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Time, Space, and Generic Reconstitution:
Martin Luther King's "A Time to Break
Silence" as Radical Jeremiad

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For countless thousands of children in Vietnam, breathing is quickened by terror and pain, and tiny bodies learn more about death every day. These solemn, rarely smiling little ones have never known what it is to live without despair.

They indeed know death, for it walks with them by day and accompanies their sleep at night. It is as omnipresent as the napalm that falls from the skies with the frequency and impartiality of the monsoon rain.

The horror of what we are doing to the children of Vietnam—"we," because napalm and white phosphorous are the weapons of America—is staggering. . . . There is no one to provide . . . care for most of the . . . horribly maimed children . . . and despite growing efforts by American and South Vietnamese authorities to conceal the fact, it's clear that there are hundreds of thousands of terribly injured children, with no hope for decent treatment on even a day-to-day basis, much less for

the long months and years of restorative surgery needed to repair ten searing seconds of napalm.¹

This fragment from the opening of William Pepper's 1967 photo essay "The Children of Vietnam" is relevant to our essay because, as numerous scholars have noted, it was only after encountering Pepper's essay in *Ramparts* magazine sometime in early 1967 that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. decided to declare publicly his opposition to the war in Vietnam.² He included some antiwar remarks in a February 1967 speech in Los Angeles and a March speech in Chicago. But King delivered his most comprehensive indictment of the American war effort the following month. After initially planning to use the United Nations Building as the backdrop for his speech, King eventually concluded that it would be more advantageous to speak on familiar turf. So on April 4 he addressed an audience of over 3,000 at the Riverside Church in New York City at a meeting sponsored by the prominent antiwar group Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. The speech he delivered that day is commonly known as either "A Time to Break Silence" or "Beyond Vietnam."

As he prepared the Riverside speech, King confronted a daunting rhetorical situation. Not only was he challenging a popular president who had provided crucial support during the legislative struggles on civil rights in 1964 and 1965 on an issue—foreign policy—thought to be beyond his area of expertise, he was also defying the position adopted at the time by virtually the entire civil rights establishment. Very few people thought it wise for Martin Luther King to oppose his nation's policies in Southeast Asia.³ But our focus is not on how King managed his considerable instrumental burden; rather, we turn our attention to the text's constitutive dimension as we seek to disclose its transformative action.

Previous critics have noted the text's "three thematic movements."⁴ After three introductory paragraphs in which he established "that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak," King began the first section of the address. In this section King proleptically engaged those "many persons [who] have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. . . . Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why

are you joining the voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix, they say. Aren't you hurting the cause of your people, they ask?" In response to these questions, King traced his "path from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church . . . to this sanctuary tonight."⁵ That path led King to expand his "field of . . . moral vision," allowing him to identify seven ways to articulate the civil rights and the antiwar movements.⁶

The text's second section extended King's concluding observation in section 1 that because God "is deeply concerned especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come tonight to speak for them" (234). In this section King advanced a counternarrative of American involvement in Vietnam by adopting multiple perspectives (from the Viet Cong to American soldiers) and giving voice to their neglected needs and concerns. King concluded this second section by, first, "suggest[ing] five concrete things that our government should do immediately to begin the long and difficult process of extricating ourselves from this nightmarish conflict" (which included declaring a unilateral cease-fire and recognizing that the National Liberation Front must play a role in the negotiation process) and then urging Americans "to raise our voices if our nation persists in its perverse ways in Vietnam" (239).

King then acknowledged that "there is something seductively tempting about stopping . . . and sending us all off on what in some circles has become a popular crusade against the war in Vietnam" (240). King resisted the temptation, at least in part, because of the text's internal logic. By articulating his civil rights and antiwar commitments in the text's first section, King established that his mission extended beyond the problem of American race relations. In so doing he prepared his immediate audience and eventual readers for the text's second section, which moved beyond civil rights in order to examine the nation's policies in Southeast Asia. While focusing on Vietnam was tempting, King insisted that his audience continue moving, first beyond civil rights, and now beyond Vietnam. In the final section King challenged his audience to undertake "a radical revolution in values" that would undermine "the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism" (240).

Throughout the three sections King deployed the three topoi—promise, decline, and redemption—common to the secularized, African American jeremiad.⁷ King devoted considerable emphasis to the topos of

decline. At the outset, he remarked: “Now, it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America’s soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam” (234). Toward the end of his counter-narrative in the address’s middle section, he warned that “the image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism” (238).

While the nation’s decision to wage war in Vietnam threatened to poison its soul and destroy its image at home and abroad, that decision—and the specific political and military tactics through which it was implemented—was not King’s exclusive concern in the speech. In what at first glance might have been considered an unusual move, as we have noted, he devoted the final section to three sub-topoi that were becoming more common in his discourse: “the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism.” While King acknowledged the temptation to focus solely on the war, he believed that the nation needed to confront a “more disturbing” truth. “The war in Vietnam,” he declared, was merely “a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit” (240).

Redemption was attainable, King believed, if the nation engaged in “a radical revolution in values” (240). Utilizing a loose anaphora pattern, he detailed the objectives of such a radical or “true revolution of values” in the speech’s final section: “A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of our past and present policies. . . . A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. . . . A true revolution in values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: ‘This way of settling human differences is not just’” (240–41). Toward the end of this final section, King appropriated the voices of Kennedy and Lincoln to urge his audience: “Now let us begin. Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world” (243). Although there was no guarantee of success, redemption through rededication remained, he insisted, a real possibility.

King devoted the least amount of attention to the jeremiadic topic of promise, the community’s original covenant with God or—once the form was secularized—with itself. He believed that the United States, like all Western nations, had once displayed “the revolutionary spirit” that played

a crucial role in the “modern world[’s]” emergence. While King did not explore the substance of this spirit in detail, it nevertheless anchored his jeremiadic appeal, since “our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture th[is] revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism” (242). To redeem itself, King implied, the nation must be rededicated to its founding revolutionary spirit.

