

# Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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ter of American life was the belief that 'all men are created equal.'"

Beem argues that King led one of the most successful, nonviolent resistance movements in American history.

Quoting historian August Meier, Beem says, King succeeded because he was "a conservative militant."

He was not a "conservative in any political sense," explains Beem. King was a "democratic socialist," who opposed the Vietnam War and also emphasized that racism in America meant the United States was not living up to its own ideals. In King's words, American culture was "the very antithesis" of what it claimed to believe.

"The American ideal 'all men are created equal' constituted what King called a 'promissory note.' In each case, ordinary citizens demanded that that promise be honored. And through their actions, the nation was made more free and more just.

By framing the cause of civil rights in words and ideas that most Americans strongly identified with, King was able to appeal to their innate patriotism. What's more, those who stood against his cause were, by implication, the ones who could be seen as un-American."

King fought on behalf of poor people.

In fact, argues Joshua F.J. Inwood, an ethicist at Pennsylvania State

University's Rock Ethics Institute, King's later work related to ending poverty, although that is "often ignored." Says Inwood,

"When King was assassinated in Memphis he was in the midst of building toward a national march on Washington, D.C. that would have brought tens of thousands of economically disenfranchised people to advocate for policies that would ameliorate poverty. This effort - known as the 'Poor People's Campaign' - aimed to dramatically shift national priorities to the health and welfare of working peoples."

### King's idea of love

What then was at the core of King's strategy?

Scholars argue that King strove to bring people together. Howard University's Kenyatta Gilbert has studied the preaching of African-American ministers:

"King brought people of every tribe, class and creed closer toward forming 'God's beloved community' - an anchor of love and hope for humankind."

However, Joshuan Inwood explains, love for King was not a "mushy or easily dismissed emotion."

King advocated "agape" - "a love that demanded that one stand up for oneself and tells those who oppress that what they were doing was wrong."

Inwood writes that agape was at the center of the movement King was building. Agape made it a "moral imperative to engage with one's oppressor in a way that

showed the oppressor the ways their actions dehumanize and detract from society."

### Why this matters now

"Consider the following question," writes Western New England University historian John Baick.

"What would Martin Luther King be doing if he were alive today? The Selma of 1965 no longer exists. But the Selma, or Ferguson, or Staten Island, or Cleveland of 2015 shows that history isn't finished."

In reviewing the film "Selma," Baick points out how King's skills at oratory were only one of many. He explains,

King's voice was only one of his tools. There was his vision, his ferocity, his strategic and tactical organizing skills, and his willingness to sacrifice.

Then there was King's humility. As Beem suggests, in another article, humility is a much-needed virtue, while pointing to the "overwhelming" scientific evidence on human biases.

But humility, as he writes, also "means that you aware of your own failures, and are respectful of those with whom you disagree."

Beem explains that King acknowledged his limited perspective.

In his letter from Birmingham jail, he wrote,

"If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth or indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me."

## IN MEMORIAM: Civil Rights Trailblazer Rev. Dr. Vernon Tyson Dies at 89



Rev. Dr. Vernon Tyson

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire Correspondent

supremacy during the Civil Rights Movement, "didn't cater to my daddy's desires."

The Rev. Dr. Vernon Tyson "hoped to become a peacemaker," his son Tim wrote in the 2004 biography, "Blood Done Sign My Name."

Instead, African Americans had to confront "that hate in the streets," but also in their own souls, "to create a new black sense of self."

However, Tim Tyson said, "Daddy wanted the black freedom struggle to behave itself in a way that would help him reassure white people."

On Saturday, Dec. 29, the elder Tyson, a retired United Methodist minister who worked in churches throughout North Carolina, died at his Raleigh home.

In other words, Black people who turned radical in reaction to the radicalism of white

He was 89.

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