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The Sixtieth Anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" Speech

Martin Luther King Jr. and Julius K. Nyerere's Shared Dreams for Racial Equality and Human Dignity

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Abstract
This article parallels Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream for civil, economic, and racial equality in the USA with Julius K. Nyerere's unrelenting liberation struggle for the emancipation of Southern Africa from colonial shackles. I write this article fully cognizant of King's belief that what united the minority and colonial peoples of America, African, and Asia was the struggle to overcome the legacy of colonialism and racial injustice. I therefore argue that King's dream was a shared dream, which I analyze through the prism of liberation theology.

Keywords
Stephen Biko, Martin Luther King Jr., liberation struggle, nonviolent resistance, Julius K. Nyerere, racial equality, racial justice, shared dream

Introduction

Three months before Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, a servant of God and president of Tanganyika (1962) and the United Republic of Tanzania (1964), was joined by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and twenty-eight other heads of independent African states to rally the African continent to constitute a unified body

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against a common enemy—colonialism. They institutionalized this body through the Charter for the Organization of African Unity (OAU) signed on May 25, 1963. The OAU, which morphed into the African Union (AU) in 2002 following the Sirte Declaration of September 9, 1999, was "Africa's first post-independence continental institution."[1] One may argue, as does James H. Cone, that King's leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott inspired many African, Caribbean, and Asian countries in their fight against imperialism. However, it is significant to note that at the time of King's inspirational "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963, more than twenty-eight African countries had attained political independence.[2]

In this article I parallel the theology and methodology behind King's dream for civil, economic, and racial equality in the United States with Nyerere's unrelenting struggle to liberate Southern Africa from colonial shackles. This liberation from colonial shackles is not to be equated with Black consciousness, defined by Bantu Stephen Biko[3] as "the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude."[4] Instead, such an emancipation must be understood in an intersectional way, considering cultural, psychological, religious, political, economic, and social lenses. Above all, this liberation must be conceived as a conversion of the mind and heart, and hence in need of liberated minds to ensure human dignity.[5]

I start by situating King's dream within a larger context of Black consciousness against the racial injustice and dehumanizing inequality strongly opposed by W. E. B. Du Bois and by King himself. But I also want to link this discussion with Julius Nyerere's unrelenting struggle for the liberation of Africa, specifically Southern Africa. I argue that King's and Nyerere's approaches to racial justice were influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence. Furthermore, I will identify this struggle's theological underpinnings by drawing on Nyerere's *Ujamaa* ethics, King's commitment to nonviolence, and Biko's conviction that Black consciousness would unite Blacks in the fight for emancipation. I conclude by showing how King's dream influenced Southern Africa's struggle for self-rule and how King's dream was in turn inspired by his encounters with African leaders like Nkrumah and Nyerere, whose

1. African Union, "About the African Union," https://au.int/en/overview.
2. See James H. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 2 (1987): 455–67 at 455, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1900033.
3. Commonly known as Steve Biko, he was a young Anglican layman and founder of the 1960s Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.
4. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, ed. Aelred Stubbs (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978), 49.
5. For a deeper understanding of Biko's philosophy of Black consciousness, read Steve Biko, *The Testimony of Steve Biko*, ed. Millard Arnold (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1979), i–xxv. See also Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography* (Cape Town: Fafelberg, 2012).

commitment to human dignity and racial equality contributed to a better African continent.

I write this article mindful of King's assertion that "the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism."[6] His dream was therefore a shared ideal that I analyze through the prism of liberation theology.

Contextualizing King's Dream

Black mobilization cannot be fully accounted for without giving due credit to W. E. B. Du Bois. A committed member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a leading Black sociologist, activist, researcher, and publisher, Du Bois fervently believed that African Americans should stand tall and be counted among the human races. To realize this belief, he established the American Negro Academy for the formation of the Black person's character—including virtues such as integrity, impartiality, and leadership.[7] He believed that the academy's moral and social focus would be incomplete without a practical dimension and thus he developed the "Academy Creed." The creed's seven objectives included striving "in every honorable way for the realization of the best and highest aims, for the development of strong manhood and pure womanhood, and for the rearing of a race ideal in America and Africa, to the glory of God and the uplifting of the Negro people."[8] I believe the creed's objectives set the stage for the liberation of the Black race in Africa and the Americas. So, I suggest that King's dream be understood in the context of Du Bois's Academy Creed.[9]

Du Bois died at age ninety-five in Ghana on August 27, 1963, one day before King's "I Have a Dream" speech marking the one-hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The close proximity of the two events is apt: the ideals inspiring Du Bois's Academy Creed for God's glory and the "uplifting of the Negro people" continues in King's own dream. Within the African context, 1963

6. Martin Luther King Jr., "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 24.
7. W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 84.
8. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 86. For a political economic reading of how Du Bois and King approached empowerment of Black males for better economic justice in the US context, see Adebayo Odungbure, "The Political Economy of Niggerdom: W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King Jr. on the Racial and Economic Discrimination of Black Males in America," *Journal of Black Studies* 50, no. 3 (2019): 273–97, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26985170.
9. My assertion is backed by King's determination to overcome Black self-loathing with a sense of pride in being Black. For details, see Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 130–42.

