

Dr. King was a democratic socialist who was committed to radical racial justice. We have to stop lying to ourselves. We have to stop picking his bones clean and confront what he actually called us to be.

When we celebrate Dr. King we think about the Montgomery bus boycott, and we tell that story from the bus boycott to the "I Have a Dream" speech and the March on Washington and it's part of a standard story we tell ourselves about the Black freedom struggle that is accepted by mainstream society.

It's a story that begins in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the founding of the NAACP. And then we jumped from the NAACP all the way to Brown v. Board of Education, and then the Montgomery bus boycott, and then the student sit-ins, and then the March on Washington, and then Selma, and then King's murder.

It fixes Dr. King in one place because he's palatable then. Because he's talking about love. By the time King is murdered, he's still talking about love. He was a preacher after all. But he's speaking to the three evils. The peril of militarism. The effects of capitalism, and of course, the ongoing sin of racism.

Dr. King was also engaged in a radical politics, because he understood that radical change is necessary if the country was actually going to be saved. There's this sense in which Dr. King is always invoked, the Dr. King of 1963, the Dr. King of '62, '61, the Dr. King of the Montgomery bus boycott, in order to constrain the scope and extent of our politics.

But when talk about Dr. King of '68, when he's talking about a fundamental reordering of our economic reality, when he's thinking about, and trying to organize a Poor People's Campaign, where he's going to bring poor people from around the country, Black people, brown people, white people, from around the country to build a tent city in Washington, D.C., to bring to the fore the situation, the circumstance of poor people around the country.

That's not the Dr. King of "I Have a Dream," that's the Dr. King who understood that we needed a radical act of civil disobedience to jar the conscience of the nation. Remember, by the time he was shot down on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1968, Dr. King was calling for a fundamental reordering of America's economic system. He understood that racial justice was tied to economic justice. He understood that a system, an economic system, which presupposed that there was disposable people, could only produce a society that was predicated upon evil.

And so, he challenged the very assumptions of the country, and he did so from a moral standpoint. And for some, that was not only radical, for some in the government, he was the most dangerous human being in the country.

King, in some ways, passed from being a kind of radical figure in American history, to being a corroborator of America's promise. King became not the figure who challenged us to live up to the principles of the revolution. King became an affirmer of those principles, a kind of voice

Transcript of Professor Eddie Glaude Jr. talking about Martin Luther King Jr.

that, in some ways, celebrated the greatness of America. So he crossed over and became, in the symbology of the country, a figure consistent with Washington and Jefferson, and the like.

He, his voice, in other words, was co-opted as a part of a story of America exceptionalism. An affirmation of the greatness of America, as opposed to a critical voice speaking to the contradictions at the heart of the country.

Dr. King would not be satisfied with the moderates of today. Dr. King would be highly critical of folk who are satisfied with the current order of things, or folk who are willing to bite their tongue in the face of the nastiness and ugliness of a person like Donald Trump.

I think, if Dr. King were to be here in this moment, he would see a continuation of the forces that he confronted in the last days of his life.