

Martin Luther King (MLK) in his Letter from the Birmingham jail clearly depicted his method to bring about change. His march on Washington, "I Have a Dream" speech, spelled out his goal of one nation unified and just, where children of all colors may play together as brothers. His was a 4-step nonviolence program: 1. Collection of facts, 2. Negotiation, 3. Self-purification, 4. Direct action. The goal of direct action (marches) was to create enough irritation as to bring both sides to the table and create a true negotiation, causing change through unity.

His following was not universal in the community as a whole, nor in the Black community itself. He depicted the three movements of the time as first, those that were complacent, and were willing to live with racism, implying some were making a livelihood from it. Second, his own non-violent movement seeking justice through peaceful means, and third, those driven by hatred and despair. This latter group comprised of younger, urban men, who wanted direct action including violence, came into power after MLK's death, under Malcolm X. One can see the differences in approach with Malcolm X's mocking of MLK in his statement, "It is criminal not to defend oneself." Under his leadership the process for reaching the end goals changed from dialogue to monologue. This ideology was continued by the Black Panthers and so-called Black Nationalists.

It appears that the BLM movement, which has caught on nationally, is leaning toward this latter group using a separate but equal strategy. Young people have joined in the spirit of ending racial injustice. How do they understand this complex issue? Does the data support the conclusions?

MLK was after the cause not the symptoms. He recognized that simply changing laws was not enough. If the changes were not the goal of the entire community, there would be no real change. We are now at a crossroads, we must agree on a definition of the problem before we ask, "What must change?" and "How do we make those changes?" Will we arrive at a consensus through negotiation or smash and grab tactics? Will the outcome join us following "E Pluribus Unum", or create a country of separate but equal? Before we make any changes, following his way we must first ask, "What are the facts that define 21st century racism? Without discussion based on agreed upon facts, we are being asked to accept allegations as truth. Examples of such include, "The white race is racist innately; that white females may not wear clothing or hair styles that belong to Black culture because it is a theft of their domain; without discussion we are being asked to understand and accept terms that have been coined unknowingly such as micro-aggression." Without dialogue this can only be deemed a demagogic approach to the solution.

The media has espoused and accepted these actions in subtle ways. Daily we see videos of racial incidents. The way they are presented allows one to get the idea that racism is rampant. These sound bites can be read both ways: either as proof that whites in general are racist or, given we are a nation of over 320 million that the relatively small number of cases prove that these racist acts belong to a very small percent of the white community, and are not supported by the community as a whole. Commentators have said that due to pent up anger over racism, those that are looting, vandalizing, and destroying property should be exonerated because of history. Must we accept that statues that depict those with any history of slavery be torn down without a standard that is mutually defined? Can these actions be called anything but mob rule?

MLK in one of his last acts tried to organize a march for labor, janitors and the like. He included Black workers and those from Appalachia who were white. He believed poverty wasted the soul and was at the heart of racism. His efforts failed, there was no interest. It might be time to revisit the proposition that spiritual poverty caused by poor living conditions is at the heart of what we are calling racism today. We must immediately pause all changes, and all join in search for the causes, and mutually arrive at solutions that are based on love and justice, not just band-aid the problem through blame.

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