Given King’s deployment of the jeremiad’s conventional topoi, it might seem odd that George Dionisopoulos and his coauthors concluded their careful reading of the text by arguing: “In questioning the values of American society—rather than urging more stringent adherence to them—King rejected the jeremiad and, thus, the traditional form of American dissent.”⁸ We have not introduced this reading in order to engage in a narrow argument regarding generic classification. We suggest instead that the speech’s disputed generic status raises important questions regarding rhetorical invention and rhetoric’s capacity to engage in political and moral critique, particularly in time of war. As many scholars argue, presidential war rhetoric justifies military action, but it also constitutes the American people as a united community of virtuous warriors. This move is necessary, at least in part, because war demands brutality of a sort normally thought immoral. By refiguring the audience’s identity, war rhetoric transforms such ferocity, defining it anew as the quality needed to defend the community from a savage Other.⁹ As a result, war opponents must not only dispute the expediency of military action, but also take on the additional burden of reconstituting communal identity. They must address a question posed repeatedly over the years: what kind of people are we to be?

Identities, in turn, cannot be constructed *ex nihilo*. They must be constituted out of communal traditions and living genres.¹⁰ We argue King’s rhetorical art was constrained and enabled by those traditions of discourse in which he participated. Faced with the necessities imposed by the power of war rhetoric, this speech invoked alternative and subversive American idioms as well as forms. In doing so, he radicalized his available discursive resources. He collapsed the traditional distinction between individual and national moral agency and asserted that an ethical response to the war in Vietnam required an abandonment of American

exceptionalism. By tracing this speech's temporal¹¹ and spatial dimensions, we hope to disclose the way King radicalized the American jeremiad as he transcended its parochial horizon, resulting in a truly innovative form of generic reconstitution that addressed his considerable burdens.

Jeremiadic Containment, Critical Memory, and the Tradition of Civic Republicanism

In his 1978 study *The American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch introduced the idea of jeremiadic containment. He noted that for Americans in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "the symbol of America . . . [became] a vision designed to contain self-assertion." He then explained: "I mean *containment* in its double sense, as sustenance and restriction. The symbol set free titanic creative energies in our classic writers, and it confined their freedom to the terms of the American myth."¹² In Bercovitch's account, the symbol of America enabled social and political practice, but that practice was at the same time always constrained, contained, by the symbol. In short, social and political practices lack any generative or transformative capacity, no ability to go beyond the constraining and containing force of the American symbol.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing to the present day, the American Revolution has been one aspect of the broader American symbol frequently invoked in secular jeremiads. Within the jeremiadic imagination, the Revolution's norms and values established the terms of the political community's founding covenant, providing a frame of reference through which advocates could evaluate the community. According to Bercovitch: "In all cases, the ideal of the *American* revolution ruled out any basic challenge to the system. . . . In the United States, the summons to dissent, because it was grounded in a prescribed ritual form [the jeremiad], pre-empted the threat of radical alternatives." The jeremiad, he continued, ritualized political dissent, helping "to control the energies . . . unleashed" through the act of Revolution and "preclude . . . the possibility of fundamental social change."¹³

In a more recent essay, Bercovitch considered the purportedly radical rhetoric of Frederick Douglass, Henry David Thoreau, Elizabeth Cady

Stanton, Martin Luther King, Paul Goodman, and Gloria Steinem. “These dissenters,” Bercovitch remarked, “miscalculated not just the power but the nature of rhetoric.” He explained: “They had thought to appropriate America as a trope of the spirit, and so to turn the national symbol, now freed of its base historical content, into a vehicle of moral and political renovation. In the event, however, the symbol had refigured the moral and political terms of renovation—had rendered freedom, opportunity, democracy, and radicalism itself part of the American Way.”¹⁴ Bercovitch’s reflections on American radicalism enabled him to recognize, if only implicitly, a perennial problem in rhetorical advocacy that J. Robert Cox has labeled the “scandal of *doxa*.” Rhetorical advocates are, Cox maintains, caught in a bind because their inventional resources—common opinions, cultural values, or in short communal *doxa*—constrain their ability to generate new insights or perspectives. He writes: “In this context, public argument is suspect; it is the vessel of custom, blindness, and inaction. Drawn from *doxa*, from a continuity with all that is past, public moral argument can only rationalize what is. The effort to create the ‘new’ labors against this scandal of *doxa*.”¹⁵

In his analysis of King’s speech, Fred Antczak argues that it was essential to locate the text temporally “in the context of a larger moral tradition, our living tradition of revolution.”¹⁶ We agree with Antczak, but suggest that greater specificity may be in order. One way to grasp King’s effort to radicalize the jeremiad and negotiate the scandal of *doxa* involves exploring its temporal dimension, which reveals the way his text incorporates important elements of the western European civic republican tradition. One of that tradition’s foremost students, John Pocock, suggests that “the [civic republican] dread of corruption [was] the true heir of the [Puritan] jeremiad.” Since the mid-eighteenth century, Americans have, Pocock maintains, “remained obsessively concerned by the threat of corruption.”¹⁷ Rereading King’s critique of American society via the civic republican concept of corruption illustrates one way he radicalized the jeremiad.

As Gordon Wood and others document, since the revolutionary era Americans have deployed images of poison and disease to mark the presence of civic corruption, and we find King employing similar images in the speech. But even more important than the consistency of images over

time is the way King harnessed an important civic republican distinction. Reflecting a strong individualistic ethos, the traditional Puritan jeremiad and its secularized kin imagined civic decline as a consequence of personal sin. As John Murphy notes: “The jeremiad deflects attention away from possible institutional or systemic flaws and toward considerations of individual sin. Redemption is achieved,” he continues, “through the efforts of the American people, not through a change in the system itself.”¹⁸ But as Pocock has noted, the civic republican tradition eschews this individualistic fixation. In fact, he maintains that early modern civic republicans such as Machiavelli developed “a sociological as well as a merely moral analysis of corruption.” According to Pocock, explicit “social analysis of the conditions propitious and unpropitious to republican government” constituted an important element of civic republican discourse. Given Pocock’s observations regarding the civic republican concern with social analysis, we should not be surprised to find jeremiads manifesting forms of systemic critique as a counterbalance to individual moral decline.

