



King approaches conflict management by using nonviolence to discover the true arguments over moral principals embedded within conflicts that are shared by all parties. King chooses to use specific nonviolent actions and even specifically chose the word equality, in order to reveal the hatred and racism prevalent in white America. King used nonviolent protests to expose the injustice of racism toward African Americans. He chose the word equality because the term is not individualistic, being equal inherently involves another person. Equality reveals the weakness of thinking in terms of individuals being at fault, and does not leave room for conflict. Either whites treat African Americans as though their lives have equal importance, or they cannot claim to value equality. Whites cannot fight against equality, because it is morally right.

Nonviolence is also important because, in King's view, it allows African Americans to maintain their dignity and discipline in light of injustice. In *Where Do We Go From Here*, King, speaking of the march in Mississippi, says that "We left the room assuring him that we would conduct the march in his spirit and would seek as never before to expose the ugly racism that pervaded Mississippi and to arouse a new sense of dignity and manhood in every Negro who inhabited that bastion of man's inhumanity to man (King, 25)." King recognized that when African Americans organize peaceful marches on predominantly white towns, whites were angry and violent towards them. He expected his nonviolent methods will to powerfully reveal the white racism until there is no racism or injustice to expose, and allow African Americans to retain their dignity while fostering awareness, understanding, and change.

Preaching nonviolence, love, and equality is easy. King takes it a step further because he puts these values into action. King is tough minded because practicing nonviolence in the face of adversity is hard, and it means that there will be suffering. "The central quality in the Negro's life is pain—pain so old and so deep that it shows in almost every moment of his existence (King, 109)." Exposing the deeply rooted racism in white America is emotionally and physically difficult because it is exposed when whites inflict hatred and violence upon African Americans. Whites do not understand what it is like to be black in America. Blacks were slaves, then they were freed into a world where they were resented, hated, and had no opportunities for advancement. They faced discrimination every where they went, solely because of the color of their skin. King is



African Americans had been suffering ever since there were forced to come to

racism is not something that African Americans created; it is something that always existed. Through the nonviolent actions of African Americans, racism was brought out into the open. King fought in a productive way to reveal the hatred, while violence reinforced the hatred which made it an unproductive way to fight.

### *Why are Equality and Love so Important?*

King's concept of love gives meaning to the nonviolence movement. King does not make the argument that justice is impossible without love. Rather, he argues that if a person has love, then they will choose justice and equality. Equality proceeds from the heart (Moses, Chapter 1). A person that chooses to have love, even for his oppressors, will choose to be nonviolent. When King shows violent racist whites that he is acting out of love and respect, he hopes that they will choose to also be nonviolent, and eventually that whites will choose to love African Americans as themselves.

For King, everything starts with love. It is the love that he has for America and the love he has for his people that calls him to the movement in the first place, and it is that love that made him keep fighting for justice and equality every day. Love is the key to nonviolence because it demonstrates that African Americans still have love and respect for whites even through the oppression and hatred. If whites can realize this, they will accept love themselves, which in turn promotes equality.

King says that if you have love, equality and justice will follow (Moses, Chapter 1). Equality is important to King because it is something that involves all American citizens, regardless of race or social status. King uses equality to apply the movement to everyone so that the connection between African Americans and poor whites will be realized. King loves America, and he wants it to be a country that treats everyone with dignity. He thinks that more needs to be done to help people in poverty and to help African Americans. Poor whites and poor blacks are very similar in their conditions, however, poor whites have the opportunity to overcome their poverty, while African Americans are oppressed. They do not have the same opportunities for employment, earn the same wages, and they are even limited on the conditions that they can live in. King demanded social change by eliminating the structures of American society that foster poverty and racism.

That is also why King argues that poverty and oppression is not the fault of the individual, and nothing good can be achieved from blaming an individual for their racism. While he also insists that each individual has a responsibility to oppose racism, poverty, and violence within our own communities. This is what King hears the Christian call to love our neighbors as ourselves. Blaming individuals is unproductive because the habits of racism are embedded in American culture. Whites are taught to be racist their whole lives. It is the culture of America, the structure of American society that must be changed. "If we are seeking a home, there is not much value in discussing blueprints if we have no money and are barred from acquiring the land (King, 144)." While individuals cannot be personally blamed for their poverty, or their racism, individuals responsibility for making a change is required. King is fighting to change the structure of America from a society that fosters poverty and racism into a society that has equality for

everyone. King is not saying that individuals are unaccountable for their actions, but that

King also avoids unproductive conflict. Violence is unproductive because it does not reveal the true conflict, and King also recognizes that attacking America and attacking whites for their racist attitudes would be unproductive. Displaying hatred is easy, hatred and anger are easy emotions. However, King did not choose the easy path, nothing about his nonviolent movement was easy. King preached about love and equality, but also about the struggling and the strength needed to practice love. Loving whites was a difficult concept because of the atrocities that whites had committed against African Americans, starting with forcing them to this country to be their slaves. King's optimism in America was also a hard concept. The government had done very little to help African Americans. The Emancipation Proclamation freed them, but they had no money and no where to go, their families were ripped apart, and they were in no way treated as equals by whites or by the government.

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