witnessed the founding of the OAU, whose main objective—spearheaded by Nyerere, *inter alia*—was to disentangle "Africa from the vestiges of colonization and apartheid."[10] But 1963 was also a turning point in the struggle of America's Blacks to finally realize their constitutional rights. King states that this pivotal year in the political consciousness of Blacks in America was a result of observing "the drama of Negro process elsewhere in the world," where voting and self-governance had become a reality while it remained a dream for Blacks in the United States.[11]

Nyerere's resistance against white supremacy, on the other hand, dates back to the late 1940s and early 1950s, when he was a student at Edinburgh University in Scotland. In an extract from an unpublished pamphlet, Nyerere stated that Eastern and Southern Africa's challenge is that of "a white minority which sincerely believes that democracy's cardinal foundation is the will of the people, but which refuses to let the term 'the people' include non-Europeans."[12] Gunnar Myrdal made a similar comment in reference to slavery, stating that upholding slavery while claiming all men are created equal implicitly means that slaves do not fit into the category of "all men."[13]

An ardent believer in racial equality and the dignity of all, Nyerere was convinced that so long as political power remains in the hands of a minority that employs it "to keep those other communities in a state of social and economic inferiority, any talk of social and economic advancement of the other communities as a solution of racial conflict is hypocritical and stupid."[14] So, like Nkrumah—who stated in 1957 that "the independence of Ghana was incomplete until the whole of Africa was free"[15]—Nyerere believed that Tanzania could not be truly independent if any African state remained under colonial rule. In his address to the United Nations on December 14, 1961, Nyerere stated that "it is not possible for Tanganyika to remain an island of freedom and peace surrounded by troubled and unfreed areas."[16] He affirmed that Tanganyika's independence from British colonial rule "meant a step towards [British] achievement of complete independence and freedom because [he believed] that no country is completely free if it keeps other people in a state of unfreedom."[17] So, for Nyerere, the fight against poverty, illiteracy, and disease in his own country went hand in hand with the struggle to liberate Southern African states from colonial rule. President Jimmy Carter described Nyerere as an ardent and passionate leader "recognized as preeminent in his commitment to the hopes and purposes of free people,"[18] and "a man who

10. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," 24.
11. Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), 22.
12. Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1952–65* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1966), 27.
13. Gunnar Myrdal, "Racial Beliefs in America," in Back and Solomos, *Theories of Race and Racism*, 87–91.
14. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 24.
15. Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Socialism: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1965–1967* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968), 144.
16. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 153.
17. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 144.
18. Julius K. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968), 6.

has deep religious convictions and who has been successful in his own country in translating those convictions into demonstrable concern about freedom, justice, equality, [and] the alleviation of hunger, poverty and disease."[19] It is therefore clear that Nyerere's dream for racial equality, freedom, and a united human race predates King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

One of King's many dreams was ending racial discrimination despite the enduring challenges facing American society. His dream was "deeply rooted in the American dream" and "the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."[20] On June 6, 1961, King quoted the Declaration of Independence at length to emphasize the fact that all people "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."[21] While King discerned the universality and inclusiveness of this dream and its nondiscriminatory nature, he also recognized the God-given rights that every individual has regardless of race, religion, color, or gender.[22] Self-evident and divinely endowed as these truths may be, the US still looks at "people of color" with morally squinted eyes. That is why King's struggle to ensure social and racial justice and rid the US of human rights abuses against Blacks focused on ensuring that American society "is stricken gloriously and incurably color-blind."[23] The recent racially motivated killings of Blacks—which have revitalized the claim for Black citizens' divinely instituted rights as a ground for their human dignity and the fact that "Black lives matter" and "Black voters matter"—demonstrate that the fight for racial justice has a long way to go.[24] It is still a dream and, as King stated when referring to Myrdal, the American dream remains the "American dilemma."[25] It also remains a "nightmare" due to the enduring racial injustice that King decried in his 1967 Christmas sermon.[26]

Methodological Approaches toward Racial Justice

King and Nyerere privileged nonviolence over a violent liberation struggle. King's nonviolent resistance, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, undergirded the 1955 bus boycott

19. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 6.
20. King, "I Have a Dream," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 219.
21. King, "The American Dream," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 208.
22. King, "The American Dream," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 208. See also Martin Luther King Jr., "The American Dream," *Negro History Bulletin* 31, no. 5 (1968): 10–15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24767159, and Beverly Eileen Mitchell, *Black Abolitionism: A Quest for Human Dignity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 148–54.
23. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr. (1965)," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 374.
24. Richard Newton, "Scared Sheetless: Negrophobia, the Fear of God, and Justified Violence in the U.S. Christian-White Imaginary," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 7, no. 3 (2019): 312, https://doi.org/10.5840/jrv202031172.
25. King, "The American Dream," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 208.
26. Eric J. Sundquist, *King's Dream* (New York: Yale University Press, 2009), 20.

