

## Identification and Prophetic Rage: Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement

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**Abstract:** Religious foundations play as much a role in justifying American institutions as James W. Ceaser believes concepts of nature and History do. Looking at the rhetoric of two opponents during the Civil Rights Movement reveals the potential range for use of religious foundations, as well as the importance of the rhetorical figures, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sam Bowers, employing them. King and Bowers act as would-be “Lawgivers,” but ones fervently believing their positions and reinterpreting a national constitution as something new rather than creating a new and different one.

In his *Nature and History in American Political Development*, James W. Ceaser introduces a project considering how political leaders identify certain core values as central to the framework of how to govern and to what end.<sup>1</sup> He refers to this framework as the “foundational idea” and offers three kinds: nature, History, and religion. Foundational ideas emerge from conflicts among political elites. Elites wish to set the agenda for governing and seek to justify their agenda setting to the public that ultimately decides which agenda to select but lacks the organization, education, or inclination to set the agenda themselves. Setting the agenda, however, is not selling talking points of a particular policy position as much as its persuading the public to adopt the foundational idea on which that policy position and others rest. For example, Ceaser shows us how John Adams persuaded couching the justification for revolution and constitution of the new nation in terms of the modern conception of natural law. Ceaser then engages in a dialectic, where the foundational ideas of one generation become the target of revolutionary ideas for the next—the Democratic Republicans finding greater confidence in conceptions of History, such as the “Gothic hypothesis” instead of the dry, mechanical idea of nature.<sup>2</sup>

Ceaser sees the attention to political foundations as a way to reintroduce the importance of *ideas* to the field of political science. The current climate of the discipline is to look to methods not drawn from politics itself but other disciplines. Behavioral and economic approaches do not offer a complete picture of what individuals, either political elites or ordinary citizens, experience in the political world. We should not be surprised, since the current methodological tools are tuned originally for their respective fields. Critiquing these methods, however, requires an alternative, and the start for such an alternative is precisely this return to the political ideas that mobilize leaders and, in turn, the citizens they lead to reconstitute political institutions and mores on the foundational idea and, on the basis of the new foundation, reform government. Embracing foundational ideas as the primary level of analysis allows us to treat the results from other methods from a uniquely political perspective—one of hardnosed prudence—rather than as nervous expert fearing normative claims might contaminate their reputation for objectivity. Instead, scholars should adopt the same perspective as the elite and citizens do.

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Ceaser, *Nature and History in American Political Development: A Debate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> (Ceaser 2006, 22-26)

Ceaser's work offers an alternative and complementary argument to what Rogers Smith argues in *Stories of Peoplehood*.<sup>3</sup> Smith looks at how narratives organize people into groups who then act politically. Bound up in the narratives is a group identity that these people invest in the state. The trouble with identity is how it is premised on exclusion of other groups. Excluded groups are frequently part of the same states, thus suffer doubly as an inferior identity and the symbolic other against which the dominant identity narrates their superior position. Therefore, stories of peoplehood can both legitimate the modern state but also cause its greatest injustices, thus demanding greater attention in political science than scholars, particularly in American politics, are usually willing to offer. Ceaser's alternative complements Smith's work in how he offers the elite perspective to illustrate how these narratives come about and on what they are based. They come about because of political events the elites cause, and the elite base their narratives on foundational ideas that best explain how to interpret those events.

An extended speech, the format in which Ceaser presents his argument limits his ability to address his topic fully. As his respondents point out, his initial account of foundational ideas overlooks religion no sooner than does he introduce it, although Ceaser considers religious leaders and publics in how they interpret nature and History within their denominational contexts.<sup>4</sup> Also, Ceaser's attention is more bound up with the elite perspective and lacks an explanation of how to move from the elite foundation for a political platform and how the public—or a public—adopts that platform as their own. Instead, he remains more interested in showing how nature and History remained constantly at odds in the way opposing elites framed their platforms that lead to, first, American statelessness and, later, the somewhat flummoxed attempts to develop a modern, centralized state.

Foundational ideas are necessarily political, since the elite who formulate them do so for political ends. However, political elites very frequently differ over what those ends might be even as they might agree on what foundations are most useful. To kill two birds with one stone, I look at two religious foundations offered during the Civil Rights movement. Both were constructed to appeal to a certain audience and mobilize them to act politically. The

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<sup>3</sup> Rogers Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> (Ceaser 2006, 99, 124-126, 148-161) Of the three interlocutors, Rogers Smith is most supportive of Ceaser's project and also most interested in Ceaser's lack of emphasis on religious foundations. Smith hopes to show both Ceaser and the reader how one might view the presidency of George W. Bush as premised on a religious foundation.

first case is of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. King wanted to develop a broad-based coalition to pressure, even shame, recalcitrant Southern leaders into ending Jim Crow laws. His foundational idea was religious; it was divine love, *agape*. His method for propagating his position was his Christian interpretation of Ghandi's *satyagraha*. His audience was white progressives. White progressives made common cause with King even as they resisted nonviolent direct action. Where King and his audience conflicted was at the foundational level. King quite simply had a different conception of politics from his white progressive allies, requiring him to politicize his Christian beliefs into a foundation on which he could build a movement.

At the same time, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, Sam Bowers, adopted a religious foundation for his movement. He hoped to stymie all efforts Civil Rights leaders made in Alabama, seeing their activity as a violation of the divine order the White Knights must defend. He sought to use the same foundational idea, love, to the opposite end King embraced. Moreover, both King and Bowers share an audience—white Southerners, especially ones in Alabama. To address that audience, Bowers restricted divine love to the white race, a love that demanded violence against those who tempt the white race with false idols. The movement Bowers hoped to inspire was very narrow. He wanted only those willing to engage in violence in order to restore the old Southern aristocracy. His narrative, then, was as narrowly construed as King's was broadly. The racist message and violent methods Bowers used disguises a similarity in the use of narrative to help dramatize the common foundational ideas King and Bowers invoke. It is the narrative that gives elites the ability to persuade their audience of their foundational idea, since the audience only understands the value of the foundational idea when they see how it operates in the past to lead to the current political condition (one always in a state of crisis).

A narrative, for this paper, is simply the placing of the speaker and audience in a timeline defined not in months and years but measured by units of moral incline or decline. Therefore, a hundred years of similar moral condition is a moment in the narrative, while the fifty years of moral incline would be much longer. Since narrative is the method that elites use to persuade their audience, the conception of *time* King and Bowers use should draw our attention. To change how the audience understands the passage of time helps in their acceptance of new narrative. Accepting centuries as moments and decades as centuries is not intuitive. To persuade an audience of it requires use of a familiar narrative form: the

jeremiad. Religious foundations, at least in American history, depend on using the jeremiad to stir up traditional religious views among religious publics and focus their attention on comparing America to Israel. The comparison is not a new one, starting with the Puritan fathers, passed down to 19<sup>th</sup> Century authors like Melville, and secularized in Manifest Destiny and Historical notions of “progress”. Therefore, it is not surprise that both King and Bowers agree not only beyond their invocation of divine love is their invocation of American Israel, since the metaphor then permits them to assume the identify of an American prophet. However, we will find that the jeremiad can take multiple forms. King identifies the sinful as the segregationists, who must experience *agape* in action in order to atone for their sins and rejoin those pursuing the American promise of full equality. Bowers, on the other hand, uses the jeremiad not to purify the hearts of the sinful but the land the sinful invaded. The enemies, civil rights activists, are not merely misguided but viciously motivated to bury the remnants of Southern greatness. They are, then, irredeemable, as they have no desire to repent. They can only be chased out by fear or eliminated altogether.

After investigating religious foundations embedded in equally religious narratives, we will look at how the narratives link the foundational ideas to the identity of the founder. In other words, we will look at how King and Bowers personify the foundational idea and how that personification is necessary to capture the imagination of the audiences. No one experiences foundational ideas. Audiences sense them only the persons who represent the ideas, the elite who speak out in their name. Our investigation of foundational ideas, then, takes us to the consideration of Jean Jacques Rousseau’s description of the Lawgiver, whose figure most resembles King and Bowers in their attempt to unite a people on a religious foundation. There, we will find that Rousseau’s account of the Lawgiver rests on a religious foundation Rousseau hopes to maintain in creating a monotheistic religion avoiding the otherworldliness of Christianity, thus developing peaceful patriotism. Drawing from the work of Bonnie Honig and Chantal Mouffe, we find that Rousseau’s Lawgiver is diagnostic for the problem of how to conceptualize of foundations, one which introduces the constant conflict among the very elite Ceaser describes. The study of foundational ideas shows much promise when merged with they study of identity and conflict, since foundations create the conflict that necessitates new foundations.

