

Myth Making as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement

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In this article I propose the mythic paradigm as a model for understanding human communication. The term myth refers to an encompassing story emerging from several specific narratives. I am attempting to expand on the narrative paradigm first proposed by Walter Fisher. Just as Fisher's paradigm grants a great deal of rhetorical force to narrative, the paradigm I propose extends that power to the myths created through the fusion of various narratives. I challenge the notion that any narrative can be examined in isolation. The meaning and significance of life requires the recognition of a mythic structure. Myth making is a capacity we all share. The mythic paradigm allows the acceptance or rejection of assertions based on their ability to be incorporated into a particular myth. In order to illustrate the application of the mythic paradigm, I examine the mythic structure created by the rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the civil rights movement.

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Since Walter Fisher proposed the narrative paradigm in 1984, the paradigm has been greeted with a mixture of enthusiasm and skepticism. Fisher's notion of narrative communication and reasoning does not negate traditional rationality, but proposes an alternative to it, which seems to explain all discourse as narrative. The narrative paradigm has undoubtedly been influential, and while many critics have applied Fisher's ideas, others have been hesitant to accept his overall theory.

The narrative paradigm has been criticized for its attempt to establish a hierarchy where narrative is more highly valued than traditional rationality. The limited role of traditional rationality in the narrative paradigm renders the narrative paradigm highly problematic when critics seek to apply the narrative to the critical assessment of texts. Furthermore, the narrative paradigm cannot enable us to make a choice when two or more narratives are equally coherent. The narrative paradigm cannot function as the sole means for selecting one narrative over equally coherent competing narratives or assessing the text's adequacy as the response to the rhetorical situation. The status of traditional rationality within Fisher's model can be seen as a severe weakness in the narrative paradigm. Without traditional rationality there is no way to assure the audience will not choose bad stories based on self delusion or rationalization. The narrative paradigm does not provide an acceptable method of judging the claims of the rhetor or the rhetorical critic. Essentially, the narrative paradigm is problematic in that it relies on the critic's personal judgment regarding the narrative presented by the rhetor (Warnick, 1987).

However, the purpose of this paper is not to take issue with the notion that narrative does not subsume rationality, but rather to argue that Fisher's basic paradigm does not adequately account for the role myth plays in creating narratives, which impact human understanding. I propose a new paradigm which explains the rhetorical force of narrative, the mythic paradigm. Only when narratives work together to create myth, do they assume the power Fisher has granted to the narrative paradigm.

The term myth means, here, an encompassing story emerging from several specific narratives. The mythic paradigm insists that human understanding be viewed as the result of the fusion of several individual narratives combining to create mythic structures that define humankind's place in the universe. The mythic paradigm challenges the notion that any narrative act can be examined in isolation. In order to be understood, a narrative must be examined within the larger framework of the overall myth within which it is situated. For instance, no sermon delivered by a Christian minister can be understood without placing it within the structure of the Christian myth. Also, no political speech in America can be understood without placing it within the mythic structures of the American dream, the frontier myth, or numerous other myths that have shaped the American psyche. The meaning and significance of life in all of its social dimensions requires the recognition of its mythic structure. The mythic paradigm actually subsumes the narrative paradigm. Fisher (1984) proposed the root metaphor, *homo narran*, to represent the essential nature of human beings. I propose *homo mythic* as the metaphor most accurate in describing human nature. When *homo mythic* is taken as the master metaphor it subsumes *homo narran*.

Homo narran is a conception that informs various ways of "recounting" or "accounting for" human choice and action. "Recounting" takes the form of history, biography, or autobiography. "Accounting for" takes the forms of theoretical explanation and argument. "Recounting" and "accounting for" can also be expressed in other ways, such as drama and

poetry. Regardless of the form they assume, “recounting” and “accounting for” are stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish meaning (Fisher, 1984).