Although King moralized the nation’s Vietnam policy (a point developed in some detail by Dionisopoulos et al.), at one point demanding that the nation “atone” not just for policy “errors” but for “our sins . . . in Vietnam,” he nevertheless resisted the tendency to collapse moral critique into a simple reaffirmation of individualism. The structures of American society generated the moral failures, the civic corruption, that King sought to uncover. By the middle of the twentieth century, a version of the sociological or systemic analysis of corruption that Pocock detected in Machiavelli had been resuscitated by intellectuals such as the maverick sociologist C. Wright Mills, by New Left advocates such as Tom Hayden, Carl Oglesby, and Paul Potter, and by black power activists such as Stokely Carmichael. By 1967 it had become common for King to claim that the civil rights movement was “forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism” and “exposing the evils that are deeply rooted in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.”¹⁹ King’s gradual embrace of systemic critique through the 1960s was, in all likelihood, due to a variety of influences, but his focus on materialism and militarism did not simply reflect unique mid-twentieth-century

American anxieties. By underscoring these forms of systemic corruption, King reanimated traditional civic republican concerns.²⁰

Pocock, Wood, and other students of the civic republican tradition have recounted in some detail the civic republican antipathy for material self-interest, luxury, extravagance, dissipation, and venality, and King's condemnation of "a 'thing-oriented' society" where "machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people" echoed these themes. But by 1967 King had begun to perceive that America's materialistic spirit was not merely the "corrupt other" common in republican theory (as tyranny is the corrupt version of monarchy); it was an ineradicable feature of the nation's economic system. "A true revolution of values," he remarked at Riverside Church, "will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth." "True compassion," he continued, "is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring" (240–41). King would continue his quest to restructure the economic edifice for the remainder of his life. For example, in his final Southern Christian Leadership Conference presidential address, he insisted that "the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. There are forty million poor people here. And one day we must ask the question, 'Why are there forty million poor people in America?' And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy."²¹ King's critique of materialism at Riverside Church should be located within his emerging rhetorical assault on American capitalism.²²

The civic republican tradition's relationship to militarism and military conflict is, on the other hand, much more contested.²³ Emphasizing a distinction between professional armies (or a "standing army") and citizen militias, Pocock has argued that for Machiavelli and other early modern republicans "a man who should devote the whole of his energies to the *arte della Guerra* . . . is an infinitely greater danger" to the community's civic health than a man who devotes more energy to commerce than his civic responsibilities. Toward the end of *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock suggests that, given the tradition's emphasis on citizen-soldiers

-serving the nation through militia service, one part of the nation's "inherited rhetorical and conceptual structure" was a civic republican hostility toward "the growth of a military-industrial complex in government."²⁴ When in the early 1960s King challenged the "blind conformity" that "the military-industrial complex" helped inculcate, he echoed civic republican concerns that, for example, Anti-federalists had introduced during the ratification debate in the late eighteenth century.²⁵

At Riverside Church, King at times defended his call for "wise restraint and calm reasonableness" in foreign affairs pragmatically, arguing that a reformed foreign/military policy would be a more effective weapon against communism since "our greatest defense against communism is to take offensive action on behalf of justice" (241). But his attack on American militarism frequently depicted it as a corrosive and corruptive force that undermined civic identity and civic morality. "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is," King insisted, "approaching spiritual death." He also stressed the war's impact on young American soldiers who were injected with "poisonous drugs of hate" and sent "home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged" (241). If the nation did not reform its militaristic policies, King predicted, "we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight" (243).

By reappropriating a systemic perspective on civic corruption and revoicing traditional civic republican themes,²⁶ King began the process of generic reconstitution. But the pervasive corruption of American values and ideals severely limited his ability to revitalize the nation's civic virtue. For this reason he could not enact the traditional jeremiadic strategy of, in Dionisopoulos and his coauthors' terms, "urging more stringent adherence to . . . the values of American society." As Fredrik Sunnemark recently remarked, by early 1967 "the Constitution and values of America [became] an accusation in [King's] rhetoric instead of a yet-to-be-fulfilled promise."²⁷ The corrupted communal *doxa* upon which King could draw only amplified his scandalous inventional dilemma: how to use existing rhetorical resources to craft a message that might move an audience beyond its existing conditions and its identity as a nation of warriors. Cox's

speculations regarding critical memory's inventional potential provides, we maintain, some insight into the way King negotiated his dilemma.

Cox acknowledges that, as inventional strategies, history and public memory frequently engender either a simplistic civic nostalgia for the past or a reified present untroubled by historical contingency. Critical memory, Cox argues, rejects both nostalgia and reification. Instead, it seeks to disrupt the reified present and recover lost or forgotten possibilities. Echoing the civic republican antipathy to civic corruption, Cox describes the way nostalgia and reified history perpetuate communal "ideals" that have become "ideologically deformed." The practice of critical memory seeks to disturb or disavow deformed or corrupted traditions, enabling advocates to "re-collect" or recover a lost or forgotten "heritage." Transposed into the idiom of civic republicanism, critical memory seeks civic *rinnovazione* (renovation or *revitalization*) through a form of *ridurre ai principii* (a return to or recovery of first principles or fundamentals).²⁸

Cox identifies a group of "transformative practices" that enable recovery of a lost heritage, "an appropriation of the seeds of a culture's past." One discursive practice to which Cox devotes considerable attention is the argument strategy of dissociation. Dissociation is powerful because it can "bring about a more or less profound change in the conceptual data that are used as the basis of argument." It is, in short, a discursive strategy for "remodeling our conceptions of reality."²⁹ According to Cox, in the context of communal memory practices "A dissociation holds 'deformed' parts of a tradition in tension with their historical alternatives. As arguers confront these possibilities critically, they disclose or liberate usable principles for contemporary practice."

Unlike, for example, Frederick Douglass's performance in Buffalo in 1852, King's speech occasion in April 1967 did not present an opportunity to explore the nation's revolutionary heritage in depth.³⁰ King did, however, deploy condensed dissociations throughout the speech, initially contrasting a superficial "smooth patriotism" with a more virtuous form of "firm dissent" (231), then in the middle portion of the address locating "the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence" in recovering "the enemy's point of view" (237). In the concluding section he continued his effort to recover "true compassion"—as we noted earlier—by distinguishing it from the merely "haphazard and superficial" (241). King

reserved his most sustained use of the strategy for his effort to recover, or in his words, “recapture,” the modern world’s revolutionary spirit in order, as he put it, “to make democracy real” (242). King’s invocation of the modern “revolutionary spirit,” his desire to recapture that spirit, and his quest for a “genuine” or “a true revolution of values” all function as condensed dissociations; the adjective “true” and the rather transcendent noun “spirit” unleash a dissociative logic that seeks to disturb a domesticated revolutionary tradition (a tradition that has made the United States and the West, in King’s judgment, “arch anti-revolutionaries”) and recover a forgotten or repressed revolutionary heritage opposed to “exploitation and oppression” as well as “poverty, racism, and militarism” and committed to fostering “new systems of justice and equality . . . all over the globe” (242).

