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"LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS": MARTIN LUTHER KING'S PROVERBIAL STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

Abstract: In barely forty years of life Martin Luther King (1929-1968) distinguished himself as one of the greatest social reformers of modern times. A vast array of biographies and studies have celebrated him as a civil rights leader, a defender of nonviolence in the struggle of desegregation, a champion of the poor, an anti-war proponent, and a broad-minded visionary of an interrelated world of free people. His large amount of verbal and written communications in the form of sermons, speeches, interviews, letters, essays, and several books are replete with Bible proverbs as "Love your enemies", "He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword", and "Man does not live by bread alone" as well as folk proverbs as "Time and tide wait for no man", "Last hired, first fired", "No gain without pain", and "Making a way out of no way." He also delights in citing quotations that have long become proverbs, to wit "No man is an island", "All men are created equal", and "No lie can live forever." King recycles these bits of traditional wisdom in various contexts, varying his proverbial messages as he addresses the multifaceted issues of civil rights. His rhetorical prowess is thus informed to a considerable degree by his effective use of his repertoire of proverbs which he frequently uses as leitmotifs or amasses into set pieces of fixed phrases to be employed repeatedly.

***Keywords*:** African American, American, anaphora, authority, Bible, civil rights, communication, context, folklore, Martin Luther King, leitmotif, metaphor, oratory, politics, proverb, quotation, repertoire, rhetoric, set piece, variation

A vast array of biographies and studies have celebrated Martin Luther King (1929-1968) as a civil rights leader, a defender of nonviolence in the struggle for desegregation, a champion for the poor, an anti-war proponent, and a broad-minded visionary of an interrelated world of free people. The proverbial truths expressed in the beginning of the Declaration of Independence that "All men are created equal" and that they have the right for "life, liberty,

and the pursuit of happiness" form the basis of his engaged and heartfelt fight for freedom, universal suffrage, anti-racism, and socioeconomic improvements for minorities. As a communicator *par excellence*, he made ample use of fixed phrases as leitmotifs in his effective oral and written rhetoric in the service of a plethora of topics and causes. Even though the term "proverb" does not belong to King's active vocabulary, he most certainly delights in using folk and Bible proverbs, famous quotations (of which some have taken on a definite claim to proverbiality), and a wealth of proverbial phrases.

It is incomprehensible that the vast scholarship on King's magisterial use of the English language has hardly commented on the proverbial nature of his multifaceted communications. It is as if the study of rhetoric as a discipline by not stressing phraseological matters has prevented any attention being paid to such preformulated language. As the massive two-volume collection of recent essays entitled *Phraseology: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research* (Burger et al. 2007) shows, this picture is slowly changing, since rhetorical scholars are now more eager to include the disciplines of phraseology in general and paremiology (the study of proverbs) in particular (Mieder 2009a). Nevertheless, regarding the proverbial language of Martin Luther King, the studies dedicated to his highly expressive and emotive language have almost completely ignored his reliance on proverbs and proverbial expressions, with my former student Dženeta Karabegović's revealing short essay "'No Lie Can Live Forever': Zur sprichwörtlichen Rhetorik von Martin Luther King" (2007) being the big exception.

Having surveyed the extant secondary literature on King's sermonic and sociopolitical language, there is little to report. Mervyn A. Warren deals with the "vividness and imagery" as well as the "figures of speech" (Warren 1966: 201; also in Warren 2001: 145) in King's style, but no mention is made of proverbial matters in the discussion of alliteration, anaphora, comparison, metaphor, repetition, and simile (See Warren 1966: 201-208; also in Warren 2001: 145-151). Other scholars speak of King's "figures of speech – similes, metaphors, allegories, and personifications" (Boulware 1969: 254), his "metaphoricality" (Spillers 1971: 17 [1989: 879]), and his stylistic preoccupation with metaphors,

repetition, parallelism, and antithesis (Ensslin 1990: 120-122), with Lewis V. Baldwin at least referring in passing to "King's eloquence and brilliant use of imagery and the folk idiom [that] help explain the ease with which he found a route to the hearts and eventually to the heads of his people" (Baldwin 1991: 296). Jonathan Rieder makes the keen observation that "A King [sermonic or rhetorical] performance was a collective act [...]: his [...] sermons and speeches were collage compositions. [...] If he was able to provoke assorted audiences, it was because his life lay at the junction of diverse lines of affiliation that taught him to speak in many tongues. Those networks formed a transmission belt through which the raw materials of song, argument, homily, citation, inflection, philosophy, sermon, rhythm, examples, authors, theology, and ideas flowed" (Rieder 2008: 10-11). All of these remarks are perfectly fitting, but why are proverbs and proverbial phrases missing in these enumerations of King's elements of style?

Especially scholars who have pointed out that King's language is very much informed by orally transmitted speech patterns might have been expected to make a point of his reliance on fixed phrases. They discuss the sense of community during sermons that often included call-response or testifying between King as the preacher and his audience (Harrison and Harrison 1993: 169; Baldwin 1988:81-82 [1989: 41-42]). This give and take of the sermonic practice in African American churches (see Daniel and Smitherman 1976: 33-39; Daniel 1979) requires a language filled with formulaic expressions that help the audience to react as a group to statements made in the pulpit. Bruce Rosenberg has shown that repetition of familiar words, phrases and stories from the Bible enhance the comprehensibility and effectiveness of orally delivered sermons (Rosenberg 1970: 105), and Walter J. Ong has pointed out that traditional and formulaic phrases take on an extremely important communicative role in sermons and speeches that address audiences orally:

> Formulas help implement rhythmic discourse and also act as mnemonic aids in their own right, as set expressions circulating through the mouths and ears of all. 'Red in the morning, the sailor's warning; red in the night, the sailor's delight.' 'Divide and conquer.' 'To err is human, to forgive is divine.' [...] 'Chase off nature and she returns at a

> gallop.' Fixed, often rhythmically balanced, expressions of this sort and of other sorts can be found occasionally in print, indeed can be 'looked up' in books of sayings, but in oral cultures they are not occasional. They are incessant. They form the substance of thought itself. Thought in any extended form is impossible without them, for it consists in them. (Ong 1982: 35)

Referring to Ong's findings, Keith D. Miller, as the undeniable expert on King's differentiated rhetoric, has characterized his discursive use of formulaic language as "shared treasure, voice merging, and self-making" (Miller 1990: 77; see also Farrell 1991, and Miller 1991b). Miller also observed that "In the folk pulpit, one gains an authoritative voice by adopting the persona of previous speakers as one adapts the sermons and formulaic expressions of a sanctified tradition. Like generations of folk preachers before him, King often borrowed, modified, and synthesized themes, analogies, metaphors, quotations, illustrations, arrangements, and forms of argument used by other preachers. Like other folk preachers, King typically ended his oral sermons (and almost every major speech) by merging his voice with the lyrics of a spiritual, hymn, or gospel song" (Miller 1991a: 121). In other words, while many of his powerful formulaic statements are not his own, it is the "blending" (Rieder 2008: 160) of them with his own voice that assures the discursive powers of Martin Luther King as a speaker and writer.

David Fleer has spoken in this regard of King's impressive and innovative "reformation" of his vast amount of sources. Reminding scholars and others that by 1957 King gave at least two hundred sermons and speeches a year (in later years one or two a day!), it should not be surprising that he had to rely on voice merging and certain sets of materials that he could easily intersperse into his sermons and speeches. This voice merging is part and parcel of his compelling and persuasive oral and written rhetoric, with his creative transformation or reformation of his sources making King a rhetorical artist (see Fleet 1995: 158-160). Similar thoughts and arguments were also presented by Keith D. Miller, arguing that King borrowed from many sources of which a considerable amount "are highly familiar – the modern equivalents

of the commonplaces of classical rhetoric" (Miller 1986: 249 [1989: 643]).