in Montgomery, Alabama.[27] During his seminary training, King became aware of the intersection between "the Christian doctrine of love" and "the Gandhian method of non-violence" in the struggle against oppression.[28] At the end of his 1959 trip to India, he was "more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom."[29] He concretely reiterated the success of a nonviolent struggle, noting "the magnificent example of Gandhi who challenged the might of the British Empire and won independence for his people using only the weapons of truth, noninjury, courage and soul force."[30]

King applied Gandhi's nonviolent approach to the Montgomery boycott, which he considered more successful than Sunday morning sermons.[31] He deemed nonviolent resistance courageous because it fights forces of evil peacefully and spiritually, and with nonconfrontational physical docility. Its purpose is friendship, mutual understanding, and a reconciled and redeemed community.[32] The success of King's nonviolent strategy led the city of Montgomery to end bus segregation after it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in November 1956.[33]

King was such a strong believer in nonviolent resistance that, though he understood oppressed people's resort to violence as a search for freedom, he was convinced that Africa's struggle for dignified self-rule would be more effective if it were "waged along the lines that were first demonstrated in that continent by Gandhi himself."[34] James H. Cone has argued that one of King's disappointments was the fact that most African countries turned to arms rather than nonviolence in their struggle for independence.[35] Violence as a means of overcoming injustice also occurred in the Northeast United States, where advocates like Malcolm X regarded nonviolence as a betrayal of justice for oppressed African Americans.[36]

27. Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, First Perennial Library edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 78–80.
28. Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love*, Fortress Press Gift edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 159. For an account of how his seminary and doctoral studies influenced his subsequent work, see John J. Ansbro, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).
29. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," 25.
30. King, "An Address Before the National Press Club (1962)," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 103. See also Rufus Burrow Jr., *Extremist for Love: Martin Luther King Jr., Man of Ideas and Nonviolent Social Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 221–82.
31. King, "An Experiment in Love," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 17. This ecumenically organized boycott occurred on Mondays and Thursdays every week.
32. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, 84.
33. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, 140–44.
34. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," 26. While King strongly advocated for nonviolent action, some scholars have argued that his organized protests often resulted in violence. See James A. Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Paradox of Nonviolent Direct Action," *Phylon (1960–)* 47, no. 1 (1986): 16–28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/274691.
35. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 462.
36. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 462. For details on violent approaches to the search for freedom and racial justice in the US, see James H. Cone, "Martin and Malcom on Nonviolence and Violence," *Phylon (1960–)* 49, no. 3/4 (2001): 173–83, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3132627.

Nyerere, a believer in nonviolence, unremittingly yet nonviolently fought colonialism, regarding it as a degradation. In his fight for dignified freedom, he employed honest and transparent methods.[37] However, though Nyerere was committed to nonviolent struggle for independence and liberation from racialism and colonialism, he did not believe there were no exceptions. A violent struggle could be justified if all efforts at negotiation and mediation had failed—a sentiment that evokes the just war theory. He repeatedly stated this belief with regard to the liberation of Rhodesia from British rule and Namibia from domination and illegal occupation by South Africa.[38] With the formation of the Frontline States (FLS) and the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), Nyerere and his allies were determined to liberate South Africa from apartheid[39] and free white-minority-ruled Rhodesia from the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) led by then-Prime Minister Ian Smith.[40]

Theological Motivation for the Struggle

King saw racial equality and the fight against institutionalized segregation as a spiritual struggle anchored in love and strengthened by prayer.[41] He clearly stated that segregation was immoral and a cancerous hindrance to the realization of the transcendental values of Judeo-Christian heritage.[42] His understanding of love as *agape* in its rich biblical sense allowed him to distinguish the evildoer who remains the beloved of God from the evil done that must be overcome to set the evildoer free.[43] For him, success would be a nonracial "victory for justice and a defeat of injustice . . . a victory for goodness in its long struggle with the forces of evil."[44] Therefore, nonviolence became the primary method of his struggle for racial justice, following the example of Jesus of Nazareth.[45] King maintained that "Christ furnished the spirit and motivation and Gandhi furnished the method."[46] Deeply rooted in faith and God's unfailing love, nonviolence was thus a gospel imperative without which humanity's greatest dreams

37. Nyerere, *Freedom and Unity*, 59.
38. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 6. See also Julius K. Nyerere, Bob Clark, and Bill Matney, "Nyerere Discusses Crisis in Southern Africa," *The Black Scholar* 8, no. 2 (1976): 10–16, 57–59, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41066070.
39. South African History Online, "Frontline States," https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/frontline-states.
40. Julius K. Nyerere, "Rhodesia in the Context of Southern Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 44, no. 3 (1966): 373–86, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/zimbabwe/1966-04-01/rhodesia-context-southern-africa.
41. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, 114–18.
42. King, "The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 147.
43. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, 86–88.
44. King, "Walk for Freedom," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 83.
45. King, *Stride toward Freedom*, 48.
46. King, *Strength to Love*, 160.

would be rendered futile.[47] King insisted that "non-violence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek."[48] For him, fighting unjust laws that barred peaceful and moral demonstrations against "perpetual injustice and segregation" was deeply grounded in "God's law as well as with the spirit of [a] non-violent direct-action program."[49] This program would only be rendered irrelevant by the "presence of justice."[50]

