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THE LEGACY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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Introduction and Moderator

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Featured Speaker

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GALSTON: Well, let me begin by introducing myself. I'm Bill Galston, a Senior Fellow in Governnace Studies here at Brookings.

I want to thank you for coming out to what I think will be both a nourishing and inspiring event.

This event is part of a series at Brookings that we call "Governing Ideas," and it represents an effort to broaden out the discussion beyond policy analysis to talk about the political historical and even theological contexts of the public culture within which the discussion of public policy in this country takes place.

And it gives me very great pleasure to be able to present to you someone who is not only a good friend but a superb scholar -- as you'll see for yourselves very soon -- Jonathan Rieder, who has been, for nearly two decades a professor of sociology at Barnard, where he served -- God save him -- as chairman of the department for 15 years. Remarkably sane, under the circumstances, though significantly grayer than he would have been otherwise.

Jon first came to my attention not long after he published a remarkable book -- I think a path-breaking book -- entitled *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism.* This was during the period of so-called "white backlash." It was a period during which

respectable academic and political opinion demonized the so-called backlashes.

And Jonathan had a different idea. He said, “Well, why don’t I go talk to them and find out what they’re thinking, what they’re feeling. And try to tell a more complex story?”

And I wish I could say that that book launched a torrent of comparably complexifying scholarship. It did not. But I think it stands as a monument to what sociology at its best can contribute to the public discourse.

And speaking of contributing to the public discourse, Jonathan then went on to do something quite unusual for a dedicated academic. He actually founded, and for six years served as the co-editor of a journal -- a very demanding journal -- called *Common Quest, The Magazine of Black-Jewish Relations*, which won, and deservedly won, national recognition for its frank, innovative, but always civil exploration of a wide range of racial, ethnic and religious tensions in the United States.

He’s here with us today to discuss his -- I think the word “path-breaking” is overused. In fact I’ve probably overused it myself in the past five minutes, but I think it’s fitting in this case -- path-breaking new book, *The Word of the Lord is Upon Me* which, as you probably noticed,

was the subject of a long and highly laudatory review in the *Post* book section just yesterday.

I'm tempted to go on at length about this book, which I had the pleasure of reading a couple of weeks ago. But the marvelous novelist Charles Johnson, the author of the acclaimed book *Middle Passage*, among others, has said it a lot better than I could. So let me just quote briefly from what Charles Johnson has to say about this book.

He says, in part: "Jonathan Rieder saves Martin Luther King, Jr. from the curse of canonization. He replaces the hagiographic, airbrushed images and the kitschy plastic dolls with a brilliant reading of King's chameleon-like gift for effortlessly gliding, in public and provide, between ethnic and universal idioms, between the street and theological seminars.

"*The Word of the Lord is Upon Me* restores our perception of this great man's complexity, flaws, scars and profound humanity."

That pretty much sums it up. But you need to get the flavor and the texture of this book, which you will in about 30 seconds.

Here's the agenda.

Professor Rieder will speak for 25 or 30 minutes. If the spirit moves me, in my capacity as moderator I may put a couple of questions to

him, and then there will be lots of time left open for questions and discussions from the floor.

So -- Jon Rieder, it's all yours.

(Applause)

PROF. RIEDER: Thank you.

On the 40th anniversary of the death of an extraordinary man like King, it's always hard to know how to acknowledge him. There's one version of King which we know is, in many ways, the conventional one, rehashed by the larger society, and invoked once a year on his birthday, or during Black History Month often by the larger society. And it really tells a story about King's relationship to American civic culture.

And at the heart of this is a story of King as the embodiment of quintessentially American or universal values: that he was the man who took us beyond Black and White. And we have that -- and some of King, in his fancier moments. And King had a very fancy streak. And he would soar to express this idea with "beloved community," or the "garment of mutuality." And more poetically, we have that same image which, again, is an image beyond race, of Black children and White children holding hands as, again, a symbol of the perfectibility of democracy.

And so with all the flaws of democracy, it's a story that there's something inherent in the American experiment that perfects itself

against racism and other forms of really, of forces that undermine that glorious vision in nasty and mean social and political inequality.

This is very much part of the image of “St. Martin” -- you know, the lone man who American culture wants to sort of exalt over a very complicated movement.

And this obviously also has implications for cultural policy, because it suggests that King’s central commitment, or contribution, to cultural policy was a notion of “can’t we get beyond race,” in some sense. And in the public realm we should diminish the importance of our personal ethnic or religious or racial identity.

Now, there’s another revised version of the civic culture which is also compatible with King, or this vision of King, which is: Wait a second. Civic culture isn’t about the values we share, but it’s a kind of rhetoric we learn to speak when we are in a mixed, pluralistic setting.

And the author John Cuddihy has written a lovely book called *No Offense*. And his point there is it’s not really shared values, at least in the larger religious arena, that defines America. But each of the religious pillars of America has a very powerful, unapologetically triumphalist streak -- the Catholic notion that “we’re the one true Church,” or the Jews’ notion that “we’re the chosen people,” or an Evangelical Christian version of “only those saved in Jesus.”

And what Cuddihy shows is that as these groups develop in American pluralism, they learn to leave that triumphal language, that particular language, backstage. And in the public we present ourselves, in some sense, with the preface, “I just happen to be Jewish.” Or “I just happen to be Protestant.” “I just happen to be almost a gingerly genteel.” Don’t think I’m going to get in your face with my ethnicity, or sexual orientation, or -- all of these things.

So in this vision of King and King’s narrative, in a way modern identity politics, “I’m here and I’m queer,” Black Nationalism, yarmulkes and hijab worn proudly in the public sphere seems almost a break with King and his vision of decorousness and looking for the shared ground in public. And in that sense King is seen as an inoffensive figure.

So what I wanted today suggest something very different: that in my book I tried to uncover a less familiar King by starting where most of his performances took place, before Black audiences, with his preacher buddies and colleagues backstage -- and I spent a lot of time interviewing them, in church, preaching to Black congregations, in which King presented himself as a different kind of figure than he was at National Cathedral or Riverside Church, or Patel Chapel at Yale. And in the mass meetings, as well.

And what we're going to see in some sense is a King -- and I'm going to use, you know, the language that has emerged in the debate of Obama's relationship to Jeremiah Wright in Trinity Church. For all the problems with this comparison -- and I think there are -- Trinity Church declares itself unapologetically Black and unapologetically Christian.

And in many respects there is a King we don't understand fully enough who is unapologetically Black and unapologetically Christian. And I'm not going to talk about the second aspect of this today, except in the questions, if you want to get into it. But if you look at the unapologetically Black and Christian King backstage, talking to Black audiences, we can analyze the crossover addresses to Whites, like "I Have a Dream," and "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and we find that King found a way to bring that Black voice -- and I'm using "Black" and "White" always in quotes, as a kind of very handy way of describing different styles of talk -- King brought that right into his public, civic performance, as well. Long before Black Power, King would soar with intensity talking about fleecy locks and dark complexion.