### What is a political foundation?

A political foundation is, as Hugh Hecló says, an idea about an event.<sup>5</sup> The idea interprets the event, and the event is not something that “happens” but something political agents perform. Usually, the same people who cause the political event express the ideas about these events. In fact, the ideas about the event are not merely what inspire the events but the interpretation that these actors want others to use when observing the events. We find this in Ceaser’s understanding of the original American founding. Ceaser observes how John Adams wanted to frame the new constitution as an issue of natural rights in order to find an ancestral source for the guarantees the constitution protects. The founders could not rely on the tradition of English citizenship any longer, since the new nation was no longer English. What we see in Adams is how the elite, forming the constitution, made a *political* decision about the philosophical question of foundations.<sup>6</sup>

We can conclude several things from Ceaser’s example. First, political foundations are contingent. Nothing about the Constitution was necessarily bound up with the foundation in nature. Those who chose to formulate the Constitution also chose to express its foundation in one particular idea. Second, political foundations are persuasive. Adams was not concerned about the foundation in nature because he only wanted to choose the *right* foundation for the Constitution but also the one that would most likely produce agreement with the people ultimately responsible for its ratification, the colonists. Finally, foundational ideas contain internal logics limiting their possibilities for application. Ceaser frames the choice between natural and traditional English rights as a choice between foundations in nature and History respectively. Tradition relies on the carrying over of a previous identity the founders wanted to replace. Rights had to come from something old and even older than English tradition. If rights are built into the structure of nature, then the English traditions are merely an example of the pre-existing structure people access by reason. Only in this interpretation was the need met to find an a-historical foundation for their historical document.

The foundational idea was only the beginning. Following the passage of the final draft of the Constitution, the elite at the convention had to persuade their colonists of the legitimacy of the constitution *by appealing to the foundation they, the elite, had agreed upon*. The most

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<sup>5</sup> Hugh Hecló, *Christianity and American Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>6</sup> (Ceaser 2006, 22-26)

obvious example of this attempt to persuade colonists to ratify the constitution is *The Federalist*, in which Publius compliments the colonists by observing their ability to observe their natural rights with reason and, with that same reason, how the constitution creates a government most capable of preserving those rights. Ceaser points out how the Publius strenuously argues against the foundation physiocratic History as a source for interpreting the Constitution, indicating that ratifying the constitution is not enough. It must be ratified as a foundation rooted in the rational, observable present rather than the romantic, unperceivable future.

Yet the success of the attempts Publius made to dissuade the New Yorkers of a Historical foundation remain ambiguous. The purpose here is obviously not to determine how much success Publius had but to answer what exactly do these lessons tell us about political foundations. What we can conclude from the struggle Publius endured is that the event—the ratification of the constitution—is open for interpretation. The three persons behind Publius—Madison, Hamilton, and Jay—want to control the interpretation of the constitution in order to ensure not just the ratification of constitution but also its implementation. In a democratic system, however, they cannot claim control of the foundation. They must engage in persuasion against those who seek to interpret the event in their own terms. Frequently, those using Historical interpretations were skeptical of the Constitution. Moreover, those with their own view of nature saw the constitution as *violating* the very foundations Publius wished to use to ground it.<sup>7</sup> We must then remember one critical aspect of *The Federalist*—that it originally appears in articles of New York newspapers. To persuade a people to ratify a constitution requires reaching as many of them as possible, but the articles persuading them to act must also persuade them of *why* they should act the way the authors recommend. There is some irony of using a foundation of nature—which understands human beings as able to use reason to perceive natural laws—to persuade a public that opponents of the Constitution do not understand the natural laws they perceive. Nevertheless, what we conclude here is a fourth lesson—that interpretations the elite offer

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<sup>7</sup> (Ceaser 2006, 33-44) Ceaser sees the debate between Whigs and Democratic-Republicans as the time during which nature and History became most confused, since both sides sought to offer a historical narrative merged with the authority of nature. The historicization of nature into part of the American political tradition points to how the political use of the concept strips nature of its “eternity”. As the Founders became targets of new political elites, Ceaser shows how nature loses its “immanence” before Historical laws. History becomes immanent, even as it describes the past, since History refers to the rational laws inherent in the passage of time. Nature is subject to those laws. The competition Ceaser features here points to how elites must search for an idea the people will view *as foundational* not merely as a foundation.

are subject to dispute. The only two possibilities for there to be no dispute is where there is already agreement, thus negating the need for persuasion, or where there is the use of coercion over persuasion, thus ignoring the need for a foundation.

### **The Religious Foundation of Martin Luther King, Jr.**

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., sought to reinterpret American foundations in terms of a political event he hoped to create. The Civil Rights movement was not always the movement we see in black and white marches. It required the meeting of elites in small, hot rooms. The movement began, according to Richard Lischer, when King stood before an audience at Holt Street Baptist Church and delivered the sermon announcing and defending the Montgomery Bus Boycott. At that moment, and not before, civil rights activists identified their struggles with a religious foundation King represents in his public persona:

In a single spasm of growth [King] had shed the categories and confinements of philosophy and made himself one with the people. Here was an artifice more profound and subtle than the homiletician's playing with forms: the integration of civil guarantees and prophetic vision; the intuitive identification with the weariness and rage of the people; the sensitivity to the historical hour; and (not least the technical skill in manipulating rhetorical formulas—these were the bloodline benefits of an education in the black church. Out of the matrix of Mother Ebenezer, the sustainers and Reformers, and all his mentors and master in the Word, King was prepared to become the voice of the Movement. In the Holt Street speech, the Movement was born.<sup>8</sup>

According to Reverend Wyatt Walker, one of King's closest associates in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Movement began with mayor Theophilus Eugene "Bull" Connor's resistance to SCLC activist in Birmingham, Alabama:

While [Reverend Fred] Shuttlesworth, Martin Luther King, and other SCLC official hoped for positive news coverage, the press and the public showed little interest during the first few days of the movement. The demonstration to win the "heart and conscience" of Birmingham's population met stiff resistance not only from local segregationists, but from gradualists and liberals of both races, too, as well as a flood of national criticism. The first extensive news coverage occurred after a violent confrontation with Birmingham police on Sunday, April 7. Bull Connor provided the brutal images of segregation that Walker and the SCLC had looked for when he released a squad of growling police dogs. Walker jumped for joy and

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 89.

proclaimed over and over: “We’ve got a movement. We’ve got a movement. We had some police brutality. They brought out the dogs. We’ve got a movement.”<sup>9</sup>

The disagreement points to how the event King wishes to create was always in doubt, either because it had not fully started or because it was flagging (as it had in Albany, Georgia). The doubt rests in whether the display of King’s persona and audience identification began with core of African American activists at Holt Street or with the broadcast of King and those activists suffering at the hands of segregation. The need to discern *when* the movement began is, in part, the efforts for these two scholars to identify the movement itself, how King led it, and why his audience responded the way they did.

In fact, part of why Walker originally joined the SCLC was to assist King in finding a location to ignite national coverage of the fight for African American integration. SCLC leadership as S. Jonathan Bass tells us, mostly goaded Connor into the confrontations in Birmingham, Alabama.<sup>10</sup> Birmingham had a large, urban African American population and an adamantly racist mayor. The failure of the SCLC to ignite the movement in Albany, Georgia, came with the politeness city leadership used to treat SCLC resistance. Without direct conflict between SCLC and city leadership, there was no news. Without news, there is no national attention to the integration crisis in the South. Without national attention, integration remains unimportant to the national political agenda. In Bull Connor, the SCLC found a person “stupid” and racist enough to put up a fight with SCLC.<sup>11</sup> Of course, Connor had an interest in appealing to white racists, since he was running against a mayoral candidate with the backing of the Birmingham business elite. Connor hoped fighting civil rights activists might mobilize Concern Citizens Councils to rally for his election, since such a program worked for Governor George Wallace. The conflicts created the kind of action newspapers could use to sell papers, thus ensuring that the national attention would remain fixed on the otherwise insignificant industrial Southern town.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the “Letter from Birmingham Jail”* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 104.

<sup>10</sup> (Bass 2001, 96-99)

<sup>11</sup> (Bass 2001, 99)

<sup>12</sup> Bass explains how Connor’s extreme segregationism actually lost him his reelection campaign to a moderate segregationist, Albert Boutwell (Bass 2001, 100-101). Boutwell’s winning moderation on segregation fuses well with the explanation David L. Chappell gives in *A Stone of Hope* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina University Press, 2004), 153-178. He describes segregationists as much less organized for the publicity battle the NAACP and SCLC waged in the South, leading to a desperate attempt to respectability when the foundations for which King argued were already laid. The result was the kind of paranoid defenses that

The SCLC leadership calculated resistance according to maximizing media attention on integration. When a city ordinance effectively banned the marches the SCLC planned, King intentionally violated them, thus ensuring his trip to prison. The basis on which he violated the laws was not to become a martyr but over the question of whether he did more good showing solidarity with other jailed activists or staying out of jail to raise valuable resources for the always financially ailing SCLC budget. After lengthy solitary prayer and discussions with friends, King elected to protest in an illegal march and go to prison, where he refused bail for several days.<sup>13</sup> The press took great interest in the event, with papers like the *New York Times* writing sympathetic features and Soviet newspapers comment on the apparent hypocrisy of a democratic nation suppressing the voices its citizens.<sup>14</sup> King interpreted his imprisonment in the tradition of American civil disobedience in which, according to Thoreau, no greater sign of innocence is there than to be in jail. However, the style in which King portrayed his imprisonment in the historical work, “Letter in Birmingham Jail”, tells us much more about the event than simply what put King in prison. Rather, King used it as an opportunity to explain to the press the reasons individuals should support the movement King and the SCLC were trying to create and why, in particular, those sympathetic with the SCLC goals but not their methods should reconsider their position.