Though a staunch believer in nonviolence, King, like Nyerere, was not naïve. He warned America that it would

> be faced with the ever-present threat of violence, riots and senseless crime as long as the Negros by the hundreds of thousands are packed into malodorous, rat-plagued ghettos; as long as Negroes remain smothered by poverty in the midst of an affluent society; as long as Negroes see their freedom endlessly delayed and diminished by the winds of tokenism and small handouts from the white power structure.[51]

He was aware of the root causes of the minority's suffering under segregationist supremacist laws, but he anchored his unrelenting struggle in faith, hope, and love, and in the paradoxical but unfailing liberating power of God.[52]

As a theologian and minister, King's nonviolent struggle for racial equality was not only motivated by the Gospel. King drew widely from his systematic theological and philosophical training, as well as from the social, anthropological, scientific, and biological research that refuted white supremacists' superior race theory mainly propagated by Nazi scientists.[53] Contrary to the German scientists' view of a superior race, medical science had demonstrated that the blood of the entire human race, regardless of skin color, fell into four blood types.[54] Nonetheless, in my view, a cautionary reading of a biological account of races remains imperative, otherwise one risks forming another caste based on blood types. As Myrdal critically remarks, "the fateful word *race*" is as recent as the so-called Enlightenment era.[55] In his view, it remains a "biological ideology" used as "an intellectual explanation of, and a moral apology for, slavery in a society which went out emphatically to invoke as its highest principles the ideals of the inalienable rights of all men to freedom and equality of opportunity."[56] So, while blood types cut across the so-called racial groups, a biological account of races is not sufficient to address the issue of racial inequality.

47. King, *Strength to Love*, 159.
48. King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 301.
49. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 357.
50. King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 147.
51. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 360.
52. King, *Strength to Love*, 87–97.
53. King, *Strength to Love*, 158.
54. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 358.
55. Myrdal, "Racial Beliefs in America," 91.
56. Myrdal, "Racial Beliefs in America," 91.

King regarded racial tensions as the greatest moral dilemma in American society. But he equally saw it as a paradox among Christian believers who preferred silence to speaking out against injustice. This led him to state that "the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition is not the glaring noisiness of the so-called bad people, but the appalling silence of the so-called good people."[57] In a more poignant and sharp criticism of the church's silence, he stated with a great sense of shame that the church was "the most segregated major institution in America."[58] Unfortunately, this segregation was not only physical but also markedly theological—a fact that appalled King. He abhorred that churches had committed "themselves to otherworldly religion which made a strange distinction between body and soul, the sacred and the secular," thereby considering the social Gospel of no concern to them.[59] In other words, he called upon church leaders to adhere to the Gospel message by becoming active messengers of justice and peace, and not remaining as bystanders. He envisioned a model of the church as "a thermostat of society" rather than simply its "thermometer."[60] In the former, the church shapes how people think and react to injustice; in the latter, the church measures in a disengaged fashion how people go about their day-to-day affairs.[61]

Nyerere made a similar call to action on October 16, 1970, when addressing the Maryknoll Sisters during their Congress at their headquarters in Ossining, New York. In what has been termed his "ecclesiological challenge,"[62] Nyerere cautioned the church and its organizations against acting as if human development was individualistic with no social or economic dimensions. He advocated for the human agency of every person, especially the poor, and warned the church against turning them into objects of charity construed as handouts. In his view, this was tantamount to preaching "resignation" by accepting the social, political, and economic status quo of the present-day world. In place of this gospel of resignation, Nyerere suggested that the church be actively involved in "the rebellion against social structures and economic organizations which condemn men to poverty, humiliation and degradation."[63]

A similar voice was heard in South Africa a few years later. At a May 1972 conference in Edendale, South Africa, the South African activist Bantu Stephen Biko cautioned a group of Black clergy against delivering sermons "every Sunday to heap loads of blame on black people in townships for their thieving, house-breaking, stabbing, murdering, adultery, etc.," without ever trying to "relate all these vices to poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, lack of schooling and migratory labour."[64] Biko wanted

57. King, "The Current Crisis in Race Relations," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 89. See also King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 136–37.
58. King, "An Address Before the National Press Club," 101.
59. King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 299.
60. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 345.
61. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 345.
62. See Laurenti Magesa, "Nyerere's Ecclesiological Challenge," in Magesa, *The Prophetic Role of the Church in Tanzania Today* (Eldoret: Gaba Publications, 1991), 76–94.
63. Julius K. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1968–1973* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1973), 215.
64. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 57.

the clergy to analyze the root causes of these vices—that is, the structural and systemic injustice in South Africa.[65] He invited them to engage in Black theology, which should be "committed to eradicating all causes of suffering as represented in the death of children from starvation, outbreaks of epidemics in poor areas, or the existence of thuggery and vandalism in townships."[66] Seven years earlier, in his January 1965 interview with *Playboy*, King indicated that the root cause of Black frustration and worry rested in "slum housing, chronic poverty, woefully inadequate education, and substandard schools."[67] I see in Nyerere, Biko, and King—the three great advocates of human rights—a synergy of thought and mindfulness, which King called a "restless determination"[68] to ensure that all people live in harmonious relationships as brothers and sisters who partake at the table of freedom, justice, and equality.