So I'm going to leave aside the crossover King in the larger pluralistic setting, and focus on the King talking to Black audiences.

And we could start, I won't say in the more trivial context, but we could start at least in a very basic way with his friendships. And if you

look at King in public he was known for the mask of dignity and refinement: the elevated tone. And, you know, he begins “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” “My Dear Fellow Clergymen.” And, again, the mannerly King was very important in his presentation to the world.

And of course we know there was a different King that, when he’s writing “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” he’s writing it with indignation. He’s furious that the White ministers have criticized him. And his colleagues -- Wyatt T. Walker told me this story -- you know, are saying, “Martin, Doc, why are you worrying about these White people? We have a mobilization. We have to get rights. We’re trying to run this Birmingham campaign. Why are you even worrying about them?”

And so, “My Dear Fellow Clergymen -- ” -- and I found a recording in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Within hours of being let out of the jail, King goes into a Black church in Birmingham, and he’s talking about “These preachers calling me naughty and calling us naughty,” and you really see a somewhat more down-home King.

And this was the King, of course, that appeared with his colleagues, Reverend Joe Lowery, Andrew Young, Wyatt T. Walker -- all kinds of amazing human beings. And we have to remember that King’s nickname for Andrew Young on some occasions was, “L’il Nigger.” “L’il Nigger, just where you been?” And Lowery was saying, “Of course we

used the term ‘nigger’ and ‘cracker.’ We talked about White people as ‘cracker’ backstage.” And he said of course it wasn’t self-denigrating. “We loved our Blackness too much. “When we were talking about -- ” you know, “ -- together, we could relax -- ” that, you know, “dignity” and engage in politically correct down-home style of talk.

This would appear when King loved to preach mock funerals. He would preach his own funeral because he expected that he would not live long, but he also preached the funerals of others. And one famous occasion, he was preaching Andrew Young’s funeral. And the way he started out was, “Ya’ll think they’re gonna get me first. But ya’ll gonna be jumpin’ out in front of the TV cameras and they’re gonna get you. And here’s what I’ll preach. I’ll preach you the best funeral you ever had. ‘Ohhhhh, Andrew Young. Lord, White folks made a big mistake today. They’ve sent home to Glory your faithful servant, Andrew young. Lord have mercy on the White folks who did this terrible deed. They killed the wrong Negro. In Andrew Young, White folk had a friend so faithful, so enduring they should have never harmed a hair on his head.’”

Now, none of the preachers really thought that Andrew Young was an Uncle Tom, but it was again part of their comfort within the ethnic brotherhood, as it were, brotherhood of one kind, rather than that more lofty version of brotherhood.

In King's preaching to Black congregations, this same powerful, unapologetic sense, that King of Blackness, that King translated with a phrase he uses over and over, "my people." The man who loved "beloved community" never left his love and loyalty to "my people."

And there are many ways that this unfolded. As a matter of style, King when he was at Riverside or National Cathedral, there would be the quotes from St. Thomas Aquinas, and John Dunn. And while he never dropped them utterly in the Black preaching context, it was also the case that it was a different more fervent King who appeared, with a very intense relationship with his savior, Jesus Christ. And in synagogues, and with his Jewish colleagues that he was friendly, he would stress Moses and the shared Old Testament prophet. And when he was with Rabbi Heschel, his good buddy, again it would always be the Exodus narrative that they could share. And Heschel once said, "We were drawn to one another because I thought Jesus wasn't really that important in some sense. It was Exodus narrative."

But, of course, King had a very intense relationship to Jesus. And he would preach at Ebenezer, "Oh, Nicodemus, you must be born again." And he would shout out praise songs for his savior in the rhythm and cadence of Daddy King's folk pulpit, who would reappear in a powerful way through him.

You would hear King sob as he would cross over, not into the fancy language of Jefferson or the theologians, but the hymnal, in which he would say, talking about his own semi-born again experience, when he was down and really faltering, and he couldn't go on during the bus boycott in Montgomery, and he said, "The Lord came to me and said, 'Martin King, stand up for justice.'" And you hear King almost sobbing. "He told me He'd never leave me. "He'd never leave me. He'd never leave me alone."

Again, a very powerful, emotive, less theological voice at Ebenezer.

But this was most powerfully expressed in the stories of Black lives. And John Lewis -- Congressman Lewis, told me the story, what first got him about King when he was a little boy, he heard him on radio, Lewis, out in Troy, Alabama, and he hears this sermon, and he said, "What got me was it was the story of Black lives."

And King brought stories of Black lives into the Ebenezer, and even before, Dexter Baptist Church. He would tell the story of the time he was on a plane. He'd often report on his excursions out into the White world. And he would say, "Oh, there was a white person, a passenger next to me. And this person told me on the plane, 'You know, I grew up with so much affection for Nigras.'" And then King stops and he

says, “He couldn’t say ‘Negroes.’” He said, “I always did nice things for you Nigras, and I know that in my family we didn’t grow up with any prejudice for Nigras. We loved them.”

“But over the last few years -- ” -- and now, as King tells the story, his passenger shifted into a personal “you,” -- ”Since you Nigras have been demonstratin’, you got others shoutin’ ‘Black Power’ and all this, we just don’t feel the same kind of love for you.”

And you hear King stop and he says, “If you really loved us, it isn’t a conditional thing. You don’t love us as long as we accept our enslaved status.”

Never was this voice of “my people” more powerful than when King channeled the voices of the Black ancestors. And he had a powerful relationship to the slaves. And he brought them into his ordinary sermons, his basic homilies. And he would talk about, “Oh, what a wonderful thing they did. What an amazing thing. They took that question mark, ‘Is there a Balm in Gilead?” and they straightened it into a statement, ‘There <u>is</u> a Balm in Gilead.’”

But, most powerful, was when King would adopt the voice of the old slave preacher and, in a sense, make himself one with that person.

King started out preaching, “We find the tribal idea alive in White supremacy. But you’ve got to remember, God loves all his

children." And before long, King had deferred to the words of his predecessors, "You know the old slave preacher used to say this in beautiful terms. They had to live day in and day out. There wasn't nothin' to look forward to, morning after morning, but the blisterin' heat. Long rows of cotton, the rawhide whip of the overseer. Women knew they had to sacrifice their bodies to satisfy the biological urges of the masters. AS soon as their children were born, they were snatched from their hand like a dog snatches a bone from a human hand.

"Oh, they would pray over and over again that they did not count, that they did not belong, that they were no nobody."