However, *homo narran* is not sufficient to explain why narratives become an accepted way of “recounting” and “accounting for” our actions. It is only when we view man as *homo mythic* that we can truly understand how rhetoric works to explain and create our place in the world around us. Thus, narratives work together to create myth and *homo mythic* subsumes *homo narran*. This merely extends Fisher’s work to its logical conclusion. As Fisher (1984) noted, “The *homo narran* metaphor is an incorporation and extension of Burke’s definition of man as the symbol-using animal.” (p. 6) Since narratives serve as symbols and join together to create myths, myths must then serve as symbols for all moral and ethical decisions as well as understanding. Myths take on rhetorical force rather than fantasy and serve to guide human behavior.

The following contentions structure the mythic paradigm. (1) Humans working as a group are essentially myth makers. (2) Myths provide the basis for human reasoning. (3) Good reason is measured against mythic standards emerging from history, culture, and narrative. (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as myth-making beings. (5) Different myths guide human action and serve as the communicative expressions of social reality.

These characteristics subsume the narrative paradigm. Myth making is a capacity we all share. The mythic paradigm does not require reasoning or even the tests of narrative fidelity and narrative probability. It simply allows the acceptance or rejection of certain assertions based on their ability to be incorporated into a particular myth. The mythic paradigm offers an understanding of human action. Myths serve as the guide for moral judgment.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

America has faced no greater moral decisions than those made during the civil rights movement. In order to illustrate the application of the mythic paradigm, I propose to analyze how myths were used during the civil rights movement to advocate social change.

During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, a highly visible program for racial equality that emerged from a distinct mythic structure dominated public consciousness. This program aimed at complete integration through nonviolent protest. This vision defined the spectrum of the freedom struggle during the 1960s. The most esteemed leader of this nonviolent assimilationist group was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He was the spokesman for a huge coalition of groups that accepted his rhetoric, tactics, and philosophy, essentially his mythic structure.

The struggle for racial equality continues today, and the legacy of King still haunts present day African-American spokesmen. Just as America’s political leaders frequently call upon the ideas of the founding fathers for support, so do African-American leaders call upon the ideas of King. The myth of King is still so powerful that in the American psyche it dominates all other mythic structures.

King articulated a mythic vision that violence was never justified. He never spoke of violent defense, and his message emphasized nonviolent resistance. King also clearly articulated the mythic view that African Americans were very much a part of America, and the African-

American dream was essentially a fulfillment of that American dream. King presented the doctrine of passive resistance as a method of appealing to the humanity of whites to grant equality to African Americans. King's mythic structure was even consistent with the mythic structure underlying traditional American values, chiefly, those of equality and justice for all.

King was the representative spokesman and driving force behind this vision in the 1960s, but his mythic structure is trans-historical and has continued to win followers. Although we can conceptualize King's message within its proper historical context, because of its rhetorical force, King acts more like an agent or custodian of this mythic structure. King articulated the basic goodness of human beings as a fundamental axiom.

The height of the civil rights movement is marked by King's famous March on Washington, the setting for his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," and his nonviolent demonstrations in numerous Southern cities. Though his life ended with his assassination, the myth continued.

The purpose of this study is to examine the "core texts" of Martin Luther King, Jr., in order to apply the mythic paradigm to illustrate how these "core texts" work together to create the mythic structure Americans use to understand race relations. As every rhetorician knows, bodies, objects, sites, and strategies do not possess fixed meanings. They acquire meaning. And as time goes by, those acquired meanings are "contested" in societal and moral space. Thus, this study seeks to unearth the mythic structure emerging from King's rhetoric. King is viewed as an iconic leader who gave the civil rights movement its dominant form. His myth is appealed to a broad audience, and he is presented as the spokesman for a variety of African-American points of view.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

In order to illustrate how King produced America's dominant mythic structure for understanding race relations, I will explore the myth evoked by his rhetoric as a variant to the timeless myth of the hero's quest. Joseph Campbell (1949) asserts that hero myths begin in separation when the hero leaves family and community for a journey into the darkness. Here the hero faces a series of tests such as riddles, conflicts, or captivities, and eventually emerges triumphant to receive great gifts. However, the hero transcends personal ambition and returns home to share the gifts with those most in need.