Aware of and inspired by the biblical significance of dreams,[69] one sees in King's speech a divine reminder that racial injustice does not simply violate the US Constitution, which prizes the dignity and equality of all, but also disfigures persons created in the image and likeness of God. Such disfiguration also taints who God is and what God stands for in the face of the oppressed and marginalized. To paraphrase King, the church that does not address injustice injures the body of Christ.[70] In the case of South Africa, such injustices included regarding women as minors with no right to vote let alone sign their own documents, own land, or speak for themselves.[71] When churchgoers—or spiritualists, as Anthony Bellagamba terms them—see religion as having nothing to do with world affairs, they create a false dichotomy between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, religion and politics, the sacred and profane, and, at a more profound christological level, they introduce a separation of the human and divine that the Incarnation reconciled in the person of Christ.[72] For Nyerere, this kind of religiosity or Christian worldview would "degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful . . . and be identified with injustice and persecution" of the oppressed.[73]

In Biko's words, religion should desist from preaching to people that they endure human-inflicted suffering.[74] In his own words, "God is not in the habit of coming

65. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 57.
66. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 59.
67. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 360. See also King, *Where Do We Go from Here*, 126.
68. King, "An Address Before the National Press Club," 101.
69. For a detailed account of how biblical dreams inspired King's "I Have a Dream" speech, see Sundquist, *King's Dream*, 23.
70. King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 300.
71. Joyce Hollyday, "We Carry the Cross Close to Us: An Interview with Motlalepula Chabaku," in *Crucible of Fire: The Church Confronts Apartheid*, ed. Jim Wallis and Joyce Hollyday (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Washington, DC: Sojourners, 1989), 94, 98.
72. Anthony Bellagamba, "Spirituality and Liberation," in *Towards African Christian Liberation*, ed. Leonard Namwera (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1990), 248–49. See also Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013).
73. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development*, 215–16.
74. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 59.

down from heaven to solve human problems on earth."[75] Put differently by King, "by endowing us with freedom, God relinquished a measure of his own sovereignty and imposed certain limitations upon himself."[76] The call to live the social Gospel can be summed up by King's warning that any "religion that is concerned only for the [human] souls and is not equally concerned about the slums that damn them, the economic conditions that strangle them, and the social conditions that cripple them is a spiritually moribund religion."[77] Cone comments that King realized that "poverty, racism and militarism" were interconnected when he came to terms with the fact that not everyone agreed with his nonviolent resistance to racial injustice.[78] Similarly, Nyerere regarded whatever undermines human dignity as "physical and spiritual slums"[79] that the church must dismantle to set people on a path toward God's image and likeness,[80] the lack of which leads to what Myrdal terms deformation of "the body and soul of the people."[81]

So, like King, Nyerere believed in the kind of God and in a confession of faith that takes salvation (both earthly and heavenly) seriously by according everyone the dignity they deserve. This dignity can be promoted if the church becomes "a force of social justice" and cooperates "with other forces of social justice wherever they are, and whatever they are called."[82] Nyerere invited church members to play this salvific role fully aware of the clergy and religious leaders in Latin America, Spain, Rhodesia, and South Africa who worked in solidarity with the poor. He was equally conscious that a number of these priests had been martyred or persecuted, and sadly, that others had been ostracized by church leadership. But he maintained that they were all "redeeming the reputation of Catholicism and organized Christianity," as they demonstrated and witnessed to the Gospel "even if it is at the cost of great sacrifice."[83]

Nyerere, like King, held that in the face of enforced poverty and injustice besetting the poor, the church's "kindness is not enough; piety is not enough; and charity is not

75. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 60.
76. King, *Strength to Love*, 83–84.
77. King, *Strength to Love*, 159.
78. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 462. See also an excerpt of his lecture at the University of Oslo on December 11, 1964, following his Nobel Peace Prize award in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (London: Abacus, 2000), 261.
79. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development*, 219.
80. On the church's prophetic and redemptive role against oppressive regimes, see Desmond Tutu's April 8, 1988, letter in response to P. W. Botha's personal letter to him dated March 16, 1988. The two letters appear as an appendix in Wallis and Hollyday, eds., *Crucible of Fire*, 144–47, 156–63.
81. Myrdal, "Racial Beliefs in America," 95.
82. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development*, 219.
83. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development*, 222. On the call for the church to remain prophetic, see also King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 300. In the case of South Africa, see Wallis and Hollyday, eds., "Your Days are Over! A Sermon by Allan Boesak," in *Crucible of Fire*, 23–31.

enough."[84] He believed, like Jon Sobrino,[85] that the church's role in such social conditions is to uplift the oppressed and empower them to stand on their own. In other words, for Nyerere, the impoverished should not simply come to the church for handouts "but for support against injustice."[86] This clarion call of the church's mission remains what King, Nyerere, and Biko must always be remembered for. They did not simply preach social justice and human dignity but created local and international networks to build a society of equals. The three great liberators dreamed together yet separately to realize a free, equal, and dignified humanity.