Here King defined the role of the old slave preacher as the surrogate of God who restores the humanity of the slaves. The healing act began with a gaze of pathos. "Oh, and that old slave preacher would look at his people. He would say to 'em that all week long you've been told you were nobody. All week long you've been reminded of the fact you were a slave. All week long you've been called a nigger. But I want to say to you -- " -- and here, King's thickening of dialect creates the impression that he is the slave preacher. He's crowding right into that voice. "You ain't no slave. You ain't no nigger. But you God's chillun."

King brought the same powerful, unapologetically Black sense into the mass meetings.

And here is a King that could express indignation in a kind of tender fashion for “my people,” or in a much angrier indignant, and even bitter, at times, feeling.

He was speaking in Los Angeles not long after the Los Angeles riots. And when you think about the controversy over Obama not disowning Jeremiah Wright we need to remember that King would not disown the Watts rioters. He condemned what they did, but he would not disown them.

And King said, in a powerful -- that sigh that was his punctuation mark -- “Ohhh.” And he could do it in a Divine way. He could do it in a kind of tender way. It was his substitute for old-fashioned whooping of the folk pulpit, in which he would use it as an emotional exclamation.

And he’s talking to the rioters, and he says, “Ohhh, I know the temptation. I know the temptation to become bitter that comes to all of us.” And the “us” is a Black “us.” It comes to all of us, including Martin Luther King. And Martin Luther King, of course, had gone through a period of hating all White people that took him some years to overcome, and his parents had to work to overcome. His notion of love for humanity was never something weak or sentimental, it was grounded in a realistic understanding that it was natural to have those feelings. But the tough-

minded, morally courageous thing was to go to the better way of Jesus Christ.

But he never thought -- moralistically, or righteously -- ”How dare you think that?” And King placed himself comfortably in the community of Watts’ rage in that moment.

Sometimes that sense of Black “we” would not be so tender empathy, but it could become angry. And King would say, “It’s the Black man -- ” -- noticed, he’s dropped the universal language -- ”It’s the Black man who produced the wealth of this nation.” All right. “And the nation doesn’t have enough sense to share its wealth and its power with the very people who made it so?” “And I know what I’m talking about, this morning. Yes, sir. The Black man made America wealthy.”

And as he fell into his whooping meter, as it were, he used a refrain that was a kind of mantra of King’s, establishing Black presence and Black beauty prior to Thomas Jefferson in civic culture, “We were here before the Pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth in 1620. We were here before Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence. We were here before the beautiful words of the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ were here. We were here.”

Some think that sense of the Black man shifted or yielded beyond anger into a kind of tinge of bitterness. And you hear King, in the

final months of his life, preparing for the Poor People's March, mobilizing people to come to Washington. And King is out of sorts. He's always had feelings that he would be killed. But in the last year before his life (sic) it would become much more intense. He knew there were death plots circulating.

But he's talking about the sinfulness of slavery, and the "they" again is a White—"They kept us in slavery 244 years in this country. And they said they freed us from slavery, but they didn't give us any land. Frederick Douglass said we should 40 acres and a mule."

This refusal to welcome was no remnant of archaic history -- "And they still haven't given us anything, after making our foreparents work and labor for 244 years for nothing? Didn't pay 'em a cent."

This same jeering edge was in King's observation, "Our young Black boys and our young White boys are forced to fight together and kill together in brutal solidarity in Vietnam. And when they come back home, they can't even live on the same block."

In Montgomery, at a mass meeting a few weeks earlier -- this is early '68, February, maybe early March -- King seemed to affirm civil religious. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights." And you hear King say, almost sarcastically, "That's a beautiful creed."

It didn't say all -- it said each individual has certain rights. But this nod to Jefferson mainly served to highlight the sinful mendacity of those who spouted it.

His repetition confirmed the sarcasm. "That's beautiful. America's never lived up to it. The men who wrote that owned slaves."

And a kind of come -- start making my transition to the end, sort of giving -- one of the most interesting ways that King thought about the origins of this country was not limited to what the founding of the nation, and what it did to the slaves, but he could launch a devastating chronicle of the captive Black nation that merged with America's treatment of others.

He said, "Even before Blacks were slaves, they destroyed indigenous people. Do you know that in America the White man sought to annihilate the Indian? Wipe 'em out. And he made a national policy that said the only good Indian is a dead Indian.

"Now the nation that got started like that has a lot of repenting to do."

Now, I don't want to give the wrong impression that King's unapologetically Black stance was ultimately his theological or personal end-game. Whenever he moved into these moments of intense Black

communion, he always manages to circle back and affirm his faith in all God's children.

They're momentary interludes, powerful interludes, that are not in opposition to his faith in universalism, to his faith in all God's children. They coexist with it. It's not Blackness versus universalism, Blackness versus humanity, but the ability to have those multiple identities that were so powerful to him.

And, again, I won't go into that for now. In the questions we can, if you like. But keep in mind that at the very moment that King is crafting "I Have a Dream," a speech he did not intend to give at the March on Washington, but the Lord spoke to his condition, and he sort of took off half way through.

But notice that he ends, not with the American "My Country 'Tis of Thee" -- there are two songs at the end. And he first makes African Americans Americans by, "once we have freedom, then African Americans can sing "My Country 'Tis of Thee." It's a moment of nation building. They can't really sing that until they have rights, and enter Constitutional protection.

But it is not the American anthem, or the American song canon that has the final word, it is the slaves'. It is the sacred ancestors. And King brings White people into a Black "we," and has the White nation

sing, in the words of the old slave preacher -- the spiritual -- ”We are free at last.” In a sense, he makes White people his ancestors, in a very interesting way.

Since it’s the 40th anniversary of his death, I’ll close today by reflecting on this powerful sense of King’s premonition of death. Because nowhere better was King’s sense of universalism more powerful -- his ability to come out of Blackness to see this larger sense of “American-ness” and humanity, as it were, than his sense of his mission which, remember, was always grounded in a prophetic Christian view that “I’ve been anointed to free the captives. I’ve been anointed to feed the hungry.” And when Black critics of him are saying, you know, “Forget about Vietnam. Let’s focus on Black things,” he says, “Ebenezer, you know, did not anoint me. The Lord anointed me.” And my mission is far beyond my mission as a civil rights worker, but as a minister preaching the word of Jesus Christ.

And that prophetic sense steeled him -- and all the others in his movement -- that sense of a larger spiritual purpose. And C.T. Vivian, Reverend Vivian, told me the story, when he was in St. Augustine, desegregating the beaches, and the Klan was holding his head under the water, and he just started laughing, cackling. And C.T. cackles today when he tells that story, that’s how bad he is. Because he had the spirit of

the Lord upon him. He wasn't afraid -- like Fred Shuttleworth, like all of King's colleagues. They had a sense that it's better to live with a scarred up body, or to die in a secular, practical sense, than to live with a scarred up soul.

