton and the Holiday

When Clinton assumed the presidency in 1993, American society was distorted by a level of inequality not seen since World War II. The top 10 percent of households owned 73 percent of national wealth, while the poorest 10 percent owned a mere 1.5 percent of national wealth.²⁵ The end of the post-war economic boom had seen the fortunes of millions of Americans decline over a thirty year period as levels of poverty increased to the point where thirty-three million Americans (13 percent of the population) lived below the poverty line by 1990.²⁶ Furthermore, recession had afflicted the economy in 1990-1991.²⁷

Though the civil rights movement overcame *de jure* racial segregation, by 1992 *de facto* racial segregation remained a daily reality for millions of African Americans. Poverty disproportionately disadvantaged racial minorities and according to William Goldsmith and Edward Blakely, a "growing group of racially distinct Americans" were "socially disconnected from the greater society." The poor were educationally impaired, shunned by labour markets and

²⁵ There was a massive decrease in federal government housing funding from thirty billion dollars to eight billion dollars. This facilitated an "erosion of social institutions" in urban society. Minority families were under great pressure, with one third of Latino families and over half of African American families being one-parent families. In short, 31.6 percent African Americans lived in poverty. Furthermore, the real value of the minimum wage declined by 44 percent, the size of the middle class shrank and the number of homeless Americans numbered between two to three million, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 203-208.

²⁶ This was a rise from twenty-five million in 1975 and there was also a decrease of African American median income compared to white Americans' income. The thirty-year period dated from 1959. Goldsmith and Blakely, *Separate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities*: 15, 27, 31; Rank, *Living on the Edge*: 12.

²⁷ Louis Uchitelle, "The Good News that Fails to Cure," *New York Times*, 3 December 1991, D2.

overrepresented in prisons.²⁸ Despite all King and the movement had done to integrate American schools, housing and public accommodations, by the 1990s a high proportion of “African Americans lived in overwhelmingly segregated neighbourhoods.” Inner-city minority populations were marginalized and exploited due to a geographic concentration of poverty in the cities and seventy-one percent of poor African Americans lived in poor central neighbourhoods.²⁹ The black middle class left inner cities, however, which exacerbated their geographic, cultural and financial separation from the black working class.³⁰ The problems King dedicated his life to eliminating, such as poverty, racism, segregation and violence, remained serious issues in American life in the 1990s.

Enduring racial inequality came with harmful consequences. The homicide rate for black men nearly doubled from 1960 to 1980 and black Americans were incarcerated at a rate seven times higher than white Americans. Nearly one in four African American men aged between twenty and twenty-nine went to prison, more than the number that studied in higher education.³¹ The Los Angeles Riot in 1992, during which fifty-one people died in an area populated by poor African Americans and Latinos, became the most visible manifestation of economic and racial inequality.³² Multicultural tensions exacerbated that violence and the conflict involved blacks, Hispanics, Koreans and the police, whose white officers had beaten Rodney King, an African American, in the prelude to the riot.³³ The violence and *de facto* segregation suggested that the Kerner Commission’s 1968 warning about continued separate and unequal societies of blacks and whites had become a reality for millions of Americans.³⁴

Clinton wanted to reverse these trends. The LA riot occurred during the 1992 presidential election campaign and propelled the issues of urban decay, poverty and race relations to the political forefront. Clinton quickly criticised Republicans for “more than a decade of urban decay” due to low federal expenditure in cities – and urban renewal became part of a mix of issues debated in the presidential election that included education, health care and welfare reform.³⁵ This debate continued an ideological struggle between liberals and conservatives that began in the civil rights

²⁸ Goldsmith and Blakely, *Seperate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities*: 10.

²⁹ Poor African Americans were separated from income creating labour markets, Goldsmith and Blakely, *Seperate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities*: 9, 47-51.

³⁰ Such separation made and inner city black neighbourhoods less economically diverse, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 188.

³¹ Black Homicide rate rose from thirty-seven per 100,000 to sixty-five per 100,000, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 190-193.

³² R.W. Apple Jr., “Riots and Ballots: If Past Is Guide, Turmoil in California May Set Off Powerful Political Forces,” *New York Times*, 2 May 1992, 2.

³³ The violence was sparked by the acquittal, by an all white jury, of white police officers who bashed a black man, Rodney King. In the violent aftermath at least fifteen of the dead were Black, eleven Hispanic, five White, two Asian and five of unknown ethnic origin, “38 Bodies at the County Morgue Reflect the Diversity of a Torn City,” *New York Times*, 2 May 1992, 7.

³⁴ Disorders, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*: 1.

³⁵ Apple Jr., “Riots and Ballots,” 9.

era and had intensified with a long conservative revolt against the welfare policies of the Great Society and New Deal, a point made by most liberal and progressive scholars.³⁶ These scholars argue that nearly fifty years of anti-poverty measures were reversed in the 1980s so economic and political forces *generated*, rather than alleviated, poverty as conservatives attempted to dismantle the welfare state.³⁷

Clinton was inaugurated on 20 January 1993 after campaigning as a New Democrat who embraced both liberal and conservative ideals.³⁸ He ratified the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), negotiated and signed by Bush, and committed himself to reforming the welfare system. Despite grand ambitions, however, Clinton began his presidency with a massive fiscal deficit that restricted his capacity to enact progressive economic reforms.³⁹ In that context, the King Holiday and Service Act became part of Clinton's legislative resistance to conservative attacks on the welfare state. This agenda included healthcare reform and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. That Act reformed the national community service network and became a legislative companion to the King Holiday and Service Act.⁴⁰

Clinton's personality was an important catalyst for change. He came of age during the civil rights movement and greatly admired King. Born in 1946 and raised in the South (Arkansas), he was already a politically aware youth from a Democrat leaning family when nearby Little Rock became the epicentre of school integration in 1957.⁴¹ Despite family poverty, Clinton's uneducated grandfather taught him racial tolerance.⁴² His upbringing was unlike that of his predecessor Bush (born into New England wealth), and Clinton's presidency represented generational change. The Vietnam War, which Clinton opposed, defined his generation, whereas World War II defined Bush's generation.⁴³ Unlike Bush, who condemned King at times in the 1960s, Clinton was

³⁶ This backlash continued a centuries old battle between advocates of private giving of welfare (from churches, for example) to public welfare (from Federal Government, for example), Rank, *Living on the Edge*: 12; Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 1-6, 60-61, 226-227.

³⁷ Conservatives aimed to return responsibility for citizen welfare to individuals and private charities, Goldsmith and Blakely, *Seperate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in U.S. Cities*: 1; Rank, *Living on the Edge*: 18-21.

³⁸ Clinton wanted to attract "voters who had not supported Democratic presidential candidates" for years. Bill Clinton, *My Life: Bill Clinton* (London: Hutchinson, 2004), 326-7, 366; Clinton was the first Democrat to win two presidential elections since Franklin D. Roosevelt, "William J. Clinton," in *The White House*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/williamjclinton>, accessed 1 September 2015; Democrats controlled both houses of the 103rd Congress (1993-1995): Senate 57-43 and House 258-176 (with 1 independent), respectively. Office, "Party Division in the Senate"; Office of the Historian, "Party Divisions of the House of Representatives," Office of Art and Archives, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/>, accessed 22 April 2015.

³⁹ Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 164-166, 168.

⁴⁰ Peter Frumkin and JoAnn Jastrzab, *Serving Country and Community: Who Benefits from National Service?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 45-47, 190-197; For an analysis of national service in the 1980s, see Charles C. Moskos, *A Call to Civic Service: National Service for Country and Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1988); Moskos has been given credit for helping inspire Clinton to reform national service, Frumkin and Jastrzab, *Serving Country and Community: Who Benefits from National Service?*: 191.

⁴¹ Clinton watched the 1956 presidential debates as a 10 year old on the family's first television Clinton, *My Life*: 1, 35, 37.

⁴² Clinton, *My Life*: 10-13, 64.

⁴³ Clinton, *My Life*: 108-110.

transfixed and inspired by the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech.⁴⁴ From such a past, Clinton developed a good relationship with the African American community. He engaged with race as an issue – unlike Reagan, who ignored it as often as possible. As Governor of Arkansas he tried to right a historic injustice when he held a reception for the by then adult Little Rock Nine at the Governor’s mansion in 1987.⁴⁵ Clinton had also suffered many ignominies typically faced by poor African Americans. Author Toni Morrison went so far as to describe him as America’s “first black president.” According to Morrison, Clinton displayed “almost every trope of blackness: single-parent household, born poor, working-class, saxophone playing, McDonald’s-and-junk-food-loving boy from Arkansas.”⁴⁶ Despite being intelligent enough to enrol in the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and then Oxford University, Clinton understood how hard life in the US could be for the economically deprived and he consistently demonstrated empathy for the oppressed.⁴⁷

Clinton politically aligned himself with Democrats who knew and had worked with King personally. Von Bothmer argues that “racial reconciliation was crucial to Clinton’s political persona” and the evidence suggests this was indeed the case.⁴⁸ Clinton described a 1995 civil rights reunion in Selma as a return “to the emotional core of my political life.” This emotional core was a longing for “an America without a racial divide” and Clinton praised the reunion attendees, who included Coretta Scott King, John Lewis and Harris Wofford, as people who had done “so much to nourish” this core.⁴⁹ This affinity with civil rights movement veterans was an important factor in Clinton’s sympathy with those who wanted to change the King Holiday. All told, Clinton was a more likely ally for Coretta than Bush. Both raised in the South, they knew and admired movement veterans, turned Democratic Party politicians, Lewis, Wofford and Andrew Young.⁵⁰

The push to reform the Holiday developed in the first year of Clinton’s presidency. As President-elect, he spoke on the King Holiday at the historically black Howard University and described King as “the most eloquent voice for freedom and justice in my lifetime.”⁵¹ Coretta sought to take advantage of the new president’s sympathy and wrote to him in March 1993, arguing for permanent status and funding for the King Commission.⁵² The enhanced power of Democrats in Washington after the 1992 election made Holiday reform possible. With Democrat control of the presidency, the House and the Senate, a majority formed that was able to secure the Commission’s

⁴⁴ Clinton, *My Life*: 64, 121.

⁴⁵ The occasion was the 30th anniversary of the crisis. He also commemorated the 40th anniversary and eventually awarded the Little Rock Nine with the Congressional Gold Medal in 2000, Clinton, *My Life*: 37.

⁴⁶ Toni Morrison, “Talk of the Town: Comment,” *The New Yorker* (5 October 1998), accessed 29 August 2015.

⁴⁷ Clinton, *My Life*: 45-53, 69-71, 134-136.

⁴⁸ Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 147.

⁴⁹ Andrew Young, Joseph Lowery, Julian Bond and Ethel Kennedy also attended, Clinton, *My Life*: 897; Clinton’s words about emotional core were also referred to by Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*: 147.

⁵⁰ Frady, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage*; John Lewis and Michael D’Orso, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 405-475; Young, *An Easy Burden*: 507-520.

⁵¹ Nell Henderson, “Clinton Leads Nation in Paying Homage to King,” *Washington Post*, 19 January 1993, B1.

⁵² Scott King “Letter to President Clinton,” 15 March 1993.

future.⁵³ In Congress, two Democrat politicians who had been deeply involved with the civil rights movement led the move to preserve the Commission and redefine the Holiday: Representative John Lewis of Georgia and Senator Harris Wofford of Pennsylvania. Lewis, an African American and former freedom rider, spoke at the March on Washington in 1963 as the chairperson of SNCC. Organisers edited his speech as they considered it too strident. Though now a politician, he was once considered more radical than King.⁵⁴ Wofford had worked as a civil rights advisor to President Kennedy and encouraged King to travel to India to learn about nonviolence.⁵⁵ He arranged the first meeting between Kennedy and King as well as the famous phone call from Kennedy to Coretta in 1960 after her husband had been jailed for participation in an Atlanta sit-in. This phone call has widely been credited for convincing black voters to support Kennedy's victorious presidential campaign.⁵⁶ Wofford later became the Associate Director of the Peace Corps, which was one source of inspiration for Clinton's service initiative.⁵⁷ Both Lewis and Wofford sought to reform the Holiday in a way they believed was more in keeping with King's philosophy and they had Coretta's encouragement to transform the day into an "active living tribute" to King's "legacy of service and direct action."⁵⁸

In the early to mid-1990s a relatively low number of Americans observed King Day when compared to other holidays. Two reports, produced independent of the Commission, provided evidence of low participation rates. The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA), a non-government organisation that provided business information, found that only twenty-two per cent of businesses it surveyed granted a paid King Holiday. Similarly, a Fortune 500 survey of US businesses (1990) found that only 18 percent of respondents granted employees the day off. Among those companies, King Day was often an optional holiday which could "be observed or taken at another time." Although there had been an upward trend in participation across the total workforce to 31 percent in 1993 (government employees included), the number of employees who took the day off was dramatically short of the most popular American holidays.⁵⁹ The Holiday was second last in regard

⁵³ Democratic Policy Committee, "DPC Legislative Bulletin: H.R. 1933, King Holiday and Service Act of 1994," 23 May 1994, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, By Laws and Legislation: Memos and Correspondences (1 of 4), 3.

⁵⁴ Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking With the Wind*: 135-174, 200-225, 323-347.

⁵⁵ Martin Luther King Papers Project, Jr., "Harris Llewellyn Wofford," in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle*; Wofford was one of the first white law students at Howard University, Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

⁵⁶ Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*: 11-28; "Harris Llewellyn Wofford", *King Encyclopedia*, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_wofford_harris_llewellyn_1926/ accessed 21 April 2015.

⁵⁷ Wofford was Associate Director of the Peace Corps (1962-1966), "Harris Wofford," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.

⁵⁸ King Commission, "Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting," 3 May 1993, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/ Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Quarterly Commission Meeting, May 1993, 9.

⁵⁹ The Bureau of National Affairs was a nongovernment "research and publishing concern." The *Times* also reported the Holiday suffered from a "lack of definition" and cited the new Holiday in Arizona, shared with Cesar Chavez, as

to private sector workers being able to take the day off. In contrast, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, Labor Day, and Memorial Day were more highly observed, with between 98 and 100 percent of employees receiving the day off. Only Columbus Day was observed by fewer participants than King Day.⁶⁰

The Commission also conducted its own Holiday participation surveys in 1991, 1992 and 1993. One and a half thousand randomly chosen respondents answered questions about Holiday participation and activities and their responses confirm the above findings. Ninety-four percent of respondents were aware the Holiday existed, but there was uncertainty as to its date. In terms of participation, less than 30 percent were involved in a Holiday activity and 25 percent of those did not take the day off. They constituted a group that had to work, but still commemorated King in some way. The majority of respondents worked and did not observe the Holiday in any organised activity.⁶¹ The Commission would find similar results again in 1994.⁶²

One impediment to majority observation of the Holiday was the perception that it was "segregated."⁶³ According to the *New York Times*, "viewed as a black holiday rather than a national one," the Holiday struggled to achieve "broad acceptance" and was "mostly ignored by businesses." Indeed, it was employers in the South, who had "the highest percentage of blacks in its population," who were most likely to grant the day off. As reported in the *Times*, the Commission was worried about low public enthusiasm and wanted to "change the public perception" of the Holiday from "civil rights to broader themes of nonviolence and public service" to prevent its being

objectionable to some blacks who wanted an exclusively black holiday, Peter Applebome, "Broader Acceptance Sought for King Holiday," *New York Times*, 16 January 1994, 18.

⁶⁰ The last four were: President's Day, Veterans, King Day and Columbus Day. The low rate of Columbus Day observance at this time is noteworthy because the 500th Anniversary of Columbus' landing in the Americas occurred in 1992 (perhaps its controversial nature rendered it too difficult to endorse), Applebome, "Broader Acceptance Sought."; Work days taken off by employees in greater numbers than the King Holiday, but which were not official public holidays include: the day after Thanksgiving, Good Friday, Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve. Three hundred and seventeen employers responded to the BNA survey and 18 percent gave day off, while more than a third of non-profit and nine per cent of manufacturers closed. Companies with unions were more likely to close, 'The Pantheon of Holidays' "The 1990 Annual Report of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission," 1990; see also David Wessel, "When is a Holiday Not a Full Holiday? When it is Today," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 January 1990, 1,18.

⁶¹ The 1,500 were "randomly-drawn folks throughout the United States." King Commission, "Commission Meeting," 16 March 1993, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Federal Holiday Commission Meeting, March 1993, 52-53.

⁶² In 1994, the Commission conducted a fourth survey focused on awareness, participation and activity. It found: 90 percent awareness of the Holiday and a 29 percent participation rate on the Holiday (of the latter, a majority took the day off); 35 percent did some local community service; 40-50 percent said they would if that was an option; if an employer promoted a project, 41 percent were likely to participate. The survey was nationwide, with two skews: the sample group was 18 years older or above and users of financial services. King Commission, "Commission/Corporation Meeting," 9 June 1994, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 6: Commission/Committee Meetings, June 1994-March 1995, Folder: Commission/Corporation Meeting, Transcript of Proceedings, June 1994, 82-84.

⁶³ John Blake, "King Day Short of the Mountaintop: Advocates Worry Jan. 17 Seen as 'Black Holiday'," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 7 January 1994, 1.

“marginalized as a second tier holiday.”⁶⁴ Coretta warned that the surest way to eliminate the Holiday or reduce its “national impact” was “to limit its importance” to just the “African American and minority communities.”⁶⁵ Given that much of US society was *de facto* segregated, the Holiday symbolised this separation and though Americans shared public accommodations, they were often divided on the Holiday.⁶⁶ To rectify this, Holiday reformers sought a new method to encourage participation by all Americans.

The reformers, therefore, attempted to revive King Day by giving it more substance. Coretta hoped that focusing the Holiday on community service would protect it from conservative and liberal attacks. She reasoned with Clinton that although the Holiday was finally “observed in all fifty states,” such a milestone merely marked the start of a “process to bring integrity, substance and continuity to the occasion.” Coretta warned, “many American holidays ... experienced discontinuous histories because they did not embody the values” that spoke “directly to America’s life as a nation” or “articulate the central ideals and principles” of the nation.⁶⁷ This fear the Holiday might be discontinued, however, was not founded on an immediate threat. Congressional support for King Day had been high since 1979 and remained high. Furthermore, the 1989 Commission extension proved the majority in Congress supported the organisation. Coretta’s concern that many Americans viewed the Holiday as unsubstantial was more legitimate. As seen previously, activists and academics criticised the Holiday for being over reliant on the Dream and Coretta wanted to change this impression.⁶⁸ At a press conference at the UN in 1993, she acknowledged that the Holiday’s “full potential for changing people’s attitudes and behaviour is yet to be achieved” and spoke of how her late husband “would want the Holiday to be a day of action, not apathy” nor “shopping or sales.”⁶⁹

The Holiday seemed secure on the American calendar, but the Commission became a proxy for politicians who opposed liberalism. A hard core of Republicans in Congress turned against it, as exemplified by a House committee report, issued after a review of federal holidays and

⁶⁴ Eight in ten government agencies and banks, and two thirds of schools and colleges also closed. Applebome, “Broader Acceptance Sought,” 1, 18.

⁶⁵ “Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission Press Conference,” 16 November 1993, 19-20.

⁶⁶ African Americans much preferred King Day to Independence Day (and Sioux saw no reason to celebrate Independence Day), see Thelen and Rosenzweig, *The Presence of the Past*: 149-170.

⁶⁷ The last two states to make a Holiday, Arizona and New Hampshire, completed the establishment of state King Holidays. In November 1992, Arizona approved the King Holiday see Timothy Noah, “Fourteen States Clear Initiatives to Restrict Congressional Service,” *Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 1992, 13; see also, “Talking Points For Meeting With the President,” 1993.

⁶⁸ One citizens’ group, the American Committee to Invigorate the King Holiday, was formed independently of the Commission in 1993. It was comprised of “scholars, civil rights leaders and public officials” and was formed to change the Holiday. Applebome, “Broader Acceptance Sought,” 18; William Raspberry, “King’s Day,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 1994, 23.

⁶⁹ Coretta’s full quote: “King “would want the Holiday to be a day of action, not apathy, reflection not recreation, service not shopping or sales and a day not only of words but of deeds.” “Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission Press Conference,” 16 November 1993, 19.

commemorations. Four white Republicans argued that the King Holiday and Service Act epitomised why it was “so hard for Congress to cut the budget.” They believed the Commission’s work complete because all fifty states observed the day, so they not only objected to its funding request, but also concluded it was time to “terminate this ever-expanding Commission.”⁷⁰ Coretta also encountered Republican opposition to her lobbying effort to extend the Commission. Representative Newt Gingrich, from King’s state of Georgia, wrote that although a “big supporter of the ... Holiday,” he had withdrawn support for the Commission. Not long before he reached the apex of his power as House Speaker, Gingrich promised to “return fiscal responsibility to the federal government by retiring commissions ... that have served their original purpose.” Therefore, he could not “support a commission that has already addressed its objective” and cost \$300,000 per year.⁷¹ Likewise, John Linder, another Georgia Republican, argued that due to “fiscal constraints, I believe that Federal funds should no longer be used to fund the Commission.”⁷² The Commission also received condemnation from a usually favourable voice.⁷³ On 19 March, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* recommended the Commission’s closure. The editorial portrayed it as a fiscal waste and denounced legislation to extend its lifespan. Like the minority of House Republicans, the newspaper argued the Commission was obsolete since all states observed the Holiday. The newspaper characterised the Commission as a “government bureaucracy” and since it had “done its job,” responsibility for King’s “heritage” and teachings should return to the King Center.⁷⁴

Still an ardent supporter of both the Holiday and Commission, Lloyd Davis too had begun to show signs of dissatisfaction. In one internal paper, he “respectfully submitted the following, not too clever, observations and suggestions.” He noted that the National Parade of Celebration had become “a local activity and its quality is not where it once was or where it could be.” Too many invitations to eminent people were embarrassing and too many events equalled “overkill.” He

⁷⁰ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 - Report Together With Minority Views*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., HR 1933, 3 February 1994, 14-15; Subcommittee on Census, Statistics and Postal Personal, *Oversight Hearing to Review the Activities of Federal Holiday and Commemorative Commissions*, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., 16 March 1993, 1-31; The minority were all white males, born approximately within a decade of King: John Myers (R-IN), b1927, cashier and farmer; Dan Burton (R-IN), b1938, army, business man; Don Young (R-AK), b1933, teacher, mayor, riverboat captain; Thomas Petri (R-WI), b1940, lawyer. Biographical details from in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* (United States Government).

⁷¹ Gingrich (Republican Whip) thought the Commission had helped to ensure the Holiday was “observed in every state” and ought to continue in the short term, but it should not be permanent. Newt Gingrich, “Letter to Coretta Scott King,” 30 November 1993, 97-0003, Box 4: Legislative Papers 1993-1999, Folder: King Center Staff Correspondence (2 of 3) 1993-1994.

⁷² John Linder, “Letter to Coretta Scott King,” 15 September 1993, 97-0003, Box 4: Legislative Papers 1993-1999, Folder: King Center Staff Correspondence (2 of 3) 1993-1994; Robert Michel (R-IL), Republican Leader, wrote to Coretta that “the principle of making any commission permanent is a bad move. They all ought to come under periodic review.” Robert H. Michel, “Letter to Coretta Scott King,” 2 April 1993, 97-0003, Box 4: Legislative Papers 1993-1999, Folder: King Center Staff Correspondence (2 of 3) 1993-1994.

⁷³ In 1986, Davis praised the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*: “I simply cannot say enough about the support we received from the Atlanta Journal and Constitution. They were ready with an editorial, a column, a feature story, or whatever else was required.” “‘Behind the Scenes’ Report of the Staff Vice President for Government and International Affairs,” 25 April 1986, 2.

⁷⁴ Editorial, “Perpetuating Dr. King’s legacy,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 March 1993, 12.

asserted that there was no harm in letting others organise events, such as an SCLC gun buyback, and that different themes between the Commission and Center were confusing. In one cutting criticism, he claimed King Week had become “repetitious and boring.” In regard to one ongoing concern, Davis noted that “King week events are not as inclusive as they should be” so plans had “to be made to involve more whites and other minorities.”⁷⁵

Coretta defended the Commission against its most vocal critics. She rebutted criticism from the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* in an article, which the paper published. Coretta countered that the Commission was an investment in nonviolence and its primary role was to institutionalise the Holiday as a “day of community service and interracial cooperation.” She pointed to the LA riot to prove the Holiday’s, and therefore the Commission’s, necessary role to “promote better race” relations. As “one of the most cost-effective investments” made “toward a more nonviolent America,” according to Coretta, the Commission was also needed to encourage private sector Holiday observance.⁷⁶ The Commission had powerful allies who used their influence to reform the Holiday. Clinton’s election facilitated a liberation of King’s legacy from the memorial confine of the Dream and the coincidence of his inauguration and King Week allowed “King boosters to vent their anger at twelve years of Republican government and misapprehension of King’s message.”⁷⁷ The *New York Times* revised its opinion of the Holiday and argued that a “distorting revisionism” depicted King as a “moderate alternative” and denied “his vitality”. The *Times* now described his nonviolence as “militant” and urged he be remembered as “a nonviolent revolutionary.”⁷⁸

Community Service

It can be seen that there were problems with, and good reasons to change, the Holiday. Why, however, did the Commission select King the Drum Major to reanimate the celebration? King’s more liberal admirers were frustrated by Republican misuse of King’s message, so they sought to reclaim King’s activist legacy.⁷⁹ One way they did that was to change the Holiday’s emphasis to

⁷⁵ Davis suggested “returning the Parade responsibility to the Federal Commission or to some other entity other than the King Center.” Lloyd Davis, “King Week 1995,” 25 February 1994,

⁷⁶ Because government employees comprised only sixteen per cent of the labour force and the private sector had such a low observance rate, the Commission had an important role to encourage more employers to grant workers the day off. Coretta Scott King, “King Panel is an Investment in Non-Violence,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 16 April 1993, 11; The Commission’s own *Living the Dream* newsletter published a quote from Sawyer who argued that “The King Commission is a good example of an organization that has carried out its mission admirably with only a modest amount of federal funds.” King Commission, “Living the Dream,” Spring 1993, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 1: Publications, Executive Correspondence-Media Coverage 1984-1987, Folder: Living the Dream Newsletter 1987-1994, 1, 11.

⁷⁷ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 71, 82n60.

⁷⁸ Editorial, “Dr. King, Peaceful Disturber,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1993, 16; quoted extensively by Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 119; The *Times* also published an article that argued King deserved a “second look” to re-evaluate his radicalism, Michael Eric Dyson, “King’s Light, Malcolm’s Shadow,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1993, 17.

⁷⁹ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 71, 82n60.

reflect a more movement orientated, less individualistic King Day. In order to see how they went about that task, it is necessary to look at the Commission's plans. One, an early draft of goals and objectives for 1991-1994, illustrates there was no proposal to prepare a Day of Service, or to use the Drum Major image, during the Bush administration.⁸⁰ Furthermore, when Wofford campaigned for election to the Senate in 1991, he focused on health care and made no discernable mention of Holiday reform.⁸¹ Rather, Clinton's election and the end of the Cold War seemed to have a sudden effect on Holiday planning. The Commission's Strategic Plan for 1994-1999 reasoned that in the post-Cold War era American citizens were concerned about "domestic problems" such as violence, drug abuse, race and class divisions, and the plight of the homeless. With this in mind, the plan suggested "one solution" to the problems might be "the voluntary involvement of citizens willing to confront social needs and challenges."⁸² Senator Wofford appears to have provided added impetus for change. In early 1993, Wofford challenged the Commission to engage Americans in service, "consistent with the position by President Clinton."⁸³ The Commission's Operations Committee subsequently drafted a resolution to change the Holiday, which the full Commission discussed and voted on during a meeting on 16 March 1993. Commissioners enthusiastically supported the resolution: Sessions thought it "right on target" and Miller thought it "brilliant." The Commission unanimously passed a resolution to turn the Holiday into a day of service.⁸⁴ Commissioners met again on 3 May 1993 and Coretta told them that service was "at the heart of ... King's philosophy."⁸⁵ Coretta wanted to push new boundaries and stated that previously "we didn't go too far because the legislation did not go very far." Thus "we were playing it as safe as we could."⁸⁶ However, times had changed and so would the Holiday. Senator Wofford's representative at the meeting noted the bipartisan support for Clinton's "national service initiative" which was on an

⁸⁰ The draft contained the suggestion that Americans ought to "Remember, Celebrate but most importantly Act" to continue Dr. King's unfinished work" in King Commission, "Goals and Objectives, Draft for 1991-1994," 1991, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, Goals-Objectives 1991-1994, 'Draft', 12.

⁸¹ Other featured issues included abortion, family leave, the death penalty, capital gains tax and school choice/tax credits, Katharine Seelye, "The Climax of a Campaign Full of Surprises: Replacing Heinz Turned Out to be a Race, Not a Walk," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 November 1991, 1, 12; For more on Wofford's campaign, see Claude Lewis, "Wofford Has Taken the Initiative in the U.S. Senate Race," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 November 1991, 9; Katharine Seelye, "Wofford Chosen for Heinz Seat," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 May 1991, 1, 10; Alexis Moore, "Wofford Sworn in as U.S. Senator," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 May 1991, 2; See also, the Jacob S. Hacker, *The Road to Nowhere: the Genesis of President Clinton's Plan for Health Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Wofford won election to complete final three years of term of the senator he replaced, who died in a plane crash, Katharine Seelye, "Wofford Stuns Thornburgh: Sends a Message to DC," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 November 1991, 1.