King’s recurrent dissociations enacted a form of critical memory that sought a civic republican *ridurre*, a recovery of corrupted or deformed national values that would enable transformative political action (*rinnovazione*) by reconstituting our civic virtue. But as important as this temporal element is to the text’s transformative action, we should follow King’s advice and resist the temptation to stop here. By tracing the text’s spatial dynamics, we come to see that a purely historical form of recovery is insufficient. In “A Time to Break Silence,” King intimated that, for the nation to recover its (corrupted) virtue, its citizens must be willing to relinquish their parochial national identity.

Space, Movement, and Errand

To contend that a restoration of civic virtue requires movement in or through space should come as no surprise to students of American letters. Deeply embedded within U.S. public discourse is the faith that to move again is to be born again. If the world around us reeks of corruption, Huck Finn teaches, we can always “light out for the Territory.” Space, however, assumes a particularly powerful role in the civic republican or Jeffersonian tradition of dissent that we have been tracing through King’s text. In his germinal work on republican resistance to the Hamiltonian system in the early United States, Drew McCoy notes the widespread belief that

corruption “could be forestalled in America as long as its citizens were able to expand across space rather than develop through time.”³¹

His analysis suggests that, for the early republicans, time was the enemy. In their developmental view of human society, nations rose, flourished, and fell because of the ravages of time. The inevitable decline of “those who labour in the earth . . . the chosen people of God,” in Jefferson’s famous words, and the concomitant and equally inevitable growth of commerce introduces paper credit, stockjobbers, bankers, and lawyers. In short, the weeds of commerce kill the pastoral garden of republican virtue. Only movement to ever-new “empires of liberty” could save republican citizens. It was this opposition that leads Pocock to proclaim “that what was involved was a flight from modernity and a future no less than from antiquity and a past.”³² Such a perspective crafts this tradition’s conception of space as a means to escape history, past and future. Thus, Pocock, as we have noted, links cries of corruption to Puritan outrage, arguing that the “jeremiad—that most American of all rhetorical modes—was merged with the language of classical republican theory to the point where one can almost speak of an apocalyptic Machiavellianism.”³³

His reservations about these flights notwithstanding, Pocock’s productive link between the jeremiad and civic republicanism implies a means through which we can “re-collect,” in Cox’s terms, the transformative operations of movement through space as it works in this address. King’s spatial dynamics reconfigured the traditions through which he spoke and engaged the audience in the task of national redemption. To begin, it is important to note, in the words of G. P. Mohrmann, “that when we talk of metaphorical space and place, we are not talking of passive constructs, but are talking instead of constructs alive with the potential for action, and their vigor often derives largely from that potential.”³⁴ In the jeremiadic tradition, that incipient action flows powerfully from the Puritan interpretation of their “errand.”

It is that concept which creates the most striking disagreement between those two great students of Puritan culture, Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch. For Miller, an errand must either be for oneself *or* for someone else. That opposition leads to a series of debilitating dichotomies that result in a psychological reading of the jeremiad as a “self-defeating ritual of purgation.”³⁵ It is a lament for an errand that was lost with the

restoration of monarchy in the Old England and the restoration of sinfulness in the New. For Bercovitch, an errand could be for oneself *and* for someone else. He takes as his text Samuel Danforth's *Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*. Danforth takes as *his* text Jesus' encomium for John the Baptist in Matthew 11:7–9. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" is the question, and Danforth provides the answer. Danforth, Bercovitch believes, "invests the errand with the general import of '*pilgrimage*.'"³⁶ The wilderness is both in us, in our hard hearts and recalcitrant wills, and outside of us, in the wilds of North America. To encounter the latter is to change the former; such has been the pilgrimage into the wilderness from Moses through the Baptist through Christ and now to the people of the New Jerusalem. Pilgrimage through space recovers the holy spirit of the original, yet progressive, revelation of God. Paradoxically, to move outward through space is to recollect the purity of the inner self. The errand is both/and; encountering the "other" of an outer world transforms the inner self; both self and other change and grow.

Yet the scandal of *doxa* intrudes again. For much of our history, Bercovitch implies, the locus of transformation rested not within the superior, civilized self, but over and against the uncivilized other. He writes, "New England was from the start an outpost of the modern world. It evolved from its own origins, as it were, into a middle-class culture—a commercially oriented society . . . a relatively homogenous society whose enterprise was consecrated, according to its civic and clerical leadership, by a divine plan of progress."³⁷ Sanctioned by divine capitalism, we would make the other into our peaceful, civilized middle-class selves, from the Jacksonian Trail of Tears to Remember the Alamo, from the Frontier Thesis to the March of the Flag, from the jungles of Vietnam to the cities of Iraq. John Pocock, too, recognizes the charge of this dominant spatial discourse, identifying it with the dynamic force of Machiavellian *virtu* and paying particular attention to its nineteenth-century exemplar: "When [Andrew] Jackson is regularly praised as a general who won victories without attending to the formalities of international law, a president who made laws and decisions without attending to constitutional niceties, it is clear that we are dealing with a leader of *virtu* in a highly Machiavellian sense."³⁸ The differing ways in which we view Jefferson and Jackson, the civilized

scholar and the uncouth general, trace nicely the transformation of virtue that occurred in U.S. political culture. Movement through space has often come to mean subjugation of place, a process we now sometimes term “pre-emptive war.”

Moving uneasily in the shadows cast by the divine march of the flag is Huckleberry Finn. Recall that he determined to “light out” at novel’s end, after his journey down the Mississippi with Jim, a trip that taught him the wonders of Jacksonian civilization and the fact that Jim “had a good heart in him and was a good man.”³⁹ That journey made more movement inevitable: “But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can’t stand it. I been there before.”⁴⁰ King, too, had been there before. The Aunt Sallies of white America sought to civilize him, by their own lights, and he, too, sought escape through movement. The restless energy of his texts flows, we suggest, from an invigoration of this subversive sense of movement in American public address, from a journey that changes the self as that self encounters the other in a place beyond ourselves. He reached for an aspect of the jeremiadic tradition, the full notion of an errand into the wilderness of the world and one’s own soul and defined that moment, in a phrase borrowed from Buber, as a creative confrontation that changes an “I-It” relationship to an “I-Thou” relationship.