King identified the eight progressive white clergy as an audience for his letter. The letter is supposedly a response to the clergy’s demand that there be a cessation of direct, nonviolent action, since such tactics harm rather than help the extension of civil rights to African Americans. Rather than insisting on rights with a movement, the SCLC should show some patience as white citizens catch up with the worldviews that King already possessed. Again, Bass shows that the statement these eight clergy made was actually a reflection of the various ideological positions each of these clergy assumed. Rabbi Milton Grafman and Bishop Joseph Durick, for instance, both considered themselves liberal clergy aiming to improve the status of African Americans within the current political regime. Considering that Connor’s mayoral tenure was coming to an end in a contentious fight at the Alabama Supreme Court and the pressure each church encountered from radical white supremacist

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explained both African American superiority in publicity and their inherent inferiority—that Jews and (or) communists were behind the whole thing (Chappell 2004, 155).

<sup>13</sup> (Bass 2001, 106-109)

<sup>14</sup> (Bass 2001, 132)

groups, greater hostility from the very African Americans requiring help seemed only to place that help at greater risk. The word for this position is “gradualism.” Lurking behind the term is a foundation in left-leaning social gospel ideas of religious foundations. These ideas rested in a narrative of natural improvement in a democracy, one guaranteed by keeping Judeo-Christian principles up to date with the changes democracy introduces to the world.<sup>15</sup> Religion becomes a sort of booster for responsible technological development while retaining the moral compass to direct individual attention to assisting the greater integration of disadvantaged into that democracy. However, in Birmingham, the notion of a social gospel underlying economic progress required a recognition of the extent to which members of different races progressed. History shows that progress allows for greater freedom for white citizens and, therefore, more capable education of African Americans to the extent to which they could learn. Unlike Grafman, Durick, and Bishop Paul Hardin, Jr., of the Methodist church, Episcopalian Bishop Charles Colcock Jones Carpenter and Methodist bishop Nolan Harmon saw the African Americans of Birmingham as behind and needing assistance from white neighbors.<sup>16</sup>

King knew about none of this, since he had never met the eight clergy. They were his foil for the broader audience to which he appealed. Bass calls them his “symbolic audience”, but Bass ignores the importance of how the symbolism allows King to admonish his broader audience without offending them.<sup>17</sup> King addresses them to mitigate the blame King wishes to place on the shoulders of progressive white citizens across the nation. Addressing the clergy allows King to invoke the Christian image of the Pharisee, wherein the clergy are

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<sup>15</sup> Faith in human progress is the subject of both religious and secular works during the Progressive Movement. Mainline Protestants looked to the theology of Walter Rauschenbach’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis* and *Christianizing the Social Order*. Rauschenbach’s appeal to divine faith moved audiences more effectively than the drier, more philosophical works of progressive philosophers like John Dewey and Lionel Trilling. Chappell refers to the failure for secular progressivism to find broad appeal as “pulpit envy” (Chappell 2004, 18-24). The problem with secular progressivism is, according to Chappell, the absence of a identifying figure. Rauschenbach’s prophesies for perfecting the social order allowed him to stand in for the divine he mediated. Chappell argues that progressives had to wait until they found a man privately faithful but publicly progressive, and that man was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt’s death became the equivalent of the death of the public appeal for secular progressivism, hence introducing the cultural space for someone like King to pursue the causes of progressivism but more according to the more realistic social gospel of Reinhold Niebhur. In addition to King, one can also look to how Robert N. Bellah and, later, Martin Marty try to rescue social democracy with his account of the American civil religion. Robert Bellah, “The Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* Winter 1967; Martin E. Marty, “Two King of Civil Religion,” from *American Civil Religion* ed. Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper Book Forum, 1974) 139-160; Martin E. Marty, “Civil Religion: Two Kinds of Two Kings,” *Religion & Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 77-94.

<sup>16</sup> (Bass 2001, 28-35)

<sup>17</sup> (Bass 2001, 120)

affiliated with upholding the corrupt regime in their failure to defend the just men the regime imprisons. King writes his letter supposedly from prison, although Bass shows us that we might suspect it only began there, but the symbolic context permits King to adopt the rhetorical position Thoreau used but with greater emphasis on the religious tradition of civil disobedience Thoreau overlooked.<sup>18</sup> King spreads the American tradition across the variety of religious traditions found in the clergy he addresses, in order to show the particularly Christian denomination King represents has common ground with other progressive faiths. As a result, he can reestablish the identity of these religious groups as not so much denominational but as those who are for integration by way of direct action or against integration by way of “gradualism”, which is a defense of segregation in effect even if not in intent. As a result, the audience King wishes to persuade can cast their guilt for taking no action so far onto the eight clergy and renew a commitment to King’s movement.

King builds the new progressive consensus out of interpretations of the intellectual traditions of each faith. He constructs a narrative into which you could place Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic thought (as well as secular, philosophical thought). The narrative begins with finding in each tradition figures that prefigured King’s direct, nonviolent action. For Jews, King appeals to the prophet Amos—one of King’s favorite prophets from Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>19</sup> Amos comes from the Southern Kingdom of Judah to speak to the wealthier Northern tribes. Amos prophesies to the wealthy to treat those less well off with greater generosity. The wealthy, affiliated with the king and with the religious hierarchy, chase Amos back to the Southern Kingdom. Soon after, the Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria. In his appeal to Amos, King foreshadows the villain in the narrative we find in the letter, Elijah Muhammad, wherein the failure to heed the nonviolent message leads to the violence that risks destroying the entire nation.<sup>20</sup> For Protestants and Catholics, King appeals to Jesus of Nazareth and St. Paul.<sup>21</sup> Both Jesus and Paul prophesy rather than fight. In fact, Jesus restrains his apostle Peter from fighting those who come to arrest him. Paul experiences a conversion after a career persecuting Christians and ceases all violent action he once took against them. Instead, he begins a life of teaching that lands him very often in

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<sup>18</sup> (Bass 2001, 115-120)

<sup>19</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” (1963) reprinted in *Blessed Are the Peacemakers* by S. Jonathan Bass (op. cit.), 237-256 (249)

<sup>20</sup> (King 1963, 248).

<sup>21</sup> (King 1963, 239, 247, 249)

jails, from which he would write letters to the various churches he had help found. As Bass points out, King emulates Paul in his writing style, speaking to all religious peoples as if they were one mission Paul founded, admonishing them for their misguided action and recommending right action.<sup>22</sup> Finally, King references the story of Socrates, who stands before the Athenian jury and loses because of his desire to speak the truth rather than what the people want to hear. King again finds in an ancient example a person prefiguring his own experiences, but the symbolic audience, the eight clergy, are not those who initially reject King's message. They are the citizens of the state itself. The jury of Athens represented the whole city, just like the eight clergy represent, in the letter, the entire white church.<sup>23</sup>

King then creates a jeremiad that places greater moral value on direct action against the state, the kind that places a person in jail, for the purpose of *saving that same state*. The fact that Amos was not a citizen of the Northern Kingdom or that Jesus and Paul were not interested in saving the physical kingdom of Israel is not important for King, since the prefigures are as symbolic at the eight clergy he addresses. He merely wishes to show the larger audience how the eight clergy bear a strong resemblance to the priests exiling Amos or the Pharisees crucifying Jesus and Paul, while King resembles the prophets themselves. To add to this comparison, King invokes intellectuals who help systematize individual direct action. For Jews, King appeals to the ethics of Martin Buber.<sup>24</sup> For Protestants, King appeals to Bunyan and Tillich.<sup>25</sup> For Catholics, King looks to St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>26</sup> In each case, we find how the religious moralists support the violation of unjust laws in the way the biblical

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<sup>22</sup> (Bass 2001, 120) Bass points to two articles as influential on his observation: Mia Klein, "The *Other* Beauty of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,'" *College Composition and Communication* 32 (February 1981): 30 and Malinda Snow, "Martin Luther King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' as Pauline Epistle," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (August 1985): 319-20.

<sup>23</sup> (King 1963, 247, 249) King directly compares himself with Socrates and Jesus, whom he sees as very similar, since both were misunderstood extremists imprisoned by mobs and eventually executed. The comparison is orthodox and the result of the absorption of ancient philosophers into Christian theology during the Middle Ages. The comparison actually has less in common than you would think. Socrates never disobeys laws in the way that King implies when referring to Socrates as an extremist. In fact, Socrates hopes obeying the laws might help Athens return to her former glory (*Death of Socrates*), while Jesus of Nazareth intentionally violates laws either to show their unimportance in the face of the broader commandment to love G\*d and one's neighbor or to reveal himself as the Way to those who would listen (depending on who you read). See Karl Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus: The Paradigmatic Individuals* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1957), ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Ralph Manheim, 94-96. The relationship with Socrates as unbeliever might help illuminate King's use of Mahatma Gandhi as "brown saint". King goes so far to pair Gandhi as an equal to Jesus of Nazareth. See Martin Luther King Jr., "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience," *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987) 48.

<sup>24</sup> (King 1963, 244)

<sup>25</sup> (King 1963, 249, 244 respectively)

<sup>26</sup> (King 1963, 244)

and historical figures did. King, then, represents the true, prophetic role that religious leaders define in criticizing government failures. The eight white clergy, we know, are guilty of being Pharisees, since they are not in prison cells next to King but in their studies writing letters decrying the very action that put King in prison.

