

# PHILOSOPHY OF THE MOVEMENT: NONVIOLENCE

## INTERVIEW THREAD TWO: NONVIOLENCE AS A TACTIC

### REV. JESSE JACKSON

"There was the joy of -- he would say the most difficult part of the movement, when you, when you leave the excitement of a march in Selma, where there's even violent reaction -- that's not the difficult part. The difficult part is that when all that's over, you got to get people to register and vote. The slow -- they call it the slow non-romantic dimension, when the lights are not there, the hardcore organizing, convincing people to change their minds, to change their situation. 'Cause at the end of the day, change comes when people change their minds. Most people who were on the occupation, whose backs are against the wall, have three options, and that's why it's so difficult to organize is our understanding this. Most people adjust- they have found their place, they have found their space -- where they live, where they can live, where they grocery shop, where they go to school, where they go to church, where they get married. They live in this circle and they have adjusted to -- they blank the outside world away. So, if you're in, in the ghetto and you're paying pension funds, and the pension funds are building the other side of town, they're building the big tall, buildings, but you just forget that. You're living in conditions where, you live there, but you don't control the economic resources, but you've adjusted. And some people -- beyond- they resent, they know better, but they don't feel empowered enough to change anything. So, they have a- often become very bitter. They, they've not adjusted, they resent.

"And then there's the third dimension called resistance. That's where the action comes in. Where you're not only -- you become maladjusted, as Doctor King would say, and you resent, but you also begin to resist. Resisting means some kind of boycott, some kind of action. The weapons we use --- one, the effective use of one's vote, one's dollar, coalition, action, and to be morally right. Those are the weapons that you use, because at the end of the day, our biggest weapon is to be mostly morally right. Ms. Parks was mostly right. Those who marched in Birmingham were mostly right. Those who marched for the right to vote were mostly morally right. We couldn't impose wrong on anybody. We had, in fact, to assert the rightness of our cause and the righteousness of our cause and be willing to suffer and sacrifice at the end. And nonviolence was both a strategy and a way of life. If we had been fighting with arms, we couldn't have battled in arms. But then Doctor King said, 'If you shoot and you get shot, then there are no winners, but if you can have change without shooting, getting shot, then both can survive for another day.'"

### MARY LOU FINLEY

"So, this young man said -- the first thing he said when he came in the door was, 'Are you really Martin Luther King?' Doctor King thought that was pretty funny. And he assured him that he was, in fact, Martin Luther King, and they had a very lovely kind of conversation with Doctor King really saying, 'We want you to join the movement.'

"And so, finally, the young man left. And pretty soon later, there was another knock on the door. We opened the door again and here was the same young man, but there was like a whole train of them going down the stairs. And so, they all, we invited them all in. Doctor said, 'Invite them all in.' And the same young man, he came back and said, he said, 'Well, I went back and told my buddies that Martin Luther King moved in here, but nobody believed me. So, everybody else wanted to come and see you too.' So, we had a wonderful conversation. Doctor King was really wanting, again, to get them interested in the movement. And it wasn't a very long conversation, but it was a very sweet moment. I just felt -- it was amazing that I happened to be there when this actually happened. And what I realized later was that those young men came back a number of times to see Doctor King in that apartment. One time, they came late at night. There was something that had happened that was really upsetting, and they said, 'We don't know about this nonviolent stuff. We're trying to think, we don't know about this.' Doctor King stayed up until four o'clock in the morning telling them -- doing basically a nonviolence workshop for them, until finally at four o'clock they said, 'Okay. We're not sure about nonviolence in general, but we can at least go with nonviolence as something... Really, we would say as a strategy. We'll try it out, basically.'"

## CLEVELAND SELLERS

“Well, let me start you back with SNCC. SNCC was always a lot different from many of the other organizations. A lot of it had to do with our youthfulness and it also had to do with our experiences. Most of the people in SNCC were not nonviolent in terms of principles and beliefs. They saw nonviolence as a tactic and it was a very important tactic and it- in the public accommodation-testing phase of it, it saved lives and it saved harm to those who were participating in that. And so, it also gave America an opportunity to see what the resistance was like when the press wasn't there, when the news wasn't there, the TV wasn't there. So, we employed it where it was needed, but it was never a way of life for us, and Doctor King actually understood that we didn't -- we didn't embrace the nonviolence as he embraced nonviolence as being a preacher. It was a part of the morality to be nonviolent, turn the other cheek and that kind of thing.

“Well, most people across the south that we were working with, when, you know, you went to Mississippi, a lot of them would have shotguns up near the window and they would say that, 'I know you all are nonviolent and if somebody fires in the house, we going to fire back.' And they said, 'Well, we have a shotgun, a rifle over here for you, but you don't have to take it because we understand that you're nonviolent.' But they were willing as a probably a human principle to defend their families and that never left. Nobody, nobody took that away from them and we weren't prepared to take that away from them. So, I think that's where you began to see the whole notion about SNCC and nonviolence. We never were an organization that embraced nonviolence as a principle, as a way of life, okay? And so, it was very easy to change tactics 'cause that's what we saw happening. We were not sitting in at lunch counters in 1966, you know? We weren't riding the bus to open up public transportation operations. We had already taken care of that, not in 1966. And so, we were moving along, and we didn't see that as a radical change.”