King’s figuration of the transformative power of movement through space came not only from his reading of Buber and the like, but also from his biblical heritage. Malinda Snow, in her analysis of “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” notes that the word *walk*, not a likely candidate for religious allusion, often comes to mean in the English Bible “the righteous person’s safe passage through life . . . one who walks is both righteous and protected.” After citing numerous examples from the Scriptures, she writes, “For King, to walk was as morally significant an action as to go to jail.”⁴¹ To put it another way, for King, every journey was alive with the possibility of Saul’s trip to Damascus. We might all become Paul in our encounters with the faces of God. Such energy has not gone unnoticed in the previous fine readings of this address; Antczak, for example, reveals the “ever-widening contexts of duty” that King used to justify his right to speak.⁴² Dionisopoulos and his colleagues do not engage the spatial axes that infuse the text, but their writing reflects the flux of King’s images;

he offers not ideas, but “trajectories,” his “trajectories” do not fit, they “collide,” and he presents not a history from above, but “from below.”⁴³ It remains to specify the textual movements that have sparked such critical agitation.

Those movements began at the beginning. King announced, “I come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice” (231). Not only does King “come” to the church, he was compelled to do so by an inner force, by his conscience. The insistent dialectic between movement and stasis, inner and outer, continued through the introduction. He acknowledged the “difficult” mission of opposition: “Even when pressed by the demands of *inner truth*, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government’s policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit *move* without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought *within one’s bosom and in the surrounding world*” (231, emphasis ours). “Apathy,” the dictionary tells us, derives from the Greek: *a* meaning “without” and the rhetorically familiar *pathos* meaning “feeling” or “suffering.” To be apathetic is to be without pathos. Conformist thought on Vietnam, much like racism, extended into “one’s bosom,” an analysis of our lives that echoes Samuel Danforth’s both/and errand and Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*.⁴⁴ To “move,” in the face of these “outposts in our heads,” to borrow Sally Kempton’s feminist phrase, was terribly difficult, a problem King emphasized with another spatial image: “We are always on the verge of being *mesmerized* by uncertainty; but we must *move on*” (231, emphasis ours).

King used the introduction to present, in effect, his rhetorical obstacle. It was daunting. Conformist thought had left us without feeling, and thus, “The calling to speak is often a vocation of agony,” similar to the pain that results from movement after a prolonged confinement. Our body, our conscience, was not used to the exercise because we had been “mesmerized.” Yet King offered hope; the dissociation between a “smooth patriotism” and a “firm dissent” that we spoke of earlier was reinforced by spatial imagery—we should move to the “*high grounds* of a firm dissent. . . . Perhaps a new spirit is *rising* among us. If it is, let us *trace its movement* well and pray that our own *inner being* may be sensitive to its guidance for we are *deeply* in need of a *new way* beyond the darkness that seems *so close* around us” (231, emphasis ours). It may be possible to pack more

spatial imagery into a sentence, but we are not sure how to do so. Consistent with archetypal metaphors, the new spirit rose, and, King implied, we must follow it to the good high ground.⁴⁵ Our “inner being,” he suggested, could change as we “trace” the “movement.” Movement upward and outward resulted in inner change, a “path,” King then indicated, that he himself had followed.

The introduction proper ended as King turned to the issue of his dissent. As he “moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart,” many “have questioned me about the wisdom of my path” (232). As we noted at the outset, King asked their questions: Why you? Why dissent? Why mix civil rights and the war? This section resembled nothing so much as “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” and, by linking these texts, King cast his nameless interlocutors as the white ministers in Birmingham, surely an uncomfortable position for many of his allies. Like the ministers, they wondered why he came here. As in his response to those earlier ministers, King was “greatly saddened” by the inquiries because such questions suggested that they “have not really known me, my commitment or my calling. Indeed, their questions suggest that they do not know the world in which they live” (232). Note the juxtaposition and the implied reversal. If they did not know King, they did not know the world; if they did not know the world, they did not know King. Like the apostle Paul once more wearily traveling out into the world to spread the good news, King must, again, explain why “the path from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church . . . leads clearly to this sanctuary tonight,” just as it led clearly to Birmingham’s jail (232). The condensed allusion to the “Letter” foreshadowed the powerful, explicit links King would draw between the civil rights movement and Vietnam. It also set in place the spatial dynamics that move through the succeeding three sections of the address—to know King is to know the world, and to know the world is to move as King moved.

Fred Antczak has discerned both the widening contexts of duty that form King’s justification for dissent and the implicit model he offers his audience in the first section.⁴⁶ It is important to note, however, the two additional spatial axes that characterize this portion of the address. First, as King widened those contexts of duty, from his role as civil rights leader to his “calling to be a son of the living God” (234), as he moved out into

the world, he also moved inward into his own soul. His leadership of civil rights was a political role; his calling was personal indeed. To move outward through contexts of duty was to move inward to the burning of one's own heart. He implicitly asked a similar move of the audience; a "son of the living God" could not help but question the current path of the United States in Vietnam. Second, King's use of space, the subversive historical alternative, as Cox might put it, was held in tension with the nation's past movement outward, the hegemonic tradition. In contrast to King's movement, as the nation moved outward, "adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money [from the war on poverty] like some demonic destructive suction tube." As the nation moved outward, it sent black men "to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population." As the nation moved outward, young men in the ghetto asked King, was it not "using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted?" Why should they not do so? (223). Even in what appeared to be a simple, defensive, and enumerated justification of dissent, King's spatial movement foreshadowed the revolution in values for which he would call. The nation's movement led to violence at home and abroad; his movement promised redemption and learning, just as he had learned from those young people in the ghetto.

Yet the question remained for King: How might he move the audience as he himself had been moved by the spirit? Recall that King saw apathy as a major rhetorical problem. As a result, pathos becomes a key strategy, and Thomas Farrell's analysis of it helps us to understand King's text. Pathos, Farrell notes, has created problems because it seems to traffic in "excitations of emotion." If we regard the audience as an "agency of logos and judgment," as King surely did, what can we say of emotion? Farrell argues that the import of pathos rests in its ability to remove "us from the immediacy of familiar appearance, thereby allowing us to formulate conditions for appreciating the needs of others." As pathos acts in rhetoric, "There is a doubly reflexive move, from awareness of our own emotion (fear) to a recognition of what may be involved when it is others who are suffering." From this view, emotions allow "the sense of recognition we require whenever we are taken outside of our own immediacy: from the neighborhood to the moral community. . . . Without rhetoric's

intervention, we would have only the partiality of immediate interest, the familiar locale. We would end where we started.”⁴⁷ Needless to say, we find Farrell’s use of spatial metaphors suggestive. King moved us from our immediate locality to Vietnam, from apathy to a sense of recognition.