And I'll close, then, by saying how King then was steady in his sense of facing death.

From the very start of the Montgomery bus boycott, when his house was bombed, he was threatened and knew he wouldn't live a long life. His repertoire of death talk was eclectic. It took the form of eerie unsettlement as a rattled King rambled on at a Montgomery mass meeting. "If anyone should be killed, let it be me," before he collapsed at the pulpit.

It was snippy when a young SNCC activist would not relent in trying to get King to join the Freedom Riders, and King told -- I believe it was Diane Nash -- "I will choose the time of my own Golgotha."

It was dismissive, even pedestrian, when his battered field staff was having a hard time, and he said, "I settled that fear of death long ago. I don't think anybody can be free until you settle that."

Lying in a hospital -- Andrew Young told me this story -- King confessed that he had an out-of-body experience when he was stabbed in Harlem, and he imagined himself on the ceiling looking down at himself in

a ring -- he imagined a ring of Black clergy eager for his death. And King muses, “I’m not ready to go yet.”

Death evoked a light quip before an airplane ride to Memphis, when the pilot apologized for a bomb threat that delayed takeoff: “Well, it looks like they won’t kill me this flight, after telling me that.”

Around the same time, on a tour across about Black Belt towns, it cycled from defiant rejection of bodyguards: “I can’t live that kind of life. I feel like a bird in a cage,” through resigned -- ”There’s no way in the world you can keep someone from killing you if they really want to kill you,” to sardonic -- ”I would much rather be Martin Luther King late, than the late Martin Luther King.”

It could soar with intensity, “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” “I’m not fearing any man.”

And, finally, it could exult in a praise song -- ”And I’m so glad I didn’t die.”

So I think I’ll end on that note of King’s own words. And I’m glad to talk about -- well, I think Bill may have a couple of questions to get us started. But then we can talk about King, or anything contemporary. Or anywhere you’d like to go with this.

(Applause)

MR. GALSTON: It always helps to have the microphone facing up. There we go. You may want to do the same thing.

I do have a couple of questions to get us started, both of which pivot off of one crucial moment in a very famous speech that he gave, indeed the last speech that he gave, in Memphis.

And I am struck by the fact that in that speech which you can correct me if I'm wrong, which was before an almost entirely African American audience, the image of himself that he presented was not Jesus but Moses.

And what I want to suggest is that there was a deep truth in that, and it's a truth that follows from your analysis. And that is, to the extent that you see yourself as being in an indissoluble bond with a particular people -- right? -- you are not saying neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female, et cetera, et cetera. You know, you're not -- you're taking in principle the structure of your situation as a leader, as a human being, as a speaker, is suffused with the particularism of the relationship with the people that you're leading.

And so I guess I'm inviting you to speculate on how central this motif of Martin Luther King as Moses was to his own self understanding.

PROF. RIEDER: I think that the Exodus narrative, and Moses was central, in the way King thought of himself. And, again, it was -- in a sense, Exodus had kind of gone into remission to some degree.

If you look at the emergence, the transition from spirituals to gospel music is, in part, a shift from the Exodus narrative in deliverance theme, to the theme of redemption in the next world.

And so when the Civil Rights movement -- it's not like Exodus disappeared from the folk pulpit, but when people talk about the prophetic strain within Afro-Christianity, they're recognizing that this deliverance theme has always been much more powerful than in White Christianity.

So I think the Civil Rights movement retrieves the deliverance theme, just as they retrieved the spirituals and they sort of turned them into gospel music, into the spirituals. And for King -- again, Daddy King had spent a whole season, back in the '30s, preaching on Exodus. And, again, Exodus is a story, as you say, of a people.

And if we go back to the old slave spiritual, the genius of the slaves was they were able to affirm a sense of liberation of Black people, and extending that to more universal. They could see in the story of the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage a template that

existed beyond just the Jews. So the universal and the particular is very much all, as you said, tied up together.

And just remember that slave spiritual: “Didn’t my Lord deliver Daniel, and why not every man?”

So when you think about the theology of slave religion, there is a tremendous universalism and humanity that extended beyond themselves.

The only qualification I would have to the importance of Exodus is that Exodus tended to be selected out by certain settings, and that was mass meetings. So, in church, Moses plays a modest role. It’s when King is politically mobilizing that he identifies most with Moses. In church, it’s the figure of Jesus that was powerful to him.

And what’s interesting is, King could sometimes identify with Moses, but he never saw himself like Moses. When he was a little boy, his favorite song was, “I Want to Be More and More Like Jesus.” And he brought the house down at various religious conventions when, as an eight-year-old, he would sing that song.

So, one final point and then we need to get more folks in, and I know you have another question.

In slave religion there's an argument that Jesus and Moses kind of merge together. So Jesus is kind of a late Moses. He's a deliverer as well as a redeemer.

MR. GALSTON: My second and last question.

I want to invite you to speculate on a more recent speech that invoked the figure of Moses, namely a speech that Senator Obama gave -- I think it was in Georgia -- where he distinguished between the Moses generation and the Joshua generation -- right? -- from the standpoint of your investigation into Martin Luther King's rhetoric, the sermons and the speeches.

How do you think he would have heard and interpreted that utterance?

PROF. RIEDER: Well, you know, he says it -- King said it in that last Memphis speech, the night before he was killed. He said, "I may not get there with you." He's handing -- but we as a people -- there's that "people" again -- "we as a people will."

So I think he very much would see Obama in the line of the next generation, who is taking forward, you know, from the mountaintop on, the next task of deliverance.

So, you know, again, I think there's a haunting resonance there that was being invoked.

Now, I also wonder -- it's very smart of Obama, given the generational skewing of young people, of he's also -- there's a larger appeal to the next generation that kind of transcends the religious setting. But -- absolutely, Obama is sort of placing himself in this Black tradition, Black religious tradition.

But what's interesting about Obama, of course, is King starts as somebody whose life was spent in a total Black world until he goes off to seminary. He starts ensconced in Auburn Avenue, in the Black pulpit in Morehouse College. So King acquires his universalism as he moves out in these larger settings.

In a way, Obama starts at the opposite position. He starts as the boundary crosser, the Kansas-Kenya hybrid. He goes off to Indonesia. It's only in his 20s that he kind of begins to identify as an African American. He has to become African American.

And later in the questions, if someone wants to kind of, you know, ask further, we can remember that great moment in South Carolina, when Obama, who has become African American, is asked by a Black reporter if Clinton was the first Black President?

So here, poor Obama, who's acquired his Blackness, has to become the arbiter of White Blackness, and a very complicated moment for him, and he handled it well.

MR. GALSTON: Well, I'm going to display moderator self-control from here on out.