⁸² King Commission, "Strategic Plan (1994-1999)," 1994, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005 Box 3, Box 3: Strategic Plan 1994-1999, Folder: Publications, Media Coverage – Annual Reports – 1996, 1-2.

⁸³ This is Davis's phrasing "Commission Meeting," 16 March 1993, 20.

⁸⁴ "Commission Meeting," 16 March 1993, 20-24.

⁸⁵ "Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting," 3 May 1993, 10.

⁸⁶ "Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting," 3 May 1993, 18.

“accelerated pace” in Congress.⁸⁷ By this stage, Coretta had met with Clinton and received his “interest and support” and a Democrat policy document suggests that the Commission had been included in budget projections.⁸⁸ In June, Clinton also appointed four new Commissioners: Henry Cisneros (HUD), Mike Espy (Department of Agriculture), Alexis Herman (Presidential Assistant) and Bruce Babbitt (Department of Interior).⁸⁹ Each had Democratic Party links and replaced appointments made by Bush and Reagan.

On 22 September 1993, Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act, which created the CNCS and AmeriCorps.⁹⁰ The CNCS consolidated all of the US government-supported volunteer agencies in the one corporation, and AmeriCorps was in the vanguard of the plan. Clinton claimed the service reforms evolved from a desire to give Americans the opportunity to serve the nation without having to enlist in military service.⁹¹ AmeriCorps provided college funding to youth in exchange for civilian service and the scheme created a positive from Clinton’s opposition to the Vietnam War.⁹² These reforms continued a revival of service ideals that Bush fostered with his praise of community organisations and they drew upon a tradition of volunteerism in the US, as AmeriCorps was considered a domestic Peace Corp for the 1990s.⁹³ Wofford, once a Peace Corp leader, embraced these reforms and the King Commission aimed to develop a similar spirit.⁹⁴ With the Commission scheduled to expire on 20 April 1994, Wofford and Lewis introduced

⁸⁷ Marty Rogers “Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting,” 3 May 1993, 20, 23.

⁸⁸ “Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting,” 3 May 1993, 9, 26-27; “DPC Legislative Bulletin: H.R. 1933, King Holiday and Service Act of 1994,” 23 May 1994, 5.

⁸⁹ “Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting,” 3 May 1993, 11; The Democrat era Commissioners were: Coretta Scott King, Chair; Rep. Ralph Regula, Vice Chair (R-OH); Christina King Farris, Vice Chair/Treasurer; Rep. Alan Wheat, Secretary (D-MO); Donald C. Alexander (HUD, Former Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs); Hon Bruce Babbitt (Dept. of the Interior, Secretary); Leonard Burchman (HUD, Former Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs); Joan Brown Campbell (National Council of Churches); Dr. Ben Chavis (NAACP); Hon Henry C. Cisneros (HUD); John Cox (King Center); Sen. John C. Danforth; William Darnell (Executive Director of Harbor Festival Foundation); Rev. Richard Deats (Fellowship of Reconciliation); Sen. Robert Dole (R-KS); Hon. Mike Espy (Dept. Agriculture, US Secretary); Rep. Gary A. Franks (R-CT); Keith Geiger (National Education Association, President); Dr. Robert C. Henderson (National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is); Alexis M. Herman (White House, Director of Public Liaison); Jessie Hill, Jr. (President, Atlanta Life Insurance Company); Sen. Ernest F. Hollings David C. Jory (Citicorp, Vice President and Director Federal Tax Legislation and Regulation); Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly (Washington DC Mayor); Jack Kemp (Co-Director Empower America); Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA); Richard H. Kimberly (Kimberly-Clark Corp, Dir. of Fed Gov. Relations); Dexter King (Executive, King Family Estate); Rev Joseph Lowery (SCLC); Sister Catherine T. McNamee CSJ (National Catholic Education Association); Dr. Carole Miller (Miller Consulting); W. Stewart Minton (Unidex, President); Rep. Thomas C. Sawyer (D-OH); Jack Sheinkman (AFL-CIO, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union); Dr. Roland B. Smith, Jr. (Notre Dame, Executive Assistant to President); David J. Stern (National Basketball Association, Commissioner); Paul Tagliabue (National Football League); Jose Velez (League of United Latin American Citizens, President); Maynard I. Wishner (National Jewish Community); Stevie Wonder (Entertainer)

⁹⁰ Two veterans of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps and the first director of John F. Kennedy’s Peace Corp, Sargent Shriver, attended. This was the same day he introduced his health care reforms Clinton, *My Life*: 547.

⁹¹ Clinton, *My Life*: 151.

⁹² Clinton, *My Life*: 366, 495.

⁹³ CNCS, “Our History”; Bush had invoked the power of voluntary community service with his portrayal of community organisations as akin to “a thousand points of light.” Bush, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination.”

⁹⁴ Gerald T. Rice, *The Bold Experiment: JFK’s Peace Corps* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), xi, 36-37.

the King Holiday and Service Act of 1993, with Coretta's "blessing," to extend its lifespan and reform King Day.⁹⁵ The Act passed the House by unanimous consent under suspension of the rules on 15 March 1994, bringing the Commission one step closer to a new extension with a new mandate.⁹⁶

The goal of the President and of liberals in Congress was to use King's historical legacy to fight present-day economic, education and racial inequality. This involved recognition that King's work remained unfinished, a distinct shift in attitude since liberalism's nadir in the Reagan era. Likewise Coretta hoped a reformed Holiday would enable Americans to alleviate "hunger, homelessness, illiteracy" and environmental destruction, among many other problems.⁹⁷ Idealism, inspired by the Drum Major, was to be buttressed by practical action to effect real change; the partnership with the CNCS would encourage Americans to pursue King's unfinished agenda.⁹⁸ Senator Wofford claimed he wanted "to remember Martin the way he would have liked." He argued in a *Washington Post* opinion article that King Day ought to be "a day of action, not apathy" and he highlighted Pennsylvania's efforts to engage citizens in "public service and anti-violence efforts."⁹⁹ The *Post* praised this new direction and argued King would be devastated by "the carnage that is taking place on American streets today." The *Post* thought the proposal reflected "the true legacy" of King's life.¹⁰⁰

To argue the case for change, reformers invoked King's radicalism. The Senate Committee on the Judiciary held a hearing into the Act on 13 April 1994.¹⁰¹ In her testimony, Democrat Senator Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois, the first-ever-female African American senator, claimed King would have been appalled at the state of the nation, especially youth poverty.¹⁰² Wofford recalled King's fight against urban poverty, class and race discrimination. He warned that youth were "denied hope and opportunity" and claimed King would have thought it a "scandal to let another generation of young Americans fall into a vicious cycle of poverty, drugs, crime, prison and death."

⁹⁵ Wofford introduced the King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 (S774) to the Senate on 3 April 1993. Lewis introduced the House version (HR1933) on 29 April 1993. *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 - Hearing*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 10.

⁹⁶ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 - Hearing*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994.

⁹⁷ "Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission Press Conference," 16 November 1993.

⁹⁸ CNCS, "Our History"; *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*.

⁹⁹ Wofford concluded that the King Holiday ought to be used to change a "culture of violence and permissiveness." Harris Wofford, "A Day 'On', Not a Day Off," *Washington Post*, 16 January 1994, C7.

¹⁰⁰ Clinton also wrote to Wofford and expressed support for the "reauthorization" of the Commission. He believed community service was "an appropriate way to honor" King, Clinton, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 - Hearing*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 13; Editorial, "The King Holiday, 10 Years Later," *Washington Post*, 17 January 1994, 22.

¹⁰¹ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 - Hearing*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994.

¹⁰² Moseley Braun was "only the second black Senator since the Reconstruction Era," Office of the Historian, "Carol Moseley Braun," *History, Art and Archives* House of Representatives, <http://history.house.gov/People/Detail/18611?ret=True>, accessed 22 April 2015; King also would have been shocked by "inadequate education" and "juvenile arrests for murder," Moseley-Braun, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993 - Hearing*, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 1-2.

The hearing provided a forum to invoke King as the Drum Major who lived in a Chicago “ghetto” in 1966, in order to familiarise himself with that city’s segregated housing, who organised the Poor Peoples Campaign and who fought for the rights of Memphis sanitation workers.¹⁰³ This new stance repudiated the often bland invocation of timeless ideals made by Reagan and Bush. Republicans tended to prefer grandiose images and even at this hearing, Jack Kemp extolled King’s commitment to the ideals of the American Revolution.¹⁰⁴

Wofford also made some conservative arguments in order to win bipartisan support. He claimed that the Holiday could also change “a culture of violence and permissiveness” and that was “what this day ought to be about.” This permissive culture allegedly tolerated teenage pregnancy, single families and black on black violence – issues Wofford idealistically claimed might be solved by volunteer work. He asserted that people would learn good habits on the Holiday that could be “continued through the rest of the year.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, he argued that:

Community service in all its forms is one commonsense response to the problem of youth violence. Rigorous, demanding service can give young people a different kind of ‘gang,’ one that does some good not only for the community, but for themselves, because it can instill the kind of discipline, work skills, personal responsibility and respect for law that are essential to becoming productive citizens.¹⁰⁶

This call for the Holiday to end “permissiveness” found support from William S. Cohen, a Republican from Maine, who thought that volunteering would set an example to “young people who have grown up without significant moral purpose or parental guidance.” It would provide an incentive to “say yes” to what youth should do.¹⁰⁷

The hearing reveals the validity of Polletta’s argument, that King’s nonviolence was “restyled as a commitment to ending violence, especially among youth.” Furthermore, as Polletta elaborated, “for a Commission under attack, piggybacking on the Clinton administration’s volunteerism initiative made strategic sense – even if it meant playing to a belief that the black community’s preeminent problem was teen violence.”¹⁰⁸ Commissioner and FBI Director William Sessions, for example, vigorously promoted a Youth Against Violence program, which he believed should be the

¹⁰³ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 459-460, 575-624.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Kemp, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993*, Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Wofford, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993*, Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 10-12; Wofford had previously made this claim in his *Washington Post* article, Wofford, “A Day ‘On’,” C7.

¹⁰⁶ Wofford, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993*, Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 11; For discussion about conservative uses of King, see also Von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993*, Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ Polletta, “Legacies and Liabilities,” 210-211.

linchpin of lobbying efforts to reform the Holiday.¹⁰⁹ Sessions thought it would give structure to the service proposal and the Commission unanimously passed a motion in support of his strategy.¹¹⁰

Coretta knew opponents portrayed the Holiday as merely a “day off at the taxpayer’s expense.” Redefining the Holiday may have been calculated to dispel this perception and, in terms that would probably have pleased no conservative, she asserted the Holiday called “America to look inward” to “examine its own shortcomings.” In her view, community service could help businesses and Americans to serve, hopefully “all year.” The Act provided the Holiday with “a new and significant beginning” and despite some of the more conservative arguments put forward by reformers, Coretta encouraged a more activist Holiday.¹¹¹ Her goal was the passage of legislation to stimulate King’s fight for “equal economic and educational opportunities.”¹¹²

During Senate debate, the Commission encountered trenchant opposition from its old foe, Senator Helms. He realised abolition of the Holiday was unlikely, so continued a proxy war by attacking the Commission. With disdain, Helms portrayed the Commission as a beggar with “outstretched hands” demanding Congress to “Gimme, gimme, gimme” money.¹¹³ He condemned these “outstretched hands demanding millions” and argued that since “Uncle Sugar” began funding the Commission it did not want to “raise private funds anymore.”¹¹⁴ Helms criticised the Commission’s accounting practices, argued it contributed to the nation’s debt and highlighted Davis’s service with the claim he was paid too much (\$80,000 pa from HUD).¹¹⁵ Helms also mocked the national service idea as “only a pretense to keep this badly managed program alive, because this Senate simply will not stop spending on any program once it starts.”¹¹⁶ He submitted to the Senate a copy of the Commission’s financial audit and building maintenance report. This was a damaging development because his possession of the documents revealed, according to Davis, the existence of an informer on the Commission’s staff who had supplied Helms the information.¹¹⁷ Helms initiated two amendments to the legislation: a cessation of funding, and a time limit on the

¹⁰⁹ Coretta reconciled with the FBI under Sessions’ leadership and Davis commented that Sessions, who was leaving the Commission, was the “greatest thing that ever happened to the Commission.” Sessions thought that the black community suffered the most from violence, “Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting,” 3 May 1993, 63-67.

¹¹⁰ The Youth Against Violence program originated in the King Center a decade earlier, but was picked up by the Commission (at Davis’ suggestion) as a worthwhile program to pursue because it was “a meaningful demonstration of the purpose of the holiday.” The King Center provided in-house non-violence training, but the Commission with Special Agent Ed Horn (FBI-ATL) provided workshops in communities. “Proceedings, Quarterly Commission Meeting,” 3 May 1993, 24-30.

¹¹¹ Coretta Scott King, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993* Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 17-19.

¹¹² *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, 2.

¹¹³ Helms argued the Commission was originally meant to be temporary, but had become a “permanent drain” on taxpayer funds. *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 - Senate Debate*, 103rd Cong., 2nd sess., 23-24 May 1994, S6166-S6167.

¹¹⁴ Helms *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, Senate Debate, 1994, S6168, S6175.

¹¹⁵ Helms noted that many Commissioners did not attend meetings, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, Senate Debate, 1994, S6167-6170.

¹¹⁶ Helms *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, Senate Debate, 1994, S6240.

¹¹⁷ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 61-62.

period a civil servant could work for the Commission. The funding amendment failed, but the amendment to restrict federal employee service to one year was passed. Given his diatribe against Davis, it appears the Executive Director was the target of this amendment.¹¹⁸

There is evidence to suggest that Davis's fear, that a member of his staff collaborated with Helms, was based in reality. It is worth backtracking in order to briefly explain a conflict he was embroiled in, especially as it foreshadowed the organisation's eventual fate. On 27 November 1991, Davis wrote to Helen Hancock, the Commission's Office Manager and Secretary in Washington DC, to terminate her employment. He cited budget constraints and Congress's reluctance to provide additional funding as the reason.¹¹⁹ Hancock then wrote to Coretta and requested that the termination be rescinded. Madeline Y. Lawson, the Commission's Deputy Executive Director, supported Hancock¹²⁰ and argued her "performance has been outstanding," so "I can not in good conscience ask Ms. Hancock to accept this decision for the reasons given." Lawson alleged that Davis had "hired several persons in nonessential positions at much higher salaries to build his own personal staff." She complained that Davis "continued to create positions without any input from Commissioners and a total disregard for the well established federal hiring practices." Lawson alleged that Davis had transferred all Commission funds and financial records from the Washington office, and she pointed to the existence of deep disagreement between herself and Davis: she stated, "I have been slandered and vicious lies have been spread about me." Lawson claimed, "I would not be a part of a practice not within the proper government operating procedures or accept the blame for the excessive spending by the Executive Director" which was "clearly unethical if not illegal." Lawson argued that Davis "planned to piece meal close the Washington office and hire his own staff in Atlanta. If Ms. Hancock's termination is not reconsidered, his strategy would become complete." Lawson recommended that an "administrative oversight committee" be appointed that did not include Davis: "It is disheartening ... to have the decision making process rest solely with an individual who is accountable to no one because all of you have such great demands on your professional and personal lives."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, Senate Debate, 1994, S6175-76.

¹¹⁹ Lloyd Davis, "Letter to Helen Hancock," 27 November 1991, 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, By Laws and Legislation: Memos and Correspondences (1 of 4).

¹²⁰ Helen Hancock, "Letter to Coretta Scott King," 9 December 1991, 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, By Laws and Legislation: Memos and Correspondences (1 of 4); Lawson was initially appointed from the "Department of Health and Human Services" and based in the Washington DC office. At the time of her appointment, Davis wrote "Ms Lawson will represent me in all decisions relative to the operations of that office and personnel so assigned." Lloyd Davis, "Letter to All Staff," 24 August 1989, 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, By Laws and Legislation: Memos and Correspondences (2 of 4).

¹²¹ Lawson stated these staff members were Al Boutin as Executive Assistant and Denny Townsend as Director of Public Affairs. Lawson had previously advised that the Commission did not have the necessary funding for those appointments and expressed concern that "Boutin did not get along well with staff" and may have used Commission funds for his wife's travel on one occasion. According to Lawson, Boutin and Townsend's positions were based on a projected increase in funding and were the "nonessential positions that need to be eliminated at this time; not Ms. Hancock's." She also claimed that three loan staff had left in two months and it "is a travesty that the loan personnel

Davis requested advice from the Commission's attorney about the hiring of staff. The advice confirmed he had the right to hire staff because one major responsibility of the Executive Director was to approve "recruiting, hiring and assigning of all personnel including interns and volunteers."¹²² In January 1992, a special business meeting discussed the allegations. Arthur Anderson had completed an audit of the Commission and reported that irregular board meetings had caused Davis "to act without the cooperation" of others because he needed "to make day to day decisions" when the Commission was not meeting. Nonetheless, the audit suggested Davis follow "a game plan ... laid out by the Governing Board."¹²³ The auditors recommended that the Commission establish an operating committee to "formulate and formalize the authority of" the Executive Director.¹²⁴ The Commission met in April 1992 and Coretta told Commissioners that the audit reported "no serious problems with the management of the finances and operations."¹²⁵ An *ad hoc* committee, chaired by Commissioner William Sessions of the FBI, suggested the abolition of the Executive and Oversight committees, followed by the establishment of an Operating Committee with a membership of: Coretta Scott King, Chairperson; Ralph Regula, Vice Chair; Christine Farris-King, Treasurer; Representative Alan Wheat, Secretary; Jesse Hill; Jack Kemp; Stewart Minton; Sister Catherine McNamee; and Leonard Burchman.¹²⁶ The purpose was to streamline the Commission for the future.¹²⁷

The historical record has not yet provided more information on who Davis thought passed on information to Helms. But it is reasonable to suspect that some in the aforementioned conflict may have. Davis briefly left the Commission after the allegations of financial impropriety, but was ultimately cleared of any wrongdoing.¹²⁸ Coretta convinced him to return.¹²⁹ She was effusive in her praise of him and recounted how he proposed the idea of the Commission and warned she

leave with such low morale and total disgust." Madeline Lawson, "Letter to Coretta Scott King," 9 December 1991, 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, By Laws and Legislation: Memos and Correspondences (1 of 4); See also Al Boutin, "Letter to Coretta Scott King," 25 April 1992, 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Governance, By Laws and Legislation: Memos and Correspondences (1 of 4).

¹²² The charter "clearly does not require a bifurcated hiring policy" where by Executive Director hired staff and the Commission hired for all other positions. Commission's legal advice came from Donald C. Alexander and Jana S. DeSirgh at Cadwaladier, Wickersham and Taft. Donald C. Alexander and Jana S. DeSirgh, "Letter to Davis," 27 August 1991, 97-0001, Box 1: Legislative Papers 1984-1994, Folder: Funding Legislation, June 1994, 1-3.

¹²³ King Commission, "Proceedings, Special Business Meeting," 13 January 1992, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 5: Commission/Committee Meetings, January 1990-May 1993, Folder: Special Business Meeting, Transcript of Proceedings, January 1992, 8, 20.

¹²⁴ "Proceedings, Special Business Meeting," 13 January 1992, 19.

¹²⁵ "Proceedings," 8 April 1992, 12.

¹²⁶ Sessions' suggested: 1) the abolition of the Executive and Oversight committees and the establishment of an operating committee; 2) new bylaws and rules of authority for the Executive Director to be written down for governance; 3) tighter financial controls; 4) an assessment of the viability of the D.C. and Atlanta offices to be made. "Proceedings," 8 April 1992, 12-41; "Proceedings, Commission Meeting," 20 October 1992, 17-18.

¹²⁷ "Proceedings," 8 April 1992, 12.

¹²⁸ In the interim, Davis worked for the Government and the Catholic University on transfer. "Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting," 25 September 1992, 26.

¹²⁹ Lloyd Davis "Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting," 25 September 1992, 24.

“could talk for hours on what ... Davis has meant to the legacy” of King.¹³⁰ In her view, Davis was “one of my right arms” and the “Commission couldn’t be the same” without him.¹³¹ Sessions also expressed complete confidence that Davis ought to be re-appointed because he was “heart, mind, soul, body, committed to the” Holiday.¹³² The board voted unanimously for Davis’s return and he himself commented, “Mrs King has been after me ... since I left.”¹³³ Coretta stated, he “belongs here, and I told him that when he was trying to leave.”¹³⁴ She praised Davis’ “vision, his hard work, and his knowledge of government that pointed us in the direction of a commission.”¹³⁵

§

On 25 May 1994, the Senate passed the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 by a margin of 94 to 4 and added the service ethos to the Holiday.¹³⁶ The Commission received a five year extension to operate until 30 September 1999 and the Senate also approved federal funding by a margin of 74 to 28, which illustrated strong support for the Commission.¹³⁷ Appropriations began at \$300,000 per year, but were scheduled to rise by \$50,000 a year to culminate at \$500,000 by 1999.¹³⁸ Significantly, additional funding would be available from the CNCS, which could make grants of up to 30 percent of the total cost of a “service opportunity.” To foster close links between the organisations, the CNCS’s Chief Executive Officer automatically became a member of the King Commission.¹³⁹ The CEO was Eli Segal, a Democrat and close friend of Clinton.¹⁴⁰

On 9 June 1994, the Commission met for the first time since passage of the Act and discussed its impact. The Act pleased Coretta, though she expressed deep concern about the one-year time limit imposed on federal public servants seconded to the Commission.¹⁴¹ This amendment, if it stood the test of time, meant Davis and other staff would have to leave the Commission after a year so a lengthy discussion ensued about how the Commission ought to respond to this unwanted development.¹⁴² Davis thought the “incredible” amendment “was aimed at me” and claimed to have

¹³⁰ Coretta Scott King “Proceedings,” 8 April 1992, 82.

¹³¹ “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 20 October 1992, 10; Al Boutin filled in while Davis was away, but Alan Minton, Davis’ Executive Assistant, also insisted Davis go back to the Commission. “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 20 October 1992, 32.

¹³² “Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting,” 25 September 1992, 13, 24.

¹³³ “Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting,” 25 September 1992, 24.

¹³⁴ “Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting,” 25 September 1992, 27.

¹³⁵ “Proceedings, Quarterly Meeting,” 25 September 1992, 26.

¹³⁶ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*, Senate Debate, 1994, S6244; “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 9-10.

¹³⁷ The Act was introduced to the House by Rep. Lewis and one hundred co-sponsors, King Commission, “Living the Dream,” Summer 1994, 1.

¹³⁸ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*.

¹³⁹ *King Holiday and Service Act of 1994*.

¹⁴⁰ Adam Bernstein, “Democratic Campaign Chief Eli Segal,” *Washington Post*, 21 February 2006.

¹⁴¹ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 10.

¹⁴² “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 48-82.

“never seen a piece of legislation crafted to deal in a sense with one single federal career employee.” Davis regretted that “a member of my own staff apparently worked with” Helms and provided “a great deal of the information.” Davis rued, with perhaps unwitting irony, that “when you’re getting loaned people on detail, you don’t know who you’re getting. You have to accept who the agencies send, and I’m sure that there are other members of the staff now that unfortunately are supplying Senator Helms and others with information.”¹⁴³ The Commission wanted to employ federal employees for longer than a year and discussed possible strategies to bypass or overturn the amendment. One strategy was to return to Congress and renegotiate before the mid-term elections. The other was to accept the legislation and return in the next year after the election. Most favoured the later option, though as one prophetic analyst cautioned, “I have no reason to believe that in the next session of Congress, Congress is going to be as sympathetic to our cause as this one is.”¹⁴⁴ The Commission leaned toward accepting the legislation, but also thought it necessary to discuss with Senators Bob Dole and Nancy Kassebaum, a Republican from Kansas, before proceeding in either way to correct the “ridiculous error” of the staff amendment.¹⁴⁵ Coretta thought tenure was “very important” and that consistency among staff was essential. Davis had “tremendous knowledge of the philosophy of” King and “if you take the people away who really understand that and who can implement [that] ... then you kill the heart of the Commission.”¹⁴⁶ The Commission formed a committee, headed by Congressman Sawyer, to plan a reversal of the amendment.¹⁴⁷

The staff amendment aside, the Commission could proceed and plan the new Day of Service. This involved creating a new theme and “Open your Heart and Offer your Hands” was suggested.¹⁴⁸ A discussion ensued, but Coretta thought the suggestion did not “convey enough of the day of national service, and I think we’ve got to add something to it.” Christine Farris King added it needed “some kind of lead-in,” and Commissioner Sister Catherine T. McNamee thought it needed a “little more punch and conciseness.” Likewise, Commissioner Dr. Robert C. Henderson thought more would be needed to “have people redefine themselves as servants of the community” in order to “transform the nation.” Commissioner Keith Geiger commented that since violence had become a problem in the suburbs, not just urban areas, ending violence could be a potential theme. Davis replied that the 1994 theme had been “Stop the Killing, Start the Healing and Building,” and that the “SCLC latched on to it with their gun buy-back program.” Henderson suggested that King’s words should be used and one that came to mind was “Drum major of justice.”¹⁴⁹ Despite these

¹⁴³ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 61-62.

¹⁴⁴ Geiger “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 72-73.

¹⁴⁵ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 64-75.

¹⁴⁶ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 65-66.

¹⁴⁷ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 81-82.

¹⁴⁸ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 27-39.

¹⁴⁹ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 30-36; The speakers are: Sister Catherine T. McNamee, President of the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA); Dr. Robert C. Henderson, Secretary General of the National

suggestions, all agreed to “go back to the drafting board” for the theme development.¹⁵⁰ Though a new theme did not come immediately from the above discussion, the discussion nonetheless emphasises the collaborative nature of the Commission at this point. Having worked in tandem with Congress and the President, the Commission discussed with Coretta how the Holiday ought to be projected. The eventual 1995 theme reflected this collective effort: “On the King Holiday, Help Somebody! Every American Can Make a Difference.”¹⁵¹

Impact of the Reform

Clinton signed the King Holiday and Service Act on 23 August 1994 and the destiny of the Holiday and Commission appeared secure.¹⁵² Yet, despite the successful passage of the Act, it took time for the reforms to have a positive effect. Within the Commission, there was debate about how much the 1995 Holiday could promote the new emphasis. Commissioner Richard Kimberly, as Chair of the National Service Committee, was realistic about what could be organised given the short amount of time remaining.¹⁵³ In an October 1994 meeting, the last before the 1995 Holiday, Kimberly suggested the Commission ought to do something for the upcoming Holiday but “not overextend ourselves.” The Commission had “to be realistic to the time frame that we have.” He planned to work with CNCS and the volunteer organisation United Way to engage in a modest outreach to communities.¹⁵⁴ Kimberly viewed the 1995 Holiday as the basis for future celebrations and suggested a more concerted effort must wait until 1996.¹⁵⁵ Daniel Goodwin, who represented Commissioner Senator Kennedy, argued it was “not enough to just simply say ‘Let’s help someone’” and he warned against a mere “band-aid” effort.¹⁵⁶ One set back to the plans became apparent; although the CNCS was ready to help with 20,000 AmeriCorps volunteers, it would not have the promised grant money until 1996.¹⁵⁷

Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is; Keith Geiger, President of the National Education Association (NEA), King Commission, “1994 Annual Report,” 1994, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0005, Box 2: Publications, Media Coverage-Annual Reports 1990-1995, Folder: 1993 Annual Report, 1994 Annual Report, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Bill Darnell, “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 27-39.

¹⁵¹ Lloyd Davis, “Remarks By Lloyd Davis,” 6 January 1994, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0016, Box 2: Guest Speakers and Biographical Data, Folder: Remarks by Lloyd Davis, January 1994, 5. The year of this document is printed as 1994, however, that is likely an error. In his remarks, Davis spoke about the theme for the imminent 1995 King Day.

¹⁵² AP, “King Holiday is Linked,” B7.

¹⁵³ Evidence of Kimberly as chair of the Service Committee, Richard H. Kimberly, “Letter to Coretta Scott King,” 20 December 1993, (Folder: State/Local Commission Files 1989-1995, District of Columbia); Kimberly was Director of Federal Government Relations at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, “1994 Annual Report,” 1994, 4.

¹⁵⁴ “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 29.

¹⁵⁵ Kimberly warned there was only three months to organise state commissions to refocus, “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 30, 42-43.

¹⁵⁶ “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 2, 36-37.

¹⁵⁷ “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 32.

Despite the slow start, the Commission succeeded in developing a new official image of King that acted as a counterpoint to the Dream. The Drum Major helped add substance to the Holiday and met with approval in major newspapers. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* referred to the Drum Major in 1995 in advice on how to remember King, and Vice President Al Gore also invoked the new image.¹⁵⁸ In 1996, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* expressed approval of the new symbolism and claimed King himself would have led the “volunteer effort to pick up where government has left off.” The *Inquirer* claimed that “there’s no better way to commemorate the man and his mission than by voluntarily helping a useful cause.”¹⁵⁹ In 1997, another *Inquirer* editorial praised the high turnout for local volunteer activity as “proof that ... the King Day of Service is catching on.”¹⁶⁰ The *Inquirer* published another editorial on King Day itself that supported service as a Holiday tradition.¹⁶¹ When added to *New York Times* and *Washington Post* encouragement of the Day of Service, this enthusiasm is what Coretta had hoped to see.¹⁶² It also provided a response to liberal critics who argued the Holiday relied too much on King’s Dream. Recognition came in time as the media reported on more service activities. In 1997, a charity group called Hands on Atlanta organised six hundred residents, students and officials to assist at the Atlanta Community Food Bank to give food to the homeless.¹⁶³ Other organised activities included the painting of a school gym, a blood donation drive, voter registration drives, a soup kitchen in Baltimore, and the cleaning up of a homeless shelter in Los Angeles. AmeriCorps members also renovated an exhibit on school integration in Topeka, Kansas, planted trees, fixed school class rooms and prepared food for those who had AIDS.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

This chapter sought to show why the Commission changed the Holiday. It argued that King Day was reformed due to the low participation rate on the Holiday and in response to criticism that its promise was unfulfilled. The fact Holiday celebrations were *de facto* segregated and the continued perception of an over reliance on the Dream provided even more reasons. Thus, the impetus to

¹⁵⁸ Editorial, “King’s Legacy, In His Own Words,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1995, 10; Dianna Marder, “Gore Salutes Those Who Honor Dr. King,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 January 1995, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Editorial, “Volunteers for America,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 January 1996, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Editorial, “Service Day With a Smile,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1997, 10.