Rosa Louise Parks (1913-2005), the seamstress and civil rights champion who precipitated the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, by her refusal on December 1, 1955, to adhere to the segregated bus-seating policies in that city, has perhaps characterized King's proverbially informed oratory the best: "But let us remember that what gave his speeches and sermons legitimacy was that Dr. King didn't just talk the talk; he walked the walk from Montgomery to Memphis, enduring jails, beatings, abuse, threats, the bombing of his home, and the highest sacrifice a person can make for a righteous cause" (Carson and Shepard 2001: 4). Yes, indeed, Martin Luther King is the epitome of the black folk wisdom of "talking the talk and walking the walk." He breathed, talked and walked civil rights by word and deed, setting an example for millions of African Americans in particular and Americans in general. In his nonviolent but compassionate and unbending struggle for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" he left no proverbial stone unturned, making ample use of Bible and folk proverbs as well as proverbial expressions and proverb-like quotations to add metaphorical and emotive expressiveness to his oral and written messages (see Mieder 2011).

Even though King is not prone to use the term "proverb" he certainly based a number of sermonic outlines and actual sermons on the explication of proverbs, citing them at times as leitmotifs but not explicitly referring to them as Bible or folk proverbs. Always being the preacher and teacher, it is not surprising that he would call on such proverbial wisdom as a base of his religious and social messages. An early example can be seen from a minuscule sermon introduction with the proverb "Life is what you make it" as a title:

> Life Is What You Make It
>
> INTRODUCTION
>
> Many people wander into the world, and they pick up everything they can get their hands upon looking for life. They never get it. What they get is existence. Existence is what you find; life is what you create. Therefore, if life ever seems worth while to you, it is not because you found it that way, but because you

> made it so. (VI,83-84; Nov. 30, 1948 – Feb. 16, 1949; all Roman numerals refer to the six volumes of Clayborne Carson et al. [eds.], *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* [1992-2007])

Always having yet another sermon in mind, King also wrote down short sermon conclusions that might come in handy when another text needed to be composed in a hurry. These introductions and conclusions were kept in folders for ready reference. The following example is once again of special interest, since King uses the introductory formula "there is an old saying" to indicate that he is citing a folk proverb. The "saying"-designation implies a proverb, of course, but even this term appears very seldom in King's communications:

> *Success In Life*
> There is an old saying, "If wishes were horses beggars would ride." Friends, the great highroad of success lies along the old high-way of steadfast well-doing; and they who are the most industrious and the most persistent, and work in the truest spirit, will invariably be the most successful. Success treads on the heels of every right effort. (VI,85; Nov. 30 1848 – Feb. 16, 1849)

While such paragraphs are mere rudiments, King also has left us with complete sermons with a proverbial title and an ensuing explication of that very text. The quintessential example is King's preoccupation with the Bible proverb "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44) which he explicated in a number of related "Loving Your Enemies"-sermons. In fact, King used the proverb "Love your enemies" a total of 53 times, and it will be no surprise to anyone that it is Martin Luther King's most favorite proverb as an expression of his Christian-based "fundamental concept of nonviolence" (Hedgepeth 1984: 81 [1989: 543]). In his "Loving Your Enemies"-sermon delivered on November 17, 1957, at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, King points out that the idea of nonviolence is perfectly expressed in the "Love your enemies"-proverb of the New Testament:

> So I want to turn your attention to this subject: "Loving Your Enemies." It's so basic to me because it is a part of

> my basic philosophical and theological orientation: the whole idea of love, the whole philosophy of love. In the fifth chapter of the gospel as recorded by Saint Matthew, we read these very arresting words, flowing from the lips of our Lord and Master: "Ye have heard that it has been said, 'Thou shall love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" [Matt. 5:43-45]. (IV,3126; Nov. 17, 1957)

When he gave yet another version of this sermon on March 7, 1961, at Detroit, his words and the Bible verses were quite similar, but they do show that he usually does not cite himself *verbatim*. In this later paragraph he argues from a much more personal vantage point and also connects the idea of loving one's enemies with civil rights issues:

> Now this afternoon I would like to have you think with me on a passage of scripture that has been a great influence in my life and a passage that I have sought to bring to bear on the whole struggle for racial justice, which is taking place in our nation. The words are found in the fifth chapter of the gospel as recorded by Saint Matthew. And these words flow from the lips of our Lord and Master: "Ye have heard it said of old that thou shall love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" [Matt. 5:43-45]. (VI,422; March 7, 1961)

Additional references of this all-pervasive proverb in these and other sermons all illustrate the many mutations of King's basic argument that love is the key element in a world of nonviolence. Adding the folk proverb "Hate begets hate" as a warning to his emphasis on the Bible proverb "Love your enemies", he makes the following strong statement in yet another restatement of this sermon in his book *Strength to Love* (1963):

> *Why should we love our enemies?* The first reason is fairly obvious. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction. So when Jesus says "Love your enemies" [Matt. 5:44], he is setting forth a profound and ultimately inescapable admonition. Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies – or else? The chain reaction of evil – hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation. (King 1963: 37)

This paragraph becomes a proverbial cautionary tale, as in fact many of King's sermons might well be classified. Of course, despite all of this anxiety, gloom, and despair, King always has the audacity of hope for a better world. The purpose of his sermonic explications of proverbs is thus an uplifting attempt of finding a better way for humankind to struggle for freedom and peace throughout the world. His favorite Bible proverb "Love your enemies" is without doubt the wisdom that can lead us there.

Martin Luther King was above all a preacher whose "rhetoric was of the *Biblical vernacular*" (Marbury 1971: 4 [1989: 626]). He knew his Bible, and he spoke and wrote with the Holy Book always on his mind. He could cite entire passages from the Bible, and he used its well-known passages to add authority to his views and arguments (Calloway-Thomas and Lucaites 1993). The scriptures were always with him, but as he quoted them, he also was perfectly capable to apply them to the sociopolitical issues of his time. While he was steeped in the Bible and believed in the word of God, he most certainly used its language and wisdom to help the cause of desegregation and civil rights along. There is thus hardly a page in King's oeuvre that does not at least contain a reference to the Bible (Stevenson 1949; Mieder 1990). At times he retells Biblical parables or cites entire verses, but more often than not he restricts himself to but a sentence or two from the Bible.

Sometimes he explains the specific meaning that they might have for the modern world, and in other instances he employs them to add argumentative weight to his religious and social rhetoric. Since he is a social reformer wearing the preacher's robe, he is clearly also a moral teacher relying heavily on Bible proverbs to spread the good word. Preachers have always made use of Biblical proverbs (McKenzie 1996 and 2002), with his namesake Martin Luther having been a champion of Bible and folk proverbs in Germany during the Reformation (Cornette 1942 [1997]).

When King delivered one of the versions of his well-known sermon "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life" on April 9, 1967, at New Covenant Church in Chicago, he included the proverb "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Gal. 5:14) as an expression of reciprocal love and two additional proverbial Bible passages from Amos and Isaiah. Above all, he summarizes the three dimensions of a complete life by way of the golden rule "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt. 7:12). This proverb that is known in various forms in the world's religions could easily have become King's proverbial leitmotif for his nonviolent struggle for human rights (Hertzler 1933-1934; Griffin 1991: 67-69; Templeton 1997: 8-12), but he chose the shorter and more direct proverb "Love your enemies" (Matt 5:44) instead. But here then is King's rhetorical masterpiece that amasses four Bible proverbs into a powerful statement of love, justice, peace, and morality:

> Go out this morning. Love yourself, and that means rational and healthy self-interest. You are commanded to do that. That's the length of life. Then follow that: Love your neighbor as you love yourself [Gal. 5:14]. You are commanded to do that. That's the breadth of life. And I'm going to take my seat now by letting you know that there's a first and even greater commandment: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, [*Yeah*] with all thy soul, with all thy strength." I think the psychologist would just say "with all thy personality." And when you do that, you've got the breadth [King meant to say: height] of life.
>
> And when you get all three of these together, you can walk and never get weary. You can look up and see the morning stars singing together, and the sons of God