The Influence of King's Dream on Africa and Vice Versa

Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision and spiritual struggle against racial segregation was not limited to the US. He dreamed of a nonviolent struggle spanning international borders in search of lasting peace.[87] King influenced South African clergy like Allan Boesak, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in the 1980s and moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa. Boesak acknowledged that his call for a nonviolent struggle against a violent apartheid regime was inspired by "Gandhi, Martin and Jesus."[88]

Lewis V. Baldwin examines King's impact on Africa in his *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, in which he dedicates an entire chapter to King's thought and influence on Africa. Lewis argues that King's passion for Africa's struggle against European exploitation raised awareness of how European imperialism inhibited "not only the growth and development of West Africa, but also the Union of South Africa and other parts of Southern Africa, Eastern African countries like Uganda and Kenya, and North African areas such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, and Libya."[89] The significance of King's thought and influence on Africa became more prominent following his assassination; across the continent, condolences were expressed and memorial services were led in honor of this ally of Africa's struggle for emancipation from imperial shackles.[90]

King's legacy in Africa outlives him, as evinced by his wife's endeavor to continue her husband's work at the international level by making the King Center in Atlanta a forum "for which new advances can be made in [the] long campaign to eliminate the indignities and inhumanities of apartheid."[91] In her estimation, this would be a

84. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development*, 220.
85. Jon Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Articles* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).
86. Nyerere, *Freedom and Development*, 223.
87. King, *Strength to Love*, 161.
88. Wallis and Hollyday, eds., "At an Apocalypse: The South African Church Claims Its Hope: An Interview with Allan Boesak," in *Crucible of Fire*, 58.
89. Lewis V. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 165–66.
90. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 218–24.
91. Cited in Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 239.

fulfillment of King's dream. Coretta Scott King has dedicated her life and the King Center's resources to working with the Free South Africa movement to eradicate the debilitating effects of apartheid on the Black South African population, even to the point of being "arrested along with other immediate family members for protesting outside the South African embassy in Washington."[92]

However, in his struggle for racial justice, King was also inspired by developments in civil and political rights in India and Africa—rights that African descendants in the United States still had no access to.[93] This inspiration is evidenced by his 1960 statement that "in one after another of African states black men form the government, write laws, and administer the affairs of the states. But in state after state in the United States the Negro is ruled and governed without a fragment of participation in civic life."[94] Moreover, in his April 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King admitted that while "nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we [Black Americans] still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter," African descendants in the US could not wait any longer than 340 years of racial injustice to claim their "constitutional and God-given rights."[95] Cone affirms the influence of Third World liberation on King's theological thinking:

> King's optimism regarding the prospect of freedom's achievement was derived partly from the success of the civil rights movement in America and liberation movements in the Third World. The Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins and freedom rides, the demonstrations in Birmingham, the March on Washington, the Selma March, and other less publicized civil rights victories throughout the South—all were linked with the success of anticolonialist movements in the Third World.[96]

Corroborating Cone's claim and King's confession regarding how Africa inspired his anti-segregation movement, Biko in his 1971 paper on "White Racism and Black Consciousness" postulated that Black consciousness "among South African blacks has often been ascribed to influence from the American 'Negro' movement. Yet it seems . . . that this is a sequel to the attainment of independence by so many African states within so short a time."[97] Nonetheless, other authors hold a different view, stating that

92. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 240.
93. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 547.
94. King, "The Burning Truth in the South," in Washington, *A Testament of Hope*, 96; and King, "The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness," 146. King had been in correspondence with African liberation figures such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Tom Mboya of Kenya, and Chief Albert John Luthuli of South Africa, who mutually enriched each other on the common course against oppressive colonial and racial injustice. See Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 163–218.
95. King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 292.
96. Cone, "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Third World," 457.
97. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 69.

the Black Consciousness movement was equally inspired by the pan-African movement and King's civil rights movement.[98]

These developments made King brand the state of affairs for the people of African descent in the United States inexcusable. He was determined to effect change, hence his unrelenting nonviolent struggle for racial equality and human dignity.[99] Arguably, King's fight for integration in an America that had been independent for more than two centuries was also inspired by the fast-moving political independence of African states. Africa's "jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence" was not simply an inspiration to King's cause but also a call for solidarity between African independent nations and the struggle of their brothers and sisters in the US.[100] King saw the fraternal bond between Africans and the people of African ancestry in the United States made manifest when Kwame Nkrumah invited him to attend Ghana's political independence ceremony in 1957, which reminded him of "the fact that in [his] nation elementary rights of citizenship and equality [were] still unrealized for millions, and in particular, for the Southern Negro."[101] He viewed Ghana's independence as inspiration for his continued fight for racial equality and justice, and as "a symbol of hope for hundreds and thousands of oppressed peoples all over the world as they struggled for freedom."[102] King's urgent call for African solidarity was clear in his assertion that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, for we are tied together in a garment of mutuality."[103] This anticipated what Desmond Tutu termed *Ubuntu*, a concept which, though hard to translate into any Western language, means, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." It also means, "I am human because I belong, I participate, I share," and not merely because I think.[104] Tutu's vision for a shared humanity is analogous to Nyerere's sense of extended familyhood (*ujamaa*), which was never limited to one's biological, tribal, or clan relationships but instead sought to embrace our common humanity.[105]