¹⁶¹ Editorial, “The Way of the Strong,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 January 1997, 10.

¹⁶² During the October 1994 Commission meeting Coretta spoke about the Drum Major and “the example of King’s life was one of service.” She explained that to think about the Drum Major sermon would be helpful “as you plan and think about community service in the tradition of” King, “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 81-82.

¹⁶³ Founded in 1989, Hands on Atlanta was “an umbrella organization” that linked with “101 social service organizations and public schools.” Derrick Henry, “A Time to Give: Atlanta Groups That Provide Help to the Needy Were Flooded With Offers From Holiday Volunteers, But They Need Help All Year Long,” *Atlanta Journal - Atlanta Constitution*, 10 January 1998, B1; B. Eric D. Taylor, “Community Service: Agency Makes Open Call For Arms, King Legacy Included Volunteering, Says Hands On Atlanta,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 16 January 1997, D3.

¹⁶⁴ Paula Schwed, “Building a Hands-On-Holiday, We Honor King By Improving City, Volunteers Say,” *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 10 January 1997, E1.

change came from a desire to increase participation and create a more meaningful holiday. The reform was achieved due to the personality and political priorities of the President and Democrat majorities in Congress who wanted a progressive Holiday. A purposeful synergy developed between Clinton, Coretta, Lewis, Wofford and Congress, as illustrated by the overwhelming votes of approval to change the Holiday. Yet, although the idea was essentially progressive, it needed conservative support, which was found by linking the day to concerns about the breakdown of the black family and youth violence.

This chapter argues that the Commission sought inspiration from King's 'Drum Major Instinct' sermon. The increased power of Democrats in Washington, some of whom knew King personally, helped to facilitate reform: Wofford and Moseley Braun invoked King's fight against economic inequality, urban decay and a culture of violence – issues most scholars attribute to King's radical phase.¹⁶⁵ By refocusing the Holiday, Coretta and the Commission tried to stimulate activism and respond to critics who had declared the Holiday insubstantial. The change was also intended as an answer to conservative critics who wanted to neutralise the Holiday's influence in American life. The Holiday was not radical *per se*, but issues that scholars have attributed to King's radical phase were recalled and Americans were encouraged to complete King's work in integrated activities. The Commission offered an interpretation of King that moved beyond the Dream image and set the template for future King Holidays.

The Drum Major image was more closely aligned to the Democratic Party and its self-proclaimed commitment to the poor. The collaborative reform effort invoked a collective vision of King's leadership where the people could serve as he did. Clinton soon argued that the national service program was the achievement he "was most proud of" and linked together with the King Holiday reform, these two pieces of legislation signalled a concerted effort to revive a sense of community in the face of conservative attacks on the welfare state.¹⁶⁶ The reforms ushered in by the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994 were imperfect, yet had a long lasting effect: the Holiday is still a day of service. This is a point most scholars have neglected.

The transformation of King Day illustrated what could be achieved with supportive congressional majorities. The popularity of the Act in Congress and testimony in support of its passage indicated an understanding that the economic situation was dire for many Americans. However, after the Commission's triumph, the political landscape abruptly changed. On the 8th November 1994 mid-term elections, the Republican Party won fifty-three new seats in the House and seven in Senate to form historic majorities in both. The defeat of Wofford by Rick Santorum in

¹⁶⁵ Cohen, *King Holiday and Service Act of 1993*, Hearing, Committee on the Judiciary, 1994, 8-9.

¹⁶⁶ John M. Broder and Paul Richter, "Clinton Decries GOP Assault on National Service Program," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 January 1995, 7.

the Senate symbolised this conservative turn.¹⁶⁷ Clinton thus used the 1995 King Holiday to warn Republicans not to attack his National Service program, which Gingrich had criticised as “coerced voluntarism.”¹⁶⁸ It is to the aftermath of that election and its impact on King’s legacy that this thesis now turns.

¹⁶⁷ Democrats had controlled the House since 1954 and Republicans won control of the Senate for only the second time in forty years, Office, “Party Division in the Senate”; Historian, “Party Divisions of the House of Representatives”.

¹⁶⁸ Terence Hunt, “Hands Off National Service, Clinton Warns GOP,” *Charlotte Observer*, 17 January 1995, 2.

Chapter 6

The Decline and Fall of the King Commission (1995-1996)

The King Center is ... moving more towards the 'Coca Cola' scenario ... where we create the formula or the syrup and package it so that it can be disseminated to [sic] that King in Japan looks like King is Seattle.

Dexter Scott King, 16 March 1995

The second half of President Clinton's first term (1995-1996) coincided with a ground breaking Republican congressional majority. Despite Clinton's support, when King Holiday planning entered a crucial phase after the 1994 reforms, the Commission descended into a rapid decline. After more than twenty-five years of activism since her husband's assassination, Coretta Scott King scaled back her involvement in public life. She turned sixty-eight in 1995 and her four children had grown to adulthood. Perhaps their only genuine contemporaries were the Kennedys, who too had an important post-assassination legacy to cultivate.¹ Coretta's desire to minimise her activities provided an opportunity for a new generation to define King's legacy. The 1994 election of Dexter Scott King, the son of Martin and Coretta, to the positions of Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, and President of the King Center precipitated the Commission's downfall.²

Of the King siblings, Dexter emerged as the most influential. With his newfound power, he centralised control of his father's legacy within the King Center and the King Estate, the latter a legal entity that owned the copyright to King's intellectual property. The Estate authorized the reproduction of King's words, image and likeness and during Dexter's leadership, permission to use this intellectual property became increasingly restricted. Dexter planned to standardise and commercialise King's image in order to raise millions of dollars for the King Center. His quest for control led him to attack organisations that were responsible for interpreting his father's legacy, such as the federal government. Dexter's plans prompted a fierce debate about the ethics of profiteering from the intellectual endeavour of one who preached on behalf of the poor. Scholars, and the public, asked who had the right to own and control King's legacy: the King family or the nation?

King historiography has largely neglected the Commission's decline. For example, Dyson devotes a chapter of *I May Not Get There With You* to the mid-1990s "battle over who had the

¹ Eskew, "Coretta Scott King," 366n32.

² King Center, "Coretta King Steps Down," 21 October 1994, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0002 Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Folder: Correspondence of Commission Executive Director, Lloyd Davis; Dexter S. King-King Center CEO, King Center Press Releases; Kevin Sack, "Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path," *New York Times*, 19 August 1997, 36.

authority to shape King's legacy."³ This battle led to disputes between the King family and Boston University, CBS News and the National Parks Service (NPS). Dyson writes little about the Commission, however, perhaps because the aforementioned disputes gained greater publicity. And, in the brief reference he makes, Dyson is uncritical of the way Dexter "engineered the early closing" of the Commission in order to control the King Center's finances.⁴ More sceptically, Polletta notes the Commission's fate was "intriguing" because "after winning authorization for \$2 million over five years the Commission voted *itself* out of existence after only two years," supposedly due to the "financial burden on taxpayers."⁵ Polletta suspects that claim to be dubious and refers to "transcripts of a closed meeting of the commission's executive committee" to suggest Dexter saw the Commission as a fund raising rival. Like Dyson, however, Polletta does not elaborate on the Commission's demise, or its implications for King's legacy. Glenn Eskew notes the Commission's downfall, but devotes little attention to the matter, preferring to focus on Coretta Scott King's activism.⁶ Academics have focused on more prominent civil rights issues, so the relatively unknown fate of the Commission appears of little consequence.⁷ However, the Commission's decline and fall is a rich and controversial history that vividly illustrates the tensions and difficulties faced when commemorating a great historical figure.

Contemporary journalists, in contrast to academics, were keenly interested in the Commission's fate. Dexter's rise to power destabilised a status quo that had existed since 1984 and his combativeness proved newsworthy. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported the Commission's travails in a series of articles from February to May 1995 and this chapter draws on those in order to analyse sources found within the Commission's archive.⁸ One document examined is a 17 October 1994 letter from the King Estate that told the Commission it needed a licence agreement to use King's image. This changed the relationship between the Commission and King Center, which was closely aligned to the Estate. An even more dramatic communication followed: a 24 January 1995 memorandum from Coretta to Davis, in which she forbade the Commission to use King's image. This memorandum has been of great interest to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), but thus far, its archivists have been unable to locate it. However, during extensive research in the Commission archive for this thesis, a copy was found and it is presented in

³ Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 249-281, quote 256.

⁴ Dyson described Dexter's conduct in the NPS dispute as "unconscionable" because in that instance "the government has appeared to be a friend." Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 266-270.

⁵ Polletta, "Legacies and Liabilities," 223n18.

⁶ Eskew, "Coretta Scott King," 361.

⁷ Historians such as Timothy J. Minchin, John A. Salmond and David L. Chappell have analysed the movement's aftermath with a focus on new campaigns and battles to enforce civil rights, Minchin and Salmond, *After the Dream*; Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*.

⁸ Suggs, "Files Detail Early Efforts."; Gary Pomerantz, "King Week: Keeping the Dream Alive: Holiday Panel Fades, Bickering Marks the End of its Efforts," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 13 January 1996, C2; Cynthia Tucker, "Worldly Pressures Threaten MLK Legacy," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 January 1996, C7.

this chapter. Other sources examined include transcripts from: 16 March and 30 March 1995 Operations Committee meetings, during which the Commission's closure was first discussed; and transcripts of 25 April and 18 May 1995 meetings of the same committee. These led to a Special Commission Meeting on 23 May 1995, when the debate to close the Commission came to a vote. The transcripts offer a valuable insight into a conflict over the legacy of one of the twentieth century's most compelling leaders. So underutilised are they, that at least one important document, the January memorandum, was thought to be lost. The following analysis reveals the tale of the Commission's ruin and its role in the battle over who had the right to interpret King's legacy.

This chapter analyses the King Holiday with three questions in mind: Why did the King Commission decline and collapse? What impact did its collapse have on the Holiday? What was the overall impact on King's legacy? Consideration of these questions enables an analysis of the Holiday at a time when the Commission's future had seemed assured. This chapter argues that four main reasons explain why the Commission collapsed: Dexter's ambition and economic outlook, Coretta's desire to resign, the staff amendment in the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994, and the Republican majority in Congress. This chapter, thus, focuses on a considerably different vision of King's legacy than the Drum Major: a privatised and standardised legacy.

No-one did more to privatise King's legacy than his own son. In contrast to the collective reform of the Holiday in 1994, Dexter's reforms were individualistic and near unilaterally declared by him. This privatisation occurred as the commodification of public assets hastened during the 1990s. When neoliberal economics were revived in Washington DC, Congress sought to cut government services and the King Commission became increasingly vulnerable to the era's politics. Similarly, Clinton reverted to his New Democrat persona and acquiesced to conservative attacks on the welfare state. He signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, which he had vetoed twice before, despite the fact he believed it had the goal of "ending welfare as we know it."⁹ In this context, Dexter's plan to commoditize King's legacy and concentrate capital within the King Estate complimented the period's small government ethos and the Commission's fate sheds light on a greater trend to downsize the federal government.

Senator Helms was the Commission's most obsessive opponent, but after the 1994 mid-term election, he emerged less isolated when Republicans won majorities in both houses of Congress. Republicans won because Clinton had become a "liability." His approval rating was low, wages had stagnated and the economy, while in recovery, had not distributed enough benefits. Furthermore, the President's attempted health care reform and liberalism on gay enlistment in the military gave Republicans the scope to "stigmatize him as a big government, tax-and-spend liberal." Berman

⁹ The Act affected nine million poor children "dependent on AFDC." Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 183; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 225.

notes that in the South, “Republicans triumphed in Congress at a level unimaginable a generation earlier.”¹⁰ Clinton had to respond to this attack and in his 1996 State of the Union address he proclaimed the “era of big government is over.”¹¹ The President also signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, a welfare reform bill he had vetoed twice. In his words, the Act had the goal of “ending welfare as we know it,” but it adversely affected an estimated nine million children who lived in poverty.¹² Despite Clinton’s accommodating style, Congress became characterised by bitter partisanship and temporarily closed the public service in late 1995 and early 1996 during budget negotiations.¹³

Inspired by the ideological blueprint ‘Contract With America,’ a ten-point plan that demanded a balanced budget, welfare reform, increased defence spending, strict crime measures and line-item veto for the President, Republicans dramatically shifted the balance of power in Congress.¹⁴ Led by Newt Gingrich, a new Republican cohort revitalised the two-decade long assault on big government.¹⁵ From the New Deal onwards, liberals had dominated much of the institutional structure of the US and in that light, liberalism was associated with big government. According to David T. Courtwright, however, by 1993 the right wing had built its own institutions. They included think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, evangelical schools and advocacy groups, as well as talk radio programs, hosted by the likes of Rush Limbaugh. These institutions provided the right wing with an ideological training ground and a platform to extend the public “spectrum of ideas rightward.”¹⁶ Using these new forums, free market adherents advocated for a smaller federal government.

Liberalism is held with such disdain by US conservatives, that Jamie Peck notes the term *neoliberalism* is scarcely used in the US due to the constant connotation of the word liberal with the left.¹⁷ In this chapter, however, the term neoliberalism is used because of its free market, small government, economic connotation. Conservatism and neoliberalism are closely related, but neoliberalism has a more amoral dimension that sometimes conflicts with conservative Christian

¹⁰ Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 175-176; Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 223.

¹¹ Bill Clinton, “1996 State of the Union,” Clinton Digital Library, <http://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16124>, accessed 23 April 2015

¹² The Act affected nine million poor children “dependent on AFDC.” Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 183; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 225.

¹³ Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 235-236; King Commission, “Operations Committee Teleconference,” 12 March 1996, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 8: Commission/Corporation Meetings, August 1996-September 1996, Folder: Operations Committee Teleconference, March 1996, 10-11.

¹⁴ Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 174.

¹⁵ Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 177; Republicans also won significant gains in state legislatures and governorships. Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 228.

¹⁶ Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 230.

¹⁷ Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

morality.¹⁸ In the actions of Dexter Scott King, I discern little influence on him by the Christian Right, rather he was more influenced by free market economic practice.¹⁹

Inspired by late nineteenth and early twentieth century economics, neoliberalism, is characterised by government deregulation, privatisation and spending reduction.²⁰ Neoliberals assert that economic deregulation eliminates government interference in markets, that asset privatisation leads to large profits and spending reduction increases those profits. Based on an ideal of individual freedom, especially freedom from the state, neoliberals aim to remove barriers to business profitability. According to David Harvey, they propose that “human well-being” is best “advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”²¹ Furthermore, “private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative are seen as the keys to innovation and wealth creation” and “intellectual property rights are protected ... so as to encourage technological changes.”²² This last point is important, as Dexter wanted to use modern computer technology to promote King’s legacy around the world.

The fight to control King’s intellectual property, thus, became a key issue leading to the Commission’s demise. According to Andrew F. Christie, intellectual property is “primarily derived from human intellectual activity” and the “activities that commonly result in most IP [intellectual property] are innovation and creativity.” This innovation and creativity must result in “bringing into existence something new.”²³ King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech is one example. Clarence B. Jones, King’s lawyer and speechwriter, copyrighted the speech in 1963 on behalf of the civil rights leader.²⁴ Furthermore, intellectual property is “an intangible subject matter emanating from the

¹⁸ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49-50; Courtwright, *No Right Turn*: 4-5.

¹⁹ The terms neo-liberal and neo-conservative are often used interchangeably, but scholars agree there is an important difference. Neoconservatives are more closely aligned with the evangelical Christian right such as the Moral Majority led by Jerry Falwell, which provided neoconservative intellectuals with mass movement partners (along with alienated members of the white working class). Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 49-50; Peck notes neoliberalism is scarcely used in the US due to the liberal connotation with the left. Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*: 1; Newt Gingrich, allied with the Christian right was more apt to adopt neo-liberal economic principles than neo-conservative moral principles, possibly due to his own uneasy relationship with so called traditional morals, Courtwright, *No Right Turn*: 4-5.

²⁰ Nineteenth century liberalism and neo-classical economics ended with the Great Depression and the Keynesian consensus that more closely regulated the economy. High unemployment and high inflation rates (stagflation), ended the Keynesian consensus in the 1970s and a new/old economic order emerged, based on deregulation, privatisation and reductions of government spending. For works on neoliberalism, see Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*: 1-20; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 1-38; Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014), 1-24.

²¹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 2.

²² Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 64.

²³ Christie writes, “to lawyers, the concept of ‘property’ is more one of *rights to* subject matter than of subject matter *per se*.” A lawyer more likely sees “‘property’ as the entitlements to something exercisable against third parties, than as the thing in respect of which those entitlements exist.” Andrew F. Christie, “A Legal Perspective,” in *The Management of Intellectual Property*, ed. Derek Bosworth and Elizabeth Webster (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006), 25.

²⁴ Jones and Connelly, *Behind the Dream: The Making of the Speech that Transformed a Nation*: 92-95, 131-134, 138-143.

human intellect in respect of which a legal right of exclusivity may be granted.”²⁵ Since copyright protects “knowledge and information that would normally be termed ‘literary and artistic works,’” the owner of the copyright can ensure that the protected matter will not be reproduced without permission.²⁶ The owner of a copyright can remove a cultural work from the public domain, or limit access to that work, even if the majority of citizens view it as historically important. Christopher May argues that “intellectual property constructs a scarce resource from knowledge or information that is not formally scarce.”²⁷ Therefore, a “legal form of scarcity is introduced to ensure a price can be obtained for use.”²⁸ By removing a cultural work from the public domain, or by restricting access, a high price can be charged to those who wish to use the work.

In the mid-1990s, intellectual property rights and the liberalisation of international trade coalesced to form a new business frontier. According to May, capitalism “widened itself geographically (usually discussed under the rubric of globalisation)” and “deepened its penetration into previously non-commodified social relations.” As a result, “there is little that cannot in one way or another be rendered as property: this process is driven by the need to earn a profit” and one result is “the commodification of knowledge.”²⁹ Therefore, where certain knowledge was “previously part of a social reservoir, IPRs [Intellectual Property Rights] are a tool of commodification with the precise and clear purpose of establishing market power and control through the construction of scarcity (of use).” Since “capitalism is firmly rooted in the recognition of property rights, those areas of social life that capitalists wish to profit from must be rendered as property.”³⁰ Thus, areas of social life once thought of as existing in the public domain can be privatised.

Dexter may not have viewed his own actions as neoliberal in character, however his strategy to profit from his father’s intellectual property relied on enforcing copyrights that he controlled.³¹ He had studied business administration at Morehouse College and one expression of his economic mindset is found in his autobiography. He writes: “government is like a corporation.”³² Dexter attempted to create scarcity in regard to King’s words by eliminating competition and making

²⁵ Christie, “A Legal Perspective,” 26.

²⁶ Christopher May, *The Global Political Economy of Intellectual Property Rights: The New Enclosures* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6-7.

²⁷ May, *The Global Political Economy of Intellectual Property Rights: The New Enclosures*: 3.

²⁸ May, *The Global Political Economy of Intellectual Property Rights: The New Enclosures*: 4.

²⁹ May, *The Global Political Economy of Intellectual Property Rights: The New Enclosures*: 11.

³⁰ May, *The Global Political Economy of Intellectual Property Rights: The New Enclosures*: 12.

³¹ Harvey argues, “Neoliberalism has ... become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.” Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 3.

³² Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*; “Dexter Scott King,” in *King Encyclopedia*; *Newsweek* states King studied business at Morehouse College. Kurt Eichenwald, “The Family Feud Over Martin Luther King Jr.’s Legacy,” *Newsweek*, 3 April 2014.

file:///Users/c3156815/Desktop/The%20Family%20Feud%20Over%20Martin%20Luther%20King%20Jr.'s%20Legacy.html

business deals with the private sector, which he hoped would disseminate King's message and generate income. Dexter attempted to deregulate the government's role in public education about King by attacking the Holiday Commission and National Parks Service (both federal organisations), privatise his father's legacy by enforcing intellectual property rights, and reduce spending by downsizing the King Center. After eliminating what he perceived as competition, Dexter planned to promote his father's image in the global market.³³ Whereas Coretta wanted to promote King's philosophy abroad within the framework of the UN, Dexter thought of global marketing opportunities. These developments are important to understand, as they influenced the King Holiday by undermining its organisational structure.

Race Relations and Politics in the Mid-1990s

The attack on the Commission occurred at a time Stephen F. Lawson described as characterised by "increased racial stress." Indeed, Coretta had just argued before Congress that the Commission could help eliminate US racial divisions and reduce youth violence. There was awareness among liberals that although the US had dismantled *de jure* segregation, racial equality remained elusive for the majority of African Americans. Furthermore, race relations became more complex as the US fashioned a multi-cultural society to include Mexican and Central American immigrants.³⁴ Remedial action to redress discrimination, however, seemed unpopular. Clinton defended the government's affirmative action programs, yet in March 1995 the *Washington Post* revealed that seventy-five percent of Americans opposed affirmative action for minorities.³⁵ Slightly more than half of African Americans surveyed supported affirmative action, but eighty-one percent of whites thought minorities should not "receive preference in hiring, promotions and college admissions."³⁶ This, and similar, divisions prompted calls from some quarters for a "conversation about race."³⁷

The call for such a conversation may have been superfluous, as one was already underway courtesy of the 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's controversial analysis of US race relations had already made the front covers of *Newsweek*, *New Republic* and *New York Times Book Review*.³⁸ It sparked controversy due to its conclusion, based

³³ Neoliberals have sought to remove international trade barriers and their agenda is often thought synonymous with globalization. The "advocates of the neoliberal way" occupy positions of influence in "international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that regulate global finance and trade." Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 1-3.

³⁴ Lawson, "Introduction," xxvii-xxviii.

³⁵ Ann Devroy, "Clinton Defends Programs," *Washington Post*, 24 March 1995, 1.

³⁶ Richard Morin and Sharon Warden, "Americans Vent Anger at Affirmative Action," *Washington Post*, 24 March 1995, 1, 4.

³⁷ William Raspberry, "Needed: A Conversation About Race," *Washington Post*, 24 March 1995, 23.

³⁸ Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Russell Jacoby and Naomi Glauberman, eds., *The Bell Curve Debate: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York: Times Books, 1995); Steven Fraser, ed. *The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence, and the Future of America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995).

on questionable social science/demographic data, that black culture (not racism) caused black disadvantage. Described as “the most incendiary piece of social science to appear in the last decade,” critics depicted *The Bell Curve* as an attempt “to offer scientific proof of the inferiority of black people.”³⁹ One critic argued it was “anachronistic Social Darwinism” that reflected “a historic moment of unprecedented ungenerosity” when cuts to government spending could be supported “by an argument that beneficiaries cannot be helped, owing to inborn cognitive limits expressed as low IQ scores.”⁴⁰ The O. J. Simpson murder trial was another controversial issue. Simpson, an African American and popular former pro football star, was accused of killing his white wife. His trial made clear that many believed it impossible for a black man to receive impartial justice. Opinion over his guilt or innocence divided along racial lines and according to Lawson, the trial “exposed a wide gap between whites and blacks in their perception of whether justice was carried out.”⁴¹

Black Nationalism also achieved an ascendancy not seen since the early-1970s, as evidenced by the Million Man March of 16 October 1995. This resurgence was in part a response to the desperate plight of African American men and a leadership “vacuum in national black politics.” Organised by the Nation of Islam’s Louis Farrakhan, the march attracted between 675,000 and 1.1 million people to Washington DC. It expressed black discontent “with the unwillingness of whites to grapple with racial bias in employment, education, housing, and criminal justice.” The march prompted a fear, however, that King might again be portrayed as an Uncle Tom and Farrakhan made many civil rights veterans wary.⁴² To Julian Bond, Farrakhan represented an “alternative” to the integrationist vision, but many King loyalists boycotted the march, including John Lewis who criticised it as “an effort to ‘resegregate America.’”⁴³

Decline of the King Commission

Coretta may have considered resigning from the Commission’s leadership soon after passage of the Holiday and Service Act of 1994. A passionate advocate to extend the Commission, by October 1994 she appeared to change course. In a 6 October meeting, she was unusually subdued except for brief comments about a “new beginning.”⁴⁴ Coretta limited her remarks to allow the Commissioners and Committee chairs greater opportunity to participate.⁴⁵ She remained chairperson, but a generational change soon occurred at the King Center.

³⁹ Fraser, *The Bell Curve Wars*, 1-3.

⁴⁰ Stephen Jay Gould, “Curveball,” in *The Bell Curve Wars*, ed. Steven Fraser (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 11.

⁴¹ Lawson, “Introduction,” xxvii.

⁴² Lawson, “Introduction,” xxvii; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 227-228.

⁴³ Forward by Julian Bond in, Arthur J. Magida, *Prophet of Rage: A Life of Louis Farrakhan and his Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), xi; Howard Fineman and Bill Turque, “Grappling with Race,” *Newsweek*, 23 October 1995, 30.

⁴⁴ “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 9.

⁴⁵ Dexter Scott King attended this meeting but said little, “Proceedings, Commission Meeting,” 6 October 1994, 9.

On 21 October 1994, Dexter Scott King was elected Chairman and CEO of the King Center.⁴⁶ Named after his father's church in Montgomery, Alabama, Dexter was the King's third child and second son. Born and raised in Atlanta during the final years of *de jure* segregation, he experienced racism and taunts because of his father's activism. Dexter became part of an early trickle of students who attended an integrated elementary school.⁴⁷ He struggled at school and in *Growing Up King*, his autobiography, Dexter suggested an undiagnosed attention deficit disorder explained why he later failed to graduate from college.⁴⁸ Like his siblings, Dexter grew in the shadow of a famous father, but he developed one passion.⁴⁹ Not an accomplished musician, he loved music and that provided direction for him as an adult and led to employment in the entertainment industry.⁵⁰ Thirty-three years old in 1994, Dexter was also on the King Center's board and had briefly been its President in 1989. That tenure was epitomised by conflicts with his mother and the Board of Directors, and he resigned after four months.⁵¹ Dexter later joined the King Commission in October 1992, but exerted little influence during the next two years.⁵²

When elected to lead the King Center a second time, Dexter was praised as representative of a new generation. Coretta claimed he had "exciting and creative ideas" and Andrew Young thought Dexter understood "communications and multimedia technologies, which can help the Center translate the legacy of Dr. King to a new generation."⁵³ Dexter controlled another vital organisation: the King Estate. Comprised of Coretta and the four siblings collectively, Dexter had been appointed its executor in 1991.⁵⁴ The Estate owned and protected the intellectual property of King, which included his "name, image, likeness, recorded voice, copyrighted speeches, and words."⁵⁵ Now Dexter managed the Estate and led the Center, he suddenly became powerful.

Before his election, Dexter sent Lloyd Davis a letter on behalf of the Estate. He advised that the Estate had entered an exclusive agreement with Intellectual Properties Management (IPM) to manage King's intellectual property.⁵⁶ Dexter informed Davis IPM would contact the Commission

⁴⁶ "Coretta King Steps Down," 21 October 1994.

⁴⁷ Scott King, *My Life*: 218, 224-230, 265-266; Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 101-102; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*: 151.

⁴⁸ Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 102, 127, 149.

⁴⁹ Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 108.

⁵⁰ Scott King, *My Life*: 264; Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 66, 153.

⁵¹ Dexter was President of the King Center for 4 months in 1989, until he resigned due to "administrative differences." "Coretta King Steps Down," 21 October 1994; Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 157-173.

⁵² On 20 October 1992, Dexter was sworn in as a commissioner. He replaced Martin Luther King III, who had previously replaced Yolanda King. "Proceedings, Commission Meeting," 20 October 1992, 8, 11, 14, 23.

⁵³ "Coretta King Steps Down," 21 October 1994.

⁵⁴ Sack, "Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path," 18.

⁵⁵ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 6: Commission/Committee Meetings, June 1994-March 1995, Folder: Operations Committee Meeting, March 1995, 8.

⁵⁶ The King Estate included Coretta and the four siblings, Dexter Scott King, "Letter to Lloyd Davis," 17 October 1994, 97-0002, Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Outgoing Correspondence 1993-1995, Speeches and Miscellaneous, Folder: Dexter S. King-King Center CEO, King Center Press Releases October 1994-January

to “issue a formal license agreement” authorizing the use of King’s intellectual property.⁵⁷ Previously the Commission had a less formal arrangement, without IPM’s involvement.⁵⁸ This new requirement appeared a formality, yet it escalated into a major obstacle for the Commission. Dexter also requested the Commission’s list of committee chairpersons, state and local chairpersons, executive directors and officers of King Commissions around the nation. He wanted a list of all King “related organizations or institutions that you are aware of,” including “schools, committees, institutes, foundations, other non-profit groups.”⁵⁹ Dexter’s letter signalled intent to control King’s image by restricting usage of his father’s intellectual property.⁶⁰ In a letter to the Commission’s attorney, Davis noted the requests raised “very serious legal questions.” He did not specify those questions.⁶¹

Two African American men from Dexter’s generation supported him in his quest: Phillip Jones, a Morehouse College friend, and Isaac Farris, a cousin.⁶² Considered aggressive and “not a well-liked person,” Jones, no relation to Clarence B. Jones, managed IPM and had previously collaborated with Dexter in a production company to produce a King Holiday music video in 1985. He described himself as “an entrepreneur with ‘a hip-hop sensibility’” and IPM as analogous to film director Steven Spielberg’s DreamWorks.⁶³ Farris, interim Chief of Staff at the King Center, was the son of King’s sister, Christine Farris. He served Martin Luther King III when the later was a county commissioner, but had to resign after being accused of the solicitation of a bribe.⁶⁴ Of the two, Jones was the more important and he became, in Dexter’s words, “key to virtually all the plans of the King Estate.”⁶⁵ In fact, with an allusion to mafia advisors, Dexter described Jones as his “consiglieri.”⁶⁶ As these two worked together, critics perceived a conflict of interest between their responsibility to foster King’s legacy and their desire to concurrently profit from it.