> shouting for joy. When you get all of these working together in your very life, judgment will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream [Amos 5:24].
> When you get all the three of these together, the lamb will lie down with the lion [Isaiah 11:6]. [...]
> When you get all three of these working together, you will do unto others as you'd have them do unto you [Matt. 7:12].
> When you get all three of these together, you will recognize that out of one blood God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. (Carson and Holloran 1998: 139; April 9, 1967)

And yet, despite of its grand Biblical and moral rhetoric, this passage says nothing about racial and social matters. But such exclusion is relatively rare. In fact, the many sermons and the various versions of one and the same basic message offer valuable opportunities to illustrate Martin Luther King's *modus operandi* with the religious *and* sociopolitical implications of the proverbial wisdom included in them. A fine example involves the widely known Bible proverb "Man does not live by bread alone" (Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4) that appears in both the Old and New Testaments. King used it in a sermon on "The Christian Doctrine of Man" on March 12, 1958 at the Council of Churches' Noon Lenten Services at Detroit, stating that he as a minister has a moral and social obligation to his parishioners and the world at large. But there is also an extremely important interpretive twist of the proverb in this text when King states that the word "alone" in the proverb implies that Jesus was very well aware that man cannot live without bread nor by it alone (Turner 1977: 52 [1989: 1000]; Rieder 2008: 289). And this in turn gives King the proverbial argument that poverty must be combated in the United States and throughout the world:

> And so in Christianity the body is sacred. The body is significant. This means that in any Christian doctrine of man we must forever be concerned about man's physical well-being. Jesus was concerned about that. He realized that men had to have certain physical necessities. One day he said, "Man cannot live by bread alone" [Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4]. [*Yeah*] But the mere fact that the "alone" was added

> means that Jesus realized that man could not live without bread. [*Yes*] So as a minister of the gospel, I must not only preach to men and women to be good, but I must be concerned about the social conditions that often make them bad. [*Yeah*] It's not enough for me to tell men to be honest, but I must be concerned about the economic conditions that make them dishonest. [*Amen*] I must be concerned about the poverty in the world. I must be concerned about the ignorance in the world. I must be concerned about the slums in the world. (VI,332; March 12, 1958)

Usually relying on the proverbial wisdom of Jesus (Winton 1990), King found the perfect metaphor for his social agenda in the New Testament proverb "He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). It became *the* symbolic argument against all the ills of violent mistreatment of others. In his address on "The Montgomery Story" at the Annual NAACP Convention on June 27, 1956, at San Francisco, he cites the Bible proverb as a metaphorical sign of violence that must be overcome by a philosophy of nonviolence:

> From the beginning there has been a basic philosophy undergirding our movement. It is a philosophy of nonviolent resistance. It is a philosophy which simply says we will refuse on a nonviolent basis, to cooperate with the evil of segregation. In our struggle in America we cannot fret with the idea of retaliatory violence. To use the method of violence would be both impractical and immoral. We have neither the instruments nor the techniques of violence, and even if we had it, it would be morally wrong. There is the voice crying [*applause*], there is a voice crying through the vista of time, saying: "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword" [Matt. 26:52]. [*applause*] History is replete with the bleached bones of nations who failed to hear these words of truth, and so we decided to use the method of nonviolence, feeling that violence would not do the job. (III,305; June 27, 1956)

Many other passages with this "sword"-proverb could be cited, but suffice it to quote this one additional text from an address on

"Some Things We Must Do" that King gave on December 5, 1957, at the Second Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change in Montgomery. It is once again a rather general statement on the opposition of violence and nonviolence, with such statements as "Violence solves no social problems" and "Violence is not the way" taking on the role of quotational slogans by Martin Luther King, even though they have not been recorded in books on King's famous utterances (see Hoskins 1968; Ayres 1993):

> We must plunge deeper into the whole philosophy of nonviolence as we continue to move on in our quest for freedom. As I look at our situation and the situation of oppressed peoples all over the world, it seems to me that there are three ways that oppressed people can deal with their oppression. One is to rise up in armed revolt, one is to rise up with violence, and many people have used that method. It seems that violence has become something of the inseparable twin of western materialism. It's even become the hallmark of its grandeur. Violence nevertheless solves no social problems. It only creates new and more complicated ones. Yes, violence often brings about temporary victory, but never permanent peace. This evening as I stand before you, it seems that I can hear the voice crying through the vista of time, still saying to men in this generation: "He who lives by the sword, will perish by the sword" [Matt. 26:52]. [*All right*] History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and communities that failed to hear that command. Violence is not the way. [...] It seems to me there is a third way. There is a third way that is more powerful and enduring and lasting than the first two: that is the way of nonviolent resistance. (IV,340-341; Dec. 5, 1957)

While Martin Luther King has numerous favorite Bible proverbs and literary quotations that he cites on numerous occasions as rhetorical leitmotifs, he does not show this great fascination with any particular folk proverb. This does not mean that he shies away from using such folk wisdom when it suits him, but as a preacher he is clearly more steeped in Biblical truths. As has been pointed out already, King does not even use the term "proverb" when cit-

ing proverbs from traditional folk speech. If he uses introductory formulas at all, he prefers such designations as truism or saying, but usually he simply integrates folk proverbs without calling special attention to them. He might well have thought that they are so well known that they need no label. After all, he assumes the same with many of the Bible proverbs that he also often does not identify as such. In any case, the fact remains that the frequency of Bible proverbs outweighs that of folk proverbs (there are plenty of proverbial expressions from folk speech!), and this might in part well be due to his pride in having obtained a Ph.D. degree. That does not automatically need to result in a lesser emphasis on folk speech in the form of proverbs, but it is a known fact that King used a rather elevated style in his oral and written communications. While some of the transcriptions of sermons in his home church include some colloquial speech, he usually speaks and writes in an uplifting style that is intended to reach audiences of varied racial, social, economic, and intellectual levels. His sermonic and agitating rhetoric is based on a conscious attempt to address his listeners and readers on a demanding linguistic and intellectual level. But, of course, that does by no means exclude the significant integration of proverbs and proverbial expressions in his highly emotional and argumentative language. As preformulated or ready-made linguistic units they flow quite naturally into his messages and add considerable wisdom and expressiveness to them. Even though King does not overemphasize folk proverbs by using them as sapiential leitmotifs, he uses numerous proverbs with much rhetorical skill. Actually, just as Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass have done before him and as Barack Obama is doing now, it is the combined emphasis on Bible and folk proverbs that makes their sociopolitical statements so effective (Mieder 2000. 2001, 2009c). People then and now could easily identify with this wisdom (see Mieder 1993) and subsequently marched along with their champions in the struggle for equality and freedom. There certainly is no doubt that proverbs have played a significant role in political discourse over the centuries, and they continue to be of considerable effectiveness in (inter)national politics today (see Nichols 1996; Mieder 1997, 2005, 2008a/b; Louis 2000).