King must discredit denominational leadership in order to ensure that those he wishes to persuade to interpret the event he helped create in the way he needs them to. King must occupy a moral high ground that places him as the moral authority over traditional authority and, thus, give him the legitimacy to decide for all religious peoples the proper course of action. King selects a religious foundation for the obvious reason that he is already a religious authority among some denominations, and the current spirit of ecumenicism among many liberal Protestant groups gave him greater entrance into the religious world than it might have earlier in the century. By dividing laity from their denomination's leadership, he can then lead the people in marches. The laity ignores pastoral calls for gradualism, since those who insist on preserving an unjust status quo are the moral equivalent to those who killed Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>27</sup> The result for denominational leadership is that they are cornered. If they oppose King, then they are not legitimate interpreters of their own denominational authority. If they support King, then they are subject to King's authority. Moreover, as Bass points out, the actual eight clergy found themselves in a great deal of trouble for which King would have no sympathy. The Baptist and Presbyterian ministers faced strong segregationist resistance among their laity and did not have an independent church hierarchy in charge of their appointments. If they as ministers spoke out against segregation, the church elders could fire them.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Obviously, such an appeal does not work for Jewish members of King's audience. King appeals to the "civil disobedience" found in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abendnego's refusal to follow the laws of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. King then compares their resistance to early Church resistance to Roman persecution (from which Jews also suffered), and American colonists opposing the taxes levied on tea (the civility of such disobedience we can doubt). We are familiar with these comparisons, as they group together the Judeo-Christian consensus on moral issues, but King then applies them to the treatment of Jews under Hitler and Hungarians under Communists. King says, "Even so, I am sure that had I lived in Germany at the time [of Hitler's rule], I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers." Bass points out that older version of the "Letter" included after the word "brothers" the line, "even though it was illegal." (Bass 2001, 245)

<sup>28</sup> Bass talks about how Pastor Ed Ramage in King's letter, the minister leading the First Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, remained a moderate integrationist. To avoid splitting his congregation, he agreed to leave for an assignment in Houston, Texas. Pastor Earl Stallings, the minister in charge of First Baptist, endured years of organized segregationist resistance to his moderate integrationist position. He, too, left for a new appointment, one outside of Atlanta, Georgia (Bass 2001, 208-223)

Rabbi Grafman particularly struggled with divisions among Jewish activists from the North and his own temple in the South. Bass tells us that the activists sympathized with King and condemned Grafman for betraying the legacy of the Holocaust. Grafman found such criticism easy for Northern Jews who could travel to Alabama for a week and leave. Their activism, frequently adorned with recognizably Jewish attire, could potentially open Grafman and the Temple Emanu-El at which he was rabbi to the very persecution Jews suffered in Nazi Germany. In this ironic change of allegiances, we find Jews observing the Protestant Christian King a better interpreter of Jewish tradition than one of their own rabbis, showing how King could ultimately create a multi-denominational movement in support of integration and African American civil rights by discrediting traditional denominational authority. Bass tells us that Grafman bitterly complained that the rabbis participating in the marches never applied to fill nearby temple vacancies, preferring the relative safety of their Northern synagogues.<sup>29</sup>

Upon assuming the prophetic authority usually reserved for denominational leadership, King could then provide a narrative to explain how the crisis he created was nonetheless inevitable. He narrates the experience of African Americans of unkept promises creating frustration among African Americans to the point where they will either take nonviolent action, as King wishes, or violent action, as Black Power leaders like Elijah Muhammad prefers. King prefers the reinterpretation of the Constitution in terms of *agape* over Black Power and finds in his nonviolent methods the perfect illustration of how that *agape* is more powerful than mere coercion. King can differentiate himself from other militant black leaders as harbinger of peace for white Americans and effective change for African Americans. The only violence during King's marches came from white law enforcement, who beat or sent dogs after the nonviolent activists. With the media drawn to Birmingham in hope of story, Americans witness the attacks as unprovoked and akin to the suffering various figures from their own religious traditions. King could exploit the similarity of his treatment with the ancient figures when addressing that same audience in his speeches and writings.

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<sup>29</sup> (Bass 2001, 174-178)

King's speeches nearly always had a section in which he described the love at the foundation of the movement. He spoke of that love as *agape*, not of *eros* or *philia*.<sup>30</sup> King chooses *agape* because one does not need to feel romantic or fraternal love for a fellow citizen but only the love of that person as equal in G\*d's eyes. Since G\*d creates all humans equal, they each bear a divinely ordained dignity each of us must observe in our laws and in our customs. *Agape* resembles in structure the a-historical nature Adams preferred as the original founding, since G\*d is ancestral and eternal in the same way nature is. King's references to Aquinas and Tillich are particularly informative here, since they likely help inform his rather orthodox understanding of the Christian conception of *agape*. King radicalizes his conception by extending it to African Americans, who, under a gradualist position, receive love not as equals but as inferiors to whom white citizens either can or cannot condescend to help. *Agape* becomes the aggressive demand for immediate reform, with the all the urgency King as biblical prophet demands. Those who suffer on behalf of fighting for placing *agape* at the center of American foundations and, thus, pass laws or enforce existing laws ensuring full citizenship for African Americans. Failure for white citizens to live according to *agape* leads to the path to Elijah Muhammad and other Black Power leaders that will bring violence as an expression of hatred rather than nonviolence as an expression of love. According to Abraham Heschel, we find, in Amos the bearer of chastisement in order to turn Israel away from certain doom.<sup>31</sup> King insists the same for white Americans—that they accept his chastisement or experience the long summers of black rage.

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<sup>30</sup> (King 1987, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice" 8-9, "The Power of Nonviolence" 13, "An Experiment in Love" 19-20, "Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience" 47, "Walk for Freedom" 83-84, "The Current Crisis in Race Relations" 88, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age" 129-130)

<sup>31</sup> Heschel discusses Amos as part of the prophetic tradition of chastisement in the Hebrew Scriptures. "The central message of the prophets is the insistence that *the human situation can be understood only in conjunction with the divine situation.*" "The opposite of freedom is not determinism, but hardness of heart. Freedom presupposed openness of heart, of mind, of eye and ear...Freedom is not a natural disposition, but G\*d's precious gift to man. Those in whom viciousness becomes second nature, those in whom brutality is linked with haughtiness, forfeit their ability and therefore their right to receive that gift. Hardening of the heart is the suspension of freedom. Sin becomes compulsory and self-destruction. Guild and punishment become one." Heschel then cites Amos 8:11-12: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it." Heschel ends his chapter saying, "And yet, the word of G\*d never comes to an end. For this reason, prophetic predictions are seldom final. Now word is G\*d's final word. Judgment, far from being absolute, is conditional. A change in man's conduct brings about a change in G\*d's judgment. No word is G\*d's final word." Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962) 193-194.

King always ties the religious narratives for speaking truth to power as linked to the revolutionary doctrines of the Founders and, as at the same time, against the Founders themselves. In the “Letter”, we see Jefferson in both lights. He groups Jefferson in with the multi-denominational extremists as the American expression of an extremist defense of equality. Only a few paragraphs later, however, he then points to the narrative of slavery as prior to any words Jefferson wrote. The narrative of American equality requires agents of extremism to oppose the establishments content with “gradualism” as the byword for the status quo. Jefferson is the perfect image for King, since Jefferson was one of the most revolutionary of the Founders and, yet, also a recalcitrant slaveholder. In “The Current Crisis in Race Relations”, King refers to Jefferson’s status as “maladjusted.”<sup>32</sup> To be “maladjusted” does not mean to be neurotic but to refuse to adjust to the unjust conditions in which one lives. Again, we see the familiar list of extremists—Amos, Jesus, and Jefferson reappear. King adds Abraham Lincoln and removes St. Paul. About Jefferson, however, he says that we should be, “maladjusted as Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out in words lifted to cosmic proportions, ‘All men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’”<sup>33</sup> Again, Jefferson is both well adjusted to injustice and maladjusted to it. Jefferson embodies with white American South King addresses as much as they clergy do. And yet, Jefferson symbolizes America more broadly, a nation imperfectly rooted in equal rights. Equal rights began in the Pilgrim Fathers, who landed *after* slavery began in the New World, “Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here.”<sup>34</sup> American foundations suffer at heart from an ambivalence over the race question. King presents the final choice: after centuries of oppression, African Americans have discovered that they deserve equal respect in private affairs and rights in public affairs. Either the nation pay heed to King’s message or else betray its moral calling and descend into racial violence.