We have a full 45 minutes available for questions and discussion from the floor.

There is a roving microphone. And I would ask you simply to identify yourselves before you speak.

Let's start from the back -- the gentleman in the back, and then we'll move forward.

SPEAKER: Yes, I don't need the microphone. I don't need it.

I just have a question. I'm 40 years old. I know this is like the 40th anniversary.

MR. GALSTON: Actually, you do need the microphone.

SPEAKER: I know this is like the 40th anniversary of the MLK assassination. But I'm 40 years old. I'll be 41 in May. So I was born around '67.

But, unfortunately, I don't see the relevance of King in the current situation we're currently living in. I really don't.

What I do see, though, however, is Atlanta, George, a huge cosmopolitan city, majority African American. I see a very degenerative

Black family. I see all of the social peril situations that the current Black community is facing.

And I was listening to your quotes of King, and the things that he was saying. And my mind was going back to some of things my mother was telling me. And it seems like he was an intellectual chameleon, so to speak. And he was competing with other Black organizations, mainly the Nation of Islam, which I was born and raised in. And it's funny that I'm here in D.C. back home, when I was basically born and raised here.

A lot of the problems that Black people was facing in those times, I don't face. I never had any inferiority or not knowing who I was as a Black person.

PROF. RIEDER: Right.

SPEAKER: I traveled all over Africa at a young age. Asia -- I was all over the world.

It's very funny that the American institute holds this man up very high, for some reasons that I still, I'm perplexed about.

PROF. RIEDER: Yes.

SPEAKER: And I want you just to address those issues. And where were you at the time? And did you participate in any of the marches and things of that nature?

PROF. RIEDER: Sure.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

PROF. RIEDER: Great question.

And I think what I -- you know, I'll cut into what I think is the most important aspect of King, that -- I think you are right that King would come today and see the problems are quite different. I think he would have a great deal of pride in the racial strides that have been made in certain respects.

He would understand that Black self esteem is not necessarily what he was dealing with back in the day, in the South.

But I think he would also argue for a more primal relevance, in a sense. Because his sense of mission -- prophetic witness -- was not limited to this or that particular problem, but to the notion that God has a command to deal with all his suffering children.

So the suffering is different. But the notion of a prophetic obligation to take care of those who are hungry, or those whose families are fragile, King would see the need for some moral witness in the larger society.

So I agree with you that American society's use of King takes away the kind of edgy aspect of King. So the "chameleon" part -- another way of saying that is he was highly fluent and adaptive. But the

core message, whether he was preaching Black or preaching White, never vanished.

And I guess what King would maybe say is -- one of his most important sermons was always preaching on Lazarus and Dives. And he would say, “Oh, Dives did not go to hell because he was a rich man, but because he refused to see Lazarus every day suffering, pulling himself, gimpy Lazarus, trying to get to his gate. He made Lazarus, he made a brother invisible.”

And I think King would say the need for society to recognize those who are the Lazarus of today was simply an ongoing work to be done by the larger society.

SPEAKER: (Off mike) And where were you at? Any of the marches (inaudible).

PROF. RIEDER: I -- I am 60 years old. And in my progressive Quaker school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, they would let me out of chemistry tests to go picket Frank Rizzo, and to go on marches.

So -- and I came out of a family for whom the Civil Rights movement was a very important thing.

But -- you know, I was a young’un, so I can’t say that, you know -- this is, for me, meeting historic figures as I’ve met all these folks.

Thank you for your question.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Yes, a woman -- yes.

And your name is?

MS. FREEMAN: My name is Jo Freeman. I'm going to stand over here so I can see people.

I'm a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center. But, more importantly for this question -- and I'll answer you -- in '65, '66, I worked for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for a year-and-a-half, mostly doing voter registration in Alabama. I heard Dr. King speak many times.

And you're right about the difference in both style and substance when he was addressing Black and White audiences. And I would include in my definition of "White," anytime the national TV cameras and press were present. Because he had a different -- he had a different message.

What I couldn't see in that year -- and this is what I want to ask you, because you've studied his rhetoric over time -- I could see how his theme changed over time. He was a public figure for about 13 years. And lots of things happened in those 13 years.

Did you see changes in themes? Either for his Black or his White audience, or both -- over time in those 13 years?

And, just as a parenthetical note, I think you should tell people about his “If I Had Sneezed” speech. You know that one.

PROF. RIEDER: Yep.

MS. FREEMAN: That’s a good one.

PROF. RIEDER: Yes -- when I set myself -- what struck me as a I looked at the early King and late King, the King of Black talk and the King of White talk was, in fact, the continuity and the constancy. There were stylistic variations, but the core message was really kind of constant.

So, I’m both identifying the differences, but I’m also interested in the similarities.

And King never saw refinement and elegance as a White ideal. He learned his elegant intellectual vision from Black people of Morehouse College. His major inspirations -- people like Benjamin Mays and Mordecai Johnson and Vernon Johns, who was somewhat of a wild man compared to the other guys, but also Vern Johns. Sandy Ray in Brooklyn, Gardner Taylor -- you look at these amazing models for King, elegance and refinement were Black ideals for him. And in his family, by the way -- and not just White ideals.

So there is a complexity. But the constancy is there.

But you want me to focus on change and evolution. And I would say there is no doubt that over time King becomes more pessimistic about the power of White backlash.

So in ‘65, ‘66, he is suddenly realizing, in those districts in Ohio and in Pennsylvania, where Obama’s having no problem with the grandchildren of some of the people who scared the hell out of King -- remember, King’s two most frightening experiences was when he went back to Philadelphia, Mississippi, a year after Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman were killed, on the Meredith march, and in Chicago, in Marquette Park and places like that, when he saw the face of White ethnic backlash -- they were the two times he was most frightened.

So, over time, he does not change his theological assumption that his White brothers can be redeemed, but he begins to shift his language from “White brothers” to “sick White brothers,” and there is an evolution in his estimate of how much practical work it’s going to take to redeem his White brothers.

So when he says to Spellman College women in the early ‘60s and late ‘50s, “Ohhh, I know it’s not easy to laugh at the White man,” he believed that. But as the years went by, he had a declining faith in whether his White brothers were going to step up to the task.

So I think there's an evolution to some extent in tone, that an angrier and bitter but, in particular, more pessimistic vision of what's happening.

Secondly, as the gentleman's first question implies, he was competing with the rising force of Black nationalism. And King becomes more demonstrative in the Black pride language. He always had his Black pride language, but it becomes earthier and more insistent, as it were.

And remember, he always had a great deal of respect and tender feelings towards Malcolm X. And he once met with Elijah Muhammed, and they laughed about a variety of things in an amazing way.

So there's an evolution in language, there's an evolution in tone.