King certainly utilizes various proverbs and proverbial expressions in his depictions of segregation and the necessary fight

against it. There is in fact most fitting proverb that King found to describe how African Americans have fought segregation in a nonviolent way by, proverbially speaking, straightening up their backs and thereby validating the proverb "You can't ride a man's back unless it is bent". The passage that includes both the proverbial phrase and the proverb in tandem appears in the published version of an interview in the January 1965 issue of *Playboy*. In this statement King is also reflecting on the best way of protesting against segregation, arguing that more specific approaches in certain locales are better than general arguments against segregation as a whole:

> The mistake I made there [at Albany, Georgia] was to protest against segregation generally rather than against a single and distinct facet of it. Our protest was so vague that we got nothing, and the people were left very depressed and in despair. It would have been much better to have concentrated upon integrating the buses or the lunch counters. One victory of this kind would have been symbolic, would have galvanized support and boosted morale. But I don't mean that our work in Albany ended in failure. The Negro people there straightened up their bent backs; you can't ride a man's back unless it's bent. Also, thousands of Negroes registered to vote who never had voted before, and because of the expanded Negro vote in the next election for governor of Georgia – which pitted a moderate candidate against a rabid segregationist – Georgia elected its first governor who had pledged to respect and enforce the law impartially. And what we learned from our mistakes in Albany helped our later campaigns in other cities to be more effective. We have never since scattered our efforts in a general attack on segregation, but have focused upon specific, symbolic objectives. (Washington 1986: 344; Jan. 1965)

In his stirring address of June 23, 1963, at the "Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall" at Detroit, King cites the modern proverb "Last hired, first fired" as an unfortunate truism especially regarding the employment injustice that African Americans face in light of racial discrimination:

> We've been pushed around so long; we've been the victims of lynching mobs so long; we've been the victims of economic injustice so long – still the last hired and the first fired all over this nation. And I know the temptation. I can understand from a psychological point of view why some caught up in the clutches of the injustices surrounding them almost respond with bitterness and come to the conclusion that the problem can't be solved within, and they talk about getting away from it in terms of racial separation. But even though I can understand it psychologically, I must say to you this afternoon that this isn't the way. Black supremacy is as dangerous as white supremacy. [*Applause*] And oh, I hope you will allow me to say to you this afternoon that God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men. God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race. [*Applause*] And I believe that with this philosophy and this determined struggle we will be able to go on in the days ahead and transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. (Carson and Shepard 2001: 68-69; June 23, 1963)

The element of time in eradicating such racial injustice wore heavily on Martin Luther King's mind. In his chapter on "The Dilemma of Negro Americans" of his book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967), he alludes negatively to the two folk proverbs "Time heals all wounds" and "Time and tide wait for no man", with the first alteration implying that the evils of segregation will not be forgotten and the second variation stating that the time has surely come to rid the country of this racial injustice once and for all:

> The challenge we face is to unite around powerful action programs to eradicate the last vestiges of racial injustice. We will be greatly misled if we feel that the problem will work itself out. Structures of evil do not crumble by passive waiting. If history teaches anything, it is that evil is recalcitrant and determined, and never voluntarily relinquishes its hold short of an almost fanatical resistance. Evil must be attacked by a counteracting persistence, by the day-to-day assault of the battering rams of justice.

> We must get rid of the false notion that there is some miraculous quality in the flow of time that inevitably heals all evils. There is only one thing certain about time, and that is that it waits for no one. If it is not used constructively, it passes you by. (King 1967a: 128)

In his constant concern for the progress in the fight for civil rights, King found another proverb to express that there is no easy way or quick fix, namely "No pain, no gain". King cites the less frequent variant "No gain without pain" in his already mentioned address at the "Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall" (1963) to explain that there is a heavy price to pay (an additional proverbial phrase) for social advancement:

> And I do not want to give you the impression that it's going to be easy [to get civil rights]. There can be no great social gain without individual pain. And before the victory for brotherhood is won, some will have to get scarred up a bit. Before the victory is won, some more will be thrown into jail. Before the victory is won, some, like Medgar Evers, may have to face physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children and their white brothers from an eternal psychological death, then nothing can be more redemptive. Before the victory is won, some will be misunderstood and called bad names, but we must go on with a determination and with a faith that this problem can be solved. [*Yeah*] [*Applause*] (Carson and Shepard 2001: 70-71; June 23, 1963)

One thing is for certain in King's socially conscious mind and heart, however, and that is that something must be done against the incredible poverty among citizens of all races in the richest country of the world. In the chapter on "Nonviolence and Social Change" in his book *The Trumpet of Conscience* (1967) he describes a planned march on Washington in support of the poor to his listeners. And he is quick in modifying the proverb "Beware the man who has nothing to lose" to include the word "revolutionary". Since he supplies the information that "people say" this, he acknowledges, albeit indirectly, the proverbiality of the statement:

> The only real revolutionary, people say, is a man who has nothing to lose. There are millions of poor people in this country who have very little, or even nothing, to lose. If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life. Beginning in the New Year, we will be recruiting three thousand of the poorest citizens from ten different urban and rural areas to initiate and lead a sustained, massive, direct-action movement in Washington. Those who choose to join this initial three thousand, this nonviolent army, this "freedom church" of the poor, will work with us for three months to develop nonviolent action skills. Then we will move on Washington, determined to stay there until the legislative and executive branches of the government take serious and adequate action on jobs and income. (King 1967b: 60)

Despite his constant struggle against violence and injustice, King also has a good sense of humor. This can also be seen from King's retelling of an occasion where a student hit the proverbial nail on the head when he cited the folk proverb "If rabbits could throw rocks, there would be fewer hunters in the forest". Readers of King's essay on "The Time for Freedom Has Come" in the *New York Times Magazine* of September 16, 1961, must have enjoyed this relatively little known animal proverb. But as King is quick to point out in his explication of this piece of wisdom, there is much more to this witticism than meets the eye:

> It is not a solemn life, for all of its seriousness. During a vigorous debate among a group of students discussing the moral and practical soundness of nonviolence, a majority rejected the employment of force. As the minority dwindled to a single student, he finally declared, "All I know is that, if rabbits could throw rocks, there would be fewer hunters in the forest."
>
> This is more than a witty remark to relieve the tensions of serious and even grim discussion. It expresses some of the pent-up impatience, some of the discontent and some of the despair produced by minute corrections in the face of enormous evil. Students necessarily have conflicting reac-

> tions. It is understandable that violence presents itself as a quick, effective answer for a few.
> For the large majority, however, nonviolent, direct action has emerged as the better and more successful way out. It does not require that they abandon their discontent. This discontent is a sound, healthy social response to the injustice and brutality they see around them. Nonviolence offers a method by which they can fight the evil with which they cannot live. It offers a unique weapon which, without firing a single bullet, disarms the adversary. It exposes his moral defenses, weakens his morale, and at the same time works on his conscience. (Washington 1986: 163-164; Sept. 10, 1961)

The one thing that these young people and everybody need to remember is that all of life and existence is interconnected, and King found the perfect quotation long turned proverb to express this idea on numerous occasions. He began referring to the first line of John Donne's "No Man is an Island" (1624) in the early 1950s, citing much more of the actual poem in his address on "Facing the Challenge of a New Age" at the First Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change on December 3, 1956, at Montgomery. Even at this early date, King already speaks of an absolutely interconnected world, where people must try to find ways to interrelate in a humane fashion. Everybody's very existence depends on other people, and the bell of accountability rings for all, as Donne exclaims. This statement has long become a proverbial phrase as well, and King often uses both proverbial lines from Donne's poem together to point to this common fate of people throughout the world:

> This says [...] to us that our world is geographically one. Now we are faced with the challenge of making it spiritually one. Through our scientific genius we have made of the world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual genius we must make of it a brotherhood. We are all involved in the single process. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. We are all links in the great chain of humanity. This is what John Doane [*sic*] meant when he said years ago:

> "No man is an island, entire of it selfe; every man
> is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine;
> [...]; any mans death
> diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde;
> And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
> it tolls for thee."
> (III,456-457; Dec. 3, 1956; also in Washington 1986: 138; April, 1957)

Typical for Martin Luther King, this statement went through several mutations in a number of sermons and speeches (Boesak 1976: 28 [1989: 86]); Lischer 1995: 43) with the last one appearing in his sermon "Remaining Awake Through a great Revolution" at the National Cathedral (Episcopal) on March 31, 1968, at Washington, D.C., once again including "John Donne's famous dictum 'No man is an island' to reinforce his argument about America's interrelationship with the rest of the world and therefore its need to be concerned about all citizens not just its own" (Sharman 1999: 98):

> Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet ... we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers. Or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured.
> John Donne caught it years ago and placed it in graphic terms – "No man is an island entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent – a part of the main." And he goes on toward the end to say, "Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind. Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." We must see this, believe this, and live by it ... if we are to

> remain awake through a great revolution. (Washington 1986: 269-270; March 31, 1968)

In his book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967) King had included a chapter on "The World House", arguing that "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 Jews, 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 1967a: 167). And here, in this uplifting passage from his sermon, he speaks of a brotherhood (sisterhood is implied) that is poetically "tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality". As we speak today of globalization and an interconnected world, it behooves us to remember such passages from Martin Luther King to appreciate what great visionary he really was not only for civil rights in the United States but for justice, equality, and freedom all over the globe.