1995); Carson writes that Coretta appointed Dexter to manage the Estate, after which Dexter and Jones formed IPM to manage the Estate. Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 163-172.

⁵⁷ Dexter noted this was consistent with a prior meeting with Davis, Scott King “Letter to Lloyd Davis,” 17 October 1994.

⁵⁸ Eskew, “Coretta Scott King,” 360-361.

⁵⁹ In conclusion, Dexter stated that IPM’s “licensing policy will extend to the naming of streets and monuments.” Dexter Scott King “Letter to Lloyd Davis,” 17 October 1994.

⁶⁰ Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 260.

⁶¹ Lloyd Davis, “Letter to Donald C. Alexander,” 30 January 1995, 97-0002, Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Outgoing, Folder: Correspondence of Commission Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Correspondence between Lloyd Davis and Others, January - June 1995.

⁶² Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 122.

⁶³ Lyle V. Harris, “Capitalizing on King, Atlanta Firm Works With Family to Take Activist’s Message to New Generation,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 January 1999, B1.

⁶⁴ John Blake and Mark Sherman, “The King Team,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 February 1995, C5.

⁶⁵ Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 179.

⁶⁶ Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 170.

Not due to lead the King Center until March 1995, Dexter was installed as CEO in an emergency meeting in January.⁶⁷ Clayborne Carson writes that he met Dexter soon after, in early 1995, and “much had changed” at the Center. Dexter had moved into Coretta’s office and she “no longer had an office anywhere in the institution.” Carson believed her absence “conveyed the message that no one could circumvent Dexter’s authority by appealing to his mother.”⁶⁸ Anointed on King Day 1995 in the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Dexter told the congregation he wanted to “deliver to my generation economic freedom.”⁶⁹ It was soon clear, however, that Dexter defined economic freedom differently to his father. To Dexter, economic freedom was an individual concern rather than a collective concern.

The premature installation of Dexter was publically explained as necessary due to a conflict between the King Center and the NPS. To prepare for an increase in visitors to Atlanta for the 1996 Olympic games, the NPS planned to construct an \$11.8 million visitors’ centre within the King Historic Site, on Auburn Avenue. The NPS sought and received Coretta’s approval. Dexter planned to build an interactive museum in the same location, however, and suddenly interjected.⁷⁰ Dexter planned to build a multimedia theme park with “computerized interactive displays and holographic image of King.”⁷¹ He claimed that visitors to the King Center “were young people who were not inspired by the existing static exhibit and wanted a more interactive experience.” Dexter envisaged the “King Dream Center as a multimedia, emerging experience utilizing all of the latest technology, 3-D technology, animatronics, every kind of mood sensory technology that creates atmosphere” like the 1960s, including “an animatronic Dr. King delivering the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech.”⁷² Dexter viewed the NPS as a rival and conflict ensued in late 1994 as cooperation between it and the Center collapsed. The Center barred the NPS from conducting tours of King’s birth home and Dexter exacerbated tensions when he refused an offer from John Lewis to mediate in the dispute.⁷³

The NPS conflict typified a growing disillusionment with the King family. Carson became uneasy as he thought the Center’s “mission was to preserve a legacy and disseminate ideas rather than make a profit.”⁷⁴ He suspected the “plan would be ignored due to doubts about Dexter’s leadership abilities and about his motives.”⁷⁵ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that the

⁶⁷ The NPS had conducted free public tours of birth home for eleven years, “Dexter King Installed,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 12 January 1995, 15; “Coretta King Steps Down,” 21 October 1994.

⁶⁸ Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 168.

⁶⁹ John Blake, “Dexter King: Economic Freedom is Goal, Mother Officially Passes the Torch,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 17 January 1995, B9.

⁷⁰ Portia A. Scott, “King Legacy Still Issue in NPS, King Center Controversy,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 15 January 1995, 1,4; John Blake, “King Week ‘95: Q and A, Dexter King and Troy Lissimore,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 15 January 1995, D4.

⁷¹ Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 164.

⁷² Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 204.

⁷³ Scott, “King Legacy Still Issue,” 1, 4; Blake, “King Week ‘95: Q and A,” D4.

⁷⁴ Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 164.

⁷⁵ Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 167.

family had created an impression that “King’s legacy belongs to” them, “not to the nation.” The family issued a press release that asserted they stood “on the principle that the history of the civil rights movement and the legacy of Dr. King ... shall forever remain in the care and custody of the King family,” not the NPS, nor the federal government. How the entire movement legacy could be owned by the King family alone remained unclear, but Dexter claimed that King’s legacy “belongs to everyone spiritually but to his heirs legally.” In one riposte, Garrow stated: “King’s legacy is for all Americans” and was “too large to be the property of his descendants.”⁷⁶ A 9 January 1995 opinion piece in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* referred to the family’s tactics as “scorched-earth” and insisted that the family “must understand why some people recoil at the use of King not only as a prophet of nonviolence, but also as a profit center.”⁷⁷ This was a typical sentiment. The NPS conflict produced a multitude of negative articles about the family.⁷⁸ The Commission, like the NPS, once had a cooperative relationship with the Center and even shared employees, such as Davis. Until 1995, there was no known dispute of significance between the two organisations. The following episode, however, illustrates how much the relationship had changed.

On 24 January 1995, Coretta sent Davis a memorandum. Despite its importance, this memo has not been analysed in academic works, nor its entire content published in full.⁷⁹ Contemporary newspapers selectively quoted from the memo, but there was more to its text than the press published. Moreover, an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* article of 2006 suggested that the memo might be lost to history. An archivist at NARA, Atlanta, aware of its significance, could not locate it in the Commission archive and stated it was “like finding a needle in a haystack.”⁸⁰ During archival research for this thesis, a copy was found in the King Commission archive. Below is the full text of Coretta’s January memo:

In light of the changes at The King Center, to allow new leadership an opportunity to access the mission and purpose and direction of my late husband’s legacy, there should be no major initiative implemented until 1996. At such time, all of our resources will be available. Attempting to proceed at this time would be in direct competition with the King Center’s

⁷⁶ The article pointed out that the federal government spied King on, but Coretta had tried to reconcile with the government. John Blake, “U.S. or Heirs: Who Owns King’s Legacy? Legal Rights to Image at Question in Dispute,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 1 January 1995, 1.

⁷⁷ John Head, “The Feud Over a Legacy: Lewis Tries to Find an Answer,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 January 1995, 7.

⁷⁸ “Herman Russell Resigns From King Center Board,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 12 March 1995, 1.

⁷⁹ Eskew mentions the memo’s effect. Dexter “ordered the commission in 1995 to cease and desist from using for free King’s likeness to promote the holiday, an act that led to the disbanding of the commission in September 1996.” Eskew, “Coretta Scott King,” 361.

⁸⁰ Suggs, “Files Detail Early Efforts.”; memo also referred to in Robert A. Jordan, “King Family Feud Doesn’t Deserve Olympic Stature,” *Boston Sunday Globe*, 5 February 1995, 5.

programs, especially as it relates to educational materials being disseminated.

Any opportunities regarding the name, image and/or likeness of Martin's would jeopardize our fund raising abilities, as well as, our mission and purpose, if a control was not put into place. Until this can be re-accessed along with the vision, any plans should be forestalled.

I would also like to request the names of commission chair persons on the commission, along with the executive directors' names, and local contact persons.⁸¹

The memo marked a pivotal moment in the Commission's history and it was perceived as an instruction to halt the organisation's activities. Phrases like "no major initiative" until all "resources will be available" in 1996, suggested a dormant year and that the Center viewed the Commission as "direct competition." The prior demand for a list of Commission chairpersons and others was reiterated, which suggests Davis had not earlier complied to a similar request.

The press did not immediately report about the memo. It seems to have generated rumours, however, since Coretta issued a press statement on 3 February to confirm that the memo was sent:

In my position as Chairperson of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission, I am confirming that a memo was sent to Mr. Lloyd Davis, dated January 24, 1995, in order to create more synergy among The King organisations. The King Center has received inquiries from its corporate supporters regarding the King Holiday Commission solicitations, and to avoid competing against ourselves, as well as confusion, it is my belief that there should be a central funding mechanism that would support the King Commission and the King Center. Also, educational materials distributed by the King Commission should be already packaged by The King Center, and when published or reproduced, should be properly credited.⁸²

⁸¹ Coretta Scott King, "Memorandum – Changes at the King Center," 24 January 1995, 97-0023, Box 7: Commission/Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: March 1995, Operations Committee Meeting.

⁸² One Commission function was to send educational material such as the 'Learn-a-Bration' to schools. However, in the lead up to the 1995 King Day this was not done due to the conflict over King's image and likeness. The material was held up for review, but never approved, Coretta Scott King, "A Prepared Statement from Mrs. Coretta Scott King," 3 February 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission* 97-0023 Box 7: Commission/Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: Operations Committee Meeting, March 1995)

My request was also for the names of Chairpersons of State Holiday Commissions, as well as contact information.

It is unclear how deeply involved Coretta was in these machinations.⁸³ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* noted she was not in Atlanta when the February press statement was issued, raising doubt as to its author.⁸⁴ Jones may have authored the memo, since it was sent from IPM's office and he regularly wrote press statements for Dexter and Coretta.⁸⁵ Coretta was nonetheless capable of gamesmanship, as suggested by Carson in *Martin's Dream*, and she never contradicted the memo's sentiment.⁸⁶ Dexter's October 1994 letter imposed a new licence on the Commission, but the January memo escalated differences into a major dispute. Given the material and time needed to publicise the Holiday, being told to halt activity and denied King's intellectual property frustrated the Commission. The February press statement suggested the Center and Commission could co-exist, but it did not relieve the Commission from the previous demands.

A consensus emerged that the Commission had been seriously damaged. The *Atlanta Constitution* and *Atlanta Daily World* cited both the memo and press statement in front page articles. Each made a comparison to the ongoing conflict with the NPS and quoted the lines about the "name, image and/or likeness" of King. They reported that Davis intended to resist the order.⁸⁷ An *Atlanta Constitution* editorial described the move against the Commission as "a desperate act" of "appalling poor judgment" and ironically noted Coretta had spent years lobbying Congress for the Holiday and the Commission.⁸⁸ The *Atlanta Daily World* linked the Commission's difficulties to its status as a government body: "Another federal agency," like the NPS, had been asked not to use King's "image or likeness."⁸⁹ The newspapers concluded that the Commission had been ordered to a halt.⁹⁰ Davis likewise viewed the Commission's position as near terminal. He claimed that the correspondence enforced a "hold on all the major program activities" and "for all practical purposes, has ended the activities of this federal body."⁹¹ Davis was not willing to allow the Commission to collapse without a fight, however, and the *Atlanta Constitution* reported he planned

⁸³ Coretta Scott King, "But this is a new time and a new political climate. And we have to begin to look at that reality and see just how we fit into that." For the Commission's discussion about memo, see "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 6, 12.

⁸⁴ John Blake, "Kings Ask Panel to Back Off," *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 February 1995, 1.

⁸⁵ Davis "Letter to Donald C. Alexander," 30 January 1995; Blake and Sherman, "The King Team," C5.

⁸⁶ Carson, *Martin's Dream*: 104-107.

⁸⁷ Blake, "Kings Ask Panel to Back Off."; "King Holiday Commission Asked to Halt Activity," *Atlanta Daily World*, 7 February 1995, 1; the memo was also cited in Jordan, "King Family Feud Doesn't Deserve Olympic Stature," 5.

⁸⁸ Editorial, "Adjusting the King Vision," *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 February 1995, 22.

⁸⁹ "King Holiday Commission Asked to Halt Activity," 1.

⁹⁰ Blake, "Kings Ask Panel to Back Off."; "King Holiday Commission Asked to Halt Activity," 1.

⁹¹ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 30 March 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97 - 0023, Box 7: Commission/Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: Operations Committee Meeting, Transcript of Proceedings/March 1995, 34-35.

to ignore the injunction.⁹² Davis publically refuted Dexter and asserted that the King Center had no authority over the Commission: “We answer to the president and the Congress of the United States.” This invocation of higher authority portrayed the Commission as beyond the Center’s reach and Davis was correct, in a legislative sense.⁹³ The Center did not have authority to disband a Commission established by Congress.

Coretta nonetheless considered the Commission to be subordinate to the Center in the hierarchy of King organisations. In a 1984 ‘Preliminary Plan of Action’, one measure of the Commission’s success was whether it would increase the “level of support for the work of the King Center.”⁹⁴ During debates about the Commission’s future, Coretta described it as “parented by the King Center” and reflected: “There has always been in my mind some conflict between these two [organisations] ... it doesn’t have to be, but unless they are working in harmony, there could be.”⁹⁵ And so long as Coretta led both organisations, they worked in harmony. As she withdrew support from the Commission, however, its original subordination to the King enabled Dexter to attack its stature as an authentic interpreter of King’s legacy.

The idea that the Commission existed as the Center’s junior partner seemed out-dated by 1995. The Commission now operated at the highest echelons of American government and coordinated with the President, Congress, state governors and state legislatures. It had a different political reach to the Center because it represented the federal government and had successfully fought to establish the Holiday in every state. Thus, it had nationwide contacts. It oversaw an entire network dedicated to the Holiday, whereas the Center focused more locally on Atlanta. Furthermore, the Commission had secured funding for five years, retained Clinton’s approval, maintained an office in Washington DC and met there, all of which ensured a presence in the nation’s capital. The King Center, on the other hand, struggled to be financially self-sufficient, had a debt of \$600,000, and its critics argued it failed to adequately promote nonviolence. The Center’s reputation suffered and since it and the family were viewed as synonymous, public opinion of both turned negative. This influenced public perceptions of Dexter when he later began to frame his actions as historically legitimate. Sceptics suspected financial gain motivated him most.

Davis resigned from the King Center’s Board of Directors in late January 1995. He informed Dexter that due to the NPS dispute it was necessary to avoid a conflict of interest between “public obligations and private interests.”⁹⁶ Davis reasoned that since the Center was in conflict with the

⁹² Blake and Sherman, “The King Team,” C5.

⁹³ “King Holiday Commission Asked to Halt Activity,” 1.

⁹⁴ “Implementing the Act Establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission,” December 1984, 16.

⁹⁵ Coretta, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 5.

⁹⁶ Lloyd Davis, “Letter to Dexter Scott King,” 30 January 1995, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, 97-0002, Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Outgoing, Folder: Correspondence Between Lloyd Davis and Others, January-June 1995.

federal government's NPS, he was "uncomfortable" being employed by the Center while also employed at "another federal agency," the Commission.⁹⁷ He thanked Dexter, perhaps sarcastically, for supporting the Commission.⁹⁸ In a letter to Hosea Williams, Davis confided that the "Commission is being challenged by family, not because of its failures but because of its successes."⁹⁹ Davis stayed with the Commission and continued as Executive Director. He thought the Commission doomed, but fought for its survival in the knowledge it could still legally decide its own fate.

Fall of the King Commission

From 16 March 1995, Dexter dominated the Commission's Operations Committee, of which he was a member.¹⁰⁰ The Committee developed motions to be put to Commissioners, and so was the best forum to initiate a destabilisation campaign. Dexter argued that Americans could not differentiate between the Commission and the Center.¹⁰¹ He spoke of balancing "supply and demand" and asserted that the "King legacy is so broad and it creates so much demand that we have not yet figured out how you package it and manage it."¹⁰² He claimed his mission at the King Center was to develop "self-sufficiency and in some cases maybe privatization." Since the public wanted to "interface" with the "positive side of the King legacy," Dexter suggested "old problems" required "high tech" solutions.¹⁰³ He claimed:

The problem with the King legacy is that people perceive it to be public domain when in fact it's not ... this man protected all of his intellectual property during his lifetime. This is not something his heirs came along and did as an afterthought. We are simply caring [sic] out our fiduciary responsibility.¹⁰⁴

Dexter represented a younger generation than most on the Operations Committee. This provided the platform to claim he could manage King's legacy in the future and Coretta thought Dexter had a grasp of "new technology" and a "better vision" for the twenty-first century. She thought he was

⁹⁷ "Herman Russell Resigns From King Center Board," 1.

⁹⁸ Davis "Letter to Dexter Scott King," 30 January 1995.

⁹⁹ Lloyd Davis, "Letter to Hosea L. Williams," 16 February 1995, *Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, 97-0002, Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Outgoing, Folder: Correspondence Between Lloyd Davis and Others, January-June 1995.

¹⁰⁰ "Proceedings, Commission Meeting," 6 October 1994, 78-80; "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 2.

¹⁰¹ Dexter complained that "anybody can start a King Center," but they "shouldn't be able to." "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 10, 52-54.

¹⁰² "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 17.

¹⁰³ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 10, 52-54.

¹⁰⁴ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 55.

also “better at and more creative” at private fundraising.¹⁰⁵ If Dexter could manage the legacy in the next century and raise private funds, what was his vision? He explained, the King Center was:

moving more towards the ‘Coca Cola’ scenario, if you will, where we create the formula or the syrup and package it so that it can be disseminated to [sic] that King in Japan looks like King in Seattle. In other words, then continuity and the uniformity is there wherever you are, and the King Center will become more of a resource center in that regard.¹⁰⁶

The metaphorical syrup threatened to standardise King’s complex legacy and Dexter ignored the fact his father urged Memphis citizens to boycott Coca Cola, the night before his assassination.¹⁰⁷ Dexter saw different interpretations of his father’s legacy as problematic, though he never outlined the exact image of King he wanted to project. Dexter’s efforts to standardise King’s image would minimise the complexity of his historical legacy and ignore his anti-commercial sentiments.¹⁰⁸ Reports emerged that Dexter developed ideas on how to market his father from the nearby Elvis Presley Estate.¹⁰⁹

Dexter and the family had unique and valid insights into King as a private man. However, “the intimacy of families and that of colleagues is different.” King’s colleagues knew him as an activist and preferred an image of him enmeshed in the protest movement, with themselves by his side. Furthermore, the federal government necessarily had a role in King memorialisation on the Holiday and Daynes argues that the NPS, a branch of the federal government, projected a scholarly style of remembrance that educated the public about King.¹¹⁰ Given that the nation needed a responsible interpretation of King’s legacy, Dexter’s plan was problematic. As Taylor Branch warned, the Center wanted “monopoly control of historical materials” and the prescience of his comment was revealed by Dexter’s actions.¹¹¹

Dexter wanted to create a King brand, akin to Coke or Starbucks. This reflected the corporate thinking of the age, which Naomi Klein asserts was “connected by a single idea – that corporations

¹⁰⁵ Coretta, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 36-38.

¹⁰⁶ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 101.

¹⁰⁷ King Jr., “I See the Promised Land,” 283.

¹⁰⁸ Coretta had also cultivated corporate support, Karen Harris and Bill Montgomery, “Coca-Cola’s Keough Given Top King Award, Comedian Bill Cosby Receives Honorary Degree at Morehouse,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1986, D2.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Johnson, “King’s Legacy is Losing its Luster in Atlanta: Heirs Chastised for Harping on Finances Instead of Issues,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 17 August 1997, 1; Eskew notes that Dexter used the Elvis Presley Estate as an influence on marketing King, Eskew, “Coretta Scott King,” 367n45; Editorial, “Adjusting the King Vision,” 22; another report states, Dexter “sought advice from people at the Elvis Presley shrine, Graceland, on how to market his father.”

Lisa DiCarlo, “Martin Luther King Jr.: Minting a Fortune,” *Forbes* (13 August 2002), <http://www.forbes.com/2002/08/13/0813mlk.html>, accessed 23 April 2015.

¹¹⁰ Daynes, *Making Villains, Making Heroes*: 51.

¹¹¹ Coretta tried to relocate all of King’s historic papers to Atlanta, Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 256-257.

should produce brands, not products.” Companies became “hollow,” owning less and outsourcing production, in order to increase profits. Businesses that once manufactured products with large workforces embraced the “ubiquitous Nike model” and closed factories and ordered “products through an intricate web of contractors and subcontractors.” This made them free to devote resources to “the design and marketing required to fully project” a “big idea.”¹¹² The “big idea” was the brand and an attractive associated lifestyle image. In *Race in the Global Era*, Clarence Lusane argues that downsizing enhanced profits since companies could “decrease their workforce while increasing their profit margin.”¹¹³ Dexter followed this corporate path and sought to eliminate competition from other organisations, reduce the size of the King Center, develop brand awareness and collect revenue. In keeping with Klein’s account, King’s intellectual property was the product, and the ‘big idea’ – the lifestyle image – became nonviolence.

Dexter began the 16 March committee meeting with a claim he did not want to interfere with the Commission. However, he warned that there was “a lot of potential for conflict.”¹¹⁴ Using a metaphor to explain that the Commission was like a train going 100 mph, while the King Center was travelling at 25 mph, he wanted the trains to meet at the station and work together.¹¹⁵ The image of the Commission speeding along seems to confirm Davis’s view, that it was targeted due to its success. By the end of the meeting Dexter explained: “I feel sincerely in my heart that there’s no way to contain this beast.” Not because of “ill-will,” but because:

We are dealing in an area that’s very murky. And the only way I know you can address it is you have representative, one entity that takes the lead and everybody else benefits from that. Because there is no other way to eliminate the – and then you have, for lack of a better word – piracy on the part of a lot of these state commissions that are totally un-monitored or go un-monitored, and they’ve created fiefdoms out of this world under the banner of King.¹¹⁶

Criticising unidentified rivals, Dexter claimed there were “a lot of black organizations, for instance, who will use their affiliations to go out and blackmail a corporation by saying ‘If you don’t do this, we are going to boycott you.’” Dexter claimed that there were “people sending out bogus letters

¹¹² Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, 10th Anniversary ed. (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), xvii.

¹¹³ Clarence Lusane, *Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 9-11; Berman also notes that major businesses downsized their organisations from “the factory floor to the ... managerial echelons.” Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 169-170.

¹¹⁴ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 9.

¹¹⁵ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 18.

¹¹⁶ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 98-99.

under the name of the King Center saying we are going to boycott you if you don't support this." He did not specify who sent bogus letters, though he suggested the solution to this problem was to create a unifying organisation to sanction all activities.¹¹⁷ No doubt, he had the King Estate in mind for this responsibility and Dexter's intention to eliminate the Commission was clear.¹¹⁸ By meeting's end, he had become hyperbolic and asserted that civil war had destroyed the British and Roman Empires, an obvious allusion to the prospect of battle between the Commission and the Center.¹¹⁹ Dexter urged holistic solutions in theory, but had only one solution: terminate the Commission. No one else, however, was in favour this, not even Coretta. In a surprise rumination, she suggested a different possibility. Coretta told the committee that she might "step aside from the Commission" because "I think my time in terms of this leadership is just about over."¹²⁰ Tentatively, she offered her resignation so Dexter's vision could be realised. Coretta seemed irresolute, however, and uncertainty prevailed. Moreover, apart from her son, no one encouraged her to resign. In fact, the opposite occurred.

The high esteem in which Coretta was held became obvious. Commissioners thought it vital she remain chairperson, even if the Commission closed sooner rather than later. Her status as King's widow conferred legitimacy and moral authority. Commissioner Thomas Sawyer, a House Democrat from Ohio, suggested "we are dealing with ... stewardship that derives first from moral authority."¹²¹ He explained, Coretta's leadership was needed to secure funding in order for the Commission to continue or at least ensure a smooth transition to a new organisation.¹²² Expanding on his point, Sawyer thought the Holiday central to "the way in which the King legacy expresses itself to this nation" and the loss of Coretta's "leadership at this point would be deeply damaging to the perception within this Congress." Speaking as a Democrat in the now Republican dominated Congress, Sawyer anticipated a less sympathetic Congress than the last. He explained that without Coretta's leadership there would be "substantial damage to ... the kind of transition that you are talking about." There was a "very real consequence that we will lose the fundamental underpinnings" for the Commission and its funding "unless we have that [Coretta's] leadership", which was "necessary" to maintain "public trust" in the future of the Holiday.¹²³ Coretta remained unconvinced, however, and argued that as a bearer of the King name, Dexter was qualified to maintain the family's good reputation and influence. She replied:

¹¹⁷ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 99.

¹¹⁸ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 52-53.

¹¹⁹ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 107.

¹²⁰ Coretta Scott King, "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 36.

¹²¹ Thomas Sawyer, "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 39.

¹²² This had been confirmed by a conversation he had with Ralph Regula, who was chair of the relevant committee that would authorise funding, "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 40.

¹²³ "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 63-64.

I am not as close to the pulse of the Congress certainly as many people are. Dexter is not me, I realize, but Dexter is the son of Martin and Coretta. And he can't be that bad in terms of people accepting the leadership. And to cause great disruption in leadership. I just can't believe that.¹²⁴

Coretta reassured those present that she had “no desire to see the Commission or any aspect of the legacy put in jeopardy,” nor did she think Dexter “would want to contribute to any destruction.”¹²⁵

In terms of a formal vote, Dexter had limited power. Even if the Operations Committee put a motion to the full Commission, his vote was one among many. Legitimacy became a critical factor, however, and despite Dexter's youth and temperament, being the son of Martin Luther King Jr. enhanced his status beyond his formal voting power. Since Coretta had indicated she might retire from public life and possibly from the Commission, he was well positioned to control King's legacy. Dexter asserted that only King's heirs had the right to control his legacy and Coretta began to cede her formal power to him. Within hours of Dexter's first substantial involvement in a Commission meeting all talk had turned to the issue of ‘sunsetting’ (a euphemism for termination) the organisation. No one could effectively resist Dexter because he had Coretta's support.

Dexter did not, however, command the same heightened respect as Coretta. As Chappell noted, Coretta's “irreproachability seemed to grow even as her husband's flaws were exposed over the years.” Her “steady character” and “regal reserve” helped her to maintain dignity, and Coretta also “kept at her husband's work” devoting her life to activism. This authority helped win the Holiday in the first instance and the Commissioners treated her with respect.¹²⁶ Perhaps sensing Dexter did not have the same hard earned authority, Commissioner Richard Kimberly warned that “Helms is just looking for the thing that he can use to strip the funding” from the Commission.¹²⁷ Leadership strife, even inter-generational change, was likely to weaken the Commission since negotiations for the promised funding appropriation were ongoing and Republicans now controlled the budget agenda.¹²⁸ Terri Ann Lowenthal, representing Commissioner Sawyer, one of the few in the meeting who was of Dexter's generation, noted the Commission's supporters in Congress were of a similar age to Coretta, and so suggested she continue as chairperson in order to communicate

¹²⁴ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 77-78.

¹²⁵ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 76-77.

¹²⁶ Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 98-101.

¹²⁷ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 83; For a description of Kimberly, who was Director of Federal Government Relations with Kimberly-Clark Corporation, see “1994 Annual Report,” 1994, 4.

¹²⁸ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 83; Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 235; Berman, *America's Right Turn*: 178-179.

with that older generation. Lowenthal thought that new members of Congress were unsympathetic to the cause and did not know Dexter well enough to be persuaded to support the Commission.¹²⁹

The Operations Committee offered Dexter solutions and urged him to see the Commission as an opportunity rather than a hazard.¹³⁰ He was asked to consider the political and public relations implications of termination, but nothing placated him. Dexter argued that the government (which the Commission represented) should be there to enable not “suppress or isolate the King family or the King Center.” He saw the government as an enemy and asserted that “whenever we hear someone saying ‘We’re coming and take your history. We’re coming to take what is yours. And we are going to tell you’ ... [i]f it comes across that way, then we stand and fight.”¹³¹ Considering the federal government once sanctioned the surveillance of his father, Dexter had good reason to be suspicious of the government. The Commission was more benign, however, as was the NPS, which dedicated itself to the preservation of and education about King’s legacy. Dexter fought with both federal agencies even though, as Dyson argues, the government “appeared to be a friend” in this case and that his actions were “unconscionable.”¹³²

Davis realised before others that the Commission would likely collapse and during the 16 March meeting offered to step down as Executive Director.¹³³ He warned those present that Dexter thought the organisation was finished.¹³⁴ It seemed a *fait accompli* and committee members were shocked about the possible demise. As the reality became apparent, one Commissioner, Sister Catherine McNamee (Catholic Education Association), prodded Coretta to see if she proposed to sunset the Commission and at this point Leonard Burchman exclaimed, “I really can’t believe that this conversation is being out [sic].” Kimberly cautioned that “we need some time to think all this through,” but Coretta did not respond with an opinion.¹³⁵

The Operations Committee met again on 30 March and opposition to closure was repeated. Commissioner McNamee described the possibility as “drastic action” and Commissioner W. Stewart Minton (President of Unidex Reports) declared it a “big-time bombshell.”¹³⁶ Davis admitted he was “devastated,” confronted Dexter and argued “this is a very extreme drastic, devastating, to me, action.” He wished Dexter luck “as having made this decision to sunset” one of

¹²⁹ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 78-79; For the connection between Lowenthal and Sawyer, see “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 9 June 1994, 2.