For King, then, we find rage not as what motivates his movement but what might motivate his audience to fall in with his movement. If one does not choose to love a group of fellow citizens, those citizens will build up resentment that leads, eventually to its violent

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<sup>32</sup> (King 1987, 89)

<sup>33</sup> (King 1987, 89-90)

<sup>34</sup> (Bass 2001, 253-254)

release. If white citizens do not take direct action with King, then that is most certainly what will happen; hence, gradualism is akin to segregation, since gradual efforts rely on the good graces of capricious white Americans who will likely respond to black rage not with greater equality for those raging in the streets but for more “law and order”—the very causes of black rage in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

King reveals how the religious foundations for his movement were coeval with the movement itself. King chooses *agape* as a Christian concept capable of incorporating like-minded members of his audience, even though they were differently denominated. What determined this foundation was the common ground of faith King shared with that audience, hence the possibility for creating dissent over civil rights among those of a similar denominational background. In fact, the choice for a religious foundation clearly creates an opportunity for persuasion that King saw lacking in the Historical narratives of the Black Power movement. While disputing the foundations of ambivalent, white clergy, he had to dispute the foundations of black radicals he saw threatening the historical movement he wanted to create. All the while, we see the Civil Rights movement King helped start not as inevitable but the result of contingent decisions made among a number of political actors: to go to jail or to fundraise, to protest in Birmingham or find a place less explosive, to frame the letter around religious images or American ones.

### **The Religious Foundations for Sam Bowers**

The inclusion of Sam Bowers in this essay must be confusing for some readers. Bowers by no means achieved the same status as King, even as a villain. Bowers, as the Imperial Wizard of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, seems like a thug, a murderer, and a virulent racist. But, then again, were there not a number of rogue white terrorists trying to intimidate the white and black Civil Rights activists? What makes Bowers so special? There are two

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<sup>35</sup> The eight white clergy to whom King addresses his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” inadvertently tap into exactly this kind of rage when invoking law and order not as a euphemism but as the only way to progress to racial justice soberly. They argue in their Good Friday Statement (the one to which King was responding), “Just as we formerly pointed out that ‘hatred and violence have no sanction in our religious and political traditions,’ we also point out that such actions as incite to hatred and violence, however technically peaceful those actions may be, have no contributed to the resolution of our local problems. We do not believe that these days of new hope are days when extreme measures are justified in Birmingham” Then, they conclude, “We further strongly urge our own negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets. We appeal to both our white and negro citizenry to observe the principles of law and order and common sense” (Bass 2001, 236).

answers to that question. First, we find in the work of Charles Marsh a profound insight into the mind of Bowers.<sup>36</sup> He was more than just a racist brute but a man with a twisted view of the ancestral South as the land of great white planters and the role G\*d plays in the restoration of the proper place for the declining white aristocracy (of which Bowers believed himself to be a part).

The political foundation for Bowers was also Christian. It was more narrowly Christian than King's ecumenical *agape*. Rather, it was rooted in a jeremiad that offered a narrative not of inward purity motivating conversion to peace but a holy crusade by G\*d's champions against the forces of evil. We find in Hecló's work, as well as the original study of the American jeremiad, the temptation to trace jeremiads back to some increasingly progressive Puritan concept of "the elect", in which the original elect—the Puritans themselves—become the American people.<sup>37</sup> Such a view usually supports the notion of American exceptionalism, a notion boosted by the exceptional status America has as both a highly developed and highly religious state. Would-be founders like Bowers help explode this belief. Because Bowers mobilized only thousands and only in his particular region of the South, we might be tempted to write him off. However, the purpose in looking at Bowers is to show how the jeremiad he preaches is not progressive but regressive, one that reasserts white aristocratic privilege the Civil Rights movement threatens. Moreover, Bowers utilizes works of a bygone era of "social science" to help inform his radical biblical views.<sup>38</sup> It does not matter that Bowers uses them selectively or poorly but that he used them effectively

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Marsh, "High Priest of the Anti-Civil Rights Movement: The Calling of Sam Bowers," *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 49-81.

<sup>37</sup> Hecló, *pace* Alexis de Tocqueville, sees Christianity, not "religion" generally, as the source of values preventing American democracy from becoming too radical and, therefore, oppressive. He points to King as the last to repeat "the time-honored call. Americans must turn revived, more authentic Christian hearts toward political action that will reform society and institutionalize G\*d's call to righteousness and justice. However, his words were also a lament that indicated how, by the middle of the twentieth century, the easy conjoining of American Christianity and American patriotism had produced a fundamental complacency. That self-righteous complacency of a 'Christian nation'—long and quietly eroded by even deeper forces—set the stage for what happened next. That next big thing was, of course, the Sixties" (Hecló 2007, 79-80). More liberal scholars see the decline not the result of a decline in a Christian conception of America but in the adoption of a civil religion Americans failed to live up to. See also Sidney Mead, "The 'Nation with a Soul of a Church,'" *Church History*, 36 #3 (September 1967); Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> (Marsh 1997, 59) Marsh describes Bowers' major influences outside of biblical sources as the works of Paul de Lamoignon, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Count Arthur de Gobineau. Each of these thinkers proposed the racialist theories popular in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. See James W. Ceaser, "America as a Racial Symbol: The 'New History' of Arthur de Gobineau" *Reconstructing America: The Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 87-105.

enough to persuade his limited audience to murder and destroy property in order to restore the divinely ordained white aristocracy.

Bowers understands the Christian foundations of America as directly linked to the divinity, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>39</sup> The life, death, and resurrection are together the one “Empirical Fact” on which Bowers rests all his assumptions concerning American Christian foundations. First of all, since Jesus of Nazareth is the true Son of G\*d, He has fulfilled the promise made to Abraham and, thus, ended the Jewish faith. All Jews after Jesus are imposters.<sup>40</sup> These imposters then become the cartel that infiltrates the South with the Civil Rights movement as a front. Because they deny the divinity of Jesus, they are atheists. Because of their intentions, they are either socialists or communists (for Bowers, a distinction without a difference). Against the false foundations of the communist cartel mobilizing African Americans, Marsh juxtaposes his own worldview. Marsh argues to see more than psychotic rambling in what Bowers says, and, for the time being, we should follow his advice, since foundations need not be morally defensible to be foundations nonetheless.

Bowers argues that there are five parts to the “logos” of American life.<sup>41</sup> The first is the Empirical Fact. The second is the four-part Reformation of Christianity (the four parts representing four sources informing American Christianity—Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and John Bunyan). The final three are each uniquely American: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Great Writs of Common Law. Within these last three we find a hierarchy of laws. LAW is G\*d’s will; Law is its perfect implementation on earth; law is man’s best efforts to imitate Law; and legality is the manipulation of law for one’s own gain.<sup>42</sup> The Empirical Fact is LAW, the Reformation Law, The Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Writs law. As laws become more human, they become more secular, hence, more derivative. The hierarchy of laws reflects the hierarchical positions Bowers sees among all things, especially in race and, in fact, his position over his own White Knights. Although embracing the same sources for a religious foundation as King, Bowers proclaims the world fundamentally unequal. Bowers hopes to show that inequality in his superior use of violence against the invading civil rights activists.

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<sup>39</sup> (Marsh 1997, 62)

<sup>40</sup> (Marsh 1997, 73-74)

<sup>41</sup> (Marsh 1997, 75-76)

<sup>42</sup> (Marsh 1997, 76)

Bowers sees the Civil Rights movement as legality. Since the motive for legality is intentionally deceptive and self-serving, Bowers leaves open no possibility for reconciliation. Bowers, unlike King, sees his opponent not as ignorant but as malevolent—intentionally undermining the divinely ordained social order of the South.<sup>43</sup> To combat legality, Bowers invokes the Law, which he finds in biblical revelation. Bowers does not look in the Bible for prefigures of peaceful reconciliation prophesying, at their own peril, national ills the government must confront. Instead, he looks for prefigures of violent confrontations with those who wish harm on the chosen people. Bowers, then, retains the metaphor of an American Israel, just as King did. Religious foundations require America to resemble the kingdom that religion celebrates, whether it is the Kingdom of Judah or the Kingdom of Heaven. However, Bowers interprets the prophet for the American Israel differently. Bowers calls himself a “preacher”, who, unlike the “priest”, goes out into the world to stir up the people to defend the nation from sin.<sup>44</sup> The prophet who most resembles a preacher is Elijah from, ironically, the book First Kings in the Hebrew Scriptures.

As Marsh explains, the prophet Elijah is a violent man. When King Ahab of Judah sanctions the worship of the pagan god of rain, Baal, Elijah proclaims that the true god, YHWH, will punish Israel with a drought—an appropriate punishment for worshipping a false god of rain. After the drought takes its toll on the kingdom, Elijah finally prevails on Ahab to allow a competition between him and the priests of Baal to end the drought. The competition takes place over offerings, one to Baal and one to YHWH. The representatives of the true god will be able to call upon their divinity to ignite the offering and, thus, have the power to end the drought. The priests of Baal go first, praying loudly and ritually cutting themselves. After an extended display and great agitation, the priests of Baal achieve nothing and surrender. Before calling upon YHWH, Elijah saturates his offering with water, now a very precious resource. Elijah then simply calls on YHWH to ignite the offering, Who then immediately responds with a bolt of lightning that sets ablaze the waterlogged kindling, wood, and meat. Ahab acknowledges Elijah as the victor and rededicates Israel to YHWH. In the mean time, Elijah calls the people of Israel to escort the priests of Baal to the nearby riverbed and slaughter them.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> (Marsh 1997, 50, 65-66, 68)

<sup>44</sup> (Marsh 1997, 63-64)