DATA

In order to unearth the mythic structure of the message of King, I will examine seven of his major speeches. These speeches have been extensively anthologized and quoted. They form the fragments or sinews of the canonical "texts" of King. In the winnowing of the rhetorical legacy, these are the speeches with the toughest lives, the survivors and emblems of the official message. The speeches span a period from 1957 to the night before his assassination on April 3, 1968. They are "Give Us the Ballot-We Will Transform the South," "I Have a Dream," "Eulogy for the Martyred Children," "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," "Our God Is Marching On!" "A Time to Break Silence," and "I See the Promised Land. Transcripts of the speeches appear in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther, King, Jr., edited by James Melvin Washington and published in 1986.

THE MYTHIC JOURNEY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

The myth of the questing hero provides the underlying theme of King's discourse. It informs his persona, structures his rhetoric, and provides a model of exemplary life for the masses who respond to his message. Campbell clearly and succinctly outlines the elements of a hero's quest:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Campbell, 1949, p. 30).

The hero's journey begins in separation; he leaves family and community for a journey into darkness. Here he faces a series of tests such as riddles, combats, or captivities. The hero achieves great victories and receives gifts. However, the hero has transcended his personal ambition. Dying to personal ambition, he wishes to serve others. Returning home, the mythic hero attempts to bring salvation to his people, although, as in the case of King Arthur, Roland, or Hans Castrop, he is not always successful in doing so (Segal, 1990).

The character of the hero has been well defined. During his journey, the hero is assisted by a protector. In Christian myth this protector takes the form of the Holy Spirit. In Jewish myth, Jehovah watches over the Jews. The hero is often isolated during his journey. Jonah was in the belly of the whale. Moses was left alone in the bulrushes and went alone to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Jesus was buried in the tomb. The hero must also survive a succession of trials and may be tempted to give up his quest, returning with a boon for his people (Campbell, 1949). In order to apply the mythic paradigm to King's legacy, I will analyze King's birth as a hero, the mythical journey he undertakes, the mythical vision of community that emerges in his discourse, his death, and his legacy.

BIRTH OF A HERO

In the retrospective construction of King's "myth," the young visiting minister from Boston and Atlanta was fated to emerge as the leader of the civil rights movement on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks took her famous ride on a Montgomery city bus. On that day, Parks boarded a bus and sat down in a seat on the eleventh row. The first ten rows of a Montgomery city bus were reserved for white passengers. When all of the seats were full, a white passenger boarded, and the bus driver ordered that four African Americans on the eleventh row give up their seats. Three of the passengers moved. Parks remained seated and was arrested (Abernathy, 1989).

After her arrest, the African-American ministers of Montgomery met Friday evening, December 2, 1955, in the basement of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where King was a visiting minister, to organize a protest against the treatment of African Americans riding city buses. The ministers agreed to ask their congregations not to ride the city buses and called for another meeting on Monday, December 5, 1955, to decide whether or not to extend the boycott. The Monday boycott was a tremendous success, and the ministers met that evening and formed the Montgomery Improvement Association to lead the boycott. King was elected leader of the group, and a 385-day boycott resulted in the complete desegregation of the Montgomery

transportation system. His role as leader in the Montgomery bus boycott marked his sudden emergence as the leader of the civil rights movement. King began his mythic journey in Montgomery, a journey leading him to travel across the South with sit-ins, freedom rides, and marches. Although King did not begin these far-flung efforts, he was drawn into them as the catalyst, and legacy defines him as the hero destined to lead the civil rights movement.

JOURNEY

In tracing the hero myth created by King, it is important to note that King identified his personal journey and that of his constituents with the historic conception of African Americans as a people destined to move from freedom to bondage to freedom again in the manner of the ancient Israelites. King often spoke of his journey to bring equality to his people. He developed a powerful metaphor: The March.