¹³⁰ Dexter stated “if this Commission does not see that its destiny is tied to that of the King Center, then we are going south.” “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 107.

¹³¹ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 114.

¹³² Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 266-267.

¹³³ Davis, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 49-50.

¹³⁴ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 126.

¹³⁵ Burchman, Kimberly and McNamee, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 16 March 1995, 127-128; Burchman was a former Director of Press Relations for Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1952 presidential campaign. “Leonard Burchman: Public Affairs Officer,” *Washington Post*, 6 April 2010, B6; For a description of McNamee, see “1994 Annual Report,” 1994, 4.

¹³⁶ McNamee, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 37; Minton, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 42; For a description of Minton, see “1994 Annual Report,” 1994, 4.

the “most successful operations we have” and added the observation that Harris Wofford (and Katie Hall, who ushered the Holiday legislation through Congress in 1983) lost office campaigning for the Holiday and Commission.¹³⁷ Minton claimed that the Commission would be a laughing stock, to which Dexter replied it would not be if it saved taxpayers \$350,000.¹³⁸ Those at the meeting also refuted Dexter’s claim that the Commission detracted from the Center’s fund raising efforts.¹³⁹

At the 30 March meeting, Coretta made a clearer declaration of her intention to resign.¹⁴⁰ She stated her preference for the organisation to continue and suggested “Dexter, succeed me as chair of this Commission.”¹⁴¹ Dexter continued to attack the Commission, however, and accused others of holding Coretta “hostage” and warned, “[t]here will be a conflict.”¹⁴² Dexter met sustained resistance throughout the meeting and Davis’ frustration came to the fore. Davis asked, “how can this operations committee, with all due respect, slow down the apparatus of the Federal Agency without consultation with the full policy-making body?”¹⁴³ Another exchange went as follows:

Dexter: “I probably look like the bad guy here.”

Davis: “You are the bad guy here, Dexter.”

Dexter: “What should have happened a long time ago did not happen.”

Davis: “You are the bad guy.”¹⁴⁴

Davis explained how the new copyright restrictions impeded the Commission: “Everything we have in terms of literature affects the image, the likeness, the words of your father. I mean there is not a thing that we aren’t involved in that doesn’t affect – carry some part of his image. Words, everything else.”¹⁴⁵ Dexter was “literally placing an obstacle ... in our path now so that we cannot function, period.” Davis complained about the loss of the less formal licencing arrangement, but Coretta coolly replied, “that was in the past though, Mr. Davis.”¹⁴⁶ Affronted by blame, Dexter rebutted with the argument that Davis had been briefed in September and October 1994, so the memo about image and likeness did not appear out of “thin air.”¹⁴⁷

¹³⁷ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 26-28.

¹³⁸ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 43, 47.

¹³⁹ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 97.

¹⁴⁰ Coretta offered the date of June 1995, when the Commissioner positions would be open for election. “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 21.

¹⁴¹ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 16-17.

¹⁴² “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 43-44.

¹⁴³ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 77.

¹⁴⁴ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 113-114; see also Pomerantz, “Keeping the Dream Alive,” C2.

¹⁴⁵ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 119.

¹⁴⁶ “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 110.

¹⁴⁷ Dexter, “Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting,” 30 March 1995, 46.

Commissioners asserted that closure would be politically awkward. Sawyer argued that failure to fulfil the Commission's mandate would "raise a tension across the Congress" and Minton feared that "some folks are going to take some real big-time shots at us."¹⁴⁸ These political concerns were well founded because the core of opposition in Congress had been strengthened since the mid-term election. The Republican majority meant that passage of legislation favourable to the Commission became unlikely and since the Commission wanted to overturn the staff amendment, it needed all the support it could find. A divided Commission made this a remote possibility. As Burchman noted, Helms was "just laying and waiting for this thing to happen."¹⁴⁹ Since the above discussions were held in committee, it is unclear how aware the full Commission was of these debates and when it met in the afternoon of 30 March, its potential closure was not discussed.¹⁵⁰

By 25 April, an understanding appears to have been reached to disband the Commission. A motion to terminate its tenure was discussed during an Operations Committee. Dexter argued the Commission had "outlived its usefulness" because it was too bureaucratic. Then he made a frank admission that contradicted many previous statements.¹⁵¹ He said: "it's not about competition of resources; it's about one simple fact: whose interpretation of this legacy in history will we embrace? Meaning the Center created the model for all of this." He thought King's legacy was being used without "checks and balances" and he wanted "integrity."¹⁵² Dexter's switch in rationale at this point is mystifying because he had long argued the Commission competed against the Center. Ignoring the verbal advice of Burchman, he changed his argument to one based on historical authenticity and interpretation. Kimberly, for one, complained that Dexter had not unveiled a vision to the Commission and asserted that "great harm" would occur to Coretta in Congress.¹⁵³ Dexter's reply illustrates his obstinacy and tendency towards linguistic confusion:

Why should I have to justify – with all due respect and humility – to the Commission what my plan is when I'm – the King Center, this is the mother. The King Center is the child. She birthed it [sic]. The Commission

¹⁴⁸ Sawyer, "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 30 March 1995, 39; Minton "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 30 March 1995, 43.

¹⁴⁹ Burchman, "Proceedings, Operations Committee Meeting," 16 March 1995, 86.

¹⁵⁰ King Commission, "Quarterly Commission Meeting," 30 March 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 7: Commission/Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: Quarterly Commission Meeting, March 1995.

¹⁵¹ Dexter was warned not to say this by Burchman, King Commission, "Operations Committee Meeting," 25 April 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 7: Commission/Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: Operations Committee, April 1995, 69-70.

¹⁵² "Operations Committee Meeting," 25 April 1995, 70.

¹⁵³ "Operations Committee Meeting," 25 April 1995, 74-76.

was inspired out of that birth, and now you coming to tell me what I must do. What's wrong with that picture?¹⁵⁴

Dexter viewed the family as “flesh and blood breathing individuals who have a right, as long as we are alive, to determine how our legacy will be portrayed.”¹⁵⁵ He spoke about closing the Commission “in the most non-violent way,” as if it were a campaign akin to one of the movement's.¹⁵⁶ As a compromise, Dexter suggested keeping the Commission open as a “body that speaks specifically to the ceremonial superficial side of the Holiday.” That would have made the Commission a pointless entity.¹⁵⁷

The Operations Committee met again on 18 May. Dexter was informed that the Education Committee had “voted unanimously to support the continuation” of the Commission.¹⁵⁸ Once more Sawyer appealed to Coretta to maintain “the moral authority and the political force that we need to sustain the transitional work of the commission through 1996.” Sawyer stated:

Your presence is almost an absolute requirement in order to sustain that. To suggest that we could continue the Commission beyond that without your voice, your presence, your authority I think is to look at a very different kind of function and structure and one that might not be sustained in the environment where Ralph Regula [Commissioner and Republican] has to go and get money.¹⁵⁹

By meeting's end, however, Dexter prevailed and the Committee agreed to recommend that the Commission disband.¹⁶⁰ Immediately after the motion was approved, Davis flagged he would resign his position.¹⁶¹ The dénouement came at a Special Commission Meeting on 23 May 1995 when the Commission voted itself out of existence and determined that control of the Holiday would be shifted to the King Center and the CNCS after the 1996 Holiday. Coretta would remain as chairperson until that time.¹⁶² On 5 June 1995, Davis wrote to Wofford, who had been appointed to

¹⁵⁴ This is an accurate reproduction of the text in the archive. “Operations Committee Meeting,” 25 April 1995, 78.

¹⁵⁵ “Operations Committee Meeting,” 25 April 1995, 68.

¹⁵⁶ “Operations Committee Meeting,” 25 April 1995, 38.

¹⁵⁷ “Operations Committee Meeting,” 25 April 1995, 42.

¹⁵⁸ King Commission, “Operations Committee,” 18 May 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 7: Commission/Committee Meetings, March 1995-July 1995, Folder: Operations Committee, May 1995, 6.

¹⁵⁹ “Operations Committee,” 18 May 1995, 34.

¹⁶⁰ McNamee voted against closure, “Operations Committee,” 18 May 1995, 69.

¹⁶¹ “Operations Committee,” 18 May 1995, 70.

¹⁶² “Special Commission Meeting,” 23 May 1995, 82-83.

head the CNCS: “Mrs King and Dexter have decided to terminate ... [i]t has become a very unpleasant and regrettable situation.”¹⁶³

The Impact of the Collapse

The local press deplored the Commission’s closure. The *Atlanta Constitution* ridiculed the decision and noted the Commission cost “a mere speck” of the nation’s budget: only 0.0000002 percent. It argued the “King Center is in no position to spearhead nationwide promotion of the holiday.”¹⁶⁴ Journalist Cynthia Tucker criticised the family, writing that “the most damaging assault on King’s legacy came not from without, but from within” because “over the past two years, King’s family has done more to demean his legacy than Helms, Charles Murray (‘the Bell Curve’) and Dinesh D’Souza (‘the End of Racism’) combined.” This was perhaps extreme, but it illustrated the depth of feeling over King’s legacy. Tucker accused the family of seeking “to make King’s memory a profit center” and alleged it “set out to destroy the holiday commission.” That responsibility for the Holiday was entrusted to the King Center was “not reassuring” because it was “hardly known for top-flight organizational skills or promotional savvy.”¹⁶⁵ Tucker thought Dexter achieved “what Jesse Helms could not” and Coretta’s “extraordinary turnabout” was not lost on the journalist. The pity, according to Tucker, was that 1994’s reauthorising legislation “gave substance to the holiday” with the Day of Service, but the Commission would “not have time to build support for that idea.”¹⁶⁶ The *Atlanta Daily World* also examined the implications of the closure. It reported that the Montana King Holiday Commission chairperson “warned that states were willing to support the effort ‘as long as it’s seen as a federal mandate.’” The chair explained that in Montana, it would be difficult to sustain support for the Holiday without a federal commission because less than 10 percent of the population was black. The federal Commission provided an example of leadership and concern emerged that the Holiday would lapse into being stereotyped as a black holiday. The Commission was able to pressure state politicians to recognize the Holiday and doubt existed that the King Center could maintain the same pressure. Likewise, a representative of California’s King Holiday Commission stated that the federal Commission was necessary because employers might not treat the Holiday seriously without support from a “national agency.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Davis noted that steps were being taken to accommodate Dexter’s request. Lloyd Davis, “Letter to Harris Wofford,” 5 June 1995, 97-0002, Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Outgoing, Folder: Correspondence Between Lloyd Davis and Others, January-June 1995.

¹⁶⁴ Editorial, “A Tribute Befitting King,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 May 1995, 18; The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* had recommended closure two years earlier, Editorial, “Perpetuating Dr. King’s legacy,” 12.

¹⁶⁵ Tucker wrote Helms would be pleased, Tucker, “Worldly Pressures,” C7.

¹⁶⁶ Nor were the political implications lost on Tucker, considering “Wofford’s support of the King holiday commission was used against him in his unsuccessful re-election bid last November.” Cynthia Tucker, “Will King Family Move Hurt Holiday?,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 May 1995, B4.

¹⁶⁷ “King Holiday Commission Votes to Disband in ‘96,” *Atlanta Daily World* 1995, 1, 8; Pomerantz, “Keeping the Dream Alive,” C2.

Still responsible for one more Holiday in 1996, the Commission organised the tenth King Day. However, its imminent demise had a negative effect on celebrations even though Clinton spoke at the Ebenezer Baptist Church on King Day.¹⁶⁸ Events usually organised in conjunction with the King Center, such as the national parade, were cancelled due to a staff shortage at the Center.¹⁶⁹ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* continued to report on the Commission during January 1996 and praised it for having “done yeoman’s work with limited federal resources.” However, the paper noted a mere 23 percent of 437 employers surveyed gave employees a Holiday off the previous year and inferred much more needed to be done.¹⁷⁰ Despite these difficulties the Commission noted one positive trend: participation in service activities increased from 35,000 to 500,000 people.¹⁷¹

Although originally authorised for only the first Holiday, Congress periodically extended the Commission’s tenure so it could institutionalise King Day. The Commission’s advantage had been its bi-partisan influence in Congress, which enabled Coretta to maintain regular contact with federal politicians of different ideological types. As the political balance shifted after the 1994 mid-term elections, certain factors still favoured the Commission, not the least Clinton’s support. The Commission’s decline was not inevitable; relatively inexpensive, it had won a five-year reauthorisation just before the Republican majorities and its future looked promising. The Commission had a unique and advantageous position within the structure of King organisations. It relieved the King Center from the responsibility of organising the Holiday, leaving the Center to work for nonviolent social change. Both the Commission and Center grew due to vision and good will, and there was a clear division of responsibility between the two. The Commission campaigned for a Holiday in every state, mobilised volunteers across the US and connected Coretta to a nationwide network of commissions, governors, state politicians and bureaucrats supportive of King’s vision. Furthermore, given the King Center’s debt, the Commission’s funding was valuable.

The Commission’s fate, however, became entwined with the ideology of the new majority in Congress and a trend to downsize both government and businesses; its future was debated as Republicans attempted to implement the ‘Contract with America.’¹⁷² The Commission was also not an unmitigated success with its greatest failure being an inability to achieve majority observation of the Holiday, though often due to factors beyond its control. Its attempt to redress this and redefine

¹⁶⁸ Hollis R. Towns, “King Celebration ‘96: Peace Still Packs Them in, President Clinton Speaks at a Stirring Ebenezer Service,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 16 January 1996, B5, 02.

¹⁶⁹ John Blake, “King Week ‘96: Troubles Still Hang Over Center as Annual Celebration Begins,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 7 January 1996, C5.

¹⁷⁰ Pomerantz, “Keeping the Dream Alive,” C2.

¹⁷¹ King Commission, “Final Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 5 September 1996, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023 Box 8: Commission/Committee Meetings, August 1996-September 1996, Folder: Final Commission/Corporation Meeting, September 1996, 56-67; King Commission, “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 19 March 1996, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 8: Commission/Committee Meetings, August 1995-September 1996, Folder: Quarterly Commission/Corporation Meeting, March 1996, 11-13.

¹⁷² Berman, *America’s Right Turn*: 176-178.

King Day with the Holiday and Service Act was cut short before success could be consolidated. Buffeted by the prevailing ideology in Congress, the Commission had been rendered vulnerable by the staff amendment that threatened to deprive the organisation of institutional knowledge and staff with a passion for King's activism. Wofford's electoral defeat deprived the Commission of an ally and reduced its influence in Congress. When Coretta signalled an intention to resign, her less popular and less authoritative son sabotaged the organisation from within. Those who hoped to steady the Commission in 1995 for the future, found themselves fighting an altogether different battle against the son of the man they honoured.

Conclusion

The Commission's collapse narrowed the interpretive lens on King. A more collective organisation than Dexter wanted, the Commission attempted to unite a diverse range of King admirers and forge a Holiday with appeal to all Americans. The Commission had been an image-maker with input from both the family and community leaders. Commissioners deferred to Coretta, but she consulted with them and the interplay between the Commission, the Center, Congress and the President, as seen in the previous chapter, stood as a perfect example of an inclusive style.

Dexter's plan to centralise the King legacy sidelined the government and its affiliated organisations. Dexter himself symbolises one difficulty of memorialising a historical figure. More concerned with selling King's image than giving it substance, he asserted the family's authority to market its version of history. He dismissed criticism with the occasional wild allegation, such as a suggestion that the negative publicity generated in the NPS dispute might have occurred due to the "possible involvement of federal agencies in my father's death."¹⁷³ Despite Dexter's bluster, a major post Commission failure occurred. Just as the Commission failed to raise Holiday participation to that of the most popular US holidays, so did its successors. The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) later reported that the Holiday did not attract a greater number of participants during the remainder of the 1990s. According to the BNA, observance of the Holiday by employees in private sector business remained low (between 21 and 27 percent) for the decade after 1993.¹⁷⁴

By 1996, Dexter had reduced the King Center's deficit to \$50,000. This was an achievement, albeit in accord with a neoliberal ideology that downsized organisations and demanded balanced budgets. Dexter narrowed the Center's focus because he thought the organisation "too broad-based" and barely able to pay its way. He closed the Center's child-care facility, outsourced nonviolent programs to a new entity and ensured the Center's board, once dominated by civil rights and business leaders of Coretta's generation, had a majority of family members. The *New York Times*

¹⁷³ Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*: 198.

¹⁷⁴ It reached 30 percent in 2003, see "Three in Ten Organizations Will Close for Business on Martin Luther King Day," Bloomberg BNA, accessed 12 January 2011.

reported that the Center became “a shell of its former self” as Dexter cut the number of staff from seventy to fourteen. The downsized Center became similar to a ‘hollow corporation’ and lost its capability to effectively organise and lobby. Dexter disavowed any ambition to be a civil rights leader and this led to criticism that the Center failed to address issues of the day, such as “church burnings and welfare change.” The pastor of King’s old church, Rev. Joseph L. Roberts, stated that it “is incumbent upon somebody representing the King Center to instruct us, albeit conjecturally, on what Dr. King’s position might have been on those issues according to his principles.”¹⁷⁵ Dexter, however, forfeited that responsibility.

As the *New York Times* commented, “with almost every endeavor, he [Dexter] has excited intense opposition or, at the very least, befuddlement.”¹⁷⁶ He generated publicity that jarred with the message of nonviolence and the manner in which he attacked the King Commission exemplifies this. The press and public viewed with suspicion the desire to make King profitable; they thought it the antithesis of King’s ethical concern with America’s poor and the collective wealth of the nation. Many expressed sympathy for the family over the humble financial position King left them in, but public opinion opposed blatant profiteering. In the words of one report, “having a million dollars – instead of tens of millions – did not constitute poverty.”¹⁷⁷ Scholarly opinion also cautioned that the words of King ought to be available to the widest possible audience.¹⁷⁸

Preparations for the 1995 and 1996 Holidays were impaired by these internal power struggles and the Commission’s demise drew public attention away from the Day of Service. After 1996, Holiday planning moved to the King Center and the CNCS, however there was great disruption to the web of organisations dedicated to the Holiday at the state and local level. Closing the Commission meant the forfeit of funding promised by Congress. Personal connections and influences, like those held by Davis, were lost as he and others found themselves with diminished influence as the sole organisation dedicated to planning the Holiday across the nation was lost.

The impact of Dexter’s attack on government involvement in his father’s legacy, his privatisation drive and downsizing of King organisations was a narrower interpretation of King’s legacy. The publicity about sometimes superficial and self-destructive battles overshadowed meaningful discussion about King’s philosophy. Newspaper reporters were near universal in their condemnation of Dexter and the family, a remarkable reversal since the family had received favourable news coverage since 1968. Dexter also played into the hands of those who opposed his

¹⁷⁵ The new outsourced entity to promote nonviolence was the National Institute for Community Empowerment, Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 18; Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 270, 276.

¹⁷⁶ Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 18.

¹⁷⁷ Hollis R. Towns, “‘Tasteful’ Marketing of MLK: Heirs Agree to Licence the Words, Image of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 4 February 1996, G6; Eichenwald, “The Family Feud Over Martin Luther King Jr’s Legacy.”

¹⁷⁸ Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 249-281, esp 281; Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 18.

father's legacy, such as Jesse Helms. He manufactured a rivalry that destroyed the Commission and completed the work that Helms' staff amendment intended to do.

Chapter 7

To the Mountaintop?: The Post-Commission Era (1997-2000)

Clinton's second term was characterised by bitter partisanship, as exemplified by the Monica Lewinsky scandal that Courtwright describes as "the climactic battle of the Culture War."¹ Conservatives unleashed a storm of moralising to allege that Clinton was unworthy as the Republican controlled House of Representatives voted to impeach him.² The ordeal dominated politics from January 1998 until its conclusion in early 1999, when the Senate voted against impeachment. Clinton's victory was pyrrhic, however, as the scandal denied him the political momentum needed to implement a second term agenda. Steven M. Gillon argues it stymied Clinton's ambitions to reform Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.³

Despite Clinton's travails, he had earlier initiated a conversation unique in American history. In June 1997, he announced 'One America in the 21st Century: The President's Initiative on Race.'⁴ Appointed by Clinton, eminent African American historian John Hope Franklin directed a conversation on race that considered the nation's multicultural complexion as it attempted to move beyond the historic black and white divide.⁵ In addition to the dialogue, Clinton apologised for the United States' role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and related issues also gained prominence, such as a demand for financial reparations for the legacy of slavery.⁶ In contrast to these more liberal orientated initiatives, black conservative Ward Connerly used the anniversary of King's birth to announce the start of a campaign, in 1997, to end affirmative action in federal programs.⁷ And, according to Marable, the "Clinton administration's benign disengagement from blacks' interests, and the conservative Republicans' increasingly polemical assault against ... race sensitive reforms

¹ Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 222.

² Courtwright, *No Right Turn: Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*: 222.

³ Steven M. Gillon, *The Pact: Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry That Defined a Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 231.

⁴ White House, "One America: About the Initiative," <http://clinton4.nara.gov/Initiatives/OneAmerica/about.html>, (14 June 1997) accessed 23 April 2015.

⁵ The advisory board comprised of John Hope Franklin (Chair), Linda Chavez-Thompson (Executive Vice President of AFL-CIO), Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook (Minister from the Bronx and former White House Fellow), former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean, Angela Oh (attorney and LA leader), Robert Thomas (CEO of Nissan USA) and William Winter, Governor of Mississippi, see Gillon, *The Pact: Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry That Defined a Generation*: xi-xviii, 263-270; for a description of advisory board, see Claire Jean Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative: Recasting the American Dilemma," *Polity* 33, no. 2 (2000): 175-197; Steven F. Lawson, ed. *One America in the Twenty-first Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), B1-2.

⁶ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 235-236.

⁷ Connerly had previously attacked affirmative action, with the successful Proposition 209 in California. AP, "King Invoked in Drive to End Preferenes," *Charlotte Observer*, 16 January 1997, 4; for an analysis of Connerly's selective use of King's words, see Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 219; for a brief history of Connerly's campaign to end affirmative action in California with Proposition 209, see Ondaatje, *Black Conservative Intellectuals*: 85-87, 89; Lusane, *Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium*: 48-53.

created a reactionary political environment that nurtured the resurgence of white racist violence against black Americans.” The lynching of James Byrd, a black man from Jasper, Texas, in June 1998 testified to this resurgent racist violence.⁸ At the end of the twentieth century, uneven progress in race relations continued against a backdrop of determined resistance.

This chapter focuses on the King Holiday in the post-Commission years, from 1997 to 2000. This period spanned Clinton’s second term, when the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the King Center began to organise the Holiday. The chapter analyses the Holiday in the context of this new organisational structure and the national conversation on race relations.⁹ Such an analysis enables an evaluation of the effect of reforms at the King Center and the impact on King’s reputation at the end of the century. In this period, Holiday organisers struggled to ensure the American people received the Day of Service message. Without the Commission, they also found it increasingly difficult to connect the Holiday to contemporary debates. The Commission had earlier managed to connect King to the Bicentennial of the Constitution celebrations in 1987 and Clinton’s service agenda in 1993-1994. When the Commission collapsed its strong voice, national structure and organising capacity were lost.¹⁰ Some progress in promoting the Day of Service became evident as more service activities were organised and gained attention in the media. However, as Dexter Scott King continued the quest for profit efforts to consolidate the service message were frustrated. Though Clinton’s national conversation attempted to bridge ethnic divides and seemingly provided an opportunity to promote King Day, the Holiday was marginal to the conversation. This marginalisation represented a significant lost opportunity. Holiday planners’ disorganisation also left them unable to refute a perception that the Holiday failed to represent all ethnic communities.¹¹ Given the United States’ increasingly multicultural society, calls to make at least another Holiday, Cesar Chavez Day in honour of the Hispanic labour leader, were heard.¹²

As noted earlier, little has been written about the King Holiday in the mid-to-late 1990s. Rather, historians have been preoccupied with the great ideological and moral battles of the Clinton

⁸ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 235.

⁹ Kim, “Clinton’s Race Initiative,” 175-197; Timothy J. Minchin, “‘A Sharp Break From the Past’? Assessing the Rise in Interracial Marriage in the Contemporary United States,” *The Australasian Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 1 (2013): 27-52.

¹⁰ King’s Dream continued to maintain its unique popularity among the American people. Hansen, *The Dream*: 207-229.

¹¹ A campaign was launched to dedicate a national holiday to Hispanic labour leader Caesar Chavez, see Cesar E. Chavez National Holiday, “Cesar Chavez National Holiday,” <http://www.cesarchavezholiday.org>, accessed 23 April 2015; About Chavez, Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008), 1-3.

¹² The establishment of a Cesar Chavez Holiday is blocked by “Republican representatives who introduced a rule that prohibits any bill from being introduced which expresses a commemoration (celebration, remembrance or recognition) of an individual (Rule XII, Clause 5).” Cesar E. Chavez National Holiday, “About the Holiday,” <http://www.cesarchavezholiday.org/abouttheholiday.html>, accessed 23 April 2015

era.¹³ Those writing about the post-civil rights movement era have likewise devoted little attention to the late-1990s Holiday, preferring instead to focus on other trends in race relations. For example, Clarence Lusane predicted that the twentieth century would end with a revival of eugenics, political campaigns against immigrants, racist paramilitary groups, attacks on African Americans' voting rights, and growing economic inequality.¹⁴ And Timothy J. Minchin argued that by the 1990s, "the race question" was "no longer a black-white issue, a shift that the historiography has not caught up with."¹⁵ The trend toward a multicultural America with new racial dilemmas, as Claire Jean Kim notes, was underway.¹⁶ With these points in mind, this chapter redresses the lack of analysis of the late-1990s King Holiday.

Transition to Post-Commission Era

The Commission's implosion transferred the Holiday's leadership structure to the King Center and the CNCS. Only a few who served with the Commission remained significantly involved. After Davis left in August 1995, Alan Minton, the former Chief of Staff, became Executive Director in September.¹⁷ One appointment reflected Clinton's continued desire to promote community service; he appointed Harris Wofford to lead the CNCS as CEO. In a letter to Wofford, Davis described the appointment as "JOYFUL!" [original capitalisation].¹⁸ Wofford's appointment gave continuity to Holiday planning as the CNCS attempted to promote a national image for King Day.¹⁹ The Commission also founded a Transition Committee to transfer programs to the CNCS.²⁰

The transition was nonetheless complicated. Unsure whether \$250,000 or \$350,000 of funding would be allocated during its final year in 1996, the Commission became concerned about how much of its budget ought to be allocated to transition costs.²¹ Added to this, the transfer of programs became time consuming and the Commission fell behind in its marketing schedule.²²

¹³ Courtwright, *No Right Turn*; Berman, *America's Right Turn*.

¹⁴ Lusane, *Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium*: 43.

¹⁵ Minchin, "'A Sharp Break From the Past?'," 44.

¹⁶ Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative," 175-197.

¹⁷ Alan Minton, the son of Stuart Minton, was elected as Executive Director on 8 August 1995, to commence in the position on 11 September 1995. King Commission, "Commission/Corporation Meeting," 10 October 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 8: Commission/Committee Meetings, August 1995-September 1996, Folder: Operations Committee Meeting, Transcript of Proceedings, 13-14; Lloyd Davis, "Letter to Joseph E. A. Boutin," 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA 97-0002, Box 4: Correspondence of Executive Director Lloyd Davis, Outgoing; Folder: Correspondence Between Lloyd Davis and Others, January-June 1995; King Commission, "Operations Committee Teleconference," 8 August 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, Box 8: Commission/Committee Meetings, August 1995-September 1996, Folder: Operations Committee Teleconference, Proceedings-August 1995, 5-17.

¹⁸ Davis "Letter to Harris Wofford," 5 June 1995.

¹⁹ Monica Yant, "Defining Dr. King's Holiday," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 January 1997, B1, B8.

²⁰ "Commission/Corporation Meeting," 19 March 1996, 24, 42, 50-58.

²¹ "Commission/Corporation Meeting," 10 October 1995, 17-23.

²² King Commission, "Operations Committee, Proceedings," 10 October 1995, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission*, NARA, Atlanta, 97-0023, Box 8: Commission/Committee Meetings, August 1995-September 1996, Folder: Operations Committee Meeting, Transcript of Proceedings, 28-29.

Televised public service announcements intended to be replayed for years became invalid because of the closure. Though the Commission wanted the 1996 Holiday to be “one big, last harrah,” the televised announcements became unusable as their end credits referred to the Commission even though it would no longer legally exist.²³

On 5 September 1996, the Commission held its final meeting, in Washington DC. There was room for some sentimentality as past commissioners Regula, Kennedy and Wofford attended. Wofford received tribute and somewhat over optimistically stated he hoped to recruit fifty million future volunteers for Holiday service. He assured those present that the CNCS’s mandate “to give grants to help promote the day” would continue.²⁴ Coretta explained that although the Commission had been a “tremendous experience,” the “torch is passing on to the next generation.” She claimed, “the legacy is in good hands” even though, “It may not be the way that we thought it would be, and we wanted it to be, but things are changing.” Dexter “has the ideas and the understanding and the commitment to take the legacy into the 21st Century, because with the new technologies, it really requires someone younger to deal with that.”²⁵

Dexter indeed looked to the future more than the past, as signified by his growing interest in modern computer technology and the Internet. He coupled this interest with his major preoccupation, King’s intellectual property. When the fading Commission wanted to use King’s image or words, Dexter obfuscated and delayed permission by claiming the King Estate had to vet all usage.²⁶ Commissioner Sister McNamee became frustrated when a reissue of the Learn-A-Bration school booklet was constantly delayed, despite her insistence that revisions to the document were minor. Dexter insisted the publication had to be thoroughly scrutinised, but never finished the task.²⁷ Throughout the Commission’s sunset, Dexter enforced the Estate’s right to control King’s intellectual property. When the Commission closed unceremoniously on 30 September 1996, he finally had the opportunity to put his ideas to the test, unfettered by the Commission. The question was: how would the Holiday fare under new leadership?

