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Awake the Beloved Country

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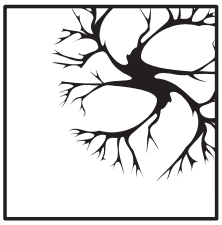

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Leadership and the Civil Rights Movement

In the spring of 1956 the Reverend Martin Luther King, a hitherto obscure black preacher catapulted to fame by the Montgomery Bus Boycott, opened his mail to discover a letter of support from a foreign correspondent. The missive was brief and to the point.

> A word from Africa of encouragement and admiration to you and all those who are with you in your struggle for an alleviation of the lot of the Negro[e]s in Montgomery. In vindicating your rights and maintaining your self-respect you are doing something which will influence all Africa for the good. In following Gandhi you are showing the world the way of future politics.[1]

The author of these words was the maverick white South African liberal Patrick Duncan. Duncan had participated in the ANC's Defiance Campaign of 1952-53 and, as his letter to King reveals, remained a committed believer in the capacity of nonviolent direct action to undermine the ramparts of apartheid, then in the process of construction by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party at home.[2] Although Duncan understandably exaggerated the Gandhian tenor of the Alabama protest and would soon discover his own faith in nonviolence to have been misplaced (at least in the South African context), his sense that the ongoing bus boycott was as much to do with identity and dignity as it was

1. P. Duncan to M. L. King, Jr., 31 March 1956, File 6:18, Patrick Duncan Papers, Borthwick Institute, University of York.
2. For a biography of Duncan see C. J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

to do with rights marked him out as an intelligent observer of events across the Atlantic. Thanks to scholars such as George Fredrickson, John Cell, and James Campbell we now know that this minor exchange between Duncan and King (for King did pen a brief personal reply) was part of a much larger and richer set of transactions which occurred between the United States and South Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[3] These transactions bore directly on a range of institutions, structures, and ideologies in both countries, not least the African Methodist Episcopal Church, *de jure* segregation and black consciousness.

While direct contact did take place between Martin Luther King and Albert Lutuli, two of the premier black leaders of the 1950s and 1960s, the purpose of this essay is not primarily to add to the growing body of evidence of U.S.-South African links. Its principal aim is to use Lutuli's career as president-general of the African National Congress (ANC) between 1952 and 1967 as a foil in order to shed light on King's contested role in the Civil Rights Movement. Although most Americans continue to regard the movement as King's own creation, recent historiography has evinced a tendency to de-emphasize the Baptist minister's leadership role and place much greater stress on the day-to-day efforts of ordinary black folk and civil rights field workers to undermine the Southern caste system. Books by John Dittmer and Charles Payne on Mississippi, for example, indicate that Dr. King was a minimal presence in the black freedom struggle in America's most racist state.[4] The movement in Mississippi, they argue, was created and sustained from the bottom up by local blacks aided and abetted by workers belonging to the mainstream civil right organizations—primarily, after 1960, those linked to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Adam Fairclough's recent study of the Civil Rights Movement in Louisiana also contributes to a less King-centric view of events. Emphasizing the role of black activists belonging to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Fairclough explicitly criticizes the Montgomery-to-Selma narrative which has provided the central focus for most accounts of the Civil Rights Movement. "The laserlike focus," writes Fairclough,

> with which historians have concentrated on the period 1955-65 has served as an historical blinder. By exaggerating the extent of the mass mobilization that took place during the early 1960s, it slights the scope of popular involvement during the 1940s and early 1950s. By highlighting the role of nonviolent direct action after 1955, it has neglected the importance of litigation and drawn too sharp a

3. Important works investigating the diverse links between the United States and South Africa include G. M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, 1981) and *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York and Oxford, 1995); J. W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (Cambridge, Eng., 1982); J. T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (New York and Oxford, 1995).

4. J. Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana and Chicago, 1994); C. M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995).

> distinction between litigation and direct action. By placing Martin Luther King Jr. at the center of the narrative, it has exaggerated the importance of the black church, placed too much emphasis on "leadership," and obscured the crucial importance of local activists.[5]

The stress on continuity and grassroots mobilization evident in recent work has greatly expanded our knowledge of the civil rights movement. Charles Payne may be right to suggest that "I have a dream" will continue to fill the airwaves each January for the foreseeable future, but no serious scholar can argue that the Montgomery-to-Selma story offers an entirely adequate framework for analysis.[6] However, while a top-down, King-centric view of the historical process clearly has limitations, this should not allow us to forget that during the 1960s King was perceived, by blacks as well as whites, as *primus inter pares*. August Meier, a white activist historian not a little puzzled by the public's preoccupation with King, recognized that he had a duty to explain the latter's place at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement—a problem which he sought to solve with his well-known depictions of King as a symbolic leader, a "conservative militant" in "the vital centre" of the struggle.[7] The fact that Meier understood the importance of grassroots action yet felt impelled to come to terms with the public's preoccupation with King should warn us against an easy dismissal of King's role. Even though counter-reactions to prevailing historiographical trends are perfectly healthy, scholars of the black freedom struggle do not need to not involve themselves in a zero-sum game. A recognition of King's critical importance to the movement does not inevitably detract from the contribution of countless other men and women to the civil rights cause.

A second point arising out of Meier's famous characterization of Dr. King is that historians of the Civil Rights Movement have good reason to focus on the concept of leadership. Given its significance as a factor in the development of social movements, surprisingly little has been done to define precisely what kind of leadership qualities were important to the Civil Rights Movement and to differentiate between the types of leadership on display at every level. Part of the problem here is that leadership has not been conceptualized adequately by scholars. True, Max Weber contributed his notions of traditional, bureaucratic, and charismatic authority to the embryonic discipline of sociology, and various anthropologists and social psychologists have developed relevant insights, but no-one, so far as I am aware, has devised a comprehensive definition of leadership. Much of this neglect stems from the fact that most people assume that they know what leadership entails. Leaders wield power—they lead—the argument runs. So wherein lies the problem?