Throughout this section, the process was inductive as King moved us along. We were more likely to care about the peasants, those for whom we were supposedly acting, and so King began there. From there, he turned to the National Liberation Front (the Viet Cong) and then to the leaders in Hanoi. At each stage, he took us out of our immediacy and confronted us with our actions and their effects on others. For instance, speaking of the peasants, he said, “Now they languish under our bombs and consider us—not their fellow Vietnamese—the real enemy. They move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met. They know they must move or be destroyed by our bombs” (236). The nation’s movement in space inevitably led to the tragic movement of the people in Vietnam; King wished us to experience that movement, to understand it, perhaps, as an ironic revelation. They had become as apathetic as our national conscience. The bombing brutalized both Americans and Vietnamese. In using emotion in this way, to borrow again from Farrell, King constituted his audience as “an agency capable of character, of ‘social emotions.’”⁴⁸ By moving us successively further away from ourselves, even unto the thoughts of Ho Chi Minh (238), King constituted us as an agency capable of judgment. We were no longer apathetic; we were moved. We had feeling again and could assume moral responsibility for our choices.

That responsibility was a heavy burden on our journey. It required not only dissent on the issue of Vietnam, but also that “true revolution of values” of which we have spoken. To this point, we have traced the movements of King’s spirit in time as he reached back to recollect and revitalize our lost and forgotten revolutionary heritage. That move gained energy from an equally palpable pilgrimage through space as King’s spirit lifted us out of our immediate locale to embrace a moral community that included the peoples of Vietnam. Much as the recovery of a civic republican discourse of dissent radicalized that journey through time by invoking a systemic critique, so, too, did the recollection of the full import of a pilgrimage through space radicalize our identity as an audience. The journey

changed us. As King turned to the revolution, he revealingly said, “There is something seductively tempting about stopping there and sending us all off on what in some circles has become a popular crusade against the war in Vietnam” (240). Note that “stopping” had a dual meaning. You may stop an action in time or you may stop a trip and settle into place. A true revolution of values allowed neither. Awakened to the responsibility of moral choice, we were driven to move forward and outward. It was, to invoke the speech’s two common titles, both a time to break silence and a move beyond Vietnam.

Two passages illustrate King’s final theme. First, in a remarkably inventive use of the parable of the Good Samaritan, King said, “We are called to play the Good Samaritan on life’s roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life’s highway” (241). Recall the question that sparked this parable. A lawyer sought to test Jesus by asking, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus, as he often did, answered a question with a question, “What is written in the law?” Then, the famous answer: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Love, in other words, was the answer to the question, and King’s invocation of this parable foreshadowed his belief, articulated later, that the power of love can transform this highway. In addition, the power of this parable resulted partly from the social status of those on the road—the priest, the Levite, and the disdained Samaritan. Samaritans were despised because they thought themselves superior, pure adherents of the faith who treated only the Pentateuch as holy and disdained the rest of the Scriptures as tainted.⁴⁹ An intriguing possibility existed here; as the Samaritan made his journey, encountered the man, and was “moved with pity” (New Revised Standard Version), the Samaritan, too, was changed. That was why he stopped. Yet for us to stop, as the individualistic ethos of the jeremiad suggests, was not enough, King insisted. To act truly in the Samaritan’s spirit, to change as he changed, we must make the entire road safe for all.

To do that meant to lift ourselves out of our parochial identities, to make priest, Levite, and Samaritan one. As King prepared for that crucial

move, he reiterated the themes we have identified. He then used them to refigure his famous Dream: "Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture that revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain'" (242). The spirit of the American Revolution, in King's view, would inspire movement against that triplet. The jeremiad's call for reform was deepened and strengthened here by a systemic critique rooted in the civic republican tradition; that tradition, in turn, was then redeemed by the eschatological promise of the jeremiad.

Perhaps more revealing in this context, however, was King's effort to reinterpret his own advocacy. As Cox notes, King's August 28, 1963, dream found "its denouement in the words of comfort Isaiah spoke to those whose exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E. would soon end."⁵⁰ It is but a small exaggeration to claim that the civil rights movement came to be culturally defined through that speech, that the speech came to be defined through King's dream, and that his dream located its promise in the authority of Isaiah. By so using Isaiah at Riverside, King made of civil rights, racism, poverty, militarism, and war a whole cloth; one must address all to address any. Whatever the case in 1963, the promise of "I Have a Dream" in 1967 could only be redeemed through a comprehensive re-vision of American society. That required a new identity. King then said: "A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in individual societies. This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men" (242).

King's call, indeed the speech, asked us to discard our belief in American exceptionalism.⁵¹ We were not special. We were not different. As a result, we had to join with others, much as the Samaritan joined the man with no name, no religion, and no identity along the road. All people were

citizens in a worldwide fellowship. Taylor Branch describes King's errand in this way: "To curtail unspeakable cruelty and waste, Americans must refine their cherished ideal of freedom by accepting that they could support but not impose it in Vietnam. To honor sacrifice with understanding, Americans must grant the Vietnamese people the elementary respect of citizens in disagreement. The lesson was at once wrenching and obvious, in the way modern people might be chastened by the centuries it took to establish that the Inquisition's bloody enforcement profaned rather than championed Christian belief."⁵² It was this call that incited critics to read the speech as ineradicably radical. In a sense, King did not so much reject the values of American society and the jeremiad as extend them to all people. But to see the enemy as citizens was to obliterate the difference that had constituted American identity in war. If they were no longer the savage Other, then who were we? In King's eyes, we were citizens and neighbors. All people, not only Americans, but all people were chosen and beloved of God.

