



The Black Intellectual Tradition and the Great Conversation with Dr. Angel Parham

Lesson 7: Martin Luther King Jr., Part I

Outline:

Martin Luther King Jr. Biography

- He was born in 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia.
- His mother was college educated. His father was a pastor. His father was a sharecropper's son.
- The King's led a relatively comfortable life, not overly well off, but not poor.

Martin Luther King Jr's Intellectual Life

- He is a wonderful model for students in how he engaged in classical and canonical texts.
- He read them carefully, absorbed what was good in them, and he critiqued what was not good in them. He always brought the eyes of faith to what he was reading.
- We want our students to cultivate intellectual virtue based on discernment and rooted in faith.
- He goes away to college at Morehouse College. Morehouse is a prestigious African American male college in Atlanta, Georgia. Martin Luther King Jr. was accepted at age 15.
- Thoreau's work on civil disobedience, and King's response:
 - Why do we have a conscience if we are just going to blindly follow the laws of the land?
 - Think carefully about how we live and about the goodness of the laws.
 - *On Civil Disobedience* is published in 1849, which is a very politically volatile time.
 - We will see what is wrong, feel bad about it, but not take any steps to rectify it (Thoreau). This is an internal hypocrisy.
 - King is very much drawn into this. He reread Thoreau's work several times.
- As a college student, King is challenged in his faith. He questions whether faith and reason be reconciled. He saw scholars who were men of deep faith, who inspired him. The life of the mind and the life of the faith can be reconciled.



- King attends Crozer Theological Seminary. He goes on a quest for a method to eliminate social evil.
 - I need to cultivate the life of faith, so that they are changed in a way that is in accordance with who God is. “On the other, I must attempt to change the societies, so the individual soul will have a change.”
 - The society which we are embedded in works on the soul. What we are surround by is formative.
 - We can’t ignore where a soul is embedded in society.
- **King’s encounter with Marx and communism.**
 - We should read all kinds of works, but this does not mean that we accept all ideas.
 - In a dialectical process of reading, you take in what is good and expel what is not good.
 - *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and King’s response:
 - Marx is arguing that there is a historic logic of class struggles.
 - What is distinctive about the capitalist era is there are only two great classes:
 - Bourgeoisie who own the means of production,
 - Proletariat who do not own the means of production
 - Means of productions is anything that can be used to produce profit.