Part of the problem, as Robert C. Tucker suggests, lies in the fact that leaders do not always wield power. This is particularly true of "nonconstituted" or informal leaders who lack access to the bureaucratic and military resources of the state—precisely the kind of social movement leaders with whom many historians of the Civil Rights Movement

5. A. Fairclough, *Race & Democracy:The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens and London, 1995), xiv.
6. Payne, *Light of Freedom*, 439-40.
7. A. Meier, "On the Role of Martin Luther King", *New Politics* 4 (Winter 1965), 52-59.

have been preoccupied. Tucker, a political scientist out of sympathy with the rather cynical view of politics as the exercise of power, suggests that leadership is a more satisfactory explanatory tool for political action—one that is capable of explaining the deeds of a Martin Luther King as well as those of a Franklin Roosevelt. Seeking to put flesh on his model, Tucker argues that leaders are generally thrown up by crises or perceived crises. In these situations previously anonymous individuals become publicly acknowledged leaders by giving "direction to a collective's activities." This general function, contends Tucker, can be divided into three interrelated tasks. Leaders' first function is a diagnostic one. That is, they provide the members of a particular group with a convincing explanation for the ills afflicting that group. Secondly, they offer practical solutions to the difficulties confronting their potential followers. And thirdly, they play a vital role in mobilizing the group behind their leadership by successfully implementing their policies. Many apolitical or depoliticized people are thus brought into a political coalition or mass-base social movement capable of reforming or even revolutionizing existing structures.[8]

LUTULI AND KING: THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Leaving aside the question of whether Tucker's model is flexible enough to explain the activities of non-national, secondary rank leaders of the kind represented by Bob Moses of SNCC and Dave Dennis of CORE, it can certainly serve as a useful aid to understanding precisely what it was that King contributed to the black freedom struggle. So, too, can the addition of a comparative perspective in the shape of Albert Lutuli.

Although there was relatively little interaction between events in South Africa and the United States during the middle decades of the twentieth century, George Fredrickson has rightly drawn our attention to the often surprising parallels between black protest ideologies in the two countries.[9] During the 1950s the predominant protest ideology and strategy in both countries was nonviolent direct action. Leading figures in the ANC and the various mainstream civil rights organizations in the United States, moreover, eschewed ethnocentric conceptions of the national community in favor of non-racial ones which had the attainment of universal adult suffrage at their core. Given the extent of white racism south of the Ohio and the Limpopo, this black commitment to nonviolence and a universalist, as distinct from chauvinist, notion of rights seems surprising.

Fredrickson explains this commitment largely by stressing the importance of Christianity and Marxism to the freedom struggles in South Africa and the United States. Powerful modernizing forces in both countries, they tended to steer their adherents away from ethnocentric responses to white oppression. Black Africans and African Americans who embraced Protestant Christianity generally did so in the knowledge that God's grace was open to all, no matter what their color. Communists, even in South Africa where they tied themselves to the cause of national liberation, held to the belief that working

8. R. C. Tucker, *Politics as Leadership* (Colombia and London, 1981), 1-30.

people were oppressed primarily because of their dependent relationship to capital and not because of their color. Both ideologies, spiritual and material, held up a millennialist view of the world in which race would not be a defining characteristic.

In South Africa Albert Lutuli was the premier exponent of nonviolent direct action.[10] A committed Christian, opponent of racial chauvinism, and Nobel Peace Prize winner, he thus constitutes an obvious comparator to Martin Luther King. Although this essay examines their function as leaders, there were numerous similarities between the two men in terms of upbringing and temperament. Born some time between 1898 and 1900, Lutuli was the older man by roughly thirty years. Like King, the product of a loving yet disciplined childhood in "Sweet Auburn," a relatively prosperous black neighborhood in Atlanta, Lutuli was the scion of an elite black family.[11] An ethnic Zulu, he was reared as a Christian in the rural settlement of Groutville in Natal, the lushest of all South Africa's provinces. Groutville had been founded in the 1830s by white missionaries belonging to the American Board of Missions, the proselytizing arm of the Congregational church. Mission reserves such as these were to be found throughout Natal in the late nineteenth century. Their chief human product was a Western-oriented Christian elite, the "kholwa," who, in common with their peers in other parts of the dominion, played an instrumental role in founding the reformist South African Native National Congress (later the ANC) in 1912. After the death of his father, an evangelist for the Seventh Day Adventist Church who served in the Rhodesian forces at the time of the Matabele uprising, Lutuli was brought up in Groutville under the watchful eye of his aunt, "a woman of deep piety, very prominent in church affairs," and later his mother, Mtonya, a hardworking woman clearly ambitious for her younger son. Like the young Martin Luther King, Lutuli was reared in a relatively sheltered environment, rural rather than urban, which, combined with the love, companionship, and discipline of a stable extended family unit, helped to produce a balanced and self-confident personality.

Both men received relatively good educations which left them well placed to pursue a middle-class occupation before they became involved in the politics of black liberation. King's path to the ministry—elite Morehouse, Crozer Theological Seminary, and then a doctorate at Boston University—was academically superior to Lutuli's education at John Dube's Ohlange Institute, Methodist Edendale, and Adams College, the main further educational establishment for blacks in Natal. At Edendale Lutuli undertook a two-year training course for primary teachers heavily grounded in religion and designed primarily to inculcate personal responsibility. At Adams he trained to teach at a more advanced level and was quickly taken onto the college's staff. At a time when Natal's segregationist commissioner of education, C. T. Loram, was eager to stress the importance of vocational training for Africans, Lutuli specialized initially in Zulu and music. In comparison with King's wide-ranging (and much pored over) intellectual diet in

9. Surprisingly, there is no scholarly biography of Lutuli. My insights are derived primarily from the following sources: A. Lutuli, *Let My People Go: An Autobiography* (London, 1962) and E. Callan, *Albert John Luthuli and the South African Race Conflict* (Kalamazoo, 1962).
10. On King's life and career before 1955 see D. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 32-51.

the 1940s, Lutuli's reading appears to have been fairly limited. "It was an extremely busy world," he later recalled of his lengthy period as a staff member at Adams. "When I could spare the time I fitted in haphazard reading—religion, sociology, political philosophy." As late as 1962 he confessed to having read none of the Marxist classics which informed the protest activities of many of his colleagues in the ANC.[12]

