

Race, Law, and the Body Politic

This discussion will lean heavily on the work of Dr. Martin Luther King and his book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967).

Given the insurrection of Jan. 6, it seems very appropriate to ask ourselves what do we mean by community and is the King idea the most realizable for this democratic society?

King writes, "Our ultimate end must be the creation of the Beloved Community."

This idea of the 'beloved community' was first employed by Howard Thurman. Thurman insists, that it is important for us to realize that Beloved Community transcends race, religion, nationality, culture, and social class. It is a call to authentic community or "common ground" as Thurman described the root of our shared humanity and spiritual nature. King fleshes out what he means by beloved community stating:

"In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood."

King's idea of the beloved community hinged on the following points.

- Intergrationism
- Non-violent Direct Action as the method for change
- God of History
- Human Goodness
- The Superiority of Truth
- Science and technology as the friend of humanity.

Even Malcolm X had a similar idea of community but not grounded in King's intergrationism. Note the statement from Malcolm X:

"We are not fighting for integration, nor are we fighting for separation. We are fighting for recognition as human beings. We are fighting for ... human rights."

For Malcolm community is,

- Grounded in freedom.
- Self-development

The looming question of chaos or community demands our thinking about the causes of chaos.

- Falsehood over Truth
- Fear of change and of the “other.”
- A sense of abandonment.
- Quest for power.

Clearly, the beloved community is grounded in justice and love. Yet how do we manifest justice in this time?

What are the attributes of justice?

Who determines what is justice?

What do we do with people who refuse to be moved by moral persuasion?

Suggested readings:

Common Ground, Howard Thurman

Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community, Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Critical essays on the Philosopher King, Robert E. Birt, ed.