The Post-Commission Holiday

The first post-Commission Holiday occurred on 20 January 1997. The Holiday and a presidential inauguration, Clinton’s second, fell on the same day for the first time. Dexter attended the inauguration and in his own words, liked Clinton’s call “to leave all the baggage behind us as we go

²³ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 10 October 1995, 46-48; “Final Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 5 September 1996, 56-67.

²⁴ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 10 October 1995, 35.

²⁵ “Final Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 5 September 1996, 77-78.

²⁶ “Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 11 June 1996, 83-89.

²⁷ “Operations Committee Teleconference,” 8 August 1995, 47-52.

into the next century.”²⁸ The coincidence of the two events prompted newspapers to wonder if the inauguration overshadowed the Holiday. Mississippi’s *Clarion Ledger* headlined with ‘King Holiday Forced to Take Back Seat to Inauguration Events.’²⁹ On the day, however, Clinton drew a connection between both occasions and spoke about race relations. Consistent with his admiration for the civil rights movement, Clinton declared that the US had “deepened the wellspring of justice by making a revolution in civil rights for African Americans and all minorities.” He asserted that “we must succeed as one America” and asked: “Will we become one nation, one people, with one common destiny – or not?” With an approving reference to multiculturalism, Clinton exclaimed, “Our rich texture of racial, religious and political diversity will be a godsend in the 21st century.”³⁰ Clinton reflected:

Thirty-four years ago, the man whose life we celebrate today spoke to us down there, at the other end of this Mall, in words that moved the conscience of a Nation. Like a prophet of old, he told of his dream that one day America would rise up and treat all its citizens as equals before the law and in the heart. Martin Luther King’s dream was the American dream.³¹

Though conflating the American Dream and King’s Dream obscured the latter’s unique quality, Clinton’s words nonetheless proved his continuing admiration for King.³²

The President’s reference to King was widely reported. The *New York Times* featured an article headlined, Clinton ‘Asks racial unity: Calls on the Congress to Join in New Effort to Close “the Breach.”’ The *Times* noted Clinton swore the oath of office on a bible opened at *Isaiah 58:12*: “thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach.”³³ The *Washington Post* headlined with, ‘Dream Resounds as President, King Converge.’³⁴ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Clinton paid “homage” to King and emphasised the President’s call for “civic unity and ‘a new spirit of community.’” The *Inquirer* juxtaposed an image of the Clinton’s attending a glamorous

²⁸ Jodi Enda and Robert A. Rankin, “He Seeks a Realization of Dr. King’s Dream,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1997, 1.

²⁹ Leroy Tillman, “King Holiday Forced to Take Back Seat to Inauguration Events,” *Clarion Ledger*, 19 January 1997, 6A; Kevin Merida, “Dream Resounds as President, King Converge; Americans Ponder Whether Ceremony Overlap Represents Eclipse or Alignment,” *Washington Post*, 21 January 1997; The *Birmingham News* featured the impending inauguration above an article about the King Holiday, on the eve of celebrations. Karin Meadows, “Nettles: King Would Be Happy, Sad Today,” *Birmingham News*, 20 January 1997.

³⁰ Bill Clinton, “2nd Inaugural Address by Bill Clinton,” Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, <http://www.inaugural.senate.gov/swearing-in/address/address-by-bill-clinton-1997>, accessed 23 April 2015

³¹ Clinton, “2nd Inaugural by Clinton”.

³² Clinton’s Second Inaugural, Clinton, “2nd Inaugural by Clinton”.

³³ Alison Mitchell, “Asks Racial Unity,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1997, 1, 13.

³⁴ Merida, “Dream Resounds as President, King Converge.”

inauguration ball to a picture of Coretta laying a wreath at the tomb of her fallen husband.³⁵ The inauguration forced the reschedule of some King Holiday activities and the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that King Week activities were streamlined due to the inauguration.³⁶ The alignment between inauguration and Holiday added poignancy to both. Yet, if the inauguration eclipsed the Holiday, the contrast between Clinton's celebratory mood and Coretta laying a wreath at King's tomb invested the day with a deep historic contrast.

Southern newspapers widely reported on the Holiday and inauguration. In Clinton's home state, the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* featured the inauguration with a front-page article published above one about the Holiday.³⁷ The Mississippi *Clarion Ledger* featured a front-page image of Clinton's swearing in ceremony, above an image of Coretta, and the *Birmingham News* highlighted Clinton's pledge to balance the budget.³⁸ Nostalgia for King interspersed the coverage. Below an article about inaugural festivities, the *Charlotte Observer* featured an article focused on generational differences between contemporary black activists and their elders.³⁹ Young activists in Charlotte revered King, but expressed frustration with elders, claiming them to be lethargic and complacent. One claimed, "King was a battler, a fighter. That's what I want to be."⁴⁰ Likewise, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* published a special editorial that claimed, "today, we lack leaders who appeal to the best in us, as King did." Published on the day of Clinton's inauguration, such a sentiment damned both President and contemporary black leaders. The *Journal Constitution* elaborated: "Unlike some black leaders, King did not shirk from demanding that the black community look within itself for both cause and solution to its problems."⁴¹ Similarly, in the North, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial compared King to Black Nationalist Rap Brown and sadly noted Brown's attitudes seemed more popular. King's words remained, however, a balm against "those who employ verbal violence to dominate the nation's sour political dialogue."⁴²

The 1997 Holiday was the second *nationwide* Day of Service.⁴³ Coretta, who still appeared in public, confidently claimed, "the King Holiday has become a remarkable day of humanitarian

³⁵ Enda and Rankin, "He Seeks a Realization," 1.

³⁶ Hollis R. Towns, "King Week: Activities Are Pared, Streamlined Service Coincides With Presidential Inauguration," *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 15 January 1997, C1; Merida, "Dream Resounds as President, King Converge," 13; AP, "Brewster Students Hope Food Drive Can Draw Attention to Holiday," *Union Leader*, 21 January 1997, 7.

³⁷ Jane Fullerton, "Clinton Sworn In A Second Time," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, 21 January 1997, 1.

³⁸ Tara Meyer, "King's Creed Remembered With Good Deeds, Song," *Clarion Ledger*, 21 January 1997, 1; Terence Hunt, "Clinton Urges Change," *Birmingham News*, 21 January 1997, 1.

³⁹ Terence Hunt, "It's Party Town, USA," *Charlotte Observer*, 20 January 1997, 1; Bob Meadows, "Black Activism, 20-Something-Style," *Charlotte Observer*, 20 January 1997, 1.

⁴⁰ Meadows, "Black Activism," 1, 8.

⁴¹ The special editorial represented the position of the *Atlanta Constitution* and was written by its editorial board, Jay Bookman et al., "Special Editorial: Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Celebrate the Fire of an American Hero." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 20 January 1997, 12.

⁴² Editorial, "The Way of the Strong," 10.

⁴³ The 1995 Holiday was only partially observed, while the 1996 Holiday became the first Day of Service with a one year lead up.

service across the nation,” and “a day of reaching across racial and cultural lines in a spirit of unconditional love.”⁴⁴ However, was this the case? Had the Holiday become a “remarkable day of humanitarian service”? In some respects, the reformed Holiday was similar to the old. In Charlotte, North Carolina, for example, religious leaders, black, white, Christian, Jewish and Muslim gathered at a King statue in Marshall Park.⁴⁵ In Memphis, admirers gathered at the Mason Temple, where King gave his final speech, as they also did at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta.⁴⁶ Scenes like these were replicated around the nation, as they had been for a decade. Change to the Holiday can, however, be discerned with an increased emphasis on service activities. Across Atlanta “volunteers honored” King by “sprucing up dilapidated schools, helping out at food banks and cleaning up poor neighbourhoods.”⁴⁷ One volunteer organisation in particular, Hands On Atlanta, initiated service activities and a two-day conference.⁴⁸ In the North, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* pointed to the “ample proof that, in only its second year, the King Day of Service is catching on.” School children of all religious denominations “passed up a chance to sleep in or hang out, and instead scrubbed and mopped and honored” King. The *Inquirer* further argued “corporations and others with technical know-how must provide” help because it was “not enough to ask over-extended, poorly funded community groups to do it all.”⁴⁹ These activities indicate emulation of the Drum Major in some quarters. The *Inquirer* nonetheless editorialised that King Day “remains for many a holiday in search of content” because “we often lack the courage to listen to the fullness of his message.” The *Inquirer* did not want to “insult” the idea of “making volunteer service this holiday’s special signature” because that “idea is fitting and worthy,” however a danger lurked that the Holiday could “ossify into comfortable cliché.” Furthermore, because King “was a black man, because his memory speaks so fiercely of the deepest, longest lingering wound in our nation’s history, we sometimes seem less than eager to deal with all that this extraordinary man represents.”⁵⁰ In another article, the *Inquirer* reported that one African American student thought the Holiday’s problem was that “it’s not unified; it doesn’t have a theme.”⁵¹ This suggested the service message did not resonate with everyone, was poorly publicised or that not all agreed it defined the day appropriately.

Consistent with the argument that the Holiday provided “recurring leverage ... to advance” King’s “unfinished cause,” protest and peace initiatives continued to define the Holiday.⁵² Gun

⁴⁴ Merida, “Dream Resounds as President, King Converge,” 13.

⁴⁵ Ken Garfield, “At King Statue, 200 Pray for Peace, Justice,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 January 1997, 2C.

⁴⁶ Editorial, “Remembering Dr. King,” *Charlotte Observer*, 15 January 1997, 12; Tim Funk and Debbie Cenziper, “Services Honor King’s Birthday,” *Charlotte Observer*, 15 January 1997, 2C; AP, “Brewster Students Hope,” A7.

⁴⁷ Tara Meyer, “Nation Puts Dr. King’s Words to Action,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1997, 2.

⁴⁸ Taylor, “Agency Makes Open Call,” D3.

⁴⁹ Editorial, “Service Day With a Smile,” 10.

⁵⁰ Editorial, “The Way of the Strong,” 10.

⁵¹ Yant, “Defining Dr. King’s Holiday,” B1, B8.

⁵² Chappell, *Waking From the Dream*: 92.

buybacks, toy gun swaps (for books) and claims King would support gun control were reported.⁵³ An annual King Day peace protest occurred outside Lockheed Martin, “the world’s largest defence contractor” and C. Delores Tucker, head of the National Political Caucus of Black Women, led a protest outside the “gansta rap” headquarters of Tower Records.⁵⁴ Tucker rallied the protesters and explained their purpose: “we are here to demonstrate that we will no longer allow anyone to dehumanize and defame us and use misogynist language against us.” Tucker admonished Tower Records for promoting “gansta porno rap.”⁵⁵ In New Hampshire, protesters denounced the state’s Civil Rights Day because King’s name was still not affixed to the day and at Indiana University protesters denounced the university for not retaining enough black students.⁵⁶

Multiculturalism and Service

Throughout his second term, Clinton consolidated his service initiatives and he conducted a Summit on Service in Philadelphia on 27 April 1997.⁵⁷ Clinton told attendees that although “the era of big government may be over ... the era of big challenges for our country is not, and so we need an era of big citizenship.” He encouraged youth to serve, since they “have the time, the energy and the idealism for this kind of citizen service.” As an inducement, he proposed legislation to ensure college students engaged in a year of service would accrue no interest on student loans.⁵⁸ With these measures, Clinton hoped to assist the American poor by encouraging volunteers to fill the void left by shrinking government programs.

Clinton next announced the national conversation about race. The President’s comments on race and use of the phrase “one America” during his second inaugural address had moved many, so he sought to expand on the theme.⁵⁹ There had also been calls for a national conversation on race and the *New York Times* published an opinion piece on Clinton’s second inauguration that argued he ought to discuss racial issues throughout his term.⁶⁰ Though not directly related to service, the conversation formed part of a sequence of events that illustrated the changing nature of US politics;

⁵³ “Toy Guns Traded for Books,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 January 1994, 1; Neill A. Borowski, “Gathering to Assess the Dream,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 January 1995, B1-2.

⁵⁴ Suzanne Gordon, “Like a Ritual, Peace Rally Draws the Usual Arrests,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 January 1996, B2.

⁵⁵ Vanessa Williams, “Voting Booth Called the Best Weapon,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 January 1996, B1; Tucker was President of the Philadelphia Martin Luther King Jr. Association for Nonviolence, see Dave Urbanski, “Clayton: Put Children First,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 January 1997, B2.

⁵⁶ Meyer, “Nation Puts Dr. King’s Words to Action,” 2; AP, “Brewster Students Hope,” 7.

⁵⁷ Presidents Carter and Bush, Vice President Gore, and Colin Powell attended the summit. Bill Clinton et al., “Remarks by President Clinton, President Carter, President Bush, General Colin Powell, and the Vice President,” (27 April 1997), <http://clinton2.nara.gov/WH/New/Summit/Opening.html>, accessed 23 April 2015.

⁵⁸ Bill Clinton et al., “Remarks By President Bill Clinton, President George Bush, President Jimmy Carter, President Gerald Ford, General Colin Powell, Mrs. Nancy Reagan, and Vice President Al Gore,” (28 April 1997), <http://clinton2.nara.gov/WH/New/Summit/Opening-day2.html>, accessed 23 April 2015.

⁵⁹ Kim, “Clinton’s Race Initiative,” 191.

⁶⁰ Nicholas Lemann, “Clinton, the Great Communicator,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1997, 17; Terence Hunt, “Second Time Around: Clinton, Gore Take Oaths Today for Four More Years,” *Birmingham News*, 20 January 1997, 1.

part of what Marable described as Clinton's post-1996 "left turn" regarding racial issues.⁶¹ On 14 June 1997, Clinton addressed university students in San Diego and told them he sought "the world's first truly multicultural democracy." He asked, "can we become one America in the 21st century?" He predicted "there will be no majority race in America" in half a century and although there was "old, unfinished business between black and white Americans ... the classic American dilemma has now become many dilemmas of race and ethnicity."⁶² Indeed, as ethnic relations became more complex, some US leaders realised they needed to communicate across not only the white/black divide, but to Hispanic, Korean and Arab Americans, among others.⁶³ Minchin notes that although few Americans "married across racial lines," an increasing majority accepted the idea of inter-racial marriage and a majority of whites "declared that they approved of interracial marriage between whites and blacks."⁶⁴ Minchin attributed this to several factors including: the national dialogue on racial issues; Clinton "reaching out to racial minorities"; a strong economy; and the "growth of a sizeable black middle-class" that "alleviated racial tensions for many citizens." Furthermore, US society was in the process of demographic change. As Minchin explains, since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 "abolished the national origins formulas that had favoured Europeans," both, "Hispanics and Asians have been the predominant groups among immigrants." And, "because Hispanics and Asians were not as residentially segregated as blacks, there was more opportunity for them to intermarry with whites." The US Census signalled this progress in race relations when it recognised "multiracial" as a new category in 2000.⁶⁵

The 2000 Census found that the US had become increasingly diverse in the late twentieth century. From a population of 281,421,906, 2.4 percent of Americans identified as multiracial, 3.6 percent as Asian, 12.3 percent (34.6 million) as black, 75.1 percent as white, and 5.5 percent as Some Other Race. In smaller numbers 0.1 percent identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 0.9 percent as American Indian and Alaskan Native. In addition, 12.5 percent identified as Hispanic, which the Census defined as an ethnic, not racial, category. Of those who identified as Hispanic 48 percent (16,907,852) identified as white only. These figures illustrate that the percentage of population that identified as 'white only' had fallen from 80.3 percent in 1990 to 75.1 percent in 2000. As this number included Hispanics, it portrayed a more diverse racial and ethnic portrait, with many Americans prepared to embrace a more complicated understanding of their own ethnicity. The fact that the Asian population increased from 2.9 percent in 1990 (when

⁶¹ Marable thought Clinton was inspired by the success of the Million Man March to start the dialogue, Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 232-233.

⁶² Bill Clinton, "Commencement Address at the University of California San Diego in La Jolla, California," ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (1997), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=54268>, accessed 1 September 2015.

⁶³ Lawson, *One America*, A3-A7.

⁶⁴ Minchin, "'A Sharp Break From the Past'?", 32, 39.

⁶⁵ Minchin, "'A Sharp Break From the Past'?", 32, 44.

that figure also included Pacific Islanders) to 3.6 percent (without Pacific Islanders) further pointed to an increase in the number of minority Americans.⁶⁶

Acknowledging the nation's multi-ethnic population, Clinton appointed an "unprecedentedly diverse board (two Blacks, one Asian American, one Latina, and three Whites)" to lead the race dialogue.⁶⁷ One member, New Jersey Republican Thomas Kean, was once a King Commissioner with a reputation for bridging the white/black divide. The President's executive order specified the board would advise Clinton on "race and racial reconciliation" and suggest methods to "bridge racial divides by encouraging leaders in communities throughout the Nation to develop and implement innovative approaches to calming racial tensions."⁶⁸ Claire Jean Kim argues Clinton's "race initiative dramatically redefined the American race problem at the century's end."⁶⁹ Kim considers the initiative's ultimate report, *One America*, a successor to Myrdal's *American Dilemma* (1944) and Kerner's *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (1968). Kim argues *One America* minimised "continuing racial discrimination" and "proposed dialogue as a means of reaching the goal of 'One America' – or national unity with a multiculturalist gloss."⁷⁰ According to Kim, two ideological trends influenced the report: first, "consensus between liberals and conservatives on the need to go beyond a focus on racism and race in public policy"; and second, the "proliferation of multiculturalist calls for the recognition and affirmation of group differences." Kim notes that conservatives argued white racism had declined into insignificance and they therefore maintained the two main barriers to black advancement were: "black cultural pathologies and liberal attempts to deny these pathologies"; and "wrong-headed race-conscious policies."⁷¹ Since the Republican dominance in Congress curtailed hopes of a legislative initiative on race, Clinton protected his reputation and voter base by starting the conversation.⁷²

Clinton referred to One America in his 1998 King Holiday Proclamation. He stated that he wanted to "encourage a national dialogue ... about race and to spur concerted action that will bring Americans together."⁷³ One America also influenced activities on the 1998 Holiday. The

⁶⁶ US Census Bureau, "Census Questionnaire Content, 1990 CQC-4,"

<https://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cqc/cqc4.pdf>, accessed 2 May 2016, 1-2; US Census Bureau, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin, Census 2000 Brief," (C2KBR/01-1), <https://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-1.pdf>, accessed 2 May 2016, 2.

⁶⁷ Bill Clinton, "Executive Order 13050 - President's Advisory Board on Race," Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (1997), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=54265>, accessed 1 September 2015; Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative," 193.

⁶⁸ Lawson, *One America*, A1-A2.

⁶⁹ Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative," 176-177.

⁷⁰ Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative," 187, 191.

⁷¹ Newt Gingrich perfectly illustrated the first point with his comment that "racism will not disappear by focusing on race," Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 233; Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative," 186-187.

⁷² Kim, "Clinton's Race Initiative," 191-194.

⁷³ Bill Clinton, "Proclamation 7064 - Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 16 January 1998," Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=55891>, accessed 1 September 2015.

presidential initiative held community events at the “King Memorial, Atlanta,” the Davis Human Relations Community Forum in California, and an MLK Prayer March and Breakfast in New York.⁷⁴ One America board members participated and John Hope Franklin accompanied Vice President Al Gore to Atlanta on 19 January 1998. Other related events included service activities in Maryland that connected “churches of different ethnic and racial backgrounds” and a silent payer march at the Manhattan Central Synagogue.⁷⁵ In Arizona, the One America initiative came to the state for two days of talks and the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that at a breakfast honouring King, “participants were asked to talk with one another about their personal experiences with discrimination.”⁷⁶

One of the few initiatives by Holiday organisers to connect with One America was an article by Wofford and Dexter, published in the *Christian Science Monitor*. They suggested one reason the President established the dialogue was that he recognised “King’s dream has not yet come true.” Recognising the nation’s diversity, they argued that “service can bridge the gap between those of different backgrounds” because, “working side-by-side in pursuit of common goals shatters stereotypes and helps people understand that their similarities are greater than their differences.” The authors went so far as to claim that “serving together may do more to unite us than talking together.”⁷⁷ This article clearly connected the Holiday’s service ethos to the One America initiative, however it is a rare example of the Holiday leadership group connecting with a contemporary political priority in the aftermath of the Commission’s collapse. Furthermore, it does not appear to have been published widely in papers with bigger circulations than the *Monitor*. To highlight the point, in an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* editorial, one journalist regretted that King was not there to participate in the dialogue on race relations. And, without a clear voice emanating from the King Center, the author instead quoted King to illustrate how he might have responded to those sceptical of the race initiative.⁷⁸

On 18 September 1998, the advisory board delivered its final report. Most historians agree that media coverage of the President’s affair with Lewinsky muted the public reception of *One America*.⁷⁹ No copies were available for the media, even though Marable ruefully described the

⁷⁴ Lawson, *One America*, Appendix C5, ‘Other Advisory Board Events and Activities’

⁷⁵ There was also a celebration in honour of King at Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and a community summit in Mississippi with discussion groups about education, youth, the economy, health, and quality of life. The White House, “Administration Events in Honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service,” Presswire, 21 January 1998, M2. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/444859022?accountid=13902>; The events listed in the White House release, correlate to those listed in Lawson, *One America*, Appendix C5, ‘Other Advisory Board Events and Activities’.

⁷⁶ William H. Carlile, “National Dialogue on Race Move to Arizona,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 January 1998, 3.

⁷⁷ Dexter Scott King and Harris Wofford, “Best Way to Mark King Holiday,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 January 1998, 20.

⁷⁸ John Head, “King’s Words Show Dialogue Can Work,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 19 January 1998, 8.

⁷⁹ Kim, “Clinton’s Race Initiative,” 176; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 232-234; Roger Wilkins (NAACP) thought traces of the report were like “sandcastles after a long, overnight rain.” Gillon, *The Pact: Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry That Defined a Generation*: 271; Lawson, “Introduction,” xxxi-xxxii.

report as “the most visionary and progressive policy statement” of “Clinton’s entire term in office.”⁸⁰ Kim argues *One America* concluded that ethnic differences among Americans “were to be permitted, even embraced, but they were to be firmly subordinated to a shared national identity and civic culture.” Dialogue, not debate, was encouraged and that “shifted the burden for solving the race problem from the government onto private citizens.”⁸¹ The report recommended “Ten Things Every American Should Do To Promote Racial Reconciliation” and the three most pertinent to the King Holiday were: “In your life, make a conscious effort to get to know people of other races”; “Support institutions that promote racial inclusion”; and “Participate in a community project to reduce racial disparities in opportunity and well-being.”⁸² This last suggestion, to participate in a community project, offered the potential to connect with King Day community service. However, the Commission’s demise left Holiday advocates with little voice in the dialogue and the King Day service activities were not recommended in the report as a way to bring Americans together.

Generation Gap: 1998-2000

The Commission’s collapse provoked fears the Holiday would revert “to the status it had only recently escaped – a ‘black holiday’ snubbed by state governments.” One Holiday organiser in Montana, Phillip Caldwell, spoke for those in states with small black populations. He argued that state organisers would have a “difficult time obtaining any kind of funding or support” without federal leadership. The federal Commission had kept “senators’ and representatives’ feet to the fire to recognize the Holiday”, as organisers could invoke the federal commitment to ensure state employees received the day off.⁸³ The analysis below examines whether these fears were justified or allayed.

“Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On, Not a Day Off” was the 1998 Holiday theme. It invoked action and service in order to steer King Day away from being stereotyped as a black holiday. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* headlined with ‘King Holiday’s Not for Slackers’ and featured volunteers in an article titled ‘A Time to Give.’⁸⁴ On King Day 1998 (19 January), Vice President Gore visited Hands On Atlanta and AmeriCorps workers engaged in volunteer activities.⁸⁵ The Wall Street stock market closed for the first time, and although a flow on effect forced other businesses to close, the *Journal Constitution* could only report ‘King Day becomes

⁸⁰ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*: 234.

⁸¹ Kim, “Clinton’s Race Initiative,” 191-194.

⁸² See Lawson, *One America*, 103.

⁸³ “Commission Votes to Disband,” 1.

⁸⁴ Yusuf Davis, “King Holiday’s Not for Slackers,” *Atlanta Journal - Atlanta Constitution*, 8 January 1998, D1; Henry, “A Time to Give,” B1.

⁸⁵ Will Anderson, “Gore Visits Draw Holiday Crowds,” *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 20 January 1998, D2.

Holiday for more workers, but not all.’⁸⁶ Likewise, the *New York Times* published a page one article titled, ‘On Day to Honor Dr. King, Some Pause as Others Shop.’ Journalist Barry Bearak reported that the Holiday “seems to have passed some dubious threshold [sic] of acceptance” whereby many “commemorate a great man’s dream by sleeping late.” Though now observed by all governments and Wall Street, the Holiday “seems to be joining Presidents’ Day, Memorial Day and Labor Day as customary if not especially meaningful pauses on the calendar.” As in past observances, “the day seemed more hallowed to blacks than whites.”⁸⁷ Clinton used the Holiday to announce an increase to the civil rights enforcement budget and joined four hundred volunteers to paint a high school.⁸⁸ He said: “We will never be able to bridge the racial divide and other divides in this country unless we decide we’re not only going to work together and learn together but we’re going to serve together.”⁸⁹

In addition to concern about whether whites celebrated was a fear that the next generation of Americans, black and white, might ignore King’s legacy. Clayborne Carson, for one, “couldn’t ignore the fact that King Holiday events ... usually featured gray-haired speakers.”⁹⁰ The *Washington Post* headlined a page one article with ‘A Holiday’s Generation Gap.’ The *Post* reported some African American students knew little about King because “much of the relevance of King’s life and times is lost on a new, young generation.” A student at Howard University explained that daily survival was more relevant to young blacks because they “still see racism and poverty.” Another black student complained about the repetitive nature of learning about King and plaintively asked: “How many reports can you do on Martin Luther King?” Some students in Washington DC confused the desegregation movement with the abolition movement and the *Post* asserted that “many who are the beneficiaries of his [King’s] legacy are indifferent to that fact and know little about him.”⁹¹ It editorialised that the “political and racial atmosphere” of 1998’s Holiday was “vastly different from the climate in which he [King] was assassinated 30 years ago.” With “nuclear war ... a distant threat” and “American guns ... silent” the US was “a less fractious, more settled and maybe even a far more open-minded society.” However, “prejudice and

⁸⁶ In fact, the BNA reported only 26% of 458 companies granted a paid Holiday. Shelia M. Poole, “King Day Becomes Holiday for More Workers, But Not All,” *Atlanta Journal*, 16 January 1998, D1; The stock exchange had closed on 9 April 1968 for King’s funeral, the first time ever for a private citizen, Michael Stern, “Tribute Paid Here,” *New York Times*, 10 April 1968, 36.

⁸⁷ One African American woman claimed King “symbolized black pride” because “[h]e was representative of our people’s hopes, our people’s dreams. He’s someone whose character and intelligence you want to emulate.” Barry Bearak, “On Day to Honor Dr. King, Some Pause as Others Shop,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1998, 1, B6; James Bennet, “Clinton Seeks Additional Money to Enforce Civil Rights Laws,” *New York Times*, 20 January 1998, B6.

⁸⁸ A hundred of those volunteers were from AmeriCorps, Michael Powell and Scott Wilson, “On King Day, Diverse Celebrations,” *Washington Post*, 20 January 1998, B1.

⁸⁹ Bennet, “Clinton Seeks Additional Money,” B6.

⁹⁰ Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 164.

⁹¹ John Lewis was distressed “that young people today don’t understand the significance of the movement and ... the contribution ... King made.” DeNeen L. Brown, “A Holiday’s Generation Gap; Many Young People Struggle With Significance of King’s Life, Times,” *Washington Post*, 19 January 1998, 1.

discrimination” still kept “Americans from sharing their communities, job sites, places of worship and classrooms.” The *Post* concluded: “that is where the nation is on this King Day: still struggling with the burden of race – much further along the journey to racial equality, but still struggling.”⁹²

Awareness that King’s generation had aged affected news coverage. Thirty years after King’s death, “those who remember him are graying” and the “immediacy of the civil rights movement and its accomplishments are yielding to the haze of hagiography and history books.” King had become “a flesh-and-blood hero slipping into history’s embrace.”⁹³ This tone continued the following year in a *New York Times* editorial that claimed, “For many young Americans, the heroic life and tragic death of ... King ... are historical artifacts from the turbulent 1960’s.” Furthermore, “the ranks of those with vivid memories of the human rights struggle Dr. King waged ... have thinned.” The *Times* warned the Holiday should not “morph into another three-day get-away weekend.” There was a need to recommit to King’s “unfinished human rights agenda” since “the abyss between whites and blacks in income and wealth” illustrated that “one does not have to look far to find the damage done by intolerance and discrimination.”⁹⁴

King Day 1999 continued the emphasis on service.⁹⁵ The *Times* reported that Clinton described the Holiday as “a day on rather than a day off” and urged “all Americans to rise to the highest calling in our land, the calling of active citizenship.”⁹⁶ Clinton volunteered to knock down a wall in a building to make way for a health clinic, spoke about housing discrimination and about new loans for minorities.⁹⁷ The *Washington Post* reported that AmeriCorps organised the painting of schools, readings to children and cleaning of parks, while the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* noted that Hands On Atlanta painted a house on Auburn Avenue.⁹⁸ Vice President Gore used the Holiday to announce a 15 percent increase in the civil rights enforcement budget to go to the departments of Justice, Education, Labor, and HUD, as well as to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.⁹⁹

⁹² Editorial, “On This King Day,” *Washington Post*, 19 January 1998, 24.