Whatever the quality of Lutuli's education, his childhood in Groutville and years at Edendale and Adams contributed hugely to his profound commitment to the Social Gospel—the notion that the Christian faith was profoundly relevant to contemporary social problems. They also brought him into contact with sympathetic whites: Protestant missionaries and educators whose paternalistic ethos was shot through with racist assumptions about black Africans but which nevertheless held out the possibility of uplift for those whom they regarded as their charges. Adams, in fact, possessed one of the few interracial faculties in South Africa—a fact of enormous importance for the development of Lutuli's universalist thought. One of his role models at the college was a white liberal, Edgar Brookes, who was appointed principal of the institution in 1934, the year before Lutuli's departure. Brookes, an English-born academic attracted to the Anglican Church's emphasis on duty and service, was a transitional figure in the history of South African liberalism.[13] By the time he arrived at Adams he had begun to reject the segregationist assumptions of the liberal mainstream (represented by figures like Loram) in favor of a non-racial conception of South African nationality. Influenced in part by visits to Chapel Hill and Tuskegee in 1927—encounters which convinced him that blacks were "capable of considerable achievement in the milieu of white civilization"—he became a fervent exponent of the kind of interracial contacts promoted by Southern liberals in the 1920s.[14] At Adams, Lutuli was impressed by Brookes' practical Christianity and participated in numerous interracial meetings at the principal's house. Blacks and whites were brought together to discuss key issues in race relations in an atmosphere which the future ANC leader later recalled as "free and relaxed."[15]

Lutuli's service-oriented faith (he was confirmed as a Methodist at Edendale and later became a Wesleyan lay preacher) and daily dealings with tolerant whites on a basis of near equality set him apart from the mass of black South Africans in the 1930s, much as Martin Luther King's theological training at interracial Crozer and Boston University distinguished him from the bulk of poor Southern blacks in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, in common with most members of the African elite, he never abandoned his cultural roots entirely. In 1926 he helped found the Zulu Language and Cultural Society as an auxiliary of the African Teachers' Association. The Society was particularly concerned that the best aspects of Zulu culture should be preserved from destruction at the hands of modernization, partly because some aspects of western "civilization," not least its materialism, were regarded as corrosive of highly prized traditional values such as the dignity of the human personality. In spite of the fact that

11. Lutuli, *Let My People Go*, 36-37.
12. Brookes's intellectual journey is discussed insightfully in P. B. Rich, *Hope and Despair: English-Speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics 1896-1976* (London and New York, 1993), 67-89.
13. Ibid., p.73.
14. Lutuli, *Let My People Go*, 41.

Lutuli and King were products of the modern era, both of them were able to draw on deep reservoirs of black culture. Whereas the former drew strength from his Zulu identity, King's worldview was steeped in the deliverance-through-suffering-and-struggle narrative of the Southern black church, a narrative forged by the historical experiences of slavery, emancipation, and segregation. Combined with their atypically prolonged contact with whites and Western thought, these resources enabled the two men to communicate effectively with blacks and liberal whites and at critical times to act as mediators between the races.

In terms of leadership training prior to their involvement in liberation politics, Lutuli had the edge over his American counterpart. King had been living in Montgomery as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Church for less than eighteen months prior to his appointment as president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) at the outset of the bus boycott. Lutuli, in contrast, spent the period between 1935 and 1952 as chief of the Umvoti Mission Reserve, his Groutville home. Reluctant to give up his career as a teacher (for teachers enjoyed the same high status in the black community in South Africa as they did in the United States), he nonetheless agreed to return to the reserve in order to deal with the depressed state of the local economy. Although his conviction "that the Christian Faith was not a private affair without relevance to society" played a critical role in his decision to return to the reserve, so too did his loyalty to his forebears and to those he regarded as his people.[16]

At Groutville Lutuli experienced at first hand the impending catastrophe facing rural Africans—soil erosion, the break-up of families as a consequence of urban migration, and the sapping of self-confidence by a South African state increasingly committed to separate and very unequal development for blacks. Chief Lutuli's position was an ambiguous one, for the government's Native Affairs Department expected him to do its bidding while the inhabitants of Groutville had a very different agenda. Although he gained a reputation with officials as an effective and responsible petty black leader, he showed no signs of being co-opted by the state—in marked contrast to many of his peers. As well as organizing local black sugar growers to good effect, he concurred in criticism of the 1936 Hertzog Bills which curtailed the suffrage rights of black Africans in Cape Province, set up the controversial Native Representative Council (NRC) as a sop to the black elite, and strengthened the grip of South African whites on the land. Although he subsequently became a member of the NRC, Lutuli rapidly began to realize, as did many other members of the African elite, that whites were not going to grant equal rights to blacks—even to educated ones like himself. After a brief period during the Second World War when it seemed that the Smuts administration might be heading in a more liberal direction, the government revealed its true colors by crushing the African Mine Workers' Strike of 1946. Lutuli signaled his disillusionment by acquiescing in the adjournment of the NRC as a protest against the government's action. This proved to be a wise move politically, for the Council was increasingly seen by blacks for what it was—a talking shop designed to direct African discontent into safe channels. His political education was honed, if not perhaps completed, by the triumph of the Nationalist Party in the 1948 election. Three years later he replaced the maverick (and increasingly conservative)

15. Lutuli, *Let My People Go*, 42.

George Champion as head of the Natal ANC and, with reservations about the lack of proper preparations, endorsed the national organization's nonviolent defiance campaign against segregated facilities.