And, finally, there's an evolution, as King increasingly sees economic inequality as much more difficult than solving the race question. He understands to deal with poverty and homelessness and suffering of all of God's suffering poor children is going to be much tougher than winning the Civil Rights revolution in some sense.

So I think you see three ways in which -- I don't know if he's becoming more radicalized in substance, but tonally, and in terms of the substance of his preoccupation, there's definitely change.

And the year you were there -- I don't know, was that Hosea Williams' program?

MS. FREEMAN: (Off mike)

PROF. RIEDER: And I talked to, you know, a lot of Hosea's shock troops.

MS. FREEMAN: That was me.

PROF. RIEDER: Okay.

MS. FREEMAN: We were the shock troops.

PROF. RIEDER: Willie Bolden, J.T. Johnson -- I tried to say the problem with the image of St. Martin, it sounds like there was this lone figure who liberated Black people.

Well, there were dozens of organizations, and tens of thousands of people. And it was the children of Selma, and it was these tough characters in SCLC who had to organization the Black Belt before King could even go into these cities.

And my wife and I, we had a book reading, a King commemoration in Atlanta earlier this week, and we were with Willie Bolden. And —

MS. FREEMAN: And Tom Lock, who organized it.

PROF. RIEDER: And Tom was there, as well. Tom was King's White driver.

MS. FREEMAN: Right.

PROF. RIEDER: And Daddy King never really got over his suspicion of Whites, would walk around and say, “Oh, no, Martin’s got a White boy for a driver.”

(Laughter)

PROF. RIEDER: And Willie Bolden, when they would tease Tom as the maniac young White shock troop, kicked out of his southern high school for leading demonstrations, Willie Bolden used to call Tom “cracker boy.” “Now, cracker boy, what are you getting us into now?” You know, “Someone do something about cracker boy.”

But there, to go to the second part of your question, Willie Bolden was in Marion, Alabama, a couple weeks before Selma, and he was standing in for King. And the first time he met King, King had asked Willie to join the movement, and Willie had been a Marine. And he said, you know, “Now, you’re telling me if someone slaps you on your cheek you’re supposed to turn the other one? Naw, I don’t think so.” So he said, “No, no, come into the movement. We’ll deal with that later.” He gives him a book by Gandhi.

So Willie Bolden was in Marion on the night a racist lawman grabs him and jacks him up by the back of his pants, and says, “You’re one of Martin Luther Coon’s boys. Where is Martin Luther Coon?” And

Willie Bolden was a very tough man, and he looks him in the eye and says, “Dr. Martin Luther King.”

And the lawman puts a gun in his mouth and says, “Nigger, if you breathe, I’m going to shoot ya. I’m gonna kill ya.” And then he says, “Please breathe.

And when Rev. Bolden tells this story, he channels the memory of King, when King was told -- when he had a bullet in him from the crazy lady in Harlem who had stabbed him, if he had sneezed, he would have died. He said, “Thank God I didn’t sneeze.” And to this day, when Willie Bolden tells the story -- and he did it in Manuel’s Tavern, Atlanta, he goes, “Thank God I didn’t breathe. Thank God I didn’t breathe.”

So I think your question gets at this evolution, and many of the field staff became very disillusioned with nonviolence. And the year after you were there, you can hear, when you listen to the tapes of the SCL meetings, out there with SCOPE and the voter registration movement, you hear the field workers, who are getting beaten like crazy, and you hear them saying, “We’ve got to get rid of this word ‘nonviolence.’ That’s something White people are using to create death for Black people.”

So, you know, King never lost his faith in nonviolence. He knew it required tough-minded courage.

But the people around him become less and less sure of that.

MR. GALSTON: The queue is now expanding.

We have Jon Rauch and David Saperstein.

MR. RAUCH: Thank you, this is a marvelous speech. I'm Jonathan Rauch. I'm a colleague of Bill's here at Brookings Governance Studies, and also write for several magazines.

There's a quotation that I've heard attributed to King, and quoted myself, and never been able to track down -- I'm hoping you can tell me -- which is that he once told a Black audience, from the pulpit, not to hate White people because they weren't wicked they were blind.

Is that a correct quotation?

I also have a larger question, but I really have always wanted to pin down that quotation.

PROF. RIEDER: You know, I don't -- and I've listened. I've spent decades listening to King's sermons. I don't remember the specific sermon where he says that, but he has a number of variants of that.

King was a sociology major as an undergraduate. He was very interested in psychology, and psychoanalysis when he was at Dexter,

which is a snootier congregation in Montgomery. He would talk about sublimation, and psychoanalysis, and Karen Horney's Neurotic Personality of Our Time.

And his view, in some sense, it's where his psychoanalysis or psychology merge with his Christianity, is: "I know you hate the White man, but you have to understand what makes him frightened."

And so one of these things was "he was blind."

But there's another image he used is, he would make the White man a slave. He'd say, "He's a slave to his bigotry. He's a slave to his panic and fear. What's he afraid of?" And King had analysis that was very similar, actually, to Malcolm X's analysis, that White people see in Black faces a sign of their own depravity, what they have done to them. And they're full of White guilt, and they last back.

So the notion that White people were blind, that they were primitive, that they were slave to their passions, that they had not yet been redeemed -- there was a kind of bad-ass subtext to that, which is, "God help the White man." He'd say, "God knows he needs your help." "God, love the White man, he needs your love."

He was turning upside down the status hierarchy. And so the notion that "we have clear sight and they are blind," "we are free spiritually and they are slaves," "we embody redemptive love, but don't let

them drag you down to their barbarian level" -- you know, there is a variant of that, albeit quite different, in Nation of Islam preaching that there's an edge in King that is often not (inaudible).

You had a second question?

MR. RAUCH: Bill, do you want to entertain another from me, or pass the mic on?

MR. GALSTON: Your questions are always entertaining, and therefore we'll entertain.

MR. RAUCH: Okay, well this one's kind of obvious, but I wonder if you'd help us with an explicit comparison between King and the King tradition, and Jeremiah Wright.

Obviously, Senator Obama wants to position Jeremiah Wright not as just some nutcase who hates America, but as a man deeply rooted in a Black spiritual tradition. And my colleague E.J. Dionne here at Brookings wrote a column arguing for a likeness between one King quotation, at least, and Jeremiah Wright.

I didn't see it. They struck me as very different in tone and in substance. I saw much less continuity than E.J. did.

Can you speak a bit to similarities and differences?

MR. GALSTON: That quotation was drawn from Jon's book.

PROF. RIEDER: Yes, I think I can.

I'm always wary of generalizations about "the Black church," like generalizations about "the White church." There are many strains of theology. There are many differences in styles of preaching.