After such spirited call for a united world connected by basic human rights, it might come as quite a surprise that the well educated and sophisticated orator King would turn with all seriousness to such a mundane American proverb as "If you build (make) a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door" (Mieder et al. 1992: 420). Actually, considerable scholarly work has been done on the origin of this text (Stevenson 1935: 343-381), and even though King always credits Ralph Waldo Emerson with having coined it in his eight citations of it between 1956 and 1963, matters are not quite as definite about Emerson's coinage of the proverbial metaphor (regarding such questionable attributions see Taylor 1931: 34-43). As Fred Shapiro and other quotation sleuths before him have pointed out, what Emerson actually wrote down and which might have given rise to the proverb as it is known today appears in a journal entry by Emerson from 1855: "I trust a good deal to common fame, as we all must. If a man has good corn, or wood, or boards, or pigs, to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or church organs, than anybody else, you will find a broad hard-beaten road to his house, though it be in the woods" (Shapiro 2006: 244-245; see also Stevenson 1935:

343-181, and 1948: 1633). But be that as it may, King used it repeatedly as an Emerson quotation – he might well have simply used it as a proverb but probably liked the quotational authority – as for example in his lecture on "The Rising Tide of Racial Consciousness" on September 6, 1960, when he talked to the National Urban League in New York City:

> We must constantly stimulate our youth to rise above the stagnant level of mediocrity, and seek to achieve excellence in their various fields of endeavor. Doors are opening now that were not open in the past, and the great challenge facing minority groups is to be ready to enter these doors as they open. No greater tragedy could befall us at this hour but that of allowing new opportunities to emerge without the concomitant preparedness to meet them. Ralph Waldo Emerson said in a lecture back in 1871 that "if a man can write a better book, or preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, even if he builds his house in the woods the world will make a beaten path to his door." This has not always been true. But I have reason to believe that because of the shape of the world today and the fact that we cannot afford the luxury of an anemic democracy, this affirmation will become increasingly true. We must make it clear to our young people that this is an age in which they will be forced to compete with people of all races and nationalities. We cannot aim merely to be good Negro teachers, good Negro doctors, or good Negro skilled laborers. We must set out to do a good job irrespective of race. We must seek to do our life's work so well that nobody could do it better. The Negro who seeks to be merely a good Negro, whatever he is, has already flunked his matriculation examination for entrance into the university of integration. (V,506; Sept. 6, 1960)

There is one more quotation turned proverb that needs to be mentioned, namely the historian Charles A. Beard's insight based on the natural phenomenon that "When it gets dark enough you can see the stars" that King cites for the last time in his sermon "I See the Promised Land" on April 3, 1968, just one day before his assassination at Memphis, Tennessee.: "I know, somehow, that only

when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding – something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee – the cry is always the same – 'We want to be free'" (Washington 1986: 279-280; April 3, 1968). Yes, indeed, stars of hope were everywhere when Martin Luther King spoke of freedom with his typical eloquence that was at least in part informed by his perfect utilization of quotations with a certain claim of proverbiality.

It should not be surprising that someone who is so inclined to the use of proverbial quotations and proverbs would not also amass them into paragraphs of utmost rhetorical authority. Once King found a certain combination of quotations and proverbs that he liked as "set pieces", he usually kept them in the same order when making use of these ready-made collages in his sermons and speeches (Miller 1992: 153-155; Lischer 1995: 104-105). Whenever appropriate, he could simply call on this impressive repertoire that he basically had memorized and could employ to add Biblical, literary or folkloric authority to his often quite spontaneous remarks.

His preference of stringing together two or more quotations and proverbs to express a certain belief or conviction can clearly be seen by his frequent reliance on two famous statements from the Declaration of Independence. By citing the proverb "All men are created equal" and the proverbial triad "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in tandem as they appear originally in this American creed (Aron 2008: 91-96), King knows that his listeners and readers will identify positively with the fundamental ideas of equality and freedom expressed in them. And while King always cites this wisdom with positive conviction, it gives him the rhetorical opportunity to show that the ideal expressed in them has not been achieved regarding the African American citizens, to wit the following paragraph from his stirring sermon on "The Christian Doctrine of Man" that he delivered on March 12, 1958, at Detroit. Judging by the responses of the audience, people must have been

quite taken by King's sermonic stroke of genius of letting God talk to them through their preacher:

> The God of the universe stands there in all of His love and forgiving power saying, "Come home. [*Yeah, Amen, Amen*] Western civilization, you have strayed away into the far country of colonialism and imperialism. You have taken one billion six hundred million of your brothers in Asia and Africa, dominated them politically, exploited them economically, segregated and humiliated them. You have trampled over them. But western civilization, if you will rise up now and come out of this far country of imperialism and colonialism and come on back to your true home, which is freedom and justice, I'll take you in. [*Yeah, Oh amen*] America, I had great intentions for you. I had planned for you to be this great nation where all men would live together as brothers – a nation of religious freedom, a nation of racial freedom. And America, you wrote it in your Declaration of Independence. You meant well, for you cried out, 'All men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. [*Yeah*] Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' [*Preach*] But in the midst of your creed, America, you've strayed away to the far country of segregation and discrimination. [*Say it, Amen*] You've taken sixteen million of your brothers, trampled over them, mistreated them, inflicted them with tragic injustices and indignities. But America, I'm not going to give you up. If you will rise up out of the far country of segregation and discrimination [*Amen*], I will take you in, America. [*Amen, Amen*] And I will bring you back to your true home." (VI,337; March 12, 1958)

As can be imagined, Martin Luther King is not always satisfied with just citing his favorite proverb "All me are created equal" and the proverbial triad "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". To add even more rhetorical credence to his arguments, he expands this double dose of authority by one, two or even three additional quotations or proverbs in the same paragraph. And in order to add a somewhat satirical twist to these phrase collages, he constructs them around the idea of a responsible person having to be

"maladjusted". Employing the anaphora "as maladjusted as" and other uses of the word "maladjusted", King claims that it takes maladjusted people to bring about equality, justice, and freedom. In his speech of September 2, 1957, at Monteagle, Tennessee, on "A Look to the Future", King the stylistic tinkerer and "mix-master, blending and layering different elements of talk" (Rieder 2008: 104), augments Jefferson's proverbial words with three Bible proverbs, namely "Let judgment run down like waters and righteousness like a might stream" (Amos 5:24) "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52) and "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44). With that anaphoral *tour de force* he has indeed found an authoritative statement for the future in which people will be courageously "maladjusted" to bring about social change:

> But there are some things in our social system to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I suggest that you too ought to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating method of physical violence. I call upon you to be maladjusted. Well you see, it may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted. The challenge to you this morning as I leave you is to be maladjusted – as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day, could cry out in terms that echo across the centuries, "Let judgment run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream" [Amos 5:24]; as maladjusted as Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not survive half slave and half free; as maladjusted as Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out in words lifted to cosmic proportions, "All men are created equal, and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among

> these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Yes, as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who dared to dream a dream of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He looked at men amid the intricate and fascinating military machinery of the Roman Empire, and could say to them, "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword"[Matt. 26:52]. Jesus, who could look at men in the midst of their tendencies for tragic hate and say to them, "Love thy enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that despitefully use you" [Matt. 5:44]. The world is in desperate need of such maladjustment. Through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice. (IV,276; Sept. 2, 1957)