⁹³ Powell and Wilson, “On King Day, Diverse Celebrations,” B1.

⁹⁴ Editorial, “Martin Luther King Jr.’s America,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1999, 16.

⁹⁵ Jennifer Ffrench-Parker, “Community Hands On, Help is on the Way Summit,” *Atlanta Journal, Atlanta Constitution*, 14 January 1999, JD03.

⁹⁶ Clinton warned, “until all children of all backgrounds have the chance to live up to their God given potential, free from want in a world at peace, Dr. King’s work and our work will not be complete.” “Clinton Says Giving Is A Tribute to King,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1999, 25.

⁹⁷ James Bennet, “At Event on King Day, a Mix of Goals Met and Hoped For,” *New York Times*, 19 January 1999, 15.

⁹⁸ AP, “Clinton: Mark Holiday by Volunteering,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 1999, 5; Jennifer Brett, “A Legacy and Dream Live On, Atlantans Embrace Holiday By Reflecting on King’s Teachings,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 January 1999, B1.

⁹⁹ Gore’s announcement was similar to what President Bush once pledged and Clinton had announced a similar proposal the previous King Day. Editorial, “King Day, 1999,” *Washington Post*, 18 January 1999, 22; Howard Kurtz, “Gore to Announce Plan to Hike Budget for Civil Rights by 15%,” *Washington Post*, 18 January 1999, 7.

King's Legacy at the End of the Twentieth Century

The last Holiday of the twentieth century, King Day 1999, enabled a retrospective analysis of King's legacy. The *Washington Post* published an editorial that doubted, "King's dream of an America that fully lives up to the creed and our democratic ideals is a reality." Progress had been made, but "the heavy weight of discrimination based on skin color" remained. Unfortunately, "the ranks of the poor are filled disproportionately with racial minorities." Yet, if "discrimination and disadvantage" were not "as widespread" as in 1963 it was, in part, "thanks to Dr. King."¹⁰⁰

In the popular press, *Time* and *Ebony* magazines listed King as one of greatest figures of the twentieth century and in the 1999 Gallup Poll, King placed second after Mother Teresa as most admired for the century.¹⁰¹ *Time* claimed it was "testament to the greatness" of King "that nearly every major city in the U.S. has a street or school named after" him. However, it was "a measure of how sorely his achievements are misunderstood that most of them are located in black neighbourhoods." Though King was a black leader, "whites may owe him the greatest debt, for liberating them from the burden of America's centuries-old hypocrisy about race."¹⁰² *Time* featured King as Gandhi's "most notable heir," which was high praise as the magazine asserted Gandhi's "spirit and philosophy ... transformed the century."¹⁰³ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* also reflected that King stood "with Mahatma Gandhi as a towering figure of this century pointing us to the cure for its dominant evil mass violence."¹⁰⁴

The first King Holiday of the twenty-first century occurred on 17 January 2000. "Remember! Celebrate! Act! A Day On, Not a Day Off!" was the theme again, and 18,000 volunteers in Philadelphia renovated schools and cleaned local neighbourhoods. In Concord, New Hampshire, where the Holiday was celebrated as Martin Luther King Day for the first time, volunteers distributed "food to the needy" and helped senior citizens. The *Washington Post* editorialised, that under the umbrella of the CNCS, "women, men and children in the District and across the nation will transform a holiday into a day of service in honor of" King. However, "King Day 2000 is also a reminder that ... King's dream of one America remains only that – a dream." Even the "community service events" served to illustrate "the economic divide between Americans" because "some Americans still go hungry."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Editorial, "King Day, 1999," 22.

¹⁰¹ Frank Newport, "Martin Luther King Jr.: Revered More After Death Than Before," Gallup, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/20920/martin-luther-king-jr-revered-more-after-death-than-before.aspx>, accessed 23 April 2016

¹⁰² Jack E. White, "Martin Luther King," *Time*, 13 April 1998, 160.

¹⁰³ Walter Isaacson, "Who Mattered and Why," *Time*, 31 December 1999, 48.

¹⁰⁴ Editorial, "The Way of the Strong," 10; see also Ernie Suggs, "MLK's Sister Stays in the Background With Her Memories," *Atlanta Journal - Atlanta Constitution*, 17 January 2000, B3.

¹⁰⁵ That King's agenda was unfinished can be seen in comparative statistics published by the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. These statistics illustrated changes from the 1960s to the late 1990s in the US. In 1960, the nation was 11 percent black and 89 percent White; in 1999 it was 12.5 percent black and 87.5 percent white. In 1960, the nation was

In the *New York Times* in 2000, Michael Dyson argued that, “for millions of blacks, his [King’s] saintly stature enhanced their collective moral standing.” Likewise, “for many whites, his public canonization relieved their otherwise troubled racial conscience.” Put differently, “for a fragmented nation ... his public acclaim afforded a rare moment of healing consensus.” Nonetheless, for Dyson, the hagiography of King “whitewashed the painful truth that America had harshly resisted his call to do the right thing” and “protecting him from critical inquiry preserves his image at the expense of his message.” Furthermore, “his bowdlerized legacy has been up for grabs by any and all” and Dyson lamented that King was appropriated in elections, hip hop, sermons and fast food commercials.¹⁰⁶

Dexter Scott King secured the profitable deals he long sought. In February 1996, the King Estate had approved a marketing agreement with IPM when the family licensed merchandise with “King’s image and words on products ranging from compact discs to a Hollywood movie.” Other items included Olympic pins and medallions. Jones claimed that “‘high quality and tasteful’ King merchandise” would satisfy public demand and squeeze out “unlicensed operators.” IPM received the “majority of the profits,” but had to forward 6 to 10 percent of profits to the Estate and pay the King Center a “significant,” but publically unspecified percentage.¹⁰⁷

The Estate next secured a deal with Time Warner in 1997, to publish King’s “books, speeches and sermons” in print and electronic media. According to Phillip Jones, the Estate would be worth thirty to fifty million dollars and retain copyright to King’s work.¹⁰⁸ When Time Warner and the Estate signed the deal Coretta claimed, “today is a great day for the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.” She added, the “agreement will make an extraordinary contribution to promoting my husband’s teachings in print and electronic media and lead to a better understanding of his life.” Time Warner stated that the Estate would earn approximately ten million dollars. The deal included a five book contract, with Clayborne Carson commissioned to compile a King autobiography and collections of King’s speeches and sermons.¹⁰⁹ Autobiographies by Dexter and Coretta were also mooted.

segregated, but by 1999, racial discrimination was illegal. In 1960, there were no housing laws to integrate minorities, but by 1999, housing discrimination was illegal. In 1960, there were four black members of the House of Representatives, but in 1999, there were thirty eight. The difference in life expectancy in 1996 between black and white was: 70 years for blacks, 77 years for whites. In 1959, there were 55 percent of black families living in poverty, by 1997, it was 27 percent. Editorial, “King Day 2000,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 2000, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Eric Dyson, “A Useful Hero: Let’s Honor Dr. King With Progress, Not Sainthood,” *New York Times*, 17 January 2000, SM13.

¹⁰⁷ The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that “King copyrighted his speeches and sermons” and after his death “those rights passed to his heirs.” Towns, “‘Tasteful’ Marketing of MLK,” G6.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin Sack, “Staking Claim to the Dream,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 January 1997, 2; Harris, “Capitalizing on King,” B1; Jones was a former Time-Warner record producer who wrote the “popular King birthday song ‘Sing, Sing, Celebrate,’” a mid-1980s rap. Towns, “‘Tasteful’ Marketing of MLK,” G6.

¹⁰⁹ Carson writes, “in the fall 1996, Dexter and Phil told me that they were negotiating a major book deal with Warner Books, the publishing arm of Time Warner Corporation.” They had a five book proposal: a memoir by Coretta, an autobiography by Dexter, a King autobiography, and a collection of King’s speeches and a collection of King’s sermons, designed to reach a non-academic audience. Carson was at the press conference in January 1997 that announced the launch. The books of speeches and sermons became *Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great*

According to the *New York Times*, the Estate wanted to take “King’s work to the mass market.” As Jones explained, “we could have gone to a publishing company that prided itself on simply publishing historical treasures ... but we want Dr. King to be in the vernacular. The last thing we want to see happen is for this to be an unprofitable labor of love that doesn’t turn into a major publishing event.” Gerald M. Levin, CEO of Time Warner, stated that “there is a relatively unexplored treasure ... aggregated by a family that really understands the historical importance of it and is also inspired by a new generation and new technologies.” Laurence J. Kirshbaum, Chairman of Time Warner Publishing, added, “there is an enormous audience, both here and abroad, for the legacy of Dr. King.” This global reach was also on Coretta’s mind: “Now, Martin’s legacy will be disseminated widely throughout the world.”¹¹⁰

Dexter depicted the deal as an attempt to redress what he claimed was a lack of supply of King’s words to the public. He claimed, King’s “writings and speeches have not been easily available to the general public” and that the “media has only played the top-40 version of his work.”¹¹¹ The new multimedia formats with King’s words included CD-ROMs for computers and a website that discussed the black experience. Dexter hoped that “raising his father’s stature through new works would heighten awareness of the Center.” He commented that, “awareness raises money.” According to the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the King Center would not “benefit directly from the publishing deal” as it was a nonprofit organisation. Instead, royalties “from the deal will go to the King estate, controlled by the family.”¹¹²

The parties gave the appearance they had embarked on more than a financial deal. Time Warner executive Kirshbaum “declined to discuss financial terms” in public and his colleague Levin described the deal as “a distinctive relationship – I won’t even call it a transaction.”¹¹³ Yet, the deal raised concerns among others. Charles E. Jones, Chairman of the African American Studies Department at Georgia State University, warned of the “risk of turning King into a commodity” and losing his message.¹¹⁴ And Julian Bond complained about the King family, that “if they are the repository of King’s legacy, I don’t see much being done to spread the message of his life and work.”¹¹⁵ Hosea Williams protested: “I have unquestionable love and respect for the King family, but the thing that gets me is the kids trying to make money from his memory.” The children were “so young when he was murdered and do not know the same Martin Luther King Jr. that I knew. He

Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 187.

¹¹⁰ Time Warner expected to earn ten million dollars a year. Robin Pogrebin, “Time Warner to Publish Martin Luther King’s Works,” *New York Times*, 9 January 1997, 14; Paul D. Colford, “A Treasure-Trove for King’s Admirers: Home Edition,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 January 1997, 3.

¹¹¹ Pogrebin, “Time Warner to Publish,” 14.

¹¹² Charles Haddad, “An ‘unexposed treasure’,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 9 January 1997, E1.

¹¹³ Colford, “A Treasure-Trove,” 3.

¹¹⁴ Towns, “‘Tasteful’ Marketing of MLK,” G6.

¹¹⁵ Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 1, 18.

never let us put a price tag on anything he did.”¹¹⁶ John Lewis asserted, “Dr. King’s legacy shouldn’t be up for sale like soap.”¹¹⁷

The profits from privatisation went to Dexter and King family members, via the Estate. The King Center was promised little. In light of the deal, journalist Cynthia Tucker hoped “the family will now relinquish the King Center to less self-interested stewards” because “they have done little with it” and the “center has never lived up to its promise.”¹¹⁸ Tucker warned that no guarantee existed that money from the Time Warner deal would “be used to enhance the work of the cash-strapped, nonprofit King Center.” Since the money was the family’s to use “as they see fit” to spend on luxury cars and Armani suits, Tucker recommended the family cede control of the King Center to the NPS.¹¹⁹

King merchandise became increasingly available for sale and IPM was criticised for “merchandising the martyr.” The new merchandise included a “multimedia strategy timed to coincide with the King Holiday” in partnership with 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Motown and MTV.¹²⁰ The Estate also maintained court cases against perceived copyright infringements and sued *USA Today* for printing the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech without permission or fee payment. This action was only halted after the paper eventually paid a fee.¹²¹

Harvey argues that “the corporatization, commodification, and privatization of hitherto public assets” opens up new fields for capital accumulation “in domains hitherto regarded as off limits to the calculus of profitability.”¹²² The general sense that King’s words ought to be off limits explains why people were shocked by Dexter’s actions. Such “commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things and social relations, that a price can be put on them, and that they can be traded subject to legal contract.” In essence, “the market is presumed to work as an appropriate guide-an ethic-for all human action.”¹²³ Harvey argues that “information technology is the privileged technology of neoliberalism.” Accordingly, “the main areas of production that gained were the emergent cultural industries (films, videos, video games, music, advertising, art shows), which use IT as a basis for innovation and the marketing of new products.” In this area, Dexter

¹¹⁶ The Rev. James Orange, a key King lieutenant felt similarly. Harris, “Capitalizing on King,” B1.

¹¹⁷ Pogrebin, “Time Warner to Publish,” 14.

¹¹⁸ Tucker thought the Center ought to be a “leading authority on conflict resolution and the first-line resource for civic activists seeking to quell the violence that continues to decimate poor black neighborhoods across the country.” Cynthia Tucker, “A Leading Role for King Center,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 19 January 1997, R5.

¹¹⁹ Tucker, “A Leading Role for King Center,” R5.

¹²⁰ The Time Warner agreement contained a five book deal to publish King’s autobiography and Coretta’s second autobiography Sack, “Staking Claim to the Dream,” 2; Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 1, 18; Harris, “Capitalizing on King,” B1.

¹²¹ Tucker, “A Leading Role for King Center,” R5; see also Harris, “Capitalizing on King,” B1; Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*.

¹²² Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 160.

¹²³ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 165.

excelled and the Time Warner deal centred on some of this technology.¹²⁴ The public assumed King intended his words for everyone, but Dexter created scarcity and increased their financial worth. Dexter claimed that he allowed “noncommercial entities and nonprofit organizations to use” King’s “words and images” and that his targets were bigger entities.¹²⁵ However, he delayed at least one academic’s book and restricted access to the King Center’s archive.¹²⁶

Having achieved the neoliberal trilogy of reduced government interference, privatisation and spending reductions, the Estate reaped its profit. Dexter offered to sell King’s papers to universities in order to “shed the financial burden of maintaining” an archive.¹²⁷ On 18 July 1997 the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that, “the possible sale or transfer of the King papers, and perhaps dozens of other valuable civil rights-related collections held at the archives, is part of a dramatic downsizing at the King Center.” Phillip Jones claimed the family did not want to fund raise anymore and Carson explained that “the King Center programming is very localized, labor-intensive and the impact is quite limited. What Dexter senses is that the intellectual property has almost infinite potential for impact.” The Time Warner agreement will allow them to “reach 100 times or 1,000 times the people that could ever be reached in terms of those who would come and visit the King Center.”¹²⁸ The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that negotiations occurred with Stanford and Emory universities about transferring the King papers and that such a “move would effectively eliminate the center’s archives, which account for considerable expenses but also is one of the organization’s few remaining programs.”¹²⁹ Rev. Joseph Roberts, of Ebenezer Baptist Church, said King “was far more universal in scope than the center appears to be.” In reply, Harold Sims, a King Center board member, explained Dexter’s attitude was to “first financially secure the King Center” and then “go back to the programs without having people put us in the position of having to blackmail us if we don’t do according to their dictates.” Sim’s added, “It’s how Dexter sees his dream.”¹³⁰

According to Carson, in contrast to Coretta “who viewed the King papers mainly as a collection of physical documents, Dexter appreciated that these documents were also valuable as

¹²⁴ Harvey notes the “extraordinary burst in information technologies” and that investment in information technology outpaced that of production and physical infrastructure. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: 157-159.

¹²⁵ Towns, “‘Tasteful’ Marketing of MLK,” G6.

¹²⁶ Professor Richard Lischer experienced interference in his educational publishing, Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 18; see Dyson for an account of Dexter’s fight and “shameful actions” with Blackside Publishing (which produced the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary about the Civil Rights Movement), *USA Today* and *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, papers which Dyson suggests have an educational role, see Dyson, *I May Not Get There*: 262-265.

¹²⁷ Sack, “Sheen of the King Legacy Dims on New, More Profitable Path,” 18.

¹²⁸ Gary Pomerantz, “King Paper’s New Chapter: Battle for Control,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 July 1997, C3.

¹²⁹ Dexter also came to an agreement with director Oliver Stone to make a film, though that concerned some due to Stone’s recent *JFK*, which was perceived as historically inaccurate. Johnson, “King’s Legacy is Losing its Luster,” A1.

¹³⁰ Sims was and former vice president of the Johnson and Johnson company, Johnson, “King’s Legacy is Losing its Luster,” A1.

intangible intellectual property that could be disseminated digitally as well as in print form.”¹³¹ Carson’s own “background as a computer programmer and his [Dexter’s] as an aspiring music producer led us to see the untapped potential for disseminating the King legacy using modern communications technology.” The Internet was rapidly developing and Carson was technologically literate. He envisaged “a time when people throughout the world would readily access thousand of King-related documents and audio-visual materials,” so he created a website for the scholarly King Papers Project.¹³² It took nearly a decade, but the Estate finally sold a substantial collection of King’s papers. In June 2006, King documents held at Sotheby’s were sold for thirty two million dollars to a “consortium of Atlanta leaders, businesses, and foundations who purchased the papers on behalf of Morehouse College.” The City of Atlanta purchased the papers, but the Estate retained the intellectual property rights.¹³³

The King family’s influence remained controversial in the late 1990s. The Estate lost one copyright infringement lawsuit against CBS News, which had included the network’s own archival footage of the March on Washington on a video available for purchase.¹³⁴ Prompted by this legal case, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*’s religious ethics section posed the following question to readers: “Who should have claim to the written and spoken legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. – his family or history?”¹³⁵ According to a second article, the “vast majority” of the public thought the King’s family “should have no special rights to his speeches, words or ideas.”¹³⁶ The keynote speaker on King Day 2000, Reverend DeForest ‘Buster’ Soaries Jr. (First Baptist Church, Lincoln Gardens, NJ) summed up the attitudes of many with the claim: “We love Dr. King when he says, ‘I have a dream’; we hate Dr. King and his family when he says, ‘I have a copyright’.”¹³⁷ Carson noted, however, he had “often heard suggestions that the King intellectual property should be in the public domain but suspected that this would lead to more commercialization of his legacy rather than less.”¹³⁸ IPM had, in once instance, “succeeded in stopping a California Republican political advertisement that featured portions of” the ‘I Have a Dream’ speech.¹³⁹

¹³¹ Coretta “had signed a legal agreement assigning all her papers, as well as those of her late husband, to a trust under Dexter’s control.” Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 168, 174.

¹³² Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 168.

¹³³ Carson “marvelled at the audacity of Dexter and Phil, who had succeeded in their gambit: removing the documents from Atlanta and then selling them back to the city for more than the asking price, while still retaining all rights to determine where the collection could be displayed or used for educational purposes. Although they had sold a few thousand documents that were in the King Center’s vault, they still retained the bulk of the original King collection at the King Center.” Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 224.

¹³⁴ Tucker, “A Leading Role for King Center,” R5; see also Harris, “Capitalizing on King,” B1; Scott King and Wiley, *Growing Up King*.

¹³⁵ “Religion Ethics: Should Kin Benefit from King Speech on ‘Dream’?” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 11 January 1997, F4.

¹³⁶ Hillard et al, “Ethics Ideas Public Domain, Many Say,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 18 January 1997, F4.

¹³⁷ Soaries was New Jersey’s Secretary of State, Rebecca McCarthy, “In Streets and Pulpit, City Honors its Martyr,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 18 January 2000, B1.

¹³⁸ Carson, *Martin’s Dream*: 167.

¹³⁹ Pogrebin, “Time Warner to Publish,” 14.

News organisations were allowed to use King related material in reports, but his work was “protected from being used by others without the estate’s consent.” Jones argued that marketing King represented “the next chapter in the civil rights movement: the battle for economic independence.” He and Dexter wanted to reach a new generation “who may consider King’s life a stale history lesson.” According to Jones, “If Dr. King were alive, he’d be on the Internet, and he’d approve of computers.”¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

This chapter argues that in the late twentieth century, the King Holiday underwent a change in keeping with the ambitions of planners. There was a consistency in the Holiday planning that ensured its central traditions were maintained: marches, protests, prayer services and artistic tributes. However, the demise of the King Commission negatively influenced the Holiday. When about to implement its new initiative, Dexter rendered the Commission mute and no increase in Holiday observation can be discerned.

However, there was a new emphasis provided by the passionate leadership of Clinton and Wofford: community service. Reform brought service activities to the fore, certainly in newspaper reports. The President sought to bring Americans, black, white, Hispanic, Asian and Native American, together through service that represented the nation’s ethnic diversity. Americans remained enchanted with the King the Dreamer, yet King the Drum Major became increasingly invoked. As the US consciously acknowledged its multicultural society, this brought added pressure to the Holiday to move beyond the historic black and white divide. Holiday organisers were unprepared for this and were distracted by the King Estate as it sought to promote King’s legacy via commercial agreements and new technology.

¹⁴⁰ Harris, “Capitalizing on King,” B1.

Conclusion

This thesis is a history of the King Holiday and a study of mourning transformed into remembrance. Previous scholars have studied the fight for King Day, however they failed to analyse the King Holiday Commission and its plans. Yet, how Americans celebrated an African American hero, pacifist is a matter of great historical importance, and this study reveals a complex Holiday. The King Holiday Act of 1983 was the culmination of efforts by black holiday advocates over the course of centuries. From pre-Revolution slaves to the civil rights activists of the 1960s, there has long been a recognition of the need for black celebrations. King Day evolved from this tradition and was both a black holiday and a new method available to desegregate the nation. As the US sought to desegregate schools, workplaces and residential areas, particularly in the South, the Holiday provided a new space for black and white Americans to join together to overcome a history of racial discrimination.

The Holiday represented a triumph for the African American community and black liberals in Congress, yet ran counter to a high tide of conservatism ushered in by the election of President Reagan. Though black liberals fought for the Holiday, conservatives soon co-opted it. Congress established the King Commission in order to institutionalise festivities and the Commission drew from existing traditions in Atlanta, where annual celebrations honouring King lasted a week. In Chapters Two and Three, this thesis illustrated that from 1986, the Commission portrayed an image of King the Dreamer, based on the theme 'Living the Dream'. President Reagan had appointed black conservatives to the Commission as he hoped they would create a colour-blind Holiday that little challenged the nation's materialistic and militaristic assumptions. King Day instead promoted traditional values, especially during the Bicentennial of the Constitution. Coretta Scott King facilitated this process as she sought to shape a Holiday all Americans, not just African Americans, could celebrate. However, a perception that King Day was a black Holiday developed and newspaper reports and workplace surveys indicated that the majority of participants in Holiday ceremonies were black. Furthermore, critics believed the Holiday became over reliant on King's 'I Have a Dream' speech at the expense of his radical legacy.

Change to the Holiday came when George H. W. Bush was elected President. Chapter Four argued that Bush supported the Holiday and the Commission more enthusiastically than Reagan. However, like his predecessor, Bush distorted King's legacy by portraying him as a pro-capitalist icon. Whereas Reagan co-opted King to promote his own domestic policy, Bush did so in foreign policy, especially as Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe. This represented an about-turn in how some conservatives thought of King; in the 1950s and 1960s they often accused him of being a

communist. Further, Bush used King's legacy of nonviolence to call for the end of apartheid in South Africa, though he ignored the late civil rights leader's endorsement of economic sanctions against that nation's racist regime. Coretta Scott King eventually criticised Bush, especially when her late husband's birthday was chosen as the commencement date for US involvement in the Gulf War. At this point, she used the Holiday to criticise Bush's willingness to declare war while the nation's social services failed. Though Bush expanded the scope by which a conservative could deploy King's image, he nonetheless shied away from praising his post-1965 activism.

President Clinton became the first Democrat in the White House to oversee the Holiday and Democratic Party victories in the 1992 election provided the opportunity for liberals to pass the King Holiday and Service Act of 1994. Chapter Five analysed this attempt by Democrats and the Commission to memorialise and harness King's fight against economic inequality. Liberals had tired of what they perceived as the misuse of King's Dream during Republican administrations. Civil rights activists and Democrat politicians, John Lewis and Harris Wofford in particular, argued that the Holiday ought to focus on service. They promoted an image of King the Drum Major, in the hope that the Holiday would be used to redress economic inequality. They also hoped their reforms would protect King Day from the damaging perception it was only a black celebration. Clinton, fellow Democrats and Coretta Scott King, all believed the reform encapsulated a more authentic and complete understanding of King's activism. However, the majority of scholarship about King Day ends at 1983, or 1986, and scholars have largely ignored this landmark reform, until now.

Chapter Six illustrates that once the King Holiday and Service Act was passed, the Commission collapsed when Coretta Scott King reduced her role in public life. Financial profit, historic interpretation, and private versus collective ownership of a legacy were at issue, as Dexter Scott King exerted his influence. The Commission's collective approach and mission to spread King's word to all citizens on a non-profit basis threatened Dexter's plan to privatise his father's legacy. Dexter sought to profit from King's intellectual property, but in the process contributed little of substance to his father's image. The Drum Major image was immediately compromised by a privatised, standardised and neo-liberal memorialisation of King that was an anathema to the collective vision of the movement. King's heir attempted to create a Coca-Cola style image based on business practices that defined economic freedom by increased profit, copyrights, intellectual property and the downsizing of workforces. Dexter redefined King's ideal of economic equality as economic freedom based on wealth accumulation – individualised and corporatized – and brand recognition in the digital age became paramount. Dexter and the Estate raised millions of dollars, though little of that went to the King Center. The undermining of Holiday reforms damaged the King family's reputation as guardians of King's legacy and detracted from his message. As Chapter

Seven argues, once the Commission closed, King Day failed to gain a substantially wider observance in the late twentieth century.

Simple pronouncements on whether King Day is too bland or too radical obscure the richness of its history. Holiday organisers were often caught between the need to acknowledge the black holiday tradition and transcend that tradition so all Americans could commemorate King. Further, the Holiday is often characterised as a day of amnesia, most particularly when it neglects the radical King. However, by invoking the Drum Major, the Commission and its supporters attempted to recall the radical aspects of King's activism. King Day has facilitated debate about King's unfinished agenda and provided a forum for blacks and whites, at least those willing to participate, to revive his legacy. The Holiday is not without limitations, however, and has not always fulfilled the ambitions of its promoters. Coretta Scott King believed in the power of Holidays to transform society. However, whites and businesses gave only partial support and by itself, King Day did not overcome deep seated racial disparities, nor did it transform the US into a nonviolent oasis, as Coretta hoped it would.

§

A leader's death often signals the beginning, not the end, of a faith. Christianity, Buddhism, and Marxism among others, illustrate that the passing of a leader or teacher can lead to a proliferation of followers. After King's death, the civil rights movement fragmented, but continued in the actions of activists who sought new methods to reinforce victories and achieve new gains. After Congress endorsed the movement's central tenet of racial equality with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, activists set about desegregating the nation's education system, work places and housing with busing, affirmative action and the removal of racist restrictions in the housing market. These efforts led to battles every bit as passionate as those that preceded the passage of the landmark 1960s legislation. In the context of the Long Civil Rights Movement, the King Holiday campaign was part of the reconstruction of not only the South, but also the nation. Blacks, and to a lesser extent whites, took to the streets and celebrated the life of a hero and King Day became an annual reminder of what the movement had achieved. It also provided a new rallying point for those who thought more action was needed to complete King's unfinished agenda.

King's legacy has thus been used to continue the struggle for civil rights. When a new generation rose to prominence after the 'classical' civil rights movement, King legatees feared his activism would be diminished or forgotten. The Holiday, however, has acted as a bulwark against that possibility. When King's Dream lost resonance for liberals, after conservative Republicans blunted the speech's capacity to inspire change, Democrats looked to the Drum Major to express

concern about economic inequality. The Drum Major may never eclipse the Dreamer in the popular imagination, but Congress and the Commission forged a new understanding of King's legacy, one based on selfless acts of service.

In 2007, the *Washington Post* published a feature on Lloyd Davis that credited him with creating the Commission and establishing a network of state commissions.¹ Davis stated that his plan was to build the Holiday “step by step, brick by brick” as he wanted the Commission to shape a Holiday that would “not sensationalize,” but “would make the holiday part of the American conscience.”² Any King Holiday, however, let alone one inspired by the Drum Major, is ironic. King professed a desire to be remembered by only humble gestures and a Holiday in his honour contradicted that wish – a wish he expressed in the very sermon that has come to define the occasion.³

The Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial on the Mall in Washington DC serves to illustrate how the remembrance of King is often ironic. On the centrepiece statue, King's ‘Drum Major Instinct’ sermon was paraphrased and carved in stone: “I was a drum major for justice, peace and righteousness.”⁴ This paraphrase caused bitter controversy and the esteemed African American writer Maya Angelou expressed outrage – she claimed the quote made King appear self-righteous and like an “arrogant twit.” She reminded that he had expressed a reluctance to be remembered as great figure and had insisted any eulogist must remember him for humble acts of service. After much debate, the paraphrase was eventually removed.⁵

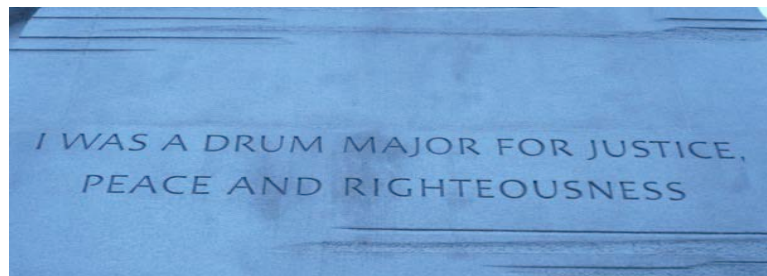


Figure 4: The Drum Major paraphrase on the King National Memorial.⁶

¹ “Davis, Proponent of Holiday,” B7.