If you look at a Frank Reed or Johnny Youngblood in Brooklyn, or a Gene Rivers in Boston, there's a kind of Black Christian nationalism.

Many people would argue that today African American churches have lost the prophetic vision, and the mega-church has kind of become preoccupied with an individual sin, rather than a social mandate.

So I don't think we need to make Wright kind of emblematic of the Black church, he's emblematic of one strain of the Black church.

I'm not an expert on Wright, so I'm going to be qualified -- I'm not afraid to answer that question, but I think you have to be careful when you pluck a snippet out of a context.

Now, if you listen to the whole sermon, "God Damn America -- " -- "God damn America" is very different if you're sitting around and you just start a conversation, "God damn America." That occurs 10 or 15 minutes into what is a prophetic Biblical context. He's parsing -- he starts with a psalm. And his theme is about the shift from worship to war. And he's going back to the Old Testament. And he's talking about innocent children being crushed by invading armies.

So there is a context which I would say is not anti-White, because he expresses sympathy for those killed in 9/11. His point is, well, there were 3,000 killed, and we get upset about 3,000 killed in 9/11, but what about slavery? And what about the Indians? And what about Hiroshima?

There is a radical pacifism. And Andrew Sullivan has made a very good point about this, that there's certainly a radical pacifism there.

So the context for the Jeremiad, in both senses of the word that appears, is a Biblical Jeremiad framework.

So in that context, when King is talking about America needing, having a lot of repenting to do, he's in a Jeremiad mode.

So in that sense, I think the two sermons do have some parallels. I don't think they're identical. I don't think Wright comes out of exactly the same tradition. He comes out of a Black Theology tradition, or something closer to Black Theology.

King always says the Black church is "so-called." It's interim. The reason there's a Black church is because White racists perverted Christianity and forced Blacks to create a Black church. So the theology is different.

But the notion of a prophetic witness against the indiscriminate killing of children, I think there is some parallel there that is substantial. And I think E.J. was right -- within that qualification.

Now, if you listen to Wright -- what little I've been able to discern from, you know, looking at the broader array -- the Jeremiad isn't necessarily his dominant note. So, you need to have a kind of empirical sense of what's the full range of preaching. He can be poetic. Write can be -- he has a precious literary streak, as well.

So, I think you have to separate -- at least in that speech.

I don't think you could make the same argument about the notion that the White government is in a conspiracy to inflict AIDS on Black people.

So I think the real difference here is not so much that Wright is anti-White and King wasn't. But Wright has a much greater pessimism about the extent and rootedness of White racism. And that's something one can then have a debate about.

But I think at least in that Jeremiad mode, there is a lot of connections. And remember that people jumped all over King in the final years. He was described as subversive, as a traitor. The *Washington Post* condemned his anti-Vietnam speech. They said, "How dare you?"

You know, lacking gratitude to Lyndon Johnson after all he did for Black people.

So, again, I don't want to overstate, but I don't want to understate the connection, as well.

MR. GALSTON: I think there's a question up front. Yes?

SPEAKER: (Off mike)

MR. GALSTON: I'm sorry?

SPEAKER: David Saperstein?

MR. GALSTON: Unfortunately he had to leave right before I got to him.

So you're up at bat. Microphone. And you are?

MR. MITCHELL: Right. Professor Rieder, Gary Mitchell from the "Mitchell Report."

And I hope you'll understand the spirit in which this question is asked, because I've been fascinated about everything from the get-go.

If one is to characterize the book in a way that I think Bill did, which is that this sort of takes King off the pedestal, if you will. This is sort of the un-hagiographic, or however one pronounces that word, look at Martin Luther King -- a) if that is not the sole story of the book but a big part of it, why is that important? Why should that be important to us now? What do we get from that?

PROF. RIEDER: Well, I would say that the kind of anti-hagiographic aspect, the sort of getting rid, you know, taking King off the pedestal, emerges as a by-product of the larger aims of the book.

So it's very important to face up to that, but the main emphasis of the book is the artistry, and artful intricacy of King's ability to blend and merge idioms, and his moves in and out of Black and White talk -- within his Black audience, and within his White audience. And I think that gives us a sense of King as a much more powerful figure, and a more modern figure, as what some academics would call a more post-ethnic figure, who speaks to us about some of these issues.

But I want to go to why I think it's important that we have a clear-eyed view of King. Because if we leave him on the pedestal, we think he's just a lofty dreamer. And I am somebody whose reading of American history -- and it goes back to, I think, Bill's interest in the way universalism can emerge out of particularism.

If you look at Jewish liberalism, there is a sense that out of special Jewish suffering, there was a concern for the rights of all.

If you look at the Catholic tradition -- political tradition -- out of a distinct Catholic tradition there emerged a kind of vision of the nation as a family that has informed John Dilulio on one side and E.J. Dionne on another side.

MR. MITCHELL: And Mario Cuomo's 1984 convention speech.

PROF. RIEDER: And Mario Cuomo.

So I think if we leave King up on the pedestal, he gives us solace that we've done our work. "Oh, there was this bad time before, but freedom -- now we have freedom," and it becomes an instrument of smug self-congratulation. And it does a disservice to the man and, I think, a disservice to the vision of the best in American society.

The notion of a perfectible union suggests that democracy is a process and ideal. We're never celebrating a finished effort -- "Oh, we are perfect" -- it's a notion that we can always perfect our union by looking at suffering and inequality and injustice.

So if we leave King up there on the pedestal in the way I intended, then King is a kind of nice, feel-good historical figure who has no relevance, and doesn't instruct us, in the kind of prophetic witness that I think John Dilulio and E.J. Dionne and Mario Cuomo are involved in.

And I think what's interesting, it's why Mike Huckabee, perhaps, was one of the few people who was able to see the distortion of Jeremiah Wright, because he was thinking as a sermonizer, and saying, "I don't want you guys to get me wrong. There's a context."

I think it's important because I think we underestimate the importance of King if we make him a convenient kind of self-congratulatory figure. Because there's a lot of work to be done.

MR. MITCHELL: Mm-hmm.

PROF. RIEDER: And so I see him as reminding us, in the way that I would say E.J. and John Dilulio are unapologetically religious -- there are different ways to be unapologetically religious -- and David Saperstein, for that matter -- people in very different ideological corners can be informed by the disturbing message of a prophetic witness.

MR. GALSTON: Let me just drop a footnote here, and then I'll take your question.

And the footnote is: there are aspects of the deliverance narrative that do encourage this sort of switch-off, switch-on way of thinking. "Then we were slaves, now we are free" -- which suggests that, in a way, the work of deliverance -- it inveigles you into believing that the work of deliverance is done when the bonds and the shackles are removed.

And so there's an interesting reflection back on that.

PROF. RIEDER: You know, I'm sorry David had to go, because I think, you know, what is the point of Passover? Which, is, you know, you remember that you were once -- we were once slaves in Egypt.