The sense of African and African descendants' solidarity based on shared humanity in protesting against oppressive structures was clearly expressed by Nyerere, especially through his extended family ethics embedded in *ujamaa.* This ethic, which transcends ethnic and racial limitations to embrace humanity as a whole, has serious

98. Mgwebi Lavin Snail, *The Antecedents and the Emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa: Its Ideology and Organisation* (München: Akademischer Verlag München, 1993), 97–117. See also Albert Nolan, "The Political and Social Context," in *Catholics in Apartheid Society*, ed. Andrew Prior (Cape Town: David Philip, 1982), 14.
99. King, "The Burning Truth in the South," 96; and King, "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," 297.
100. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 364.
101. Cited in Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 167.
102. Carson, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 114.
103. King, "*Playboy* Interview: Martin Luther King, Jr.," 364.
104. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31.
105. Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968), 38.

theological ramifications. First, it grounds the struggle for racial equality and human dignity in a transcendent belief that all people are created equal and therefore deserve equal treatment regardless of race, color, gender, and creed. Second, it offers an accessible language that all can understand, even those who do not believe we are all created in the image of God. Third, in the Southern African and African American contexts, which have experienced and continue to suffer racial discrimination, it opens a window for dialogue based on shared ancestry and humanity.

Committed to his belief in common humanity (extended familyhood) and the liberation of the oppressed majority populations of Namibia, Rhodesia, and South Africa from minority white subjugation, Nyerere emphatically stated to President Carter that America's struggle "to rectify the bitter effects of centuries of racial inequality and discrimination" in its own land "would not be made easier by the continued racial insult of apartheid in South Africa and the institutionalized racial domination in Rhodesia."[106] African American antiracist forces expressed similar sentiments. They believed that world peace could be achieved through a liberated Africa and an unsegregated America, and exerted pressure on the Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations to achieve these ends.[107]

Speaking to the press while visiting the US, Nyerere urged the country to divest from South Africa and convincingly argued that its investments in South Africa strengthened a regime whose very existence thrived on an ideology (apartheid) that contradicted what the US fundamentally stood for—namely, the equality of all persons.[108] Nyerere was not a lone moral voice against apartheid in South Africa. Baldwin points out that organizations "that made a special claim to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., also felt compelled to challenge the morality and legitimacy of South African apartheid in the 1970s," particularly the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the King Center.[109]

Furthermore, in his December 1976 "Memorandum on American Policy towards Azania (South Africa)" addressed to Senator Dick Clark, Biko stated that "America's choice is narrowed down to either entrenching the existing minority white regime or alternatively assisting in a very definite way, the attainment of the aspirations of millions of the Black population as well as those of the whites of good will."[110] With these clarion calls, Biko and Nyerere wanted the Carter administration to address America's foreign policy in South Africa alongside the domestic issues highlighted more than a decade earlier in King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

Carter adopted a different perspective than that of his predecessor, President Gerald Ford, because of his encounter with Nyerere. Against Ford's view, he did not believe that "the liberation struggle in southern Africa" was "aimed at handing the continent over to the Soviet Union" because Africa was getting arms from the Soviets.[111] Thus,

106. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 12.
107. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 229–30, 244.
108. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 17, 19, 40.
109. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 231.
110. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 139.
111. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 6.

in Carter, Nyerere saw an ally for the shared dream of liberating Southern Africa from racial injustice. He assured Carter that Tanzania welcomed his "administration's new approach to matters related to the liberation of [Africa] from colonialism and racialism."[112] Carter, too, regarded Nyerere as a person who could help him "and others take the right stand . . . towards majority rule in Rhodesia, or Zimbabwe, in Namibia and in the alleviation of racial discrimination throughout the continent of Africa and the rest of the world."[113] Other voices in support of the anti-apartheid protest included Walter Fauntroy, Joseph Lowery, Jesse Jackson, and Coretta Scott King, who in their commitment to carry forward King's legacy vowed to dismantle apartheid.[114] Nyerere convincingly argued that Southern Africa's liberation struggle was "one of nationalism and human equality versus colonialism and racialism, not communism versus democracy."[115]

Nyerere maintained that "real struggle for individual human liberation cannot . . . begin until national liberation has been secured; talk of individual human rights does not make sense while the very humanity of millions of people is denied because of their colour or their ancestry."[116] The State House press office in Dar es Salaam described Nyerere's visit to the US as "a challenge to the American people's conscience not to sustain apartheid and racial domination through political and economic support for the systems obtaining in southern Africa."[117] Nyerere held that while the US would not give arms to support efforts to liberate Southern Africa, it could use its soft power (embracing an ethic of human equality) and economic power (divesting from South Africa) to weaken Prime Minister Smith's power in Rhodesia and the apartheid regime's power in South Africa, thus paving way for freedom and human rights in the region.[118] King made a similar appeal in calling for "*a massive movement for economic sanctions*"[119] against South Africa in solidarity with African leaders like Nyerere who advocated for divestment. King's wife supported his legacy and Nyerere's unwavering fight against apartheid through the King Center, which organized like-minded leaders such as Desmond Tutu, Winnie Mandela, and Allan Boesak to abolish apartheid.[120]