² Davis returned to HUD and became a special assistant in the Office of Enforcement and Programs. He became renowned for his work in fair housing and equal opportunity, and worked until three weeks before his death at seventy nine. Stewart, “Davis, Principle Architect,” B8.

³ Remembering King for service was consistent with nonviolent activists of the past. For example, Gandhi wrote, “The question of further simplifying my life and of doing some concrete act of service to my fellow men had been constantly agitating me.” Gandhi, *An Autobiography*: 192.

⁴ Bruyneel, “The King’s Body.”

⁵ Michael E. Ruane, “‘Drum Major’ Inscription Being Removed From King Memorial; Work to be Finished for ‘63 March Anniversary,” *Washington Post*, 30 July 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/local/drum-major-inscription-being-removed-from-king-memorial-work-to-be-finished-for-63-march-anniversary/2013/07/30/f6c91024-f941-11e2-8e84-c56731a202fb_story.html, accessed 26 April 2016.

⁶ Picture from author’s collection.

King is both the first African American honoured with a national Holiday and the first non-president (and pacifist) remembered on the National Mall. When the US dedicates memorials to him, it is understood that they also represent the civil rights movement. Yet, at the National King Memorial he is portrayed as a solitary figure, detached from the mountain and the movement. King was only thirty-nine when murdered, a relatively young man. He never held an elected position – an important reason the Holiday was created in his honour – and he was regarded as the one figure who could bridge the gap between whites and blacks, left and right. His education and church background prepared him to preach to the masses and his convictions forced him to march. We cannot know the course of his career had he lived to witness the early twenty-first century, but in his absence, everyone from Coretta Scott King, former colleagues, heirs and past opponents justified their own actions by association to King's legacy.⁷

The Holiday transmits King's message across state boundaries and airwaves to the entire nation. Combined with civil rights memorials, it diversifies American history and serves as a tool to shape a tolerant future. Yet, we are only beginning to understand how these changes shape American history and a need exists for more scholarship about the King Holiday. Many states had their own King Commissions, some still do, and more analysis on these will enhance our knowledge of the Holiday's regional differences. Further research into the CNCS's management of King Day will also shed light the health of the Holiday in the twenty-first century. While beyond the scope of this thesis, an analysis of the Holiday under the presidencies of Republican George W. Bush in the Age of Terror and Democrat Barack Obama in the so-called "post-racial era" would make an interesting study. In his first King Day Presidential Proclamation, George W. Bush used the occasion to memorialise the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, saying that "these circumstances have given us renewed purpose in rededicating ourselves to Dr. King's 'Dream'." Bush credited King's nonviolence as the foundation for healing and claimed that the words of King's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, "ring true for those men and women who unselfishly attempted to rescue innocent persons in the World Trade Center buildings and at the Pentagon."⁸ By contrast, in 2010 Barack Obama asserted, "recognizing that our Nation has yet to reach Dr. King's promised land is not an admission of defeat, but a call to action." Obama encouraged Americans to visit MLKDay.gov to find service projects in their area.⁹ In 2011, he praised King, saying he "guided us toward a mountaintop on which all Americans – regardless of skin color –

⁷ Dyson attempts an imaginary interview with King, in Dyson, *April 4 1968*.

⁸ George W. Bush, "Proclamation 7518 - Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 2002," Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (2002), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=61815>.

⁹ Barack Obama, "Proclamation 8473 - Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 2010," Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (2010), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=87428>.

could live together in mutual respect and brotherhood.” Because of that “we honor Dr. King’s legacy with a national day of service.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Barack Obama, “Proclamation 8624 - Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 2011,” Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (2011), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=88908>; In 2012, Obama encouraged Americans to “draw strength from Dr. King’s stirring affirmation that ‘Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.’” Barack Obama, “Proclamation 8773 - Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 2012,” Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* (2012), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=98875>.

Epilogue

The Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial is the latest and grandest physical monument to King. Situated between the Jefferson and Lincoln memorials on the serene Tidal Basin Lake, its controversial design generated renewed debate surrounding King's memorialisation. Chinese artist Lei Yixin's sculpture troubled the United States Commission of Fine Arts, which had commissioned Lei. The Commission criticised the sculpture's depiction of King in a "confrontational" pose, calling it inappropriate. Harry E. Johnson, president of the King Memorial Foundation, promised a redesign and a "softening" of King's expression. This softening drew criticism from civil rights activists.¹¹ They echoed criticism of a bust of King, placed in the Capitol building in 1986, which was criticised as too soft and too contemplative.¹² Civil rights activists prefer that King be remembered as someone prepared to be confrontational in the face of injustice.¹³

On a winter's day in December 2012, I visited the newly opened national memorial. I considered the competing priorities that had shaped King's legacy and by extension, the memorial. King wished to be remembered with humility, yet Coretta wanted to celebrate him as a national hero. In contrast, civil rights veterans such as Ralph Abernathy wanted to ensure King's legacy of activism was prioritised. Located near the place where King gave his 'I Have a Dream' speech, the national memorial embodies these competing forces. It is heroic, yet King's face has a thoughtful and reflective expression that appropriately depicts a complex man. Historic figures like King are not one dimensional. He was certainly an activist, yet how could King have articulated his Dream without contemplation? The ground in front of the memorial and the stillness of the water in Tidal Basin provided a space to think about King.

¹¹ Stephen Manning, "Arts Panel Criticizes MLK Statue design for DC Memorial," *Associated Press Archive*, 9 May 2008.

¹² This echoed a debate about King's bust in Congress, AP, "Pensive Pose of King," 6.

¹³ Bruyneel, "The King's Body," 98-103.



Figure 5: The King National Memorial¹⁴

In ‘A Time to Break Silence,’ King stated his conviction 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-orientated’ society to a ‘person-orientated’ 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.”¹⁵ Recent tragedies highlight the fact that the fight against the triplets of racism, materialism and militarism continues. In Ferguson, Missouri, street protests were sparked by the death of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown, killed at the hands of police in August 2014. The Justice Department later “found substantial evidence of racial bias among police and court staff in Ferguson” as police and city officials had sent racist emails to one another. In one email exchange between the court clerk and police officers, a captain and a sergeant compared blacks to dogs getting welfare checks.¹⁶ Protestors in Ferguson held up signs asking ‘AM I NEXT?’ and “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot.”¹⁷ US

¹⁴ Picture from author’s collection.

¹⁵ King Jr., “A Time to Break Silence,” 240; Obama marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by walking over Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama. Nick O’Malley, “‘Searing’ Report Unveils Racial Bias of Ferguson Police Force,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 March 2015, 12.

¹⁶ Sarah Parvini, “Ferguson Releases Emails Likening Welfare Recipients to Dogs,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 2015, 12.

¹⁷ Nick O’Malley, “Ferguson is a City of Guns - And They Are Loaded With Tension,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15-16 November 2014, 26-27.

Attorney General Eric Holder, released Justice Department findings that the “city of Ferguson had used its overwhelmingly white police force to menace its black citizens to raise revenue via fines, and that it had been motivated by racial bias, and that the local courts had been complicit.”¹⁸

In November 2014, Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old African American boy, played with a pellet gun in a park. A police officer, one who had been forced from another department for his “dismal failure” in weapons handling and inability to follow instructions, fatally shot Rice. The officer prevented the boy’s sister from rendering comfort as he died and did not render assistance himself.¹⁹ In Baltimore, another black man, Freddie Gray, died in police custody with a broken neck and crushed voice box. His death sparked street violence in that city.²⁰ Further evidence that racial violence continues came on the anniversary of King’s assassination in North Charleston, South Carolina. In that working class community, a white police officer killed an unarmed black man, Walter L. Scott, by shooting him in the back as he attempted to avoid arrest for a minor traffic violation.²¹ A more horrendous attack occurred in June 2015, when nine African Americans were shot dead by a white supremacist in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. The church has “one of the largest and oldest black congregations in the region” and police defined the murders as a hate crime.²² The murderer, Dylan Roof, idealised the Confederate Battle Flag and white supremacist symbols.²³ He apparently “chose Charleston because it is [the] most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country.” Roof complained that, “We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the Internet.” He thought, “someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.”²⁴ In response to the murders, the Confederate Battle Flag was removed from the grounds of the state Capitol.²⁵

The US also continues to be afflicted by massive economic inequality. Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* notes that the top decile share of US national income increased from 30-35 percent in 1970 to 45-50 percent in 2000.²⁶ In response to this trend, the Occupy

¹⁸ Nick O’Malley, “Obama’s Equality March Not Yet Over,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 2015, 13; O’Malley, “‘Searing’ Report Unveils Racial Bias of Ferguson Police Force,” 12.

¹⁹ Nick O’Malley, “Cleveland Apology After Boy Blamed For Own Death,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 March 2015, 14.

²⁰ Nick O’Malley, “Don’t Throw Away the Key: US Changes Tack on Jailing,” *Sun-Herald*, 10 May 2015, 36.

²¹ In North Charleston, 47 percent of the population is black and the police force is 80 percent white. Matt Apuzzo and Michael S. Schmidt, “Officer is Charged With Murder of Black Man Shot in the Back,” *New York Times*, 7 April 2015, 1.

²² Reuters APP, “Multiple Deaths at Church ‘a hate crime’,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 2015.

²³ Nick O’Malley, “Flag Debate Flies Again After Massacre,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 2015, 26.

²⁴ Nick O’Malley, “‘I have no choice’, Gunman Proclaimed,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 2015, 15.

²⁵ O’Malley, “Flag Debate Flies Again,” 26; Emily Greenhouse, “‘The time has come’: Flag’s Lowering Falls to a Different Rebel,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 June 2015, 14; Harriet McLeod, “Flag Removal ‘the right thing’,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 2015, 15; Nick O’Malley, “Tears and Applause as Flag’s Day Ends in South Carolina,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11-12 July 2015, 42; Nick O’Malley, “Flag Lowered, and with it the South’s ‘Lost Cause’ Mythology,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 July 2015, 15.

²⁶ Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*: 24.

Movement emerged in New York in September 2011 and occupied Zuccotti Park, close to Wall Street. The movement spread across the nation and claimed to be with the 99 percent of Americans it alleged that Wall Street failed.²⁷ Activists pointed out that in the US, the top 1 percent have 39.8 percent of individual wealth, while the top 10 percent have 74.4 percent of individual wealth. The bottom 90 percent have just 25.6 percent, while unemployment is 11 percent and one in three children live in poverty.²⁸

Since King's death the US has been embroiled the Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan and the Iraq War, as well as the War on Terror. Furthermore, the US has been wracked by decades of gun violence. Between 1997-2001, three dozen mass shootings in schools and workplaces occurred, as did thirty-six incidents of rampage killings that resulted in the deaths of 139 people. Between 1992 and 2001, a staggering 336,000 Americans died by gunfire.²⁹ Ironically, "The foundation of American national gun laws, the Gun Control Act of 1968, came in response to an unprecedented nationwide organizing effort on behalf of individuals affected by the back-to-back assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy."³⁰ However, "With the exception of the Brady Law, which required a background check to enforce the 'prohibited persons' provisions, the 1968 act's core provisions have remained largely unchanged."³¹ The militarisation of law enforcement is another issue of concern. Civil liberty groups claim that "billions of dollars of military equipment is transferred from the federal government to police departments every year." After civil disturbances in Ferguson and Baltimore, Obama asserted that neighbourhoods ought not have an "occupying force." He claimed, "we've seen how militarised gear can sometimes give people a feeling like there's an occupying force," and then proposed reforms designed to prevent local police being supplied with military style equipment.³²

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King Day 2015 marked the thirtieth Holiday celebration. Though an underappreciated milestone, the Holiday became noteworthy for a level of protest not seen for years. The press reported on "a new generation of young activists" outraged by police brutality and the deaths of unarmed African Americans. Uppermost in the minds of protesters was the spate of black deaths at the hands of

²⁷ Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and Insurrection 2011: From the Arab Uprisings to Occupy Everywhere* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 238-9.

²⁸ O'Malley, "Ferguson is a City of Guns," 26-27.

²⁹ Kristin A. Gos, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3-4.

³⁰ Gos, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America*: 9.

³¹ For a description of the Brady Bill see Gos, *Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America*: 10, 176-179.

³² AFP, "Backlash Prompts Obama to Strip Police of Military Trappings," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 2015, 14.

police, especially in Ferguson, Missouri, and New York City, not to mention the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida, 2013. The protesters expressed dissatisfaction with King Day and one press article was subtitled “Young activists demand harder edge to civil rights holiday.”³³ In Atlanta, “a showdown occurred between the civil rights old guard and the new, more boisterous generation of protesters.” Two hundred protesters staged a sit-in, on Peachtree Street, and stopped the annual King Holiday parade. In Saint Louis, protesters “rushed the stage at a prayer service” and in New York, there was a die-in, outside the Bloomingdale’s store, and another on Boston Common. In New York, a thousand people gathered in a plaza with the sign, ‘Black Lives Matter’ suspended from a church.³⁴

Present day activists now decry the Day of Service and claim it has outlived its usefulness.³⁵ In an article published in *The Root*, Danielle C. Belton wrote of the “MLK-neutering” Day of Service as “a generic mishmash of good feelings that contorts King’s social-justice legacy into a blissful Hallmark card of post-racial nothingness.”³⁶ Belton echoed Cornel West who had denounced the “Santa Clausification” of King.³⁷ Again, progressives expressed criticism that King had been rendered cheerful, soft and harmless. Activists on the Internet and in the streets launched a Reclaim MLK campaign, spearheaded by the recently formed organisation, Black Lives Matter. They asserted that the Holiday has been co-opted and one organiser, Alicia Garza, called for a “‘day on’ to fight injustice.” Garza wanted to use the “‘Day of Service’ to lift up the needs and dreams of black lives.” This “day on” sounded similar to the call of Holiday reformers in the 1990s who wanted a day on, not off, in order to volunteer. However, in light of the recent killings of African Americans, police violence and persistent poverty, volunteering seemed not enough. Reminiscent of Jesse Jackson’s refrain that King was not assassinated for dreaming, Belton wrote, “MLK did not die because he wanted someone to paint a wall.” Fighting the “racist, classist status quo” led to his assassination.³⁸ Armed with new technologies such as mobile smart phones and digital cameras, and by organising over social media on the Internet and Twitter, activists could use the Holiday to highlight police brutality. Under “the banner of the Black Lives Matter movement, the activists shared each other’s protest through hash tags like #ReclaimMLK and #MLKStrike.” The Fast Food

³³ Michael Paulson, “Dr King’s Birthday Highlights Divisions Instead of Dream,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 2015, 10.

³⁴ Paulson, “Dr King’s Birthday Highlights Divisions Instead of Dream,” 10.

³⁵ Jeff Gammage, Aubrey Whelan, and Matt Gelb, “2 Visions of King’s Legacy: March Asserts His Message of Resistance as Others Work to Quietly Address Problems,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 January 2015, 1; Gammage, Whelan, and Gelb, “2 Vision’s of King’s Legacy,” 23.

³⁶ Danielle C. Belton, “#ReclaimMLK Seeks to Combat the Sanitizing of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Legacy,” *The Root*, 19 January 2015.

³⁷ Louis A. Ruprecht, “Cornell West: Do Not ‘Santa-Clausify’ MLK Jr.,” <http://religiondispatches.org/cornel-west-do-not-santa-clausify-mlk-jr/>, accessed 6 April 2015.

³⁸ Belton, “#ReclaimMLK.”

Forward campaign, fighting for the rights of poorly paid food workers picketed “with striking airport workers in Boston and Atlanta” on the Holiday.³⁹

These twenty-first century protests were reminiscent of King’s. One activist claimed “the official [Holiday] celebrations are inside events in churches and for politicians” but “we should also be in the streets – where he was. That’s the reclaiming of it.”⁴⁰ Protest occurred throughout New York, with subway sit-ins in Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan. There was a die-in outside the Staten Island Ferry, to protest the death of Eric Garner at the hands of the police, and even a protest outside the Metropolitan Correctional Center. Not only did the killings of Michael Brown and Garner motivate activists, but the failure to indict police outraged protestors. One activist, Larry Holmes from the New York People’s Power Assembly, denounced the mass incarceration and harassment of blacks. Holmes urged an “end to this police war against black and brown young people.”⁴¹ #ReclaimMLK, in tandem with MLKStrike, sought to revitalise King’s radical legacy on the 2015 Holiday.⁴²

In contrast, on the 2015 Holiday the King family was embroiled in a bitter battle over the sale of King’s Bible and Nobel Peace Prize, estimated to be worth ten million dollars. Bernice King, the King’s youngest child, sought to preserve the legacy with dignity while Dexter and Martin III sided against her.⁴³ The family was mocked and even the conservative *National Review Online* published an article titled, ‘We Have a Brand.’⁴⁴ The King Estate had also prevented the producers of recent hit film *Selma* from using King’s words, as they had been licenced to Steven Spielberg’s DreamWorks. *Selma* director Ava Du Vernay decided against using King’s words, due to the risk of litigation. A former colleague of King’s, Bill Rutherford, thought, “King must be spinning in his grave,” since “he attempted his entire life to communicate ideas for free.” Yet, in the words of Isaac Farris, King’s nephew, “we cannot allow our *brand* to be abused.”⁴⁵

At the final Commission meeting, Coretta stated that “the legacy is in good hands,” but the recent attempt to sell King’s Bible and Peace Prize demeans that legacy.⁴⁶ Most recently, Dexter attempted to force Bernice from her leadership position at the King Center by threatening to deny that famous institution the right to use the name, image and likeness of their father, if she were not removed from the Center. If successful, according to *Newsweek*, “The King Center would not even

³⁹ Geoff Gilbert, “MLK’s Radical Vision Got Distorted: Here’s His Real Legacy on Militarism and Inequality,” *Salon*, http://www.salon.com/2015/01/19/mlks_radical_vision_got_distorted_heres_his_real_legacy_on_militarism_inequality/ 20 January 2015, accessed 3 May 2016.

⁴⁰ Gilbert, “MLK’s Radical Vision Got Distorted.”

⁴¹ O’Malley, “Ferguson is a City of Guns,” 26-27.

⁴² Paulson, “New Generation Invokes Power of Protest at Martin Luther King Holiday Events.”

⁴³ “King’s Family Feud Over ‘Sacred’ Bible, Medal,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 2015, 13.

⁴⁴ John Fund, “We Have a Brand,” *National Review Online*, 4 January 2015.

⁴⁵ Fund, “We Have a Brand.”; *Selma*, Ava DuVernay, (Paramount, 2014)

⁴⁶ “King’s Family Feud,” 13; “Final Commission/Corporation Meeting,” 5 September 1996, 77-78.

be allowed to call itself the King Center.”⁴⁷ It has fallen to those outside the family to continue King’s activism. Civil Rights activist C. T. Vivian, who protested at Selma in 1965, asserts that King “outlined the tasks for the 21st century” and that those tasks are, “the end of racism, the end of poverty, the end of war.”⁴⁸ These words ring true and as the nation moves towards the fiftieth anniversary of King’s assassination, a new generation attempts to complete his unfinished agenda.

⁴⁷ Kurt Eichenwald, “The Family Feud Over Martin Luther King Jr.’s Legacy.” *Newsweek*, 3 April 2014, <file:///Users/c3156815/Desktop/The%20Family%20Feud%20Over%20Martin%20Luther%20King%20Jr.'s%20Legacy.html>, accessed 1 September 2015

⁴⁸ C.T. Vivian, *Martin Luther King Jr.: 21st Century Man* (New York: The Limited Editions Club, 2011), 21.

Appendix I

King Holiday Votes – Results Tables

5 Dec 1979

McClory (Monday) Amendment

	D	R	Total
Y	217	74	291
N	33	73	106
DNV	21	15	36
	271	162	433
Y%	80	45.5	67
N%	12	45	24.5
DNV%*	8	9.5	8.5

5 Dec 1979

Beard (Sunday) Amendment

	D	R	Total
Y	84	123	207
N	166	25	191
DNV	21	14	35
	271	162	433
Y%	31	76	48
N%	61	15.5	44
DNV%	8	8.5	8

2 Aug 1983 – House

	D	R	Total
Yes	250	88	338
No	15	75	90
DNV	4	1	5
	269	164	433
Y%	93	53.5	78
N%	5.5	46	21
DNV%	1.5	0.5	1

19 Oct 1983 – Senate

	D	R	Total
Y	41	37	78
N	4	18	22
	45	55	100
Y%	91	67	78
N%	9	33	22

* DNV = Did Not Vote

5 Dec 1979 - McClory (Monday) Amendment

	D	R	Total
Yes	217	74	291
No	33	73	106
DNV	21	15	36
	271	162	433

Yes%	80	46	67
No%	12	45	24.5
DNV%	8	9	8.5

Vote by Party and Region

Democrats

Yes	217	80%
No	33	12%
DNV	21	8%
Total	271	

Republicans

Yes	74	46%
No	73	45%
DNV	15	9%
Total	162	

54% of Republicans did not vote for holiday

Democrats By Region – McClory

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y	57	75	44	41	217
N	1	24	6	2	33
DNV	7	5	7	2	21
Total	65	104	57	45	271

Democrat - What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote - McClory

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y%	26	34.5	20.5	19	100
N%	3	73	18	6	100
DNV%	33.5	24	33.5	9	100

Democrat - % of How Region Voted – McClory

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	88	72	77	91
%	1.5	23	10.5	4.5
%	10.5	5	12.5	4.5
	100	100	100	100

Republicans, By Region – McClory

	NE	S	MW	W	Total
YES	28	14	21	11	74
NO	6	24	24	19	73
DNV	3	2	9	1	15
Total	37	40	54	31	162

Republicans – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote - McClory

	NE	S	MW	W	Total
Y%	38	19	28	15	100
N%	8	33	33	26	100
DNV%	20	13	60	7	100

Republicans – What % of the Region Voted for and Against the Holiday

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	76	35	39	35.5
N%	16	60	44.5	61
DNV%	8	5	16.5	3.5
	100	100	100	100

5 Dec 1979 - Beard (Sunday) Amendment

Democrat – Comparison between McClory (Monday) and Beard (Sunday) Amendments

Table illustrates how the votes changed. The far left column describes the flow of votes from the way politicians vote in on the McClory amendment to the way they voted in regard to the Beard amendment.

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y Mon to Y Sun	8	31	8	5	52
N Mon to Y Sun	1	22	6	2	31
DNV to Y Sun		1			1
Y Mon to N Sun	48	43	36	36	163
N Mon & N Sun		2			2
DNV to N Sun			1		1
Y Mon to DNV	1	1			2
DNV & DNV	7	4	6	2	19
	64	103	57	45	271

Republican – Comparison between McClory (Monday) and Beard (Sunday) Amendments

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y Mon to Y Sun	15	11	16	10	52
N Mon to Y Sun	6	24	22	18	70
DNV to Y Sun			1		1
Y Mon to N Sun	13	3	5	1	22
N Mon & N Sun			2	1	3
DNV & DNV	3	2	8	1	14
Total	37	40	54	31	162

2 Aug 1983 - House

	D	R	Total
Yes	250	88	338
No	15	75	90
DNV	4	1	5
	269	164	433
Y%	93	53.5	78
N%	5.5	46	21
DNV%	1.5	0.5	1

Democrats by Region – House 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Yes	55	97	54	44	250
No	0	13	1	1	15
DNV	2			2	4
	57	110	55	47	269

Democrats – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote – House 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y%	22	39	21.5	17.5	100
N%	0	87	6.5	6.5	100
DVN%	50			50	100

Democrats – What % of the Region Voted for and Against the Holiday – House 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	96.5	88	98	94
N%		12	2	2
DVN%	3.5			4
	100	100	100	100

Republicans, by Region – House 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y	27	17	31	13	88
N	10	24	16	25	75
DNV			1		1
	37	41	48	38	164

Republican – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote – House 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y%	31	19	35	15	100
N%	13.5	32	21.5	33	100

Republican – What % of the Region Voted for and Against the Holiday – House 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	73	41.5	64.5	34
N%	27	58.5	33.5	66
DNV			2	
	100	100	100	100

19 Oct 1983 – Senate

	D	R	Total
Y	41	37	78
N	4	18	22
	45	55	100
Y%	91	67	78
N%	9	33	22

Total Number of Democrat and Republican Senators, by Region – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Total	18	37	22	23	100

Democrat Votes, by Region – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y	9	17	7	8	41
N	0	2	2	0	4

Democrats – What % of the Region Voted for the Holiday – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	100	89.5	78	100

Democrats – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Y%	22	41.5	17	19.5	100
N%	0	50	50	0	100

Republican Votes, by region – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W	
Yes	7	13	9	8	37
No	2	5	4	7	18

Republicans – What % of the Region Voted for the Holiday – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	78	72	69	53

Republicans – What % Each Region Contributed to the Total Vote – Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	19	35	24	21.5
N%	11	28	22	39

Democrats, by % - Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	100	88	71.5	100
N%	0	12	28	0
	100	100	100	100

Republicans, by % - Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	71.5	61.5	55.5	12.5
N%	28.5	38.5	44.5	87.5
	100	100	100	100

Combined Democrat and Republican, by % - Senate 1983

	NE	S	MW	W
Y%	89	81	73	69.5
N%	11	19	27	30.5
	100	100	100	100

Appendix II

1986 List of Commissioners and Attendance

CM = Commission meeting

EX = Executive Committee meeting

OS = Oversight Committee meeting

A = Commissioner personally attended

P = Commissioner sent a proxy to attend

	25 Mar	22 Apr	15 May	20 May	24 Jun	29 Jul	18 Sep	9 Oct	24 Oct	2 Jan	4 Mar	23 Mar	23 Jun
	CM	EX	OS	CM	EX	CM	CM	Ex/Cm	CM	CM	CM	EX	CM
Coretta	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Thompson	P	P	P	P	P	P	P			P		A	
Armstrong											P		
Courter													P
Davenport	P	A		A	A		A	A	P	A	A	P	P
Dole							P	P					P
Douglas			A	A	A	A	A	A	A				
Farris King		A				A	A	A			A		
Finley		P				P		P					P
Futrell	P	A		A	P	A	P	A				P	
Gray								P				P	
Hall													
Hill	A		P	A		A							
Hollings				P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

Jefferson	P	P			P		P						
Kennedy							P				P		
King							A		A				
Lafontant						A		A	A			P	
Leland						P	P	P			P		
Levi													
Lowery						P	P						
Mathias							P	P	P	P	P		
Moore	A			A	A	P	A	A	A	A			A
Obledo	A		P					P					
Pendleton													
Randall	A			A		A	A			A	P		
Regula		Y	P	A	P	A	A	A	P	P	P	P	A
Shannon													
Uberroth	P				P			P		P	P		P
Wonder	P	P		P	P	P							
Young						A							

Appendix III

Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commissioners (1985-1996)

1985-1986

Chairperson
Coretta Scott King

Vice Chairperson
Governor James R. Thompson

George W. Armstrong
Rep. Jim A. Courter
Lawrence F. Davenport
Sen. Robert Dole
Rosslee Green Douglas
Christine King Farris
Murray Finley
Mary Hatwoold Futrell
Rep. William H. Gray III
Katie Hall
Jesse Hill Jr.
Sen. Ernest F. Hollings
Edward G. Jefferson
Sen. Edward Kennedy
Yolanda King
Jewel S. Lafontant
Rep. Mickey Leland
Edward Hirsch Levi
Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery
Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr.
Gregory T. Moore
Marion Obledo
Clarence M. Pendleton Jr.
Claire Randall
Rep. Ralph Regula
James P. Shannon
Peter V. Ueberroth
Stevie Wonder
Andrew Young

1987

Chairperson
Coretta Scott King

Vice Chairperson
Governor Thomas H. Kean

Rev. Ralph Abernathy
Marion Barry
Jack Kent Cooke
Dr. Arie Brouwer
Lawrence F. Davenport
Sen. Robert Dole
Christine King Farris
Murray Finley
Mary Hatwood Futrell
Rep. William H. Gray III
Rep. Katie Hall
Jesse Hill Jr.
Sen Ernest F. Hollings
Rev. Benjamin Hooks
Rev. T. J. Jemison
Rep. Jack Kemp
Sen. Edward Kennedy
James Kerrigan
Yolanda King
Jewel S. Lafontant
Rep. Mickey Leland
Rev. Dr. Joseph E. Lowery
Sen. Charles McC. Mathias Jr.
Albert Nellum
Marion Obledo
Michael A. Pelavin
Clarence M. Pendleton Jr.
Thomas Swan
Mitch Snyder
Rep. Ralph Regula
Gov. James R. Thompson
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<i>Atlanta Journal Constitution</i>	<i>New York Amsterdam News</i>
<i>Arizona Republic</i>	<i>The New Yorker</i>
<i>Arkansas Democrat Gazette</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
<i>Birmingham News</i>	<i>The Oregonian</i>
<i>Boston Globe</i>	<i>Orlando Sentinel</i>
<i>Charlotte Observer</i>	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>
<i>Christian Science Monitor</i>	<i>Richmond Times – Dispatch</i>
<i>Chicago Sun-Times</i>	<i>Salon</i>
<i>Chicago Tribune</i>	<i>Star Tribune</i>
<i>Clarion-Ledger</i>	<i>The Sun</i>
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<i>Irish Times</i>	<i>Toronto Star</i>
<i>Jackson Daily News</i>	<i>Time</i>
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