Martin Luther King's political education may not have been as dramatic as Lutuli's, but it was no less conditioned by a strong sense of the injustices perpetuated by whites and, ultimately, by a dawning realization that traditional reform strategies such as petitioning, negotiation, and litigation were unlikely to bring about the demise of racial oppression. Although the Dexter Avenue preacher followed his father's example in encouraging the members of his congregation to engage in civic activities (for example, by joining the local branch of the NAACP), it was arguably the ferocious reaction to the bus boycott by Montgomery whites which finally removed the scales from his eyes. In common with most Southern blacks, King had always chafed at the indignities of Jim Crow but he had not experienced the caste system's detrimental impact on ordinary black folk in the same way that Lutuli witnessed them as a chief. In the middle 1950s, moreover, there were—in marked contrast to the situation in South Africa—clear signs that the United States government was becoming more sympathetic to black aspirations. The clearest sign of all was the U.S. Supreme Court's May 1954 decision in Brown vs. Board of Education that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. It was this verdict, however, which prompted the growth of so-called "massive resistance" in the Deep South and determined the intransigent response of Montgomery whites to the initially moderate demands of the MIA. That response, accompanied as it was by violence and other forms of intimidation, convinced King and other boycott leaders that black protest had to take more radical forms if it were to succeed.

In spite of the difference in their ages—King was 26 when he became head of the MIA, Lutuli in his early fifties at the time of his election as president-general of the ANC—both men emerged as popular leaders at roughly the same time. Lutuli's accession to power in December 1952 occurred at a time when the ANC was reeling from state repression occasioned by the Defiance Campaign. Only a month previously Lutuli had been deposed as chief at Umvoti by the minister of native affairs for refusing to accept that his local duties were incompatible with his efforts as head of the Natal ANC. The chief's determination not to give in to the authorities compared favorably with the embarrassing decision of the ANC's serving president, Dr. James Moroka, not to stand trial with leading figures in the organization after their arrest during the summer and autumn. As a result, with the national leadership temporarily in disarray, Lutuli was chosen to replace the discredited Moroka with strong backing from younger ANC activists. Martin Luther King's election as chairman of the MIA followed three years later. He, too, was something of a dark horse candidate, his success owing much to the fact that he, like Lutuli, was known as an articulate, responsible, and progressive moderate without ties to existing factions. The two men, in short, assumed the reins of leadership with the minimum amount of political baggage.

CONTEXTS

Any attempt to compare Martin Luther King and Albert Lutuli as leaders must recognize the different political contexts in which they worked. Notwithstanding the very real problems confronting anyone seeking to challenge the status quo in the Deep South, it is clear that South African blacks had a much more difficult task coordinating resistance to white supremacy. The reasons why are not hard to determine. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, South African whites—just twenty percent of the country's total population—felt themselves increasingly embattled as black Africans began to assert their independence from white rule. After the Nationalist triumph in 1948, the government attempted to crack down hard on organized dissent while simultaneously pursuing its policy of separate development through influx control, petty apartheid laws and the setting up of nominally autonomous tribal homelands or "Bantustans." During the 1950s the state equipped itself with extraordinary powers to suppress Communism (broadly defined), to prevent the taking place of public and private meetings aimed at disturbing the status quo, and to confine known activists to specific areas of the country.[17] Banning orders were deployed extensively against ANC leaders and activists with the result that Lutuli was deprived of freedom of movement for the bulk of his term of office. Confinement not only had serious psychological costs but acted as a very substantial obstacle to the exercise of effective leadership.

Apart from brief periods in Southern jails, several of them self-inflicted, Martin Luther King was free to move around the United States. He owed this freedom to many factors not least a more liberal political climate, the activities of sympathetic federal judges, and the presence of a white majority population somewhat less fearful of blacks than their South African counterparts. Of course, one would not wish to push the distinction too far. Several southern states did take advantage of the Cold War climate in the 1950s to demoralize the proponents of civil rights. The NAACP and leftist organizations like the Southern Conference Education Fund were crippled for several years by state action. Civil rights activists, King included, were perpetually in fear of their lives from white violence, for the FBI proved unable or unwilling to protect them effectively against intimidation by white supremacists acting as private citizens or under the color of state law. This said, the fact remains that until his assassination in 1968, Martin Luther King was able to carry out his duties freely as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Albert Lutuli, in contrast, spent the period from 1959 until his death in 1967 confined to the immediate area around his home in the Lower Tugela District of Natal. When the novelist Alan Paton spoke at the chief's funeral, he was not even allowed to quote Lutuli in his address.[18]

The relative advantage which King had over Lutuli in terms of geographical mobility does not undermine the utility of a comparative study of the two men's leadership roles. Their functions as leaders were not dissimilar and, as we have already seen, their formative years had given them similar worldviews by the time they emerged on the national stage. What follows is an attempt to analyze their contribution to the

16. L. Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* (London, 1956), 181-202.
17. A. Paton, *The Long View* (London, 1969), 265.

liberation struggle in their respective countries under the functional categories provided by Robert Tucker: diagnosis, policy formulation, and policy implementation.

THE DIAGNOSTIC FUNCTION OF VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Both King and Lutuli played a critical role in explaining the nature and likely consequences of the crisis confronting black people in the United States and South Africa. King's first duty as president of the MIA in December 1955 was to tell a crowded mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church why it was they had to protest not only the arrest and conviction of Mrs. Rosa Parks but also the innumerable petty indignities suffered as they traveled to and from work on the buses every day. He testified to Mrs. Parks' spotless character and reminded his audience that racism was the principal cause of their woes.[19] Albert Lutuli's first address as head of the ANC had been delivered two years previously in Queenstown. In it he reviewed critically recent apartheid legislation and outlined the main reasons for the impoverishment of the black masses: the fact that blacks had been confined to twelve percent of the Union's land mass; the uneconomic wages paid to them by white employers; and "[t]he economic and political restrictions placed on them to make it impossible for them to exploit, each according to his ability, the resources of their God-given land."[20]

The ability of the two leaders to explain the nature of the problems of those they regarded as their people should not be exaggerated. Neither man at the outset of his political career knew something that other well-informed blacks did not; indeed, both of them had been pushed to the forefront of their respective organizations by others who, arguably, had come to a quicker understanding of the relevant crisis than they had. King, for example, was probably less in touch with civic affairs in Montgomery than the black trade unionist, E. D. Nixon, and Jo Ann Robinson of the Women's Political Council. Lutuli was certainly slower than some ANC activists to recognize the pernicious nature of apartheid. Most ordinary blacks, moreover, did not need telling that their living conditions were worse than those of whites or that their prospects for social and economic advancement were blocked by whites. However, crisis diagnosis for members of the black community did serve an important function. Well-entrenched patterns of deference and separate and unequal education for blacks in both the Deep South and South Africa did much to obscure the structural nature of oppression. Blacks knew perfectly well that they were at the bottom of the pile but they often had little understanding of why that was the case or that the situation could be changed. As King's deputy, Ralph Abernathy, recalled, African Americans brought up in the Jim Crow South knew that the system was wrong, but "felt too intimidated by the pervasiveness of it and by the fact that it seemed so old and so ingrained, a part of the landscape, like the slant of a hillside or the hang of a

18. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 23-24.
19. T. Karis and G. M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964—v. iii, Challenge and Violence 1953-1964*, T. Karis and G. M. Gerhart (Stanford, 1977), 125.

massive tree."[21] Explaining how blacks were oppressed and, equally importantly, telling them that the moment of crisis had arrived—that something could at last be done about their situation—was a critical precondition for mobilizing the masses behind a coherent social movement.

The South African state's attempt to seduce blacks with promises of autonomy in the reserves made Lutuli's denunciations of apartheid in the 1950s doubly important. For while hindsight reveals separate development to have been an outrageous con-trick, this was not entirely apparent during its early stages. Some thoughtful blacks, Lutuli included at first, recognized that apartheid might offer them real opportunities for political independence and economic advance. Even when the full iniquity of apartheid was revealed, large numbers of traditionalists, conservatives, and opportunists were willing to throw in their lot with the Bantustans. One of Lutuli's primary tasks, therefore, was to define apartheid as the major problem confronting South African blacks—as, he told Prime Minister Johannes Strijdom in a public letter of May 1957, "an attempt by White South Africa to shunt the African off the tried civilised road by getting him to glorify unduly his tribal past."[22]

King's diagnostic task, so far as Southern blacks in the 1950s were concerned, was less to convince ordinary folk that segregation was an inherently bad thing, than to make them realize that the time for deliverance was upon them. Even though some state governments did attempt to make Jim Crow more palatable after the Second World War—for example by spending more money on public education—few blacks at this stage appear to have believed that separate-but-equal facilities were possible. King, in common with most leading civil rights activists of the period, repeatedly contended that racism and segregation were the twin sources of black oppression and that both of these evils could be overcome through integration.

Notwithstanding their concern to educate and mobilize the black masses, neither King nor Lutuli ignored the impact of their activities on whites. Indeed, both men believed that if well-meaning whites were properly informed about black conditions and objectives, large numbers of them would work to alter the status quo. Their diagnoses, therefore, were frequently aimed as much at whites as they were at blacks. Of the two leaders, King had the least difficult task. True, many Southern whites had convinced themselves that "their negroes" were happy with their lot and found it difficult to understand that the Civil Rights Movement was not a plot by "outside agitators" to foment dissent for subversive political ends. Northerners, however, were more responsive to King's eloquent depictions of black ills, particularly when those ills were couched in terms of the South's dysfunctional place within a modern society. Only when King began to suggest towards the end of his life that the nation's capitalist system might be responsible for the rampant materialism, militarism, and racism of the Vietnam War era did the bulk of Northern whites lose interest in his analytical powers.

Lutuli had far fewer white liberals to appeal to, but, heartened by the support which the ANC received from white leftists and anti-communist progressives like Patrick Duncan and Alan Paton, he spent much time trying to persuade the ruling race that

20. R. Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York, 1990), 33.
21. Karis and Gerhart, eds., *Challenge and Violence*, 400.

apartheid was a wicked deceit, that blacks desired only the same privileges as whites, and that a multiracial democracy was possible in South Africa. As he told a public meeting organized by the left-wing Congress of Democrats, self-criticism by those in the apartheid camp was an essential precondition for change: "When people begin to question their own policies, there is some hope. A sinner who does not realise that he is a sinner, is not very far from damnation: the hope for man is greater when he begins to question."[23] The insistence that blacks wanted not apartheid but all the freedoms of a modern democracy was Lutuli's contribution to the beginning of a real debate in Afrikanerdom. Although there were signs that some whites were listening to him in the late 1950s, the persistence of government repression culminating in the farcical treason trial of the late 1950s, the massacres at Sharpeville and Langa in 1960, and the banning of the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) shortly afterwards made it clear that change would not be occasioned by whites' better nature. In response Lutuli redoubled his efforts to place the facts about apartheid in the arena of world opinion. If South African whites could not or would not understand black demands, then perhaps those in the West, particularly Britain, continental Europe, and the United States would.

POLICY FORMULATION

At the heart of the policy-making function performed by both leaders and a central feature of their appeal to blacks and whites alike was the vision of a better country. Both King and Lutuli were genuine patriots. The oppression of their fellow blacks told them that the domestic polity was sick, but their own personal experiences and deep Christian faith convinced them that their nations were capable of following a more enlightened path.

The two cases were not entirely similar. During the first phase of his career as a civil rights leader, King believed that Jim Crow was the main cause of black ills in the United States. Remove this burden from his people and the integrationist dream which he articulated so effectively in Washington in August 1963 might yet come to pass. Only with the ghetto riots of the middle 1960s, the SCLC's failure in Chicago in 1966, and the intensification of the Vietnam War did the Atlanta minister begin to realize that it was not enough to remake the South in the image of the North. He retained his belief in the beloved community to the end of his life, but by 1968 his vision had become a global rather than national one.

