MLK, Jr. Day - Salon at Lunch: Power, Love, and Activism
Monday, January 20, 2020

Essential Questions

• How do you define love? How is love part of activism today?
• How do you define power? How is power part of activism today?
• What is the relationship between love and power in activism, historically and now?

Excerpts from Martin Luther King, Jr., “Where Do We Go from Here?” (1967)
kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/where-do-we-go-here-address-delivered-eleventh-annual-sclc-convention

Excerpt 1
“Now a lot of us are preachers, and all of us have our moral convictions and concerns, and so often we have problems with power. But there is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly.

You see, what happened is that some of our philosophers got off base. Any one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites, polar opposites, so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. It was this misinterpretation that caused the philosopher Nietzsche, who was a philosopher of the will to power, to reject the Christian concept of love. It was this same misinterpretation which induced Christian theologians to reject Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power in the name of the Christian idea of love.

Now, we got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. (Yes) Power at its best [applause], power at its best is love (Yes) implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. (Speak) And this is what we must see as we move on.

Now what has happened is that we’ve had it wrong and mixed up in our country, and this has led Negro Americans in the past to seek their goals through love and moral suasion devoid of power, and white Americans to seek their goals through power devoid of love and conscience. It is leading a few extremists today to advocate for Negroes the same destructive and conscienceless power that they have justly abhorred in whites. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our times. (Yes)

Now we must develop progress, or rather, a program—and I can’t stay on this long—that will drive the nation to a guaranteed annual income . . .”
Excerpt 2
“And I say to you, I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind’s problems. And I’m going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn’t popular to talk about it in some circles today. And I’m not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love; I’m talking about a strong, demanding love. For I have seen too much hate. I’ve seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the South. I’ve seen hate on the faces of too many Klansmen and too many White Citizens Councilors in the South to want to hate, myself, because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces and their personalities, and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear. I have decided to love.

[...]

Let us be dissatisfied until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history, and every family will live in a decent, sanitary home.

Let us be dissatisfied until the dark yesterdays of segregated schools will be transformed into bright tomorrows of quality integrated education.

Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.

Let us be dissatisfied until men and women, however black they may be, will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, not on the basis of the color of their skin. Let us be dissatisfied.”

Questions for Discussion:
- How does M.L. King, Jr. understand the relationship between power and love?
- How do (same) M.L. King, Jr.’s ideas of power and love connect to today?
  - Does your community still think of love and power as opposites – that love is a “resignation of power” and power is “a denial of love”?
- Does love show up in 21st-century activism?
- Are there challenges to emphasizing love in activism today?

Resources: Power and Love for Positive Change
- Love March – smbcnh.org/love-march-1
- YWCA - ywcahartford.org
- Black Lives Matter at School - blacklivesmatteratschool.com
- CT Voter Registration - portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Election-Services/Voter-Information
- #StandUpForHumanRights - standup4humanrights.org
- The Kindness Rock Project - thekindnessrocksproject.com