King's peaceful march on Washington, DC, to address the economic plight of the poor Black minority and poor white minority can be likened to Nyerere's 1977 crusade across the United States advocating for the liberation of Southern Africa. King's march and Nyerere's crusade both pursued an equal and indiscriminate treatment of Africans and all people of African ancestry, recognizing that all persons are created equal as enshrined in various national and international human rights instruments. Ironically, in

112. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 7.
113. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 6.
114. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 234–39.
115. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 23.
116. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 37.
117. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 53.
118. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 53.
119. Carson, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 259 (emphasis in original).
120. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 240.

the case of South Africa, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) coincided with the electoral victory of the National Party in 1948, which had an objective of prohibiting "the emergence of an open, egalitarian, non-racial South Africa through the legal entrenchment of racial divisions, and the systemic exclusion of blacks from political rights."[121] This was the beginning of systematically institutionalized apartheid, which led to the March 21, 1960, Sharpeville massacre of sixty-nine Blacks who were protesting "pass laws"[122] under the leadership of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and the June 16, 1976, Soweto mass killing of children protesting the mandatory use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in all schools.[123] The mass killing occurred despite Tutu's premonition of the impending "bloodshed and violence."[124] King fully identified with what he called "*the far more deadly struggle for freedom in South Africa*" in comparison with "*the long and arduous struggle for freedom and justice in the US*."[125] Nyerere described South Africa as the single "country in the world where racial superiority, racial discrimination, is a creed, is a principle of the government of the country."[126] So, he called upon every nation that believes "in the equality of human beings, [to] isolate that regime out of the international community until they accept the equality of human beings."[127] In Tutu's eyes, South Africa's "separate and unequal" apartheid policy was worse than the US's "separate but equal" policy. This was because apartheid's unjust land distribution, and its housing and education policies, were blatant abuses of Black rights—abuses that Tutu described as "unbiblical, un-Christian, immoral and evil."[128]

Conclusion

King dreamed for the realization of the common humanity of all people in America and across the world. His dream of a society of equals, as opposed to "the separate but equal" policy operative in the US, had a positive influence on South Africa's fight against apartheid. In the same vein, King learned a great deal from Africa's struggle for self-determination, as I have demonstrated in this article. I have relied heavily on King's own words from *A Testament of Hope* and his autobiography, allowing his own voice to speak clearly on issues that were close to his heart. King's dream, like that of Biko and Nyerere, was a shared dream for racial justice. As King stated in his letter

121. Prior, *Catholics in Apartheid Society*, ix.
122. Pass laws created an internal passport system to control movements of Black people in South Africa.
123. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 17. See also Desmond Tutu, "A Growing Nightmarish Fear," in *Desmond Tutu: The Rainbow People of God*, ed. John Allen (New York: Random House, 1976), 10.
124. Tutu, "A Growing Nightmarish Fear," 10.
125. Carson, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 197 (emphasis in original).
126. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 32.
127. Nyerere, *Crusade for Liberation*, 32.
128. Tutu, "Letters: Letter from Desmond Tutu to P. W. Botha," in *Crucible of Fire*, 158.

from the Birmingham City Jail, in his struggle for freedom, the blacks in America together with their black brothers and sisters in Africa, as well as their black, brown, and yellow brothers and sisters in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, are moving together "*with a great sense of urgency toward the promised land of racial justice*."[129]

I have also demonstrated that King's dream was a shared dream that inspired both mutual learning and almost envy, as King observed the speed at which African countries were attaining political independence while African Americans were still fighting for the right to dignified citizenship in the US. Thus, Nyerere (though not explicitly mentioned in his writings), Nkrumah, Luthuli, Ben Ali, Tutu, Mandela, and Mboya remained his close allies in the struggle for equality, especially equality that accords Africans and Afro-descendants a rightful place at the table of dignifying rights and duties.

My focus on Southern Africa, and particularly South Africa, has clearly demonstrated a crossover where Nyerere, Biko, and King worked tirelessly to end apartheid. In the case of Nyerere's uncompromising advocacy and crusade, he allowed Tanzania to become a hub and shelter for victims and active members of the liberation struggle movement. King's legacy, on the other hand, outlived King's passing. Thanks to the "ground crew" with whom he worked, the fight against anti-apartheid continued with the King Center working in collaboration with ecumenical movements and other organizations at home and abroad to put an end to what Coretta Scott King termed "the indignities and inhumanities of apartheid."[130]

As we mark King's dream on its sixtieth anniversary, we also recognize that the struggle for racial justice and human dignity has not ended. King's words following the reception of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo should remain a constant reminder to confront what he identified as the greatest world's challenges: racial injustice, poverty, and war. To these we must add disease and ignorance, which Nyerere avowed to confront yet which remain an assault to human dignity. Victory will be won and human dignity attained when these five causes of indignity are abolished. So, the global fight must go on in honor of King, Nyerere, and Biko.

Author Biography

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129. Carson, *Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 197 (emphasis in original).
130. Cited in Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole*, 239.