One of the many literal marches of the civil rights movement which helping to construct the hero myth was the march from Selma to Montgomery, which ended on the steps of the Alabama capital building on March 25, 1965. King declared the march a great victory, proclaiming Selma, “a great shining moment in the conscience of man.” (King, 1965, p. 228) He declared further, that:

“There was never a moment in American history more honorable and more inspiring than the pilgrimage of clergymen and laymen of every race and faith pouring into Selma to face danger at the side of its embattled Negroes (King, 1965, p.228).”

King refers to the march as a triumph and asserts that it is a step toward African Americans gaining access to the American dream when he says, “Let us therefore continue our triumph and march to the realization of the American dream (King, 1965, p.229).

King’s marches allowed him to achieve great victories. Although he did not take direct credit for these victories, the myth created by his rhetoric fostered a sense of inevitable victory for African Americans.

In his “I Have a Dream” speech, King speaks of the unfulfilled promise of the Emancipation Proclamation. By portraying the Emancipation Proclamation and the “Brown” decision as unfulfilled yet soon to be realized victories, King creates a myth portraying himself as the hero able to achieve meaningful victories,

In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1964, in Oslo, Norway, King asserted that, under his leadership, African Americans were indeed achieving great victories: “I accept this award on behalf of a civil rights movement which is moving with determination and majestic scorn for risk and danger to establish a reign of freedom and a rule of justice (King, 1964, p. 224).” King went on to speak of new civil rights that African Americans acquired on “the tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama, to Oslo (King, 1964, p. 225).”

King also speaks of great victories in his speech after the Selma march. He credits the Selma march with having forced President Johnson to support the cause of civil rights more strongly, recounts victories in Birmingham and Montgomery, and declares segregation on its deathbed in Alabama:

From Montgomery to Birmingham, from Birmingham to Selma, from Selma, from Selma back to Montgomery, a trail wound in a circle and often bloody, yet it has become a highway up from the darkness. Alabama has tried to nurture and defend evil, but the evil is choking to death in the dusty roads and streets of this state.

So I stand before you this afternoon with the conviction that segregation is on its deathbed in Alabama, and the only thing uncertain about it is how costly the segregationists and Wallace will make the funeral (King, 1964, p. 228).

While the Selma march was not a total victory, it was still a great victory. Perhaps as important as the victories King celebrates in his Selma speech are the victories he predicts. Although King did not live to see his vision of racial harmony in this country, he was able to articulate a mythic journey that ends with ultimate equality and victory for African Americans. By ending his speech with the words of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," King is able to create rhetorically the complete abolishment of segregation in the South. It is also interesting that he chooses the words of a song associated with Union troops during the Civil War. This seems to be an extension of a theme articulated in his "I Have a Dream" speech. The mythic structure of King's rhetoric articulates a vision of the civil rights movement as an extension of the mission begun by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Civil War. King also discusses great victories during his mythic journey in his final address, "I See the Promised Land," delivered April 3, 1968, the night before his assassination. King discusses actual victories that had been won, such as the Birmingham campaign. But more importantly, King discusses the coming victory when he compares the plight of African Americans, specifically the striking sanitation workers in Memphis, to Jews during the Exodus. The sanitation workers, however, can be seen to represent the entire African-American population. The mayor of Memphis is compared to the Pharaoh, but again this analogy can be seen to represent the white power structure as a whole. Essentially, in this speech, Memphis becomes a microcosm for the worldwide struggle between the empowered and the disempowered. Rhetorically, King is able to complete the mythical journey. Although he never actually completes the journey, just as Beowulf slays Grendel and his mother, just as Matt Dillon chases the men in black hats out of Dodge, just as Christ rises from the dead, and just as Moses leads the Jews out of Egypt, King rhetorically creates a myth taking his people to the Promised Land. In concluding his speech, King seems to predict his own death in strangely prophetic fashion:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land (King, p. 286).