While this rhetorical set piece in its various mutations can be found several times in King's sermons, speeches, and books, mention should also be made of a similar often repeated and reformulated paragraph that begins with two at first unidentified quotations and eventually is expanded to include a third quotation and a Bible proverb. In his "Statement on Ending the Bus Boycott" on December 20, 1956, at Montgomery, King quotes the abolitionist Theodore Parker and the poet William Cullen Bryant in support of his argument that justice had indeed prevailed:

> These twelve months [in Montgomery] have not at all been easy. Our feet have often been tired. We have struggle[d] against tremendous odds to maintain alternative transportation. There have been moments when roaring waters of disappointment poured upon us in staggering torrents. We can remember days when unfavorable court decisions came upon us like tidal waves, leaving us treading in the deep and confused waters of despair. But amid all of this we have kept going with the faith that as we struggle, God struggles with us, and that the arc of the moral universe, although long, is bending toward justice [a statement from the abolitionist Theodore Parker that became a leitmotif in King's oratory]. We have lived under the agony and darkness of Good Friday with the conviction that one day the heightening glow of Easter would

> emerge on the horizon. We have seen truth crucified and goodness buried, but we have kept going with the conviction that truth crushed to earth will rise again [line from the poet William Cullen Bryant]. (III,486; Dec. 20, 1956)

By the time King gives his emotionally charged speech "Our God is Marching On!" on March 25, 1965, at Montgomery, he adds Thomas Carlyle's "No lie can live forever" and the Bible proverb "As you sow, so shall you reap" (Gal. 6:7) to this set piece of "messianic discourse" (Charteris-Black 2005:64) and reverses the order of the other two in this peroration of merged quotations and proverbs (Luker 2003: 41-43). This might well be yet another example of how King works from memory as he calls on his repertoire of such proverbial collages at the spur of the moment:

> Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man but to win his friendship and understanding. We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. That will be a day not of the white man, not of the black man. That will be the day of man as man.
> I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to earth will rise again.
> How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.
> How long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow [Gal. 6:7].
> How long? Not long. Because the arm [*sic*, arc] of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.
> How long? Not long, 'cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on.
> He has sounded forth the trumpets that shall never call retreat. He is lifting up the hearts of man before His judgment seat. Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him. Be jubilant, my feet. Our God is marching on. (Washington 1986: 230; March 25, 1965)

According to fellow civil rights advocate and now U.S. Representative John Lewis "this is poetry" (Carson and Shepard 2001: 116), and it would have been absolutely ridiculous, if King had in fact included the names of Bryant, Carlyle, and Parker or the precise Bible reference in his powerful anaphora "How long? Not long, because ..." (Lischer 1995: 128; see Carter 1996: 128 and 141, who mistakenly thinks Parker's statement to be King's "own metaphor"). Jonathan Rieder, referring to this set piece, very appropriately speaks of King's "theology of hope" (Rieder 2008: 322) that it expresses, calling to mind Barack Obama's more secularly stated "audacity of hope" (Obama 2006) for humankind.

Martin Luther King's struggle for freedom and equality moved forward in many different ways, and as he spoke about the various paths taken, he frequently used proverbs and proverbial phrases that have the noun "way" in them. They are by their very nature usually future oriented and are thus perfectly suited as metaphors to describe and reflect upon the way to progress. There is no doubt that King himself never tired of going out of his way for the civil and human rights movement, giving his energy and time for the cause of justice and equality in the United States and far beyond. With all the setbacks and defeats he never faltered, citing the proverbial phrase "to have come a long way" to emphasize the progress that had been made while at the same time stressing with the proverbial phrase "to have a long way to go" that much work still lies ahead. He connects these two phrases for the first time in his philosophically informed article on "The 'New Negro' of the South" that appeared in the June 1956 journal the *Socialist Call*:

> Like the synthesis of Hegelian philosophy, the realistic attitude seeks to reconcile the truths of two opposites and avoid the extremes of both. So the realist in race relations would agree with the optimist in saying, we have come a long way, but he would balance that by agreeing with the pessimist that we have a long long way to go. It is this realistic position that I would like to set forth: We have come a long long way, and we have a long long way to go. (III,282; June 1956)

By citing both proverbial phrases twice together, King presents a convincing realistic argument that finds a synthesis between the optimistic and pessimistic assessment concerning the progress of

race relations. Clearly he is always more interested in looking to the future, realizing that the end of the road towards racial justice is still far off. King exhibits an incredible faith in the future, with his strong belief in a benevolent God giving him the strength to continue on the long and treacherous way that lies ahead.

But there is one speech with the title "A Long Way to Go" that wins the proverbial prize so to speak. King delivered it on April 27, 1965, on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles, and it was published six years later in Arthur L. Smith's and Stephen Robb's edited volume *The Voice of Black Rhetoric: Selections* (1971), with the editors commenting very briefly that "'A Long Way to Go' demonstrates King's mastery of the classical canons of style and arrangement. Clearly delineating introduction, body and conclusion in this speech, King's rhetorical organization is presented at its best. While there is little that is creative about the two-section arrangement (it has been used by many speakers), King's content allows suspense to be a key factor in this speech" (Smith and Robb 1971: 183). Agreed, but what would have been wrong in also saying that the speech has a proverbial title and that both the proverbial expressions "to have come a long way" and "to have a long way to go" as individual and combined leitmotifs (always with the emphatic double use of "long") inform the structural and rhetorical mastery of this address? As it is, the two folk metaphors are part of the dual structure of the lecture, and it cannot possibly be a surprise to learn that this rhetorical genius does begin his speech with a juxtaposition of them to set the stage:

> Many of you want to know, are we making any progress? That is the desperate question, a poignant question on the lips of millions of people all over our nation and all over the world. I get it almost every day. It is a question of whether we are making any real progress in the area of race relations. And so I'm going to try to answer that question and deal with many of the issues involved using as a subject from which to speak, the future of integration. Now there are some people who feel that we aren't making any progress; there are some people who feel that we're making overwhelming progress. I would like to take what I consider a realistic position and say that we

> have come a long, long way in the struggle to make justice and freedom a reality in our nation, but we still have a long, long way to go. And it is this realistic position that I would like to use as a basis for our thinking together. (Smith and Robb 1971: 188-189; April 27, 1965)

Having said this, the realistic King is ready to present a short history lesson regarding the progress in racial relations, couching this optimistic view into the proverbial leitmotif "to have come a long way". In the second half of the speech King gives an overview of what still remains to be done, now using the proverbial phrase "To have a long, long way to go" as his hopeful leitmotif. Altogether, the speech becomes a prophetic vision of the future.

But in addition to these proverbial expressions commenting on the "long way" of the civil rights movement, there is also Martin Luther King's ingenious use of the spiritual (faith) and secular (hope) proverb "God can (will) make a way out of no way." It grew out of the African American experience of searching to carve out a life of equality and dignity. Strange as it might seem, very little is known about the actual origin, history, and dissemination of this hopeful piece of folk wisdom. It does not appear in any of the standard proverb collections that are notoriously slow in registering new proverbs (Doyle 1996; Mieder 2009b; Mieder et al. 2011). But there is no doubt that it is indeed a folk proverb with considerable amounts of recorded references. Its original version "God can (will) make a way out of no way" yields 2950 Google hits, with its truncated and secular variant "Making a way out of no way" easily reaching 84300 references in Google. The proverb does not appear to have been registered in print before 1900, which does not mean that it might not have been in oral use prior to that date. Certainly Jack L. Daniel, Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson, and Milford A, Jeremiah, who have studied the rich proverb lore of African Americans, know this text, as can be seen from the title of their article "Makin' a Way out of No Way: The Proverb Tradition in the Black Experience" (1987). However, strangely enough, they do not present the proverb in their list of fifty proverbs collected from African Americans. All that their article does include is the statement "that the essence of the Black Experience is: to make a way out of no way" (Daniel et al. 1987: 494; see also Daniel 1973; Smitherman 1977: 245-246; Barnes-

Harden 1980: 57-80; Folly 1982; Mieder 1989: 111-128; Smitherman 1994; Prahlad 1996). This, however, is proof positive that these scholars consider this proverb to be reflecting the African American worldview of trying to cope and advance with God's help in a world that is not exactly supportive of their efforts.