<sup>45</sup> 1 Kings 17-18

In Bowers' narrative of American Israel, the priests of Baal are the Jews, communists, and civil rights leaders (all of whom are more or less the same), and he is Elijah. He seeks to show those to whom the South is promised the evil lurking behind Civil Rights and the extent to which the chosen people must go to defend their holy land. The primary way Bowers designates his comrades is with the title "knight", implying the superior place in the racial hierarchy Bowers believes white Southerners occupy and must restore. Privately, Bowers places himself even above the Knights, believing them to be merely "rednecks" while Bowers descends, along his mother's line, from a family of proud Methodist preachers, distinguished attorneys, and a member of Congress.<sup>46</sup> His appeals to an ancestral South reflects Ceasar's discussion of History as a foundation, yet the History Bowers invokes is not a philosophy of History, although one of his primary sources twisted rooted his analysis in a twisted understanding of Hegelianism.<sup>47</sup> Rather, Bowers appeals to a Sacred History that uproots Christianity from its Jewish heritage and places it in a white American context. Jesus is not Jewish but a Galilean, since the very fact of Jesus makes Judaism obsolete. Christianity is an Anglo-Saxon religion most perfectly expressed in the freedom-loving Law in American government that the Jews seek to manipulate in order to undermine what Jesus gave to his elect, the white race.<sup>48</sup>

Bowers imagines the ancestral South as identical to the South of his mother and her lineage. In her and her forebears, he encounters what Frank Ankersmit calls, "the sublime historical experience."<sup>49</sup> Right-wing appeals to History are appeals to tradition. The tradition to which Bowers appeals is the tradition of racial hierarchy that had its heyday in the period during which his mother's forebears lived. Since Bowers cannot live a hundred years before his birth, he will rally friends and comrades and recreate that world in the here and now with all the violence and fear-mongering it requires. What motivates those like Bowers is a feeling of loss and need for recovery, a feeling of human agency against an unseen force, yet the feeling is a paradox, since Bowers never actually lived in the time he imagines. Worse, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century he imagines likely never existed in the way he imagined it, meaning that he thinks he lost *no one ever really possessed*.

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<sup>46</sup> (Marsh 1997, 50-51, 60)

<sup>47</sup> See note 38.

<sup>48</sup> (Marsh 1997, 78-81)

<sup>49</sup> Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 352-354.

The events Bowers hoped to bring this imagined ancestral South back to life were acts of white terrorism. Bowers understood the terrorism as linked to the subtle violence G\*d uses even in the Christian Scriptures. Bowers describes his conversion experience as G\*d striking him with a blackjack. He says, “G\*d ‘used his blackjack on [St.] Paul a lot more vigorously than he did on Sam.’”<sup>50</sup> He saw his prophecies linked to the same violence he sees behind all divine actions. He sent out Knights to harass civil rights activists. After periods of agitation and threats, the White Knights would then turn underground, leaving a permanent feeling of fear—where the will to violence was then sufficiently known. Marsh describes the effects, “Acts of sabotage would erupt often without ostensible logic, creating an environment of fear as inscrutable as divine wrath.”<sup>51</sup> G\*d is violent, and He is random. For the White Knights to serve Him, they must also imitate Him.

As the popularity of the White Knights increased, Bowers’ belief he could finally defeat the pagan invasion increased, climaxing in the murder of three civil rights activists. Of course, the moment Bowers experienced the successful “event”, he sought to control its interpretation in a statement he made to the media; moreover, he hoped to show the power of the white Southerner in the inability for the federal government to convict a white man for killing a Jewish man or conspiring violence against African Americans.<sup>52</sup> As the federal investigations into the White Knights increased, Bowers was left with fewer and fewer members, eventually leading to him to view the situation not of a cabal of white resistance but of him alone against the rest of the world. He left several hung juries behind him until finally convicted of a considerably lesser charge than the premeditated murder he masterminded.

Unlike King, Bowers appealed to a narrow audience of white Southerners, especially white Southern segregationists. Since Bowers wanted to prevent integration, he also wanted to prevent greater federal involvement. By using his Elijah narrative, he hoped to persuade his target audience, white Southerners, that they were a people under attack and had to respond to defend the land G\*d gave them. Otherwise, they will be subject to whore of Babylon. To achieve the events he planned required little in the way of active volunteers. Rather, he only needed fellow travelers to become deputies in law enforcement who would then overlook his more aggressive tactics. The trouble with Bowers’ methods, from a strictly

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<sup>50</sup> (Marsh 1997, 54)

<sup>51</sup> (Marsh 1997, 57)

<sup>52</sup> (Marsh 1997, 66-67, 71-72)

pragmatic point of view, is that the very audience he wanted to win over became disgusted with the violence and the way Bowers perpetuated the reputation of Southern violence, stupidity, and backwardness—the kind already popularized as early as William Jennings Bryant’s defense of the Bible during the *Scopes* trial and resurrected by Bull Connor and George Wallace. Rather than grassroots acts of violent defiance, Bowers inspired Southerners to find a more acceptable way to preserve the status quo—to worship in segregated churches that isolated political events to extremists outside its sanctuary.<sup>53</sup>

### **Religious Foundations: Implications**

The two narratives provide us two very different examples of one type of foundation, religion. What we see in American religious foundations is what Hecllo tells us—that they are historically Christian until King. King and Bowers refer to many of the same figures: Jesus, St. Paul, St. Thomas Aquinas, Paul Bunyan. They serve as prefigures, as precedents, for the kinds of activities King and Bowers wish for their publics to take. Where King and Bowers divide is, obviously, over the narrative; as a result, we see them select different prefigures to imitate. King chooses those who suffer nobly. Because his audience is larger than Bowers’, he also chooses figures who appeal to a broader range of people. Bowers chooses Elijah to narrate the violence of the White Knights as not merely just but as a white Christian’s duty. Both attached narratives using these prefigures to the same document—The Declaration of Independence—in seeking to identify the divinity Jefferson invokes in their religious narratives. These narratives are efforts to control the interpretations of events, but King succeeded where Bowers failed. Bass points to Wyatt Walker as an effective campaigner for King as the modern St. Paul. Marsh sees Bowers not as unable to control the immediate response to Southern whites but the response Southern whites had to the precipitous drop in their reputation across the county.

With respect to Ceaser’s categories for foundational ideas, we find elements of nature and History in the religious foundations of King and Bowers. King appeals to G\*d as a sort of anthropomorphic nature, while Bowers sees G\*d as ordaining a race to act in History. However, both retain a sense of the other foundational idea. King may see progress as contingent on nonviolent direct action, yet he is nonetheless dedicated to progress. He battles the “myth of time” not because progress is not real but merely because it is not

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<sup>53</sup> (Chappell 2004, 318-319, Marsh 1997 “Douglas Hudgins: Theologian of the Closed Society,” 82-112)

immanent. Therefore, the progressive narrative Social Gospellers originally developed merely ignored the efforts of everyday preachers to ensure that such progress continues not merely financially but morally. Meanwhile, the Historical narrative Bowers develops makes sense only if G\*d ordains his chosen people because of some inferiority He creates in the peoples he does not chose. To explain that natural inferiority, Bowers must attribute some inherent evil in those who seek to undo what is left of the ancestral South.

Religious foundations, then, assimilate into the divine entity they assume both the ideas of nature and History. The elite who use religious foundations then interpret both concepts into an invisible agent sanctioning whatever action they perform and mediating the divine, thus authoritative, interpretation of why they perform those actions. The philosopher who originally formulated this approach to religious foundations is Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract*.<sup>54</sup> Rousseau refers to the political use of religious foundations as part of a strategy the Lawgiver uses to persuade a group of individuals to accept the laws the Lawgiver writes. Because the Lawgiver is a foreigner, she can have no place in the regime she founds; therefore, she has no reason for bias in the way she creates the laws. However, she is also much more talented than the people she needs to persuade to accept her laws; therefore, she must lie to the people about the source of her laws.<sup>55</sup> She tells them that she is not the author of the constitution but, rather, a mediator of the divine who, through her, wrote the divine will for the chosen nation.<sup>56</sup> Here, the divine resembles nature, since both are eternal.

Later in *The Social Contract*, Rousseau discusses the importance of the Civil Religion in binding together the city the Lawgiver helps found.<sup>57</sup> Rousseau explains two kinds of religious foundation commonly used. Pagans have a religion of the citizen that affiliates the state with a god who then battles in heaven as the citizens battle on earth. The trouble with a pagan religion is how the mythology inspires violence among cities, hence limiting its utility for the city. After all, it is hard for a city to prosper when focusing its resources on battle.<sup>58</sup> The trouble with the perfect Christian religion, “the religion of man”, is that it develops citizens utterly disinterested in the city itself. Perfect Christians treat earthly existence as

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1968), trans. Maurice Cranston.