SUFFERING AND SACRIFICE

King's mythical journey portrays a hero who has made sacrifices, but his journey is not the isolated pilgrimage of the Greek hero. It is a communal journey. The gifts of equality and justice that African Americans gain through challenges and suffering give them a special mission and role for the redemption of the world. King speaks of lynching, the denial of voting rights, and persecution by the Ku Klux Klan in discussing challenges along the way during this journey to freedom.

King's most famous oration, "I Have a Dream," also refers to the suffering encountered by both himself and African Americans as a group. He begins the speech by reminding the audience that African Americans have suffered greatly under slavery; and even though they have been freed from slavery by the Emancipation Proclamation, the promises of freedom have not been made real. He reminds the audience also that African Americans have been forced to endure the humiliation of segregation, have been the victims of police brutality, have been economically disadvantaged, and have not been allowed to vote. Thus, King transforms those burdens that Americans traditionally assign to personal failure or weakness and recontextualizes them as signs of Godly election.

King uses his periodic jailing as a metaphor for the isolation of segregation. King's rhetoric works to produce an image of sacrifice and suffering when he says:

I am not unmindful that some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality (King, p.219).

He goes on to point out that, "the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity" (King, 1963, p. 221). This speech serves to reinforce the powerful recontextualization of suffering and sacrifice. During the mythic journey suffering always enables and redeems the sufferer.

King also spoke of the contemporary value of sacrifice when he accepted the Nobel Prize. He accepted the award as African Americans endured a "long night of racial injustice" (King, 1964, p. 224). He mentions the sacrifices made in Birmingham, where African Americans marching for freedom were met with "fire hoses, snarling dogs, and even death (King, 1964, p. 224)." He mentions the murders of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and he mentions that African Americans also suffer because they are economically disempowered in America.

Suffering is a major theme in the speech King gave at the conclusion of the march from Selma to Montgomery. King speaks of literal suffering encountered during the march, "Some of our faces are burned from the outpourings of the sweltering sun. Some have literally slept in the mud. We have been drenched by rains." (King, 1965, p. 227)

While King is speaking of literal hardships encountered during the march, the literal suffering can also be seen as a metaphor for many other hardships endured by African Americans. For instance, King also speaks of the hardships of segregation and the denial of the vote to African Americans: "The threat of the free exercise of the ballot by the Negro and the white masses alike resulted in the establishing of the segregated society." (King, 1965, p. 228) King also mentions that African Americans are the victims of bombings of their homes and churches.

In a "Time to Break Silence," a speech dealing with the Vietnam War and not civil rights directly, King also speaks of suffering. However, in this speech King speaks primarily of suffering on a global level as opposed to simply African-American suffering; he speaks of suffering on a world-wide level. He is concerned not just with the suffering of African Americans but with the suffering of all the dark peoples of the world...

King states early in the speech on Vietnam that the United States government bears “their greatest responsibility in ending a conflict that has exacted a heavy price on both continents” (King, 1967, p. 232). The Vietnam War caused suffering for many reasons, among them being the redirection of money away from social programs. The United States government was not able to invest financial resources in the American poor because too much money was being spent on Vietnam. According to King, the war was a manipulation of the poor.

King also acknowledges the suffering of the Vietnamese when he speaks of the relationship between American Christians and the Vietnamese. He states that “We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers” (King, 1967, p. 234). The atrocities of Vietnam, according to King, caused America to stray from the intended destination of King’s journey. America is concentrating her energies in the wrong place. No good can come out of the suffering of Vietnam. It is not noble, and it is not redemptive. America has strayed from the path outlined in King’s mythic journey. King continues the discussion of the unredemptive suffering in Vietnam:

We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation’s only non-Communist revolutionary political force—the unified Buddhist church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men (King, 1976, p. 236).

Finally, the motifs of suffering and sacrifice in King’s myth appear in his final public speech, “I See the Promised Land.” King uses an extended metaphor to discuss sacrifice. He uses the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan. King recounts the story. A man has been robbed by thieves and left injured on the Jericho Road. Two very holy righteous men pass the injured man but do not stop to help. However, the Good Samaritan comes by and stops to help.