Among the King scholars, it is Jonathan Rieder who has recognized that Martin Luther King did not only cite the proverb but that his entire life and work is the epitome of its basic idea. In fact, his book *The Word of the Lord Is Upon Me: The Righteous Performance of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (2008) contains a short section entitled "The Lord will make a way out of no way" (Rieder 2008: 152-157), but while he refers to King's use of the Bible proverb "Justice will run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream" as well as to King's "grandiloquence" and "mobilization talk" (Rieder 2008: 154, 155, and 157), he does not mention the folk proverb itself. However, later in his book, Rieder does have this to say: "Like a cheerleader, King offered counter-depressive aphorisms to rouse the spirit: love will not go unredeemed; God will make a way out of no way; my God is a good God; my God is marching on. Such phrases echoed the theology of hope King preached to his congregation, to whom he offered balm that would 'make the wounded whole'" (Rieder 2008: 207).

With this background we can turn to Martin Luther King's obvious knowledge and multiple use of this proverb. For example, in the chapter on "Desegregation at Last" of his book *Stride Toward Freedom. The Montgomery Story* (1958), King speaks of God being part of the struggle during the bus boycott and that it is the faith in His power that will give African Americans the strength to carry on. So when King writes "We must believe that a way will be made out of now way", the hidden subject of this passive sentence is in fact God who can find a way out of now way, as the original proverb has it:

> The evening came, and I mustered up enough courage to tell them the truth. I tried, however, to end on a note of hope. "This may well be," I said, "the darkest hour just before dawn. We have moved all of these months with the daring faith that God was with us in our struggle. The many experiences of days gone by have vindicated that

> faith in a most unexpected manner. We must go out with the same faith, the same conviction. We must believe that a way will be made out of no way." But in spite of these words, I could feel the cold breeze of pessimism passing through the audience. It was a dark night – darker than a thousand midnights. It was a night in which the light of hope was about to fade away and the lamp of faith about to flicker. We went home with nothing before us but a cloud of uncertainty. (King 1958: 158-159)

This is, of course, a typically optimistic statement by King that is much enhanced by the inclusion of the folk proverb that "The darkest hour is just before dawn." Later, during his interview with the *Playboy* editors that appeared in the January 1965 issue, he recounted what he had said to the people involved in the Montgomery bus boycott. And while his memory is quite correct, he now states the proverb with God as its clear subject: "God will make a way for us when there seems no way." By expanding its text slightly, King does in fact explicate its meaning to the editors, who, most likely as whites, might not have known the African American proverb at that time:

> There was one dark moment when we doubted it [to be successful with the bus boycott]. We had been struggling to make the boycott a success when the city of Montgomery successfully obtained an injunction from the court to stop our car pool. I didn't know what to say to our people. They had backed us up, and we had let them down. It was a desolate moment. I saw, all of us saw, that the court was leaning against us. I remember telling a group of those working closest with me to spread in the Negro community the message, "We must have the faith that things will work out somehow, that God will make a way for us when there seems no way." It was about noontime, I remember, when Rex Thomas of the Associated Press rushed over to where I was sitting and told me of the news flash that the U.S. Supreme Court had declared that bus segregation in Montgomery was unconstitutional. It had literally been the darkest hour before the dawn. (Washington 1986: 343-344; Jan. 1965)

On August 16, 1967, King cites the proverb once again in his last address as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, entitling his remarks with the question "Where Do We Go from Here?" Almost as expected by now, the proverb is to be found in the last paragraph of the entire speech in which King looks with much hope to a better future. While the two quotational proverbs "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice" and "Truth crushed to earth will rise again" together with the Bible proverb "As you sow, so shall you reap" (Gal. 6:7) imply that morality, honesty, and diligence will be rewarded, it is also made clear that there is "a power [i.e., God] that is able to make a way out of no way" for the African America people:

> When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice [Theodore Parker].
>
> Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" [Gal. 6:7]. This is for [*sic*] hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome, we have overcome, deep in my heart, I did believe we would overcome." (Washington 1986: 252; Aug. 16, 1967)

The fact that Martin Luther King quotes the proverb in these variants is an indication that he could rely on his audience knowing it in its basic wording. More importantly, its encouraging wisdom and orientation to the future made it the perfect proverb for King's religious and secular messages filled with faith, hope, and love for a world house of peace and freedom. Against all odds and obstacles, Martin Luther King, as a servant of God and humanity, was

indeed a man who believed in and succeeded in "making a way out of no way" in words and deeds. There is then no doubt that this proverb epitomizes the entire civil and human rights movement in the United States and throughout the world, and as such it is the perfect verbal sign for unwavering hope and courageous action. But there is one more fact that deserves to be registered at this point: Martin Luther King's oral and written rhetoric would perhaps not have held people's attention to the degree it did without its proverbial language adding life, spice, and wisdom to it by way of traditional and innovative metaphors.

Finally, there is one more metaphor that needs to be addressed that goes hand in hand with the proverb "Making a way out of no way". In order to look for the ways of social improvements, humankind needs to have a visionary and prophetic dream that promises that a solid faith and unwavering hope in the struggle for civil and human rights will eventually lead to progress. King himself adhered to this dream of equality and justice for all during his entire life. King and the many participants of the civil rights movement fortunately had the audacity to dream of making a way out of no way, and it should thus not be surprising that dreams of an interconnected new world house for all of humanity are a leitmotif in many of King's sermons and speeches, with the very word "dream" repeatedly appearing in their titles.

A passage from an NAACP address on "The Negro and the American Dream" that King delivered on September 25, 1960, at Charlotte, North Carolina, shows this very convincingly in the first three paragraphs (Sundquist 2009: 27). It begins with a quotable statement – "America is essentially a dream – a dream yet unfulfilled" (see Kelly-Gangi 2009: 52) – and almost predictably includes the two proverbial claims from the Declaration of Independence. But as always, dreaming the dream is not enough for King with the challenge of changing America's dream into reality demanding that all people are willing to pay a high price, as King concludes with yet another one of his favorite proverbial expressions:

> This afternoon I would like to speak from the subject, "The Negro and the American Dream." In a real sense America is essentially a dream – a dream yet unfilfilled [*sic*]. It is the dream of a land where men of all races, col-

> ors and creeds will live together as brothers. The substance of the dream is expressed in these sublime words: "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." This is the dream. It is a profound, eloquent and unequivocal expression of the dignity and worth of all human personality.
>
> But ever since the founding fathers of our nation dreamed this dream, America has manifested a schizophrenic personality. She has been torn between [two] selves – a self in which she has proudly professed democracy and a self in which she has sadly practiced the antithesis of democracy. Slavery and segregation have been strange paradoxes in a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal.
>
> Now more than ever before America is challenged to bring her noble dream into reality. The shape of the world today does not permit America the luxury of exploiting the Negro and other minority groups. The price that America must pay for the continued opression [*sic*] of the Negro is the price of its own destruction. (V,508-509; Sept. 25, 1960)

This is indeed a memorable paragraph, of which there can be found so many in King's oeuvre. But it should once again be noted, that while this great orator takes his audience to lofty heights regarding the American ideals of democracy, he is very quick to point out that they are still far from having been achieved. Democracy, equality, freedom, etc. demand work and struggle, and the best way to verbalize these demands is by way of proverbial language.

