

mate enforcement of law.”

William Lloyd Garrison and his followers were gratified that “the day of judgment” had come for the South, and supported the war effort to the hilt. The London Peace Society attempted to goad him: “We do not believe, the society stated, that the American Civil War is a war of freedom [i.e., against slavery]; we believe its object is to conquer the South. And even if it were a war of freedom, we would not support it. How, the London pacifists asked, can you stand quietly by and let brute force decide complex questions of moral right? The only evil you can see, the society complained, is the evil of slavery, but we believe that war is an even worse sin, and we will oppose it in every instance.”

Garrison’s associate Charles Whipple replied on behalf of the non-resistants. “Whipple insisted that agitating for peace would only give aid and comfort to the South,” writes Ziegler. Whipple wrote, “Every word now uttered in advocacy of peace is prejudicial to liberty, chiming with the party cry now raised by those who wish only the success of the rebels, and have no sympathy with what we recognize as ‘peace principles.’ ”

One could say that the limits of peace advocacy had been reached, and that the Civil War had driven out the hard-core British element at least from the peace societies. As horrible as war was, many U.S. citizens understood (as the handbook given to every Union soldier explained), that they were fighting for the same principles which their forebears had fought: the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution—the ultimate preservation of their nation.

The King papers: a mixed review

by Marianna Wertz

The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I: Called to Serve January 1929- June 1951

Clayborne Carson, Senior Editor
University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991
484 pages, hardbound, \$35

This beautifully published first volume of the collected papers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at first glance, appears

to be a great resource for King scholars and those seeking to continue “the dream” of the great civil rights leader today. It is handsomely bound, almost embarrassingly rich in pictures and facsimiles, and wonderfully well-documented, including a 15-page chronology of his life and works, and a calendar of documents. From the standpoint of the beauty of the book per se, it certainly merits its designation as a “Centennial Book”: one of 100 books published between 1990 and 1995 which bear this special imprint of the University of California Press.

Dr. King, for all he gave the world, certainly deserves to be remembered by such a collection of his works. And the fact that his widow, Coretta Scott King, headed the Advisory Board of the research project which produced the collection, speaks well for the intentions of the project.

The resultant content, however, is quite something else. It reads almost as though the editors *intended* to denigrate and slander Dr. King as an illiterate plagiarist. The reader is repeatedly hit over the head with documentation of King’s plagiarism as a student and with his very poor grammar, spelling, and general mastery of the English language.

One must ask why the editors chose not to edit the writings of an obviously poorly instructed student, but one whose life’s work contributed so much to humanity, whether or not he could spell correctly. Why did they choose to document *ad nauseam* every instance of plagiarism? Could this not be understood as the problem of an overanxious youth trying to please academic authority? Surely, given King’s proven character later in life, this problem could not have emanated from an evil intent.

The answer to these questions can only be found by looking at who stands behind the publication of the volume, and what their interest is. Simply stated, the volume is the product of the remnants of a civil rights movement which has been taken over by academic and foundation money, and has been polluted by it to the point of impotence.

The leading sponsors of the project—those who funded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change to carry it out—include the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, IBM Corp., Intel Corp., the Times Mirror Foundation, The Ahmanson Foundation, the Bank-America Foundation, and the AT&T Foundation. Stanford University is the leading academic funder; Editor-in-Chief Carson is a professor of history at Stanford.

One is reminded of Christ’s admonition to let the dead bury the dead. Where were these foundations when Dr. King was leading a nonviolent resistance movement to brutal racism? Where was Stanford when the black children of America’s South were excluded from a decent education? Now, after King is dead and gone, they lavishly finance a compendium of his works so academic as nearly to kill his thoughts. And such Advisory Board members as Coretta Scott King,

Andrew Young, and Harris Wofford welcome their “institutional support.”

Its merits

Given these problems, the volume remains a valuable source of information about the young Martin Luther King. There can be no doubt about King’s “roots.” His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all Baptist ministers. His grandparents, A.D. Williams and Jennie Celeste Williams, “transformed Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church from a struggling congregation in the 1890s into one of black Atlanta’s most prominent institutions.” Williams’s son-in-law, Martin, Sr., succeeded him as pastor at Ebenezer, where King’s mother was church organist and choir director. Daddy King, as King’s father was known, was also a militant leader in the voter registration and civil rights movement of the late 1930s and ’40s, through his work in the NAACP and the Atlanta Civic and Political League.

The fact that King’s other (paternal) great-grandfather, Jim Long, was a slave whose principal occupation was to breed new slaves for his master—he was a “stud,” in the vernacular—makes clear that King’s forebears had to go through hell to get to where they finally arrived.

There can also be no doubt that, when King is presenting his own ideas (rather than those plagiarized for academic purposes), his search for truth is powerful and thoroughgoing. Witness one of the earliest chronological entries, dated August 6, 1946 (17 years old), his letter to the editor of Atlanta’s largest newspaper:

“I often find when decent treatment for the Negro is urged, a certain class of people hurry to raise the scarecrow of social mingling and intermarriage. These questions have nothing to do with the case. And most people who kick up this kind of dust know that it is simple dust to obscure the real question of rights and opportunities. . . .

“We want and are entitled to the basic rights and opportunities of American citizens. . . .”

The religious question

Since most of King’s childhood and schooling was involved in religion, through his parents’ influence and his attendance at the Crozer Theological Seminary, much of the volume is devoted to King’s religious views. This is one of the volume’s strong points, simply because the writings speak for themselves. While his papers are heavily influenced by the sociological jargon and existential drivel that passed (and passes) for religious instruction, his own quest for true religion is moving and powerful.

Throughout his youth he was torn between the formal, ritualized religion he rejected at 13 years of age, and his quest for a true knowledge of God. In a 1948 essay written while at Morehouse College, King denounced merely formal religion in the following terms: “Real religion goes beyond a

form of ritual; that is, it is not to end in recitation of prayers, offering of sacrifice and other outward ceremonies. Its aim is to please the deity, and if the deity is one who delights in charity and mercy and purity more than the singing of hymns, and the burning of candles, his worshippers will best please him, not by bowing before him, and by filling the church with costly gifts, but by being pure and charitable toward men.”

He sought for many years, as the volume adequately documents, an “intellectual” alternative to fundamentalism. This led him from Plato and the neo-Platonics to the real muck of Barth, Spinoza, existentialism, and mysticism. Finally, as reflected in one of the last entries in the volume, in a paper on “Religion’s Answer to the Problem of Evil” in 1951, he found the path that eventually led him to the forefront of the civil rights movement:

“The ultimate solution is not intellectual but spiritual. After we have climbed to the top of the speculative ladder we must leap out into the darkness of faith. But this leap is not a leap of despair, for it eventually cries with St. Paul, ‘For now we see through a glass darkly; . . . but then shall I know even as I am known.’ The Christian answer to the problem of evil is ultimately contained in what he does with evil, itself the result of what Christ did with evil on the cross.”

To come to know Martin Luther King through his own struggles in this way, the volume is definitely a valuable resource, despite its major flaws.



Martin Luther King, Jr. with his mother Alberta Williams King, ca. 1951.