Speculative Conclusion

This assessment of King's call helps to account for the negative response that greeted him; to dispense with exceptionalism was no easy task. Generally, the nation's opinion leaders attacked King for speaking on Vietnam and urged him to keep to civil rights. Branch bitingly summarizes the reaction: "The call for segregated silence on Vietnam dashed any expectation that King's freedom movement had validated the citizenship credentials of blacks by historic mediation between the powerful and dispossessed. It relegated him again to the back of the bus, conspicuous yet invisible."⁵³ It is also important to note, however, that those same pundits were wrong about the outcome of the Vietnam War, wrong about the inevitability of Lyndon Johnson's reelection, wrong about the political potential of Eugene McCarthy, and, in general, wrong about the political developments in that long and terrible year following this speech. In short, assessment of the instrumental power of this speech is forever held in suspension by the assassination of its author and of the strongest antiwar presidential candidate, Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Our analysis, instead, has sought to locate King's rhetoric through two traditions of American dissent, civic republicanism and the jeremiad. We argue that he reconstitutes these languages by interanimating them, shining the light of one through the other. In a statement that possesses the virtues and vices of oversimplification, we might say: the resources of the civic republican tradition, particularly the invigoration of *ridurre*, allow for a systemic critique; the resources of the Puritan tradition, particularly the invigoration of "errand," allow for the transformative possibilities of movement. These two axes of time and space constitute American political culture in such a way as to unite the critique of the individual and systemic. That is the genius of this address. Each of us must stop along the road to Jericho. Yet we must also rebuild that road together.

King's words at Riverside Church make of this charge a living possibility. James Boyd White writes of such rhetoric, "Whenever you speak, you define a character for yourself and for at least one other—your audience—and make a community at least between the two of you; and you do this in a language that is of necessity provided to you by others and modified in your use of it."⁵⁴ To craft an effective ethical response to the powerful imperatives of presidential war rhetoric asks such character work of dissidents. An end to war means an end to the communal identity that sustained the slaughter and a refiguration of the community in light of such experiences. Much as Lincoln sought to conclude his war with "malice towards none; with charity for all," so, too, did King call for a new fellowship among all in the multiple idioms of American life. As a result of this inventional action, the possibilities for dissent, particularly in time of war, are widened, strengthened, and deepened. Our languages are modified in the wake of this speech.

Equally important, King's speech did not stand alone. It participated in a swirl of "respectable" rhetoric that questioned American exceptionalism and refused to equate American identity with some sort of special status. Compare King's denial with these words: "For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish children's future. And we are all mortal." President Kennedy rejected the notion that exceptionalism would save us from the effects of nuclear war. A month before the Riverside Church address, Senator Robert Kennedy asked us to take moral responsibility for

the carnage: “Let us reflect for a moment not on the wisdom and necessity of our cause . . . , but on the horror. . . . [War] is the vacant moment of amazed fear as a mother and child watch death by fire fall from the improbable machine sent by a country they barely comprehend. . . . All we say and all we do must be informed by our awareness that this horror is partly our responsibility; not just a nation’s responsibility but yours and mine. It is we who live in abundance and send our young men out to die. It is our chemicals that scorch the children and our bombs that level the villages.”⁵⁵ So, we conclude as we began—with the chemicals that scorch the children. As one of us has argued elsewhere, Kennedy did not quite reach the high moral ground of systemic critique we see in Riverside Church. But the Reverend King did not stand alone, nor did this address fail to shape interpretations of our “errand into the wilderness.”

In his April 30, 1970, address to the nation on the situation in Southeast Asia, Richard Nixon insisted: “It is not our power but our will and character that is being tested tonight. The question all Americans must ask and answer tonight is this: Does the richest and strongest nation in the history of the world have the character to meet a challenge by a group which rejects every effort to win a just peace, ignores our warning, tramples on solemn agreements, violates the neutrality of unarmed people, and uses our prisoners as hostages?”⁵⁶ Like most skilled political advocates, Nixon framed his rhetorical question in a way that he believed precluded all answers but one. However ironic it might seem, had Martin Luther King, Jr. been able to evade the assassin’s bullet, he would have endorsed the initial shape of Nixon’s question. King believed in 1967 that the war in Vietnam *was* testing the nation’s character in the way all wars test a nation’s character. Nixon tried to use his April 1970 speech to affirm the community’s identity as virtuous warriors. At Riverside Church three years earlier, King drew on multiple discursive resources in an effort to reconstitute the possibilities of communal identity in a time of war. King challenged Americans to recover and realize their radical potential, their true identity as revolutionaries, but he insisted that to do so they would paradoxically have to stop being Americans. He challenged the nation to think and exist in multiple registers and idioms. More than forty years later, with the nation engaged in another war, the question recurs: what kind of people, what kind of nation, do we wish to be?

NOTES

1. William Pepper, "The Children of Vietnam" *Ramparts*, January 1967, 53.
2. For example, see Adam Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," *Phylon* 45 (March 1984), esp. 28–29; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), esp. 543–544; Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), esp. 427.
3. For a discussion of the debate between King and his associates regarding this speech, see Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–68* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 584–586.
4. See George N. Dionisopoulos, Victoria J. Gallagher, Steven R. Goldzwig, and David Zarefsky, "Martin Luther King, the American Dream, and Vietnam: A Collision of Rhetorical Trajectories," *Western Journal of Communication* 56 (1992): 99.
5. "A Time to Break Silence" in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 231. Subsequent references will be made parenthetically in the text.
6. Dionisopoulos et al. summarize the seven reasons for linking the two movements: "1) it [the war] distracted the nation from civil rights and poverty, 2) blacks were dying in disproportionate numbers, 3) it made a mockery of calls for nonviolence, 4) it destroyed the [nation's] soul, 5) his dissent was required by the mission he assumed in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, 6) it [his public opposition] was also required by his status as a man of God, and 7) he would prefer to focus on the needs of the poor" ("Martin Luther King," 100). We are not sure how Dionisopoulos and his coauthors reconstructed their seventh reason. King's final point in this opening section was that he "must be true to my conviction that I share with all men the calling to be a son of the living God. Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood." This final comment appears consistent with their sixth reason. Dionisopoulos et al. fail to note King's effort to use the SCLC's motto "To save the soul of America" as an articulatory resource (see 233).
7. See David Howard-Pitney, *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
8. See Dionisopoulos et al., "Martin Luther King," 98.
9. For discussions of war rhetoric, see Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall

- Jamieson, *Deeds Done in Words: Presidential Rhetoric and the Genres of Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 101–126; Robert L. Ivie, “Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War,” *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 279–294; John M. Murphy, “‘Our Mission and Our Moment’: George W. Bush and September 11,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 607–632.
10. For a discussion of war dissent and its burdens, see John M. Murphy, “Epidictic and Deliberative Strategies in Opposition to War: The Paradox of Honor and Expediency,” *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 65–78.
 11. While it is possible to follow Michael Leff’s lead and examine a text’s internal temporal rhythm, our approach to the temporality of King’s speech concentrates instead on its external dynamics, specifically the way the speech reanimates the tradition of civic republicanism and exhibits a form of critical memory that recovers forgotten or deformed possibilities. Leff exemplifies the way a critic might engage a text’s internal temporality in “Rhetorical Timing in Lincoln’s ‘House Divided’ Speech,” *The Van Zelst Lecture in Communication*, Northwestern University School of Speech, May 1983.
 12. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 180.
 13. *Ibid.*, 160, 174, 179.
 14. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 19. Bercovitch inserted this passage at the outset of a discussion of radicalism in America. During the course of his analysis, he acknowledged the problem of simple binary oppositions (such as radicalism and reform; co-optation and dissent) and admitted that “in all these cases, dissent was demonstrably an appeal to, and through, the rhetoric and values of the dominant culture; and in every case, it issued in a fundamental challenge to the system” (20). Nevertheless, he concluded that critical or political dissensus remains unable to “transcend” its ideological context. Attempts to create critical “distinctions” function “to exclude alternatives to the dominant culture by limiting opposition to terms which are intrinsic to the patterns of dominance” (22).
 15. J. Robert Cox, “Cultural Memory and Public Moral Argument,” *The Van Zelst Lecture in Communication*, Northwestern University, May 1987, 7.
 16. Frederick J. Antczak, “When ‘Silence Is Betrayal’: An Ethical Criticism of the Revolution of Values in the Speech at Riverside Church,” in *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Sermonic Power of Public Discourse*, ed. Carolyn Calloway-Thomas and John L. Lucaites (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 140–141.

17. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 545, 548.
18. John M. Murphy, "A Time of Shame and Sorrow: Robert F. Kennedy and the American Jeremiad," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 76 (1990): 402.
19. Quoted in Vincent Harding, *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996), 76.
20. Of King's "giant triplets," only racism—rooted in a liberal natural rights vision of equality—does not have deep roots in the civic republican tradition. Civic republicanism typically accentuated an economic or material sense of equality, as opposed to the more contemporary natural rights position that, thanks in part to Locke and Jefferson, has dominated American public discourse.
21. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Where Do We Go From Here?" in *Testament of Hope*, 250. On King's radicalism, see Harding, *Martin Luther King*, esp. 69–81, and Fredrik Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom! The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), esp. 195–232.
22. See Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 78–100.
23. For example, Paul Rahe represents a strand of scholarship that emphasizes the militaristic nature of the tradition. See *Republics Ancient and Modern*, 3 vols. (1992; rpt. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
24. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 200, 548.
25. See King, *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 10. On antifederal criticism of a "standing army" as inimical to civic character, see James Jasinski, "Rhetorical Practice and Its Visions of the Public in the Ratification Debate of 1787–1788," Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1986.
26. It is also worth noting that King's critique of "our proneness to adjust to injustice" introduced another element of the civic republican tradition—the tension between accommodation and audacity—that has helped shape American public discourse. On this tension see James Jasinski, "Idioms of Prudence in Three Antebellum Controversies: Revolution, Constitution, and Slavery," in *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice*, ed. Robert Hariman (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2003), 145–188.
27. Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom!* 198.
28. In addition to "Cultural Memory and Public Moral Argument," this paragraph and

- the one to follow draws upon Cox, "Argument and Usable Traditions," in *Argument across the Lines of Disciplines*, ed. Frans H. van Eemeren et al. (Dordrecht: Foris Publishing, 1987), 93–99, and Cox, "Memory, Critical Theory, and the Argument from History," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 27 (1990): 1–13.
29. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 412–413.
 30. References to the Revolution assume greater prominence in King's 1967 discourse. For example, King concluded his first Massey lecture for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation "Impasse in Race Relations" by noting "a shattering historical irony that the American Revolution of 1776 was the consequence of many of the same conditions that prevail today." He then likens the "American Negro of 1967" to Crispus Attucks, remarking that former, like the latter, "may be the vanguard in a prolonged struggle that may change the shape of the world." In King, *The Trumpet of Conscience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 16–17.
 31. Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 62.
 32. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 462.
 33. *Ibid.*, 512.
 34. G. P. Mohrmann (ed. and rev. by Michael Leff), "Place and Space: Calhoun's Fatal Security," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (1987): 147.
 35. Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 10.
 36. *Ibid.*, 12.
 37. *Ibid.*, 20.
 38. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 536.
 39. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003), 286.
 40. *Ibid.*, 293.
 41. Malinda Snow, "Martin Luther King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' as Pauline Epistle," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 326–327.
 42. Antczak, "Silence," 142.
 43. Dionisopoulos et al., "Martin Luther King."
 44. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1966).
 45. For a fine analysis of King's use of space, archetypes, and "rhetorical distance" in "Letter from Birmingham Jail," see Michael Osborn, "Rhetorical Distance in

- 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,'" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7 (2004): 23–36.
46. Antczak, "Silence," 142.
 47. Thomas Farrell, *Norms of Rhetorical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 71.
 48. Ibid.
 49. Richard Coggins, "Samaritans," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 671–673.
 50. J. Robert Cox, "The Fulfillment of Time: King's 'I Have a Dream' Speech," in *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, ed. Michael C. Leff and Fred Kauffeld (Davis, Calif.: Hermagoras Press, 1989), 200.
 51. According to Albert J. Raboteau "African American Christianity has continuously confronted the nation with troubling questions about American exceptionalism. Perhaps the most troubling was this: 'If Christ came as the Suffering Servant, who resembled Him more, the master or the slave?' Suffering-slave Christianity stood as a prophetic condemnation of America's obsession with power, status, and possessions. African-American Christians perceived in American exceptionalism a dangerous tendency to turn the nation into an idol and Christianity into a clan religion. Divine election brings not preeminence, elevation, and glory, but—as black Christians know all too well—humiliation, suffering, and rejection." King's Riverside speech reaffirms Raboteau's observations regarding African-American Christianity, especially the way that tradition nurtures "a critique of national ambition and hubris." See Raboteau, "American Salvation: The Place of Christianity in Public Life," *Boston Review* 30 (2005), <http://bostonreview.net/BR30.2/raboteau.html> (accessed September 20, 2006).
 52. Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 597.
 53. Ibid.
 54. James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), xi.
 55. Robert F. Kennedy, *RFK: Collected Speeches*, ed. Edwin O. Guthman and C. Richard Allen (New York: Viking, 1993), 293.
 56. Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia," April 30, 1970, in *Public Papers of the President of the United States, 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 409.