To a certain degree, these "dream"-speeches foreshadow King's famous "I Have a Dream" oration of August 28, 1963 (Carson and Holloran 1998: xvi-xvii). But before turning to that address with its unforgettable "I have a dream"-anaphora, there is at least one of several precursors that needs to be mentioned, for it has been established that "in the spring and summer of 1963, 'I have a dream' became one of King's most frequently delivered set

pieces" (Hansen 2003: 111). On June 23, 1963, King delivered his major "Address at the Freedom Rally in Cobo Hall" at Detroit. This speech, a mere two months before the one at Washington, D.C., is an excellent example for how King integrates certain rhetorical set pieces with some variations again and again into his speeches. This version of the "I have a dream"-speech includes such fixed phrases as "If a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live", "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere", "Love your enemies", "Love or perish", "Last hired, first fired", "No gain without pain", "to put on the brakes", "to be called names", "to have clean hands", and "to pay the price for something". But here is the actual "I have a dream"-sequence that adds the proverbs and phrases "to join hands with someone", "to be judged by the content of one's character and not by the color of one's skin", "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24), "All men are created equal", "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", and a repetition of "to join hands with someone". This is indeed a powerful collage of preformulated language, with the ""I have a dream"-anaphora adding a contagious rhythm to it, as can be seen (heard) from the almost sermonic testifying by the Detroit audience:

> And so this afternoon, I have a dream. [*Go ahead*] It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.
> I have a dream that one day, right down in Georgia and Mississippi and Alabama, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to live together as brothers.
> I have a dream this afternoon [*I have a dream*] that one day [*Applause*], one day little white children and little Negro children will be able to join hands as brothers and sisters.
> [...]
> I have a dream this afternoon [*Yeah*] that my four little children, that my four little children will not come up in the same young days that I came up within, but they will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, and not the color of their skin. [*Applause*]

> I have a dream this afternoon that one day right here in Detroit, Negroes will be able to buy a house or rent a house anywhere that their money will carry them and they will be able to get a job. [*Applause*] [*That's right*]
> Yes, I have a dream this afternoon that one day in this land the words of Amos will become real and justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream [Amos 5:24].
> I have a dream this evening that one day we will recognize the words of Jefferson 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." I have a dream this afternoon. [*Applause*]
> [...]
> I have a dream this afternoon that the brotherhood of man will become a reality in this day.
> And with this faith I will go out and carve a tunnel of hope through the mountain of despair. With this faith, I will go out with you and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. With this faith, we will be able to achieve this new day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing with the Negroes in the spiritual of old:
> Free at last! Free at last!
> Thank God Almighty, we are free at last! [*Applause*].
> (Carson and Shepard 2001: 71-73; June 23, 1963)

Had this address in Detroit drawn as large a crowd and as much (inter)national attention by the press, it might well have become the most treasured speech by Martin Luther King, giving Detroit (my first home when I arrived in the United States as a German immigrant in August of 1960) a much needed boost as a city that is struggling to this day with racism, poverty, unemployment, and many other social problems.

By the time King delivered his "I have a dream"-speech with its set of quotational and proverbial statements at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, it was billed as the keynote address

of the "March on Washington, D.C., for Civil Rights". The press from here and abroad was present, a quarter million people had assembled, and Martin Luther King found himself at the largest public event of the civil rights movement. It gave him and his idea of nonviolent struggle for equality, justice, and freedom a national and subsequently an international forum, never to be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to be present at this momentous occasion, who witnessed the speech on television or listened to it on the radio, read it in the papers the following day or have come across it on film or in print ever since. Not surprisingly, then, much scholarly attention has been directed to this very speech (see Solomon 1993; Bobbit 2004; Vail 2006; Sayenko 2008), including two invaluable books by Drew D. Hansen, *The Dream. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Speech that Inspired a Nation* (2003), and very recently by Eric J. Sundquist, *King's Dream* (2009).

As is well known, King began his speech reading from a carefully prepared manuscript, but sensing that it prevented him from reaching the large crowd, he spontaneously switched to his "I have a dream"-sequence, as Drew D. Hansen has shown in a revealing side-by-side comparison of the written manuscript with the actual oral delivery (Hansen 2003: 71-86). As was his custom, he now relied on his "repertoire of oratorical fragments" or "his own storehouse of oratory" (Hansen 2003: 70), knowing intuitively that his "dream" set piece, spoken as an orally performed conclusion (Patton 1993: 114-116), would give him the desired conclusion that he had not been able to compose during his work on this all-important address the days and night before its delivery. Here then is the "I have a dream"-peroration with but three proverbial statements, i.e. "All men are created equal" and the proverbial phrases "to be judged by the content of one's character and not by the color of one's skin" and "to join hands with someone", with the latter being cited twice as a verbal sign of true brother- and sisterhood in an America of equality, justice, and freedom:

> So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed – we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.
I have a dream that one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.
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 content of their character. I have a dream today!
I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, that one day, right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with the little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today!
[...]
With this faith we will be able to hear [*sic*, i.e. hew] out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.
With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning – "my country 'tis of thee: sweet land of liberty; of thee I sing; land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride; from every mountain side, let freedom ring" – and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.
So let freedom ring [...]
And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and

> to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last." (Washington 1986: 219-220; August 28, 1963)

It goes to Eric J. Sundquist's credit that he draws attention to King's formulaic "Not by the Color of Their Skin" statement at the beginning of his long chapter with that title in his book *King's Dream* (2009: 194-228): "Even though it does not provide the Dream speech's most famous phrase, one sentence stands alone for the philosophy it appeared to announce and the contentious use to which it has since been put: 'I have a dream that 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.' If King's dream began to be realized with passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, his apparently clear elevation of character over color proved central to subsequent arguments about the reach and consequences of that landmark legislation. Those thirty-five spontaneous words have done more than any politician's polemic, any sociologist's theory, or any court's ruling to frame public discussion of affirmative action over the past four decades" (Sundquist 2009: 194). Regarding the use of the "phrase" – Sundquist comes close to calling it a proverbial phrase – he is correct in referring to its "spontaneous" use in the context of this particular speech. It was in fact not included in the original manuscript and King added it during his extemporaneous peroration: "'I started out reading the speech,' recalled Martin Luther King, Jr., then 'all of a sudden this thing came out of me that I have used – I'd used it many times before, that thing about 'I have a dream' – and I just felt that I wanted to use it here. I don't know why, I hadn't thought about it before the speech'" (Sundquist 2009: 14). King was thus obviously aware of his recycling of the "I have a dream"-sequence in a number of variants, and I would assume that he also knew about his previous use of the "character/skin"-phrase in his "dream"-peroration of the address in Detroit two months earlier. If Sundquist with his reference to "spontaneous words" means to imply that the use of the phrase was new in the Washington speech, then he would be mistaken. In fact, as it were, King quite liked its metaphor and meaning, citing it three more times in sermons and speeches during 1967, thereby effectively helping his formulation along the path of becoming a proverbial expression.

By the end of 1967, the "I have a dream"-anaphora, modified to "I still have a dream" after its (inter)national exposure at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, at Washington, D.C., had doubtlessly become King's rhetorical signature phrase. Of course, it represents but one of his quotational and proverbial leitmotifs that made his sermons, speeches, letters essays, and books to such effective and memorable statements in the cause of civil and human rights. Quotations turned proverbs, Bible proverbs, folk proverbs, and a plethora of proverbial expressions are an intrinsic part of King's rhetorical prowess, providing his messages with colorful metaphors and authoritative strength. His noble dream of an America and a world interconnected by equality, justice, freedom, love, and hope had to be expressed through language so that the nonviolent movement for civil and human rights could march forward. Individual words and sentences were needed to bring these dignified ideals across, and there can be no doubt that proverbs and proverbial phrases as ready-made expressions served King extremely well in adding imagery and expressiveness to his numerous oral and written communications. His dream needed words and deeds, and being a master of both, Martin Luther King was and remains the visionary champion of making a way out of no way for all of humanity that due to him has come a long way but still has a long way to go. Moving on with an adherence to the Biblical triad of "faith, hope, and love" and the acceptance of the African American proverb "Making a way out of no way" will keep Martin Luther King's proverbial dream alive for future generations as they confront their fate in the world house of brotherly and sisterly mutuality.

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