Given the fact that South Africa, the Cape liberal tradition excepted, lacked a liberal narrative of the kind possessed by the United States, Chief Lutuli's dream of a multiracial homeland—an early variant of Mandela's rainbow nation—was a remarkable one. Some of its sources were not dissimilar to those underpinning King's dream: inclusive Christian beliefs, an optimistic sense that whites were capable of overcoming their prejudices, and a pragmatic awareness that blacks needed all the help they could get in the liberation struggle. Lutuli may have been proud of his Zulu roots, but he was well aware that a resort to tribal chauvinism would play into the hands of the apartheid regime

22. Ibid., 459.

and spell disaster for the Congress alliance—the uneasy coalition of black, Indian, coloured, and white leftist organizations which spearheaded the protests of the 1950s. Positing the creation of a multiracial state, therefore, made sound political sense in the context of the troubled times. It would be wrong, however, to deny the idealistic quality of Lutuli's vision any more than it would be right to characterize Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech as an exercise in coalition-building. Indeed, it was precisely the millennial aspect of both men's leadership which appealed to so many ordinary blacks—hungry for justice and steeped, as so many of them were, in biblical notions of suffering and salvation. The breadth and depth of the two visions, then, imparted a spiritual dimension to the two freedom struggles—one which helped to mobilize people of all ethnic groups and made both King and, to a lesser extent, Lutuli into popular messiahs.

Notwithstanding the prophetic quality of their respective prognoses, we should not forget that King and Lutuli were important political leaders in their own right. As well as providing people with an alluring vision of the Promised Land, they also had to develop policies capable of making the dream a reality. Any discussion of policy formulation, however, must take into account the different organizational contexts in which they worked. Lutuli was president-general of the ANC, a nominally national and membership-based organization with a history almost as old as the Union itself. King, on the other hand, after his brief period as head of the MIA, went on to direct the activities of the SCLC, a regional organization founded in 1957 and designed by northern intellectuals, largely with King in mind, as a vehicle for sustaining the momentum generated by the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Although the SCLC was no more his brainchild than the MIA had been, King dominated the former in a way that Lutuli was unable to do with the ANC. Unlike the ANC, the SCLC was a predominantly clergy-dominated organization.[24] Most of its key figures were male clergymen like Martin Luther King. They either belonged to his immediate staff at the organization's headquarters in Atlanta or they ran the SCLC affiliates in urban areas like Birmingham, Richmond, and Savannah. Their presence often proved irksome to the few women in the organization, but it did imbue the SCLC with a degree of intellectual coherence which some of its rivals lacked. King's own charismatic personality, however, was the real source of organizational unity. Grounded in his impressive rhetorical skills, dignified bearing, strong Christian faith, and inner self-confidence, this appeal impelled loyalty from his immediate advisers whose own egos might have clashed disastrously had not King acted as an expert mediator in staff meetings.

Lutuli, a man of enormous dignity and good humor with rhetorical gifts scarcely inferior to those of King, commanded similar respect from his nominal subordinates within the ANC. Nelson Mandela, an influential figure in the upper echelons of Congress during the 1950s, remembered the chief as "[a] fairly tall, heavy-set, dark-skinned man with a great broad smile [who] combined an air of humility with deep-seated confidence. He was a man of patience and fortitude, who spoke slowly and clearly as though every word was of equal importance."[25] But while Mandela and other members of the ANC's

23. My comments on King and the SCLC rely heavily on Fairclough, *To Redeem*.
24. N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London, pbk. edn., 1995), 165.

ruling National Executive based in Johannesburg had great respect for Lutuli, the Chief did not dominate staff meetings in the same way as King. This was partly because government banning orders prevented Lutuli from attending every staff meeting. Although he appears to have been consulted on most key issues, it was physically impossible for the chief to keep a tight rein on his organization. As well as being in poor health, confinement left him remote from the real center of power on the Rand. The result was that on several occasions Lutuli had little option but to rubber stamp decisions which had already been taken. He did not know, for example, that Walter Sisulu visited China in 1955 to discuss the prospect of military aid for the ANC, nor did he have an advance sighting of the controversial Freedom Charter adopted by a mixed race gathering at Kliptown in the same year.[26] This said, it is important to recognize that the ANC's internal divisions gave Lutuli a degree of leverage which he might otherwise have lacked. During the 1950s the organization was made up of four factions: young Western-educated radicals like Mandela and Sisulu, black nationalist-oriented communists of whom Moses Kotane was the most important, a vocal Africanist bloc which was suspicious of Congress' willingness to cooperate with other racial groups, and older-generation moderates like Professor Z. K. Matthews, the instigator of the non-racial Freedom Charter. Lutuli's thoughtful moderation, his domestic and international appeal, and his importance as a Zulu in a Xhosa-dominated organization meant that he was well placed to mediate between some, if not all, of the factions. Located, like King, at "the vital center" of his organization, he had at least the potential to promote progressive consensus inside and outside his own organization.

In broad terms the objectives pursued by the two black protest leaders were remarkably similar. An inclusive democratic polity in which blacks would enjoy the same basic rights was their principal goal, a fact which made the attainment of the vote for all adult blacks an immediate priority. The suffrage was a fundamental badge of citizenship in both countries and in that sense it was viewed by protest leaders as a critical precondition for a dignified and responsible existence. It was more than just a symbol, however. Universal adult suffrage meant power. In the South African context, where blacks were in a large majority, it clearly meant the power to rule. In the American South, outside of some of the old plantation districts and inner cities, it held up the prospect of power-sharing with liberal or at least pragmatic whites. In both countries, an end to black disfranchisement also presaged the downfall of segregation, another prime target of the liberation struggles. Jim Crow and apartheid, their obvious differences aside, were both manifestations of white racism and structural engines of black oppression. Dismantling them promised blacks a greater measure of social equality and economic opportunity as well as an end to the indignities of daily life under a caste system.

Neither King nor Lutuli was naive enough to think that these goals could be obtained without individual and group sacrifice. Tempered by his reading of the prominent American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as his personal experiences under segregation and a firm grasp of biblical and historical time, King's liberalism did not, as some of his critics believed, assume that whites would give in to black demands without a fight. Whites were redeemable, certainly, but they needed blacks to make them

25. Ibid., 209.

see the beam in their eye. "Struggle," therefore, was a perpetual refrain for the SCLC leader, just as it was for Lutuli. Both men, in fact, evinced a faintly patronizing middle-class fear, shaped in part by white stereotyping, that the masses might be too obsessed with material progress or simply too slothful and apathetic to seek their own liberation. Lutuli, therefore, could complain in 1955 that black South Africans were not yet accepting fast enough the gospel of "service for the general and large good without expecting a personal and at that immediate reward"; they have not accepted fully the basic truth enshrined in the saying "No Cross, No Crown."[27] Thus could King, similarly, warn two years later that:

> It would be a tragic indictment on both the self-respect and practical wisdom of the Negro if history reveals that at the height of the twentieth century the Negro spent more for frivolities than for the cause of freedom. We must never let it be said that we spend more for the evanescent and ephemeral than for the eternal values of freedom and justice.[28]

Repeatedly positing the need for individual self-sacrifice and collective struggle was much more than just a mobilizing technique. It was designed to impart a sense of urgency and mission to the grassroots at a time when ordinary folk seemed likely to be seduced by sham-autonomy (in the case of apartheid) or material possessions (in the United States).

