

Economics and Dr. King: collecting on the 'bad check.'



(AFP/AFP/Getty Images)

When Dr. King speaks of the 'bank of justice,' how can we get justice?

In today's economy the answer is: jobs for all who want them. Dr. King fervently defended this position:

"For the civil rights leaders, the fight for justice was not limited to providing equal voting rights for all Americans and abstaining from discriminatory practices against African Americans. A federally funded Job Guarantee program was a central theme articulated by Martin Luther King and Bayard Rustin (the organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and one of this year's recipients (posthumously) of the Presidential Medal of Freedom)."

-Professor Fadhel Kaboub, Denison University economist.

Can we afford jobs for all?

Gold standard thinking of pre-crisis economics said no, but the US is not under a gold standard and today the answer is yes.

"Unfortunately, mainstream economists have been successful in spreading their deficit phobia in Washington and have kept the U.S. from implementing one of the most socially and economically transformative policies since the New Deal program. The so-called 'sound finance' advocates (deficit hawks and deficit doves) fail to understand the meaning of financial sovereignty, recognize the difference between currency issuer and currency users, and accept the logical implications of the sectoral balance analysis."

-Professor Fadhel Kaboub, Denison University economist.

Making the economy too small and then blaming poor people is like giving two treats to three cats: one third will always go hungry, no matter what. Expecting anything else is what Dr. King called the '**bootstrap philosophy**' in which African Americans who found themselves in '**an island of poverty**' were expected to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps when they had no boots.

See sources and more at CantrellAvenue.com

Economics and Dr. King: collecting on the 'bad check.'



(AFP/AFP/Getty Images)

When Dr. King speaks of the 'bank of justice,' how can we get justice?

In today's economy the answer is: jobs for all who want them. Dr. King fervently defended this position:

"For the civil rights leaders, the fight for justice was not limited to providing equal voting rights for all Americans and abstaining from discriminatory practices against African Americans. A federally funded Job Guarantee program was a central theme articulated by Martin Luther King and Bayard Rustin (the organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and one of this year's recipients (posthumously) of the Presidential Medal of Freedom)."

-Professor Fadhel Kaboub, Denison University economist.

Can we afford jobs for all?

Gold standard thinking of pre-crisis economics said no, but the US is not under a gold standard and today the answer is yes.

"Unfortunately, mainstream economists have been successful in spreading their deficit phobia in Washington and have kept the U.S. from implementing one of the most socially and economically transformative policies since the New Deal program. The so-called 'sound finance' advocates (deficit hawks and deficit doves) fail to understand the meaning of financial sovereignty, recognize the difference between currency issuer and currency users, and accept the logical implications of the sectoral balance analysis."

-Professor Fadhel Kaboub, Denison University economist.

Making the economy too small and then blaming poor people is like giving two treats to three cats: one third will always go hungry, no matter what. Expecting anything else is what Dr. King called the '**bootstrap philosophy**' in which African Americans who found themselves in '**an island of poverty**' were expected to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps when they had no boots.

See sources and more at CantrellAvenue.com

Economic History and the Dream:

Historian Bruce Levin writes that facing imminent defeat, the Confederates started to take seriously the idea of 'emancipating' their slaves and forcing them into the army. In plotting how to make the best of what Robert E. Lee called the "evil consequence" of "free negroes," slavery advocate John Henry Stringfellow wrote to Jefferson Davis in 1865:

"[we] will be in a position to make laws to control the free negro, whose wages, would be regulated by law hereafter as may suit the change of relation. In this kind of post war South, the landless free man would have to labor for the land owner on terms as economical as if he were still owned by him."

This echoed the 1863 words of General Patrick Claybourn:

"It is said slaves will not work after they are freed but we think necessity and wise legislation will compel them to work for a living."

Historian Steve Reich writes that on January 1, 1866 William E. Strong reported to Major-General O. O. Howard that Southern Planters insisted that unless they resorted "to **the overseer, whip, and hounds**" their estates would deteriorate and never recover. ...

"Planters resented that emancipation not only challenged their sense of racial supremacy but also eroded their authority as employers of labor."