And Roberto Suro, who used to have some relationship to this institution, when he writes about the Latino experience, immigrants as strangers in the land, the point of remembering that once one was a slave in Egypt is so you treat current strangers in the land in a universalist, welcoming way.

MR. GALSTON: And if you don't, the work isn't done.

PROF. RIEDER: And the work isn't done.

MR. GALSTON: Yes, ma'am.

MS. DANIELS: Hi.

MR. GALSTON: And you are?

MS. DANIELS: Sameera Daniels. I've been involved with interfaith stuff through the years.

I've read a considerable amount about King myself, and one of the things that has always struck me -- and I wondered if, you know, when you say, you know, the thing about the pedestal that, you know, that it's not necessarily good to keep a figure of that stature on a pedestal.

The thing is that I can see where some of the things that you were highlighting, some of, you know, the sort of just self-deprecating humor, is a kind of a way to -- you know, it's a big burden to be perceived as a prophet, which is what he was. And, you know, I knew people at the School of Theology at Boston University that had known him, you know.

So I just wonder whether, you know, going back to what Mr. Mitchell said that, you know, it's a way of trying to like keep yourself grounded also. Because it's a very abstract feeling for a people to perceive you as something superhuman and, you know.

So I just wondered if you saw that?

PROF. RIEDER: Oh, I think that's so insightful.

When you think of the burdens of the prophet, King was denied a normal life.

MS. DANIELS: Yes.

PROF. RIEDER: He didn't set out to become the leader of a movement. He wanted to go back to the South and preach. And there are times, when he's had a couple of drinks, it's late at night, he's been criticized by Black Nationalists, and White society is yelling at him. And he's crying out, you know, "I just want to go back to my little church.

MS. DANIELS: (Off mike) Well, because a lot of White people in the church, even the big heads from national (inaudible), were pushing him into this also, you see, because of their, you know, sense of what, you know -- you know, the guilt

PROF. RIEDER: Right.

MS. DANIELS: So they wanted to make, you know -- so that's why I say that I just wondered to what extent, you know, you can say that, you know -- what you can make of it.

I just saw it in all of the years that it's a terrible burden to be put into this situation, you know.

PROF. RIEDER: Well, she's making the point about the terrible burden.

Heschel -- Rabbi Heschel -- saw this in King. He says, "To be a prophet is a burden."

MS. DANIELS: Yeah.

PROF. RIEDER: It is a difficult -- oh, he understands this. This is why they kind of saw one another as kind of landsmen, homey, kind of —

(Laughter)

PROF. RIEDER: -- you know, "my kind of people," in some sense. Because King had "my people." It could be "my Black people," or my people who are my movement people, or my people who are my fellow prophets.

And this burden was definitely part of the quipping. I mean, Joe Lowery, or J.T. Johnson and Willie Bolden said, "Look, you know -- " -- I'll tell you, J.T. Johnson, one of the foot-soldiers, they were called. This

was Hosea Williams' shock troops. These, again, rough, tough guys who organized to get ready for King.

And they'd say, "Well, you know, people didn't see this other kind of King -- " -- the undignified King. At the retreats, or at the end of the day, he said, "We kicked back and we'd have trash talk. And our trash talk was about what happened in the movement." They'd say, "Oh, they got Ralph. Oh, the Klan got Ralph today." And they'd be like connoisseurs of suffering. And, "Oh, no, no. Look what they did to Andy." And, you know, they would laugh. They were terrified they were going to be killed in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

And at one point, King is almost too scared to pray. Because he knows the people who killed -- he says, something, "I know that the people who killed Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman are in this crowd." And Cecil Price, the deputy sheriff, who was involved in the murder, says, "You're damn right." And King is shaken.

MS. DANIELS: Yes.

PROF. RIEDER: And at one point -- and he's almost too frightened to pray. So he says, "Ralph," you know, "You pray." But he described it later. They all tell this story. Everyone -- they still tell the same stories. Andy Young told me a different version -- was, you know -- I'm quoting Andy Young in telling that day, "When Martin told the story, it

would always be, ‘Ralph prayed, but with a wary eye open. We were too scared to close our eyes.’”

Or when the man who was the embodiment of “beloved community” teased Andy Young for loving White people too much, it just took the burden of always having to be saintly away.

And I think some of -- you know, when King would go to Jamaica, you know, and he loved -- King was a great eater. You know, he loved -- everybody remembers, terrible table manners. And his mother was a very Victorian lady who taught him proper manners. But his buddy, Warren McCall, would say, “Oh, we’d laugh at King.” You know, “We’d be in a New York restaurant, putting the dog on. And King would bring out his country manners. And King would say, ‘Oh, I can’t wait on y’all,’” and he’d take a piece of food.

You know, he and Adam Clayton Powell -- Adam Clayton Powell was down in Bimini once, when were in the Bahamas. And he sent the boat over to get King and Bernard and Lewis and some of the other guys. And they cooked up greens. And King was saying, “Oh, we’re in the Bahamas and we have soul food.”

The need to kick back.

He had an old blind man, the Auburn Avenue Y. And that’s where he went as a little boy to play basketball and ping pong. He would

go to the Auburn Avenue Y, and he'd get a massage from the old blind man.

All of those things that could relax the burden.

And what Andrew Young has said is there were very few people King could relax. And John Lewis told me, he said, "Look, I was close to King, but I wasn't part of the workaday crew." So King wouldn't be bawdy or rowdy or rambunctious. He would relax somewhat, but it was with the guys, that he would really kick back.

And it was a very patriarchal -- it was a guy world. And so the sexual joking and the racial joking, that was a special kind of thing.

And as Andrew Young said, "We had to do that," you know, "Because the burden was so intense. We had no lives. We had a life that was simply on the line at every moment." Deliverance -- the work of deliverance. The prophetic life required the down-home, the bawdy, as release.

MS. DANIELS: Exactly.

PROF. RIEDER: They weren't opposed to one another.

MR. GALSTON: Other questions?

Well, seeing no other questions, let me just pronounce a benediction.

First of all, to thank you for giving us an extraordinarily informative hour and a half. It's no substitute for reading the book -- which is on sale in back. And I'm sure that Professor Rieder will be happy to sign copies.

And also to note that this idea of the burdens of prophesy is the oldest prophetic trope in the Old Testament -- you know, starting with Moses. Right? Every prophet worth his salt attempts to reject the prophetic mission, and is told, "You have no choice, buddy."

And so, you know, Martin Luther King was in the very finest prophetic tradition in feeling the burdens of prophecy, but feeling even more strongly that, ultimately, he had no right to put them down.

Thank you so much.

PROF. RIEDER: Great. Thank you.

(Applause)

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