The distinguishing feature of the liberation struggle in both countries during the 1950s and early 1960s was nonviolent direct action. As moderates both Lutuli and King were initially skeptical about the utility of the protest technique pioneered by Gandhi in Natal and India. Both leaders believed that to attempt to use military force against the white power structure in their respective countries was not only immoral (as Christians both of them found it difficult to countenance violence) but also tactically unwise. However, they understood the psychological and organizational demands of nonviolence, recognized the potential for counterforce by the state (particularly if protests were poorly disciplined), and realized that mass action was not always the best way to promote racial equality. Neither King nor Lutuli initiated the decision to use direct action as the principal weapon of deliverance. Lutuli became head of the ANC at a time when the Defiance Campaign was already beginning to falter. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was initially the brainchild of the Women's Political Committee. Both leaders, moreover, opposed indiscriminate use of demonstrations and boycotts. King's SCLC, in fact, did not really come to terms with direct action until its potency had been proven by the student sit-ins of 1960 and the CORE-SNCC Freedom Rides of 1961. ANC plans were so disrupted by government repression that some of the principal nonviolent demonstrations of the 1950s, most famously the Alexandra Bus Boycott of 1957, were carried out by ordinary blacks without direction from Lutuli or anyone else on the National Executive. For all their wariness of nonviolence, however, the fact remains that the two black leaders

26. Karis and Gerhart, eds., *Challenge and Violence*, 213.
27. J. M. Washington, ed., *The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (pbk. edn., San Francisco, 1991), 143.

were committed to the strategy as the most effective means of gaining the support of all classes to the freedom struggle, the surest guarantee of winning support from liberal whites, and the least dangerous method of securing national unity in the future.

The main difference between the use of nonviolent direct action in South Africa and the United States was that whereas Lutuli saw it as a way of signaling to whites that apartheid was unworkable, King came to recognize that it was best used as a lever to secure federal intervention, via media coverage of Southern white violence, on the side of civil rights. As he wrote in his famous letter from Birmingham City Jail in April 1963, nonviolent demonstrators did not themselves create unrest:

> We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured as long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its pus-flowing ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must likewise be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.[29]

Partly because several members of his National Executive were lukewarm supporters of nonviolence (particularly in the wake of the Defiance Campaign) but even more importantly because of the intransigence of the South African state, Lutuli never succeeded in giving nonviolence the hard political cutting edge which it had in the United States.

A central feature of policy formulation in both countries was coalition building. Both the ANC and the SCLC, with the full support of their leaders, promoted close cooperation with other groups involved in, or potentially sympathetic to, the struggle. In Lutuli's case this meant welcoming the support of South African communists (who played an influential role within the ANC itself and the white Congress of Democrats) and of the equivalent liberation organizations in the Indian and coloured communities, and of the increasingly politicized black labor movement represented by the South African Congress of Trade Unions. He personally also worked closely with individual members of the newly founded Liberal Party, most notably Alan Paton who sometimes acted as his speechwriter.[30] Although the policy of cooperation with communists was controversial, Lutuli defended it on the grounds that help from any source was essential and that communists had proved themselves genuine and effective freedom fighters in South Africa. Intellectually, he rejected Marxism on religious grounds but resisted the temptation, no mean feat during the Cold War era, to demonize its proponents. It might be asked, of course, whether this tolerance made strategic sense. After all, civil rights leaders in the United States generally shunned contact with communists on the grounds that they tarred the liberation struggle with the brush of subversion. In South Africa, however, the state's definition of communism was so broad that Lutuli's acceptance of leftist ties was never going to make the difference between state neutrality and state

28. Ibid., 291.
29. P. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Biography* (Cape Town and Oxford, 1995), 289-90.

repression. What it did do was contribute significantly to internal tensions within the ANC.

Although Martin Luther King shared Lutuli's suspicion of red-baiting, he had no desire to alienate either the federal authorities or the general public by accepting help en bloc from discredited Marxists. Far more important to him was the imperative to cooperate positively with the other main civil rights organizations: the NAACP, SNCC, CORE, and the National Urban League, as well as the other support organizations which belonged to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. Looking beyond the immediate civil rights coalition, King was also a keen supporter of Bayard Rustin's policy of aligning the movement with organized labor, a major influence within the National Democratic Party. He also sought the backing of liberal Rockefeller Republicans. In marked contrast to the Congress Alliance then, the Civil Rights Movement sought direct access to groups who actually belonged to the power structure in the United States. The ANC-led coalition was made up almost entirely of "out" groups within South African society—a fact of enormous importance so far as policy implementation was concerned.