Reich writes:

"Many Republicans, who valued property rights over labor rights, grew fearful of encouraging a class politics from below. More and more, they became convinced that it was safer and wiser to come to terms with former Confederates than to promote and protect the interests of their black working-class constituents."

A century later, that logic of oppression was still in place and that is what Martin Luther King, Jr. struggled and died to defeat. King said:

"I've seen my dream shattered because I've been through Appalachia and I've seen my white brothers along with Negroes living in poverty. And I'm concerned about white poverty as much as I'm concerned about Negro poverty."

However, today states that imposed segregation constitutions refuse to extend Medicaid. At the federal level, lawmakers refuse to extend unemployment coverage, let alone create decent jobs.

Dr. King said:

"a revolution in values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies."

but he did not live to see it completed. Thus his words remain relevant today:

"we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

At the federal level, a shift to a person-oriented society is blocked by austerity rhetoric aimed at reducing the size of government already too small to take up the slack left by the private sector of not enough jobs for those willing to work and record high insecurity for the rest. Treating our fellow human beings as costs to be squeezed down defeats the market system since they are also the customer lifeblood our Main Street economy has so badly needed for half a decade now. The revolution in values can start at the local level with active celebration of the diverse creative love of life in our beloved community.

We Can Overcome.

The moral arguments of Dr. King and the demands of the March on Washington for *Jobs* and Freedom CAN be realized in practice. The theories denying it have failed spectacularly and the theories explaining how are well worked out. America can replace networks of prison with networks of jobs. We can allow those who have, through one path or another, come within the shelter of our sovereign protection to live in dignity and security. We can take care of our own.

Economic History and the Dream:

Historian Bruce Levin writes that facing imminent defeat, the Confederates started to take seriously the idea of 'emancipating' their slaves and forcing them into the army. In plotting how to make the best of what Robert E. Lee called the "evil consequence" of "free negroes," slavery advocate John Henry Stringfellow wrote to Jefferson Davis in 1865:

"[we] will be in a position to make laws to control the free negro, whose wages, would be regulated by law hereafter as may suit the change of relation. In this kind of post war South, the landless free man would have to labor for the land owner on terms as economical as if he were still owned by him."

This echoed the 1863 words of General Patrick Claybourn:

"It is said slaves will not work after they are freed but we think necessity and wise legislation will compel them to work for a living."

Historian Steve Reich writes that on January 1, 1866 William E. Strong reported to Major-General O. O. Howard that Southern Planters insisted that unless they resorted "to **the overseer, whip, and hounds**" their estates would deteriorate and never recover. ...

"Planters resented that emancipation not only challenged their sense of racial supremacy but also eroded their authority as employers of labor."

Reich writes:

"Many Republicans, who valued property rights over labor rights, grew fearful of encouraging a class politics from below. More and more, they became convinced that it was safer and wiser to come to terms with former Confederates than to promote and protect the interests of their black working-class constituents."

A century later, that logic of oppression was still in place and that is what Martin Luther King, Jr. struggled and died to defeat. King said:

"I've seen my dream shattered because I've been through Appalachia and I've seen my white brothers along with Negroes living in poverty. And I'm concerned about white poverty as much as I'm concerned about Negro poverty."

However, today states that imposed segregation constitutions refuse to extend Medicaid. At the federal level, lawmakers refuse to extend unemployment coverage, let alone create decent jobs.

Dr. King said:

"a revolution in values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies."

but he did not live to see it completed. Thus his words remain relevant today:

"we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

At the federal level, a shift to a person-oriented society is blocked by austerity rhetoric aimed at reducing the size of government already too small to take up the slack left by the private sector of not enough jobs for those willing to work and record high insecurity for the rest. Treating our fellow human beings as costs to be squeezed down defeats the market system since those fellow human beings are also the customer lifeblood our Main Street economy has so badly needed for half a decade now. The revolution in values can start at the local level with active celebration of the diverse creative love of life in our beloved community.

We Can Overcome.

The moral arguments of Dr. King and the demands of the March on Washington for *Jobs* and Freedom CAN be realized in practice. The theories denying it have failed spectacularly and the theories explaining how are well worked out. America can replace networks of prison with networks of jobs. We can allow those who have, through one path or another, come within the shelter of our sovereign protection to live in dignity and security. We can take care of our own.