<sup>55</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 86)

<sup>56</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 87)

<sup>57</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 176)

<sup>58</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 178)

merely a waiting room for heavenly glory and would rather experience purifying suffering over mutual self-defense.<sup>59</sup>

The greatest abomination is to combine the violence of the pagan religion and the political indifference of Christianity. Rousseau sees this combination in the late medieval Catholic Church of his time—turning Christians not only against other Christians for their heresies but, worse, turning fellow citizens against each other.<sup>60</sup> Since Rome rules the Church separately from the city, the cities divide into two regimes, forcing citizens to select one or the other and fight for the side they choose. Moreover, the violence of paganism makes true Christianity impossible to perform, thus ruining the city’s capacity for peace and a Christian’s capacity for divine meditation. The opposite of the Catholic Church is the Civil Religion. The Civil Religion posits a monotheistic god that rewards in heaven just acts citizen perform on earth. The divinity serves a strictly political purpose; it exists as the god the Lawgiver invokes as the authority on which the city’s constitution rest.<sup>61</sup> The religion itself merely upholds constitutional institutions and preserves the public ethos of justice and tolerance. While the divine is the source an eternal authority sanctioning the Lawgiver’s constitution, the Civil Religion is the Historical fusion of the worship of the divine (religion of man) with the good of the state (religion of the citizen). Foundations utilizing G\*d-as-nature prefer authority to impose laws, while foundations utilizing Religion-as-History emphasize how religious and political values agree on what actions to take. Combining them gives the elite the authority they need to (re)found government and the people a new source of common identity in the religious ideals they share.

In light of King and Bowers as examples from the Civil Rights movement, Rousseau seems confused over the effects Christianity has on citizens. Bowers appears as the modern, American equivalent of the Catholic Church. He finds in religion a hierarchy requiring the subjugation of African Americans for the superior interests of white Americans. Bowers emphasizes the differentiation between true Christians and the false Jews, the chosen white race and the duplicitous black race, the freedom-loving Protestants and the servile Catholics.<sup>62</sup> Yet, Bowers loses. In fact, one scholar argues that figures like Bowers and other

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<sup>59</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 179, 181)

<sup>60</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 181)

<sup>61</sup> (Rousseau 1968, 186)

<sup>62</sup> (Marsh 1997, 59). To learn more about the broader Klan terrorism against Southern Jews, see Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan’s Campaign Against the Jews* (University Press of Mississippi, 1996).

KKK leaders actually inadvertently assisted the Civil Rights movement.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, King adopts a “true” Christian point of view, one rooted in divine love, but with a concern for the vitality of the state rather than the indifference behind which many white Protestants hid. King’s politicized *agape* is by no means the only expression of African American Christianity. Lischer points to how King had to overcome ministers of the Sustainer tradition, who sided with white gradualists in their approach civil rights.<sup>64</sup> In fact, when we look at the methods Bowers and King adopted, we see the inverse of Rousseau’s predictions. Bowers hoped to merge his religious foundation with local law enforcement in order to become the inquisitor against civil rights activists. On the other hand, King incorporated the gospel into the *satyagraha* Gandhi developed during Indian Independence. The suffering nonviolent activists endured became the fodder for press coverage, then showing the public the sins of the state and the need for greater understanding and reform.

In both cases, we witness the attempt to fuse a Christian political foundation with the state, even if the method and the agenda are different. Rousseau constructs the fundamental narrative of founding—a Lawgiver gives laws (and, ideally, gives laws for the good of those who receive them rather than the Lawgiver herself); however, he naturalizes tendencies about Christianity and paganism he observes or belief in which he inherits from previous thinkers (Machiavelli). Yet, the examples of Bowers and King point to the weakness of these characterizations. Rousseau naturalizes Christianity and pagan religions, yet the “natures” of Christianity and paganism are not so much observed as ascribed. Rousseau wants to create a dichotomy of inferiors out of which he can invoke both the enemy of Enlightenment thought, the Church, to make his proposed alternative all the more attractive. Rousseau’s project is to create a state not rooted in the artificial hierarchies of church but in the equality and unity found in common citizenship. As Hecló argues in his interpretation of Tocqueville, what Rousseau sees as natural enemies, Tocqueville found in America as natural allies.<sup>65</sup>

We see that in the different interpretation King gives of Socrates in Athens. Athens possesses the warlike pagan religion of the citizens that supposedly creates great fealty among citizens but antagonism among the cities; however, we see that there exists the same antagonism inside the city against Socrates, who was accused of impiety. King interprets

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<sup>63</sup> David Chalmers, *Backfire: How the Ku Klux Klan Helped the Civil Rights Movement* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003)

<sup>64</sup> (Lischer 1995, 26-28)

<sup>65</sup> (Hecló 2007, 7-18)

Socrates as a figure of persecution, an interpretation at odds with the way Rousseau characterizes the internal cohesion of ancient states. Moreover, King sees Socrates as morally equivalent to Prophets in action if not in purpose, turning Socrates' impiety into the most pious act—to speak with G\*d.<sup>66</sup> King unites what Rousseau divides, and so does Bowers but in a different way. Bowers accepts what Rousseau describes as the pagan division by gods, in his case G\*d versus mammon, and directs Christian soldiers to respond with a strange version of moral violence against Civil Rights activists. Of course, Rousseau's description of religious foundation for government makes sense—he wants to propose a foundation in nature against prevailing religious foundations (in France and Switzerland) to create cities like Rome but without the war, as we see in his several chapters praising the Roman constitution. He only despairs that no such nation might exist to accept his constitution, perhaps because he was not alive to see John F. Kennedy's First Inaugural Address.<sup>67</sup>

The Civil Religion is Rousseau's way of preserving the mores necessary for individuals to revere the constitution the Lawgiver presents as divinely inspired. Recent political theorists have recommended understanding Rousseau's chapter on the Lawgiver on diagnostic rather than as a permanent solution to unite individuals into a people.<sup>68</sup> He addresses a fundamental problem facing nations based in popular sovereignty. The problem is roughly the following: Constitutions turn individuals into a people. To become a people, then, requires individuals to consent to a constitution. However, for individuals to accept a constitution require them to act as a unit, that is, as a people. Therefore, they seem unable to act as a people on the very document that allows them to act as a people. In the stories of King and Bowers, we find the answer to the problem. Both address individuals who gather before them. There, they invoke the divine in whom the individuals each believe or at least a divinely inspired ethos all can accept. What unites the people is not the constitution but the foundation the Lawgiver presents. Rousseau posits a Lawgiver must deceive the people in her invocation of the divine, but King and Bowers show us (in alternatively inspiring and terrifying ways) how the Lawgivers do not have to be fundamentally impious. As Jaspers says, "In political affairs, perhaps, a man insignificant in himself may be enabled by fortuitous circumstances to produce an important effect and thus gain for a time a

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<sup>66</sup> (Jaspers 1957, 6)

<sup>67</sup> (Bellah 1967), (Ankersmit 2004, 369-374)

<sup>68</sup> Bonnie Honig, "Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory," *American Political Science Review*, February 2007 (1-17).

considerable outward power. But such a man cannot move the depths of men's souls. His power over men cannot endure."<sup>69</sup> In fact, it is hard to imagine someone as persuasive in his Christian message as King to be also somehow, at his core, a cynical atheist. Political foundations, therefore, *precede* constitutions.

King's religious foundation is a reinterpretation of the Constitution individuals ratified to become a people. King reinterprets in his religious foundations who is the "Creator" and "Nature's G\*d" and what it means to be born equal. Bowers does the same, identifying the same divinity as "Nature's G\*d" and what it means to be born equal, but with the opposite result. The reason is their position over the same question: the integration of African Americans into white society. What remains so puzzling is how could both sides offer religious foundations. The wisest answer remains the one Lincoln gave in a setting very similar to the one King and Bowers encountered.

### **Religious Foundations in Political Science**

Ceaser offers foundational ideas as a core concept for political science too often subject to the ideologies of those claiming to study them. In fact, Ceaser creates the term "foundational idea" to mean the equivalent of "public philosophy" back when Theodore Lowi wrote on the topic, meaning before Michael Sandel hijacked the term to further the communitarian movement. Rogers Smith rightly points out that Ceaser's work begins with a clarion call but becomes itself embroiled in a debate over what, if any, foundation exists in the Democratic Party. When Ceaser conjectures that Democrats channel a subconscious Rortyism, Smith

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<sup>69</sup> (Jaspers 1957, 88-89) Ceaser is of the same opinion as Jaspers when he refers to political foundations as more than simple narratives. Ceaser sees those only creating narratives as "narrativicians" who perceive themselves as "to public life, maybe even necessary, because they foster solidarity and nudge things along in the preferred direction. Narratives sound a bit like foundations; but unlike full foundations, they involve no claims of being tied to deeper structures of reality, as found in Philosophy of History. The yare 'stories,' no more and no less. People may be strongly invested in a foundational concept, but who would sacrifice for a narrative? And this is exactly the point: narratives are adaptable and do not lead to absolutist politics. The well-being of American democracy depends on eliminating once and for all the vestiges of foundational concepts." Ceaser later responds to one of his interlocutors, Nancy Rosenblum, with the following about narrativicians, "Nancy Rosenblum is of the party that believes that hermeneuticists and narrativicians are the sole legislators of the world. I am of the party that believes that legislators are also the legislators of the world. I embrace this party not because I wish things to be this way, but because the phenomena of the political world show me that this is so. I do not know if observation in this sense carries much weight with many thinkers today. Narrativicians do not accept the facticity of the phenomena of the political world. They lie in a field of dreams, believing that if you narrate it, it will be" (Ceaser 2006, 75, 188-189). Ceaser's position also puts him at odds with Smith, who sees narratives as sufficient for uniting a people, since narrative clothe ordinary or insipid motives in more regal garb (Smith 2003, 103-125).

teases Ceaser for reducing the state of political parties to a debate between two former colleagues—the same accusation Ceaser makes against Sandel.<sup>70</sup>

What Ceaser hopes to establish is how foundational ideas frame constitutional concerns that then dictate not the policy agenda of the elite but the aesthetic representation of these policies to the people the elite must persuade. What we see in the juxtaposition of Bowers and King is that what constitutes the elite itself is linked to claims of authority would-be Lawgivers make. First of all, King and Bowers experience moments of success and failure. The division between elite and people remains quite tenuous. Bowers went from grinning terrorist leader to a federal inmate worshiping in a mixed race chapel. King went from a preacher struggling with pastoral and political commitments, to a national leader for integration, and finally an increasingly marginalized voice for nonviolence over Black Power.