Significantly, neither King nor Lutuli made economic change their number one priority. Lutuli, a social democrat who confessed his preference for the moderate socialism of the British Labour Party, understood perfectly well that white domination of land was a prime cause of black poverty in South Africa. However, his reading of the situation was that once blacks gained political power they would then possess the means to secure economic equality. Although Lutuli defended his de-emphasis of the land question by claiming that land ownership had not saved the Boers from British imperial rule, his stress on the political struggle had obvious tactical merit. Not only did it enable the ANC to paper over the cracks between liberals, socialists, and communists (cracks which were clearly visible in the debate over the economic clauses of the Freedom Charter) but it also made liberal whites less likely to regard the freedom struggle as an immediate threat to their interests. In the United States the Civil Rights Movement also placed rather less emphasis on economic change than might have been expected in view of the relative poverty of so many African Americans. Critical here was the complacent view of capitalism held by most middle-class black leaders at a time when the country's fundamental way of life was consistently being compared in manichaean terms with communist totalitarianism. Only with the radicalizing events of the middle 1960s did King himself begin to lay primary stress on radical economic reform.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

According to Robert Tucker the third and final test of leadership is successful policy implementation.[31] Only by proving that their policies work can leaders continue to exert influence over their followers. Under this heading Martin Luther King appears to have been significantly more effective than his South African counterpart. Nonviolent direct action as it was implemented by the SCLC in Birmingham and Selma had a direct impact on the landmark federal statutes, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting

30. Tucker, *Politics as Leadership*, 19.

Rights Act of 1965, which finally brought about the downfall of Jim Crow. Of course, by no means all of King's Southern campaigns were successful and not all of the key decisions—for example, the controversial children's march in Birmingham which finally provoked a violent reaction from Bull Connor's police—were his own. However, with the help of his advisers King did learn from his failures, most notably the absence of planning and police repression in Albany. His writings and speeches, moreover, undoubtedly contributed towards the creation of something approaching a public consensus in favor of civil rights reform by 1964. By this stage in its development the ANC could claim no such successes for its policies. Lutuli failed to prevent a damaging split within Congress when the Africanists, led by Robert Sobukwe, broke away to form the PAC in 1959. The following year the organization was banned by the South African government in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and in June 1961 the National Executive abandoned nonviolence in favor of guerrilla action. Lutuli gave his reluctant assent to the decision—he had little option, for the government's adamant refusal to negotiate gave the upper hand to radicals like Mandela and Sisulu—but personally he remained committed to nonviolence until his death. By this stage South Africa had become a republic outside the Commonwealth, Mandela and other leading activists were incarcerated, and apartheid appeared to be more entrenched than ever.

Comparisons such as these do much to explain why Martin Luther King remains a folk hero for so many African Americans whereas Lutuli has long been eclipsed in the pantheon of black liberation heroes in South Africa. The evidence for supposing the chief to have been an inferior leader to King is reasonably strong. Notwithstanding his constant calls for better discipline and organization, he failed to mould the ANC into a cohesive vehicle for protest in the wake of the Defiance Campaign which, for all its faults, had mobilized huge numbers of non-whites across the country. Under Lutuli's leadership the ANC did attempt a number of nonviolent campaigns in the 1950s—for example, against Bantu education and women's passes—but these generally foundered on the rock of internal divisions. Failure to capitalize on the various instances of popular unrest in the same decade—the Alexandra and Evaton Bus Boycotts, the growing resistance of African women to passes and the Pondoland revolt of 1960—was an indication of the weakness of the ties between the center and the localities, the lack of a clear understanding of what it was that nonviolence was designed to achieve, and the persisting suspicion of the masses on the part of some moderate leaders. Lutuli, reputedly less prone to application than King, must take some of the blame for the ANC's failure to convert grassroots energies and goals into action on a national scale—an area in which the SCLC was much more successful.[32] However, it would be unfair to blame the Chief for the ANC's difficulties in the early 1960s. Those problems were primarily a consequence of state repression. Owing to the more liberal political climate and culture in the United States, Martin Luther King was able to convert white supremacists like Bull Connor and Jim Clark into unwitting agents of black liberation. Lutuli had no such advantage as was made clear by the closing of white ranks after Sharpeville.

31. Alan Paton, an admirer of Lutuli's, thought that the Chief suffered from an "overwhelming weakness of laziness." Alexander, *Paton*, 290.

Lest the comparisons appear overly favorable to King, it should be emphasized that the SCLC leader's achievements were few and far between after 1965. His efforts to end *de facto* segregation were stymied by the artful tactics of Mayor Richard J. Daley in Chicago in 1966; he failed to hold the civil rights coalition together in the altered political climate of the Vietnam War and the growth of black power; and disappointingly few people were mobilized by his calls for an interracial poor people's campaign in 1967-68. Long before King's death, it was clear that racism and black poverty had outlived the Southern caste system—that there were, in short, very serious limits to the efficacy of nonviolent direct action even in the relatively liberal United States.

In view of the struggle which Chief Lutuli had to exert a direct impact on liberation politics, it is tempting to share Nadine Gordimer's assessment of him as a symbolic leader.[33] It was, after all, his Nobel Peace Prize which focused much of the world's attention on the situation in South Africa during the 1960s. This, however, would be unfair, for Lutuli's outspoken support for sanctions—nonviolent action on an international scale—was an intrinsically political act which contributed, ultimately, in no small measure to the demise of the apartheid regime.[34] Like King, who admired the Chief sufficiently to send him a copy of Stride Toward Freedom in 1959 and who went on to become a vocal supporter of sanctions against South Africa, Lutuli was a brave, humanitarian and prescient leader whose goal of a multicultural community was grounded very much in this world and not the next.[35] Although time and events quickly soured the interracial dream of Martin Luther King—and may yet, in the wake of apartheid's collapse, do the same in South Africa—the visions remain for those willing to take inspiration from them.

Historians of the Civil Rights Movement are no doubt right to be troubled by the idea of messianic leadership. "Strong people," as Ella Baker once wrote, "don't need strong leaders."[36] In the middle decades of the twentieth century, however, powerless South African blacks and African Americans thirsted for leadership at all levels. Miss Baker herself was well aware of this fact and devoted much of her life to working with and developing grassroots leaders who could provide a sound base for black liberation in America. Liberation struggles, however, also require supra-local inspiration, coordination, and direction if they are to succeed on a national level. In no small measure were those qualities supplied by Martin Luther King and Albert Lutuli.

32. N. Gordimer, "Chief Luthuli," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1959, 34.
33. The scholarly debate over the fundamental causes of apartheid's downfall is in its infancy. For a useful introduction see N. Etherington, "Is it Too Soon to Start Devising Historical Explanations for the End of Apartheid?" in *The Dynamics of Change in Southern Africa*, ed. P. B. Rich (Basingstoke, 1994), 101-19.
34. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, 274.
35. Ella Baker, quoted in Payne, *Light of Freedom*, 93.