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On March 26th, 1964, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X met at the United States Capital to hear deliberations on the Civil Rights Bill being debated by the United States Senate. I was born on March 9, 1964, so I would have been a mere 17 days old when these two men, whose shoulders I stand upon, came face to face with one another. If my parents, Margaret and Willie, were aware of this momentous occasion, they would have watched the debate or read about the one-minute meeting between these two inconvenient heroes of the Civil Rights Era from the projects of Cleveland, Ohio, my birthplace—my mother and father had just arrived in Cleveland from New Orleans because my father had a tip for a job as a short-order cook in a local Cleveland restaurant on the east side, near Cuyahoga Hospital, the hospital where I was born.

Scholars and many have speculated what these two men said to each other in that one-minute of time. Both men had been working tirelessly for equal rights for African Americans for many years at the time of their meeting. Many have suggested that at this moment, Malcolm X and Martin King shifted in their “liberating visions.” In his landmark book with *Liberating Visions* as the main title, Robert Michael Franklin, the current president of Morehouse College, argues that it is useful to expand the journey of human fulfillment and social justice in America to the legacies of four “liberating visions”—Booker T. Washington, WEB DuBois, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King. Washington, the Adaptive Vision, DuBois, the Strenuous Vision, and Malcolm, the Defiant Vision--- are brought together in the Integrative Vision of King.

In the summer of 1958, King was invited to deliver two devotional addresses at the first National Conference on Christian Education of the United Church of Christ, held at Purdue University. In one of his meditations there, “The Dimensions of a Complete Life,” he explicated his vision of fulfillment by using geometry as an organizing paradigm. In this sermon we encounter the skeletal framework of his broad reflections on the moral life. Moreover, this was his favorite sermon, the one he preached as a candidate for the pastorate of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954, and the one he preached in Westminster Abbey, London, during a visit on his way to Sweden to collect his Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

Inspired by the geometric perfection of the new city of God described in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 21, King suggested that the complete life was analogous to a cube. Each of its three dimensions represents a significant individual commitment. The length of life corresponds to a person’s inner concern for his own welfare and development, breadth corresponds to concern for the welfare of others, and height refers to concern for reconciliation and communion with God. I want to suggest and emphasize the term integrative rather than integrated because King conceived the complete life to be a process, a quest rather than an achievement.

I make mention of this grounding view in King's character because in order for us to fully appreciate the full scope of the man and why we pause as a country to think about his life, he strikes me as an "Inconvenient Hero."

I think it is important that I take this opportunity to explore and address the profound sense of national amnesia that has distorted so much of America's approach to Martin Luther King, one of our national heroes. What appears to consistently emerge from national conversations and celebrations is our tendency to forget and ignore the last years of his life. I believe it might be useful to use August 28, 1963 as the era of Integrative King and the remaining years of King's life as the Defiant King. Indeed, I am suggesting that King incorporated aspects of Malcolm's Defiant Vision at that meeting in Washington, DC, in 1964. And in turn, Malcolm incorporated aspects of King's Integrative Vision at that same moment. Of course, you may be wondering why I might suggest this.

Consider for a moment that we appear to be determined to hold King captive to the powerful period of his life that culminated in the March on Washington in 1963. On that August day, King's great gift of oratory bellowed on the Washington Mall. I wonder if wisps of that oratory made their way to the soul of WEB DuBois, that strenuous voice, who had just passed away a day prior, on August 27th, 1963, in Accra, Ghana.

Somehow, King seemed easier to manage as a hero, to explain to our children, our congresspeople, and ourselves if we could forget the search for economic justice that had already begun to emerge in the March's official purpose, "for Jobs and Freedom," and if we could forget the shadows that were soon to be cast across King's life by the white terrorist bombing that killed four Sunday School children in Birmingham, just weeks after the March.

The keynote speaker for Thursday, Dr. Vincent Harding, suggests that four pivotal milestones increasingly moved King into a Defiant and Inconvenient Hero. Two I will only mention here---Mississippi Summer, sometimes referred to as Freedom Summer, in which thousands of Mississippians were registered and encouraged to vote and the participation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey and the famous line by Fannie Lou Hamer, when asked why she would not accept three seats as a compromise on the convention floor...

"We didn't come all this way for no two seats, 'cause all of us is tired."[3]

As a result of Freedom Summer, Johnson had to accommodate the Mississippi Freedom Democrats. Because of his hand being forced, combined with his earlier commitment to cash in political capital to move comprehensive Civil Rights Legislation into motion in Congress, which resulted in its passage on July 2, 1964, and more political will to insure the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Johnson felt he had been a staunch ally for the Civil Rights Movement.

King had been an Inconvenient Hero during the early years of the Johnson era. LBJ must have surely thought that would have been enough.