Second, we see that both King and Bowers identify the movement with their own personal narratives. Bowers and King personify the struggles that they wish to persuade others they experience. The interpretative framework the new foundation requires becomes less abstract if the Lawgiver becomes the incarnation of the crisis requiring the new Law. The process is called “identification”, and it is clear how such an activity works well with elite proposing a Christian religious foundation, since the Church interprets the life of Jesus as one Christians should imitate.<sup>71</sup> Finally, the “prophetic stance” Hecló finds most essential to Christian foundations relies on the same conceptual division Rousseau makes between the foreigner Lawgiver and the people she founds.<sup>72</sup> Because of the division between political and religious institutions, religious leaders are institutional foreigners in politics. They enter politics reluctantly and only to make politics moral in a way politicians seem unable to.<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, both Bowers and King experience declines when they become affiliated with the state they sought to criticize, with the white Southerners retreating from Bowers’ violence and African Americans retreating from King’s nonviolence.

Nevertheless, King’s early success during his leadership at the SCLC produced real political change in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He

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<sup>70</sup> (Ceaser 2006, 15, 148-149)

<sup>71</sup> (Lischer 1995, “From Identification to Rage,” 142-162) See also Alan Keenan, *Democracy in Question: Democratic Openness in a Time of Political Closure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 38-75.

<sup>72</sup> (Hecló 2007, 35)

<sup>73</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer and trans George Lawrence (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000) 289-290; Wilfred M. McClay, “Two Types of Secularism,” *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America*, ed. Hugh Hecló and Wilfred M. McClay (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 31-62.

successfully reinterpreted the constitution as a moral document, one with a foundation in *agape* insisting on the primacy of civil equality for all American citizens. Immediately following his success, King experienced not his failure but one of a movement to remain identified with him rather than more extreme African American critics of American racial politics. The strength of his identification relied not merely on his persuasive powers but on the ability for him to stand before his audience as a representation of their condition. So long as King's house is bombed, African American activists see King as one of them. Once he dined with Presidents, he was not. Of course, the President, Lyndon B. Johnson, deemphasized civil rights once the Vietnam War became a greater political problem. The result was King got his laws but not their enforcement, calling into question the idea that *agape*, once encountered, changes the hearts of white Americans and African Americans alike. Instead, it changes laws but not the willingness to send black sons into war while ignoring federal court decisions insisting on a faster rate of integration than states were interested in developing. The foundation King laid is not powerful for what it accomplished immediately but how, over time, it influenced the mores concerning school integration, intermarriage, and political participation. We know that some political scientists find evidence for "racial resentment" rather than overt racism, but not even King believed hearts and minds change at the same rate as his.<sup>74</sup>

Bowers represents for the South the road not taken. Perhaps, we should say the road no longer taken. The identification of religious hierarchy with racial hierarchy experienced its defeat when Bowers, and other KKK leaders, eventually found their way into federal prison. Marsh recounts Bowers having a partial conversion experience while there, giving him cause no longer to agitate for white supremacy. Instead, white Southerners mostly retreated to apolitical churches, but we know that these apolitical churches became the organization support for the emerging Republican majority and the rise of the Religious Right.<sup>75</sup> In a way, the failure of Bowers is more absolute. King lost his audience because the one area he could not control, the actions of white political leaders, failed him. On the other hand, Bowers

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<sup>74</sup> Donald R. Kinder & Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 92-127.

<sup>75</sup> Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969) 286-289; Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 3-29; D.G. Hart, "Mainstream Protestantism, 'Conservative' Religion, and Civil Society," *Religion Returns to the Public Square: Faith and Policy in America*, ed. Hugh Heclo and Wilfred M. McClay (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 195-226.

failed because of his own actions and in a way best described by King himself; quite simply, violence persuades no one, therefore leaving no lasting change of heart among those who suffer it. Whereas King's success was partial, delayed, and still compromised, Bowers' remains part of historical obscurity scholars like Marsh only recently thought relevant to study. We should not see Bowers' obscurity as cause for self-congratulation, however. It should stand as a reminder that political foundations are not necessarily good or democratic and require a strong democratic response like King's to overcome. King explains the temptation to fight violence with violence in a work published after his death.<sup>76</sup> Kinder and Sanders point to the racial riots of the 1970s as the moment in American history when good faith between white and African Americans dissolved.<sup>77</sup>

### **Conclusion: Religious Foundations and Political Science**

Ceaser, Hecllo, and Smith each agree that religious stories create group identities facilitating political action, even though they differ over which religious stories are essential to the American identity or the origin of the narratives these stories use. What remains unclear from their consensus, however, is not merely these questions but also how they fit into the realm of political science. Present study of politics focuses on using statistics to measure popular attitudes or responses to experimental stimuli imitating political phenomenon. Even in American Political Development focuses more on what are core causes for complex institutional changes. In fact, Jack Rakove complains about this very problem in response to Ceaser, observing the explanatory power of foundations appears in question.<sup>78</sup> Without explanatory power, what is left to hold our attention?

I leave Ceaser to defend his own vision for his project. My intention is to direct the study of political foundations to policy formation. In particular, works by Deborah Stone and Giandominico Majone point to a "lower" order level of ideas used to promote policy agendas.<sup>79</sup> Stone, in fact, points to the civil rights movement as an example of how elites created such a successful narrative for mainstreaming African Americans that other minority

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<sup>76</sup> (King 1986, 70-72)

<sup>77</sup> (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 102-106)

<sup>78</sup> (Ceaser 2006, 104-108)

<sup>79</sup> Deborah Stone, "Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 104, No. 2, (Summer, 1989), pp. 281-300; *Policy Paradox and Political Reason* Second Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Giandominico Majone, *Evidence, Argument, and Persuasion in Policy Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)

groups used similar narratives.<sup>80</sup> She constructs a method of interpreting how elites identify supposedly random occurrences as those under the influence of human agency, thus potentially empowering the elites to use government power to respond to these events. Stone is right to point to the Civil Rights movement. King identifies the cause for the Civil Rights Movement as African Americans no longer seeing themselves as less than white citizens but deserving of equal treatment.<sup>81</sup>

Where we might find the greatest explanatory power in foundational idea is how they worked their way into justifications among elites jockeying for influence among people and institutionalizing their interpretations of the constitution in the very laws and legal decisions they make. In turn the enforcement of these laws influences the opinions of those who become accustomed to them, leading them to become newly complacent with what was once the cause for struggle. It is as O'Shaughnessy put it in his poem, "Ode":

And therefore to-day is thrilling  
With a past day's late fulfilling;  
And the multitudes are enlisted  
In the faith that their fathers resisted,  
And, scorning the dream of to-morrow,  
Are bringing to pass, as they may,  
In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,  
The dream that was scorned yesterday.

What remains clear is that to study how foundations become the source for policy agenda and, eventually, the shared assumptions of American political culture require not merely the study of the foundational ideas but of those who express them. To change a political foundation requires more than a profound idea but an equally profound figure to express it, one with whom the people identify. In King, the people found reason to hope for greater political equality. In Bowers, some found the same rage they experienced in the passing of ancestral South. Such a conclusion likely turns the stomachs of more empirically minded scholars, since one cannot systematize leadership. Leaders are too particular to operationalize into variables one can measure against alternative causes. Moreover, some scholars find choosing one figure over another, such as King over Ralph Abernathy or Bowers over Wallace, fundamentally arbitrary. To the former, I respond that the contingency of American politics remains a problem even for matters more easily operationalized, as we

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<sup>80</sup> (Stone 1989, 291)

<sup>81</sup> (King 1986, 6, 75-77)

continue to see telephone-based polling data become less and less reliable. What was once thought a science becomes, increasingly, understood as contingent on continued penetration of a particular technology and the failure for the respondent to sign up for the “No Call” list. To the latter, I say that it is not we who choose the figures but the people themselves. After all, local leaders chose King to deliver the Holt Street sermon, not me, not Charles Marsh, and not Richard Lischer. We do not study our own arbitrary cases but those the people give us.

This last statement seems like a good note on which to conclude, since it shows that the study of political foundations is not merely a scholarly enterprise. It demonstrates a commitment to democratic decision-making, not as it is imagined in theories of deliberative democracy, in which our institutions become like (G\*d forbid) faculty meetings and biannual symposia, but as the vital and often ugly conflicts of what Chantal Mouffe calls “agonistic pluralism”. Perhaps, one day, we might find a new term that gives Mouffe’s a greater sense of the urgency of King’s march on Washington and the paranoia of Bowers’ silent meetings in the Alabama wilderness.