Although stopping to help does not prove to be a sacrifice for the Samaritan, King explains that the sacrifice comes in the form of the risk taken by the Samaritan when he explains why the previous two I do not stop:

It’s possible that these men were afraid. You see the Jericho Road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on the road I said to my wife, ‘I can see why Jesus used this as a setting for his parable.’ It’s a winding, meandering road. It’s really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1,200 miles, or rather 1,200 feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you’re about 2,200 feet below sea level. That’s a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the ‘Bloody Pass.’ And you know it’s possible that the priest and the Levite looked over at that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it’s possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure (King, 1968, pp. 284-285).

The Jericho Road was dangerous, and the first two men were afraid they might be robbed. The first two men ask the question, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me (King, 1968, p. 285)?” However, the Good Samaritan comes by and asks, “If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him (King, 1968, p. 285)?”

King then goes on to say that the audience in Memphis must be prepared to make sacrifices:

That’s the question before you tonight. Not, ‘If I stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as pastor?’ The question is not, ‘If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me? If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to them?’ That’s question (King, p. 285).

Through the use of the extended metaphor of the Good Samaritan, King is able to illustrate the importance of sacrifice to the quest for equality. The sacrifices necessary to help the sanitation strike in Memphis had become a microcosm for the larger struggle. It is also important that the sacrificer was a Samaritan. Samaritans were looked down on by Jews. If a Samaritan could risk his life for a Jew, then African Americans and whites can sacrifice to bring about the Promised Land at the end of King’s mythical journey.

KING’S LEGACY

King’s mythic journey allows African Americans to achieve victory in their struggle for equality. King’s mythic journey illustrates the global inclusiveness of King’s legacy. His journey includes all humanity, not just African Americans. His mythic vision is an all-encompassing quest for brotherhood among all people, so when King speaks of the Promised Land, he is not speaking of equality for only African Americans. He is speaking of the ability of all races of the world to live in harmony.

This, then, is the myth created by the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. He was a minister, political activist, and Christian. He wanted everyone to make it to the Promised Land. King’s rhetoric reveals a hero on a quest to achieve equality for African Americans. As a mythic hero, he was able to achieve great victories for his people, and these victories were achieved through great sacrifices. King ultimately sacrificed his life, but this sacrifice has become part of his rhetorically created myth. This sacrifice secured his place as an icon of the civil rights movement.

His mythic journey ends when he dies, having sacrificed his life so that all humanity may begin to reach the Promised Land of peace and brotherhood. His mythic legacy is indeed powerful, and he can be compared with figures whose lives created other hero myths, such as Christ, Moses, and even Abraham Lincoln.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The myth of Martin Luther King, Jr., represents the dominant view of race relations in this country. This myth defines race relations and offers a vehicle for understanding race relations in America. Our knowledge of race relations springs from this myth, helping races observe our commonalities, structuring our understanding of truth, defining our epistemic and

ontological understanding of race relations. This myth is compelling and dominates the collective psyche of our society. The mythic nature of discourse makes it compelling.

While the power and influence of myth cannot be denied, questions about the power of myth remain. What other myths dominate our societal values? Can we judge one myth to be better than others? Why do some groups accept certain myths and reject others? Must we judge certain myths as being more acceptable because they mesh with our cultural values? Can two divergent myths be accepted? Can two divergent myths be merged to create a new myth?

In proposing the mythic paradigm, I am not dismissing the importance of logic or narrative. I am proposing that man is a myth-making creature and in order to understand what drives human actions, we must understand human myth. By articulating the dominant myth guiding the civil rights struggle, I have illustrated that the mythic structure one accepts determines what actions one will take. A belief in a nonviolent hero will bring nonviolent actions. A belief in a myth calling for freedom, equality, and harmony for all races will bring about a society advocating freedom, equality, and harmony for all races.

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