However, King pressed on. As I indicated a few moments ago, the official mission of the March on Washington was *****Jobs***** and Freedom. Feels a bit Jeffersonian to me. We experience a sense of selective listening when we read the lofty words of my favorite founding father. One of the great African American historians, John Hope Franklin, puts it poignantly in Ken Burns's Jefferson---they [the Declaration of Independence]---"were beautiful words" and yet they are sufficiently abstract, according to John Ellis, so that we do not notice that there is an uneasy tension between perfect liberty and perfect equality. And, by the way, the word perfect is meant in the Jewish, not Greek, nuance. Perfect means mature, complete, whole, grounded. God said the Garden was very good, not perfect. But I digress.

The second trend rumbling during the last years of King's life was a growing agitation of younger African American youth in America's urban cores in the north who were increasingly aware of the economic stagnation and indeed, decline occurring in America's cities and the effects this was having on so-called Urban Renewal projects in the north. Remember my parents? My parents had to move several times partially because the work my father was skilled as a short order cook was in short supply. The manufacturing base of the Rust Belt was undergoing substantial transformation and the country was on the eve of giving birth to suburbia and white flight. The Black Consciousness was causing King to take notice that more work had to be done, that we had to keep going.

The award winning *Eyes on the Prize*, which is still arguably the most comprehensive documentation of the Civil Rights Era, ends with the segment, *The Promised Land*. In the last year of King's life, King confronts economic inequality, Vietnam and Johnson, Memphis, and a fragmenting civil rights movement.

So, what can we say about the inconvenience of King? Here are some thoughts:

1. MLK was one of the rare men who could be angry but not hateful - after the order of Gandhi.

2. Even though his positions were highly politicized, they were not grounded in politics. He transcended politics, and saw the rights of blacks grounded in the dignity God gives to all men, not the rights of man given primarily by a constitution or any political system.

3. He was one of the twentieth century's great orators. He saw things in terms of good and evil and was able to raise the clashing issues of

our times to the level of the poetic.

4. He was a man of courage as Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a man of courage.

Both saw truth at war with evil. Both sensed that to take the side of truth could lead to their death - and yet both decided for truth not retreat.

5. Men are needed like this today, who will not determine their actions based on the outcome, but based on truth and integrity, mercy to the disadvantaged and challenge to oppressors. Men are needed like this today, who are not in this life for their advancement or their secure tenure, but who will sacrifice everything to provide a better world for the next generation. Men are need like this who, if they are to become famous, must risk the loss of all fame. They alone make a mark on history precisely because they are willing to forgo their place in history.

6. Yet, the greatness of MLK was not in any decision of his to take on great causes, or show outstanding qualities or courageous bravery. He was simply a humble man, a servant of God, a preacher rather than a politician, who found himself forced forward by the flood of unusual circumstances. Shakespeare's Brutus says, in his "Julius Caesar", "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune" (Julius Caesar [IV, 3, line 2224]. MLK was swept along by a flood of social unrest and upheaval. He rode its crest because he was a man placed by God, and able to ride the flood by virtue of a quiet and great heart. God is preparing similar men today

for when the flood returns.

7. There is a danger in making MLK a mere object of hero-worship. By this we allow his courage to substitute for our fear, his boldness to take the place of our timidity, his radical call to hide our tepid conformity. If we do this, we shall simply be like the people Brutus describes in the lines following his quote above, where he refers to those who omit to take on the affairs of men at the flood: "Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat; and we must take the current when it serves, Or lose our ventures." If, in our current affairs, we allow ourselves to be bound in shallows and miseries instead of taking issues at the flood, we shall simply be angry men and women who live the life of endless, but futile critics.

Carl Wendell Himes, Jr., one of America's great poets, when he realized that after the assassination of King he was going to be transformed from a troublesome, dangerous black presence to a candidate for national heroism, coined this poem:

Now that he is safely dead
 Let us praise him
 Build Monuments to His Glory
 Sing Hosannas to His Name
 Dead Men Make
 Such Convenient Heroes: They
 Cannot Rise
 The Challenge the Images
 We would fashion from their lives
 And besides

It is easier to build monuments
Than to Make a Better World
So, now that he is safely dead
We, with Eased Consciences
Will teach our children
That he was a great man...knowing
That the cause for which he lived
Is Still a Cause
And the Dream for Which he Died
Is Still a Dream
A Dead Man's Dream

This is America's Opportunity, this is our opportunity as Educators and Leaders, to cultivate and teach our students what it means to be Inconvenient Heroes. Your challenge is to take the Dream off the shelf, off the monument and make it real. What are the places and spaces where the least, last, and lost reside on our campus, in our classrooms, in our neighborhoods? How will we transform this blue ribbon institution that will continue to uphold science and religion, if that might feel inconvenient to some of us. After all, King reminds us that Science Investigates and Religion Interprets, and the two are not rivals and they are also not in compartmentalized spheres. We all must walk together, lest we all fall into a pit. I hope that I have done more than inspire you...I hope I have placed conviction in you to think and act on the dream, which unfolds with every generation, on every hilltop and hamlet and low place.

Thank you for your attention.