

## Study and Discussion Guide for KWRU STRATEGY PAPERS

### Strategy Session: A Multiracial "Nonviolent Army" or "Freedom Church" of the Poor - "A New and Unsettling Force"

"A Massive Organizing Drive [ is needed ] to build a *Multiracial Nonviolent Army or 'Freedom Church' of the Poor* in the waging of a Netwar for the Hearts and Minds of the American People thereby striking a strategic blow toward ending poverty"

\*MLK, Jr's conception of a "nonviolent army, or 'freedom church' of the poor" is the concept of building the unity of the poor across color lines as the leadership base of a broader movement to eliminate poverty:

\*From "*The Trumpet of Conscience, "Nonviolence and Social Change, (1967)*

The dispossessed of this nation—the poor, both white and Negro live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against injustice...against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty.

The only real revolutionary, people say, is a man who has nothing to lose. There are millions of poor people in this country who have very little, or even nothing, to lose. If they can be helped to take action together, they will do so with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life....Those who choose to join...this nonviolent army, this "freedom church" of the poor, will...develop nonviolent action skills.

from *Beyond Vietnam, (1967)*

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. n the one hand we are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth... A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

\*From Why We Can't Wait, (1963)

There is a powerful motivation when a suppressed people enlist in an army that marches under the banner of nonviolence. A nonviolent army has a magnificent universal quality. To join an army that trains its adherents in the methods of violence, you must be a certain age. But in Birmingham, some of the most valued foot soldiers were youngsters ranging from elementary pupils to teen-age high school and college students. For acceptance in the armies that maim and kill, one must be physically sound, possessed of straight limbs and accurate vision. But in Birmingham, the lame and the halt and the crippled could and did join up.

In order to be somebody, people must feel themselves a part of something. In the nonviolent army, there is room for everyone who wants to join up. There is no color distinction. There is no examination, no pledge, except that, as a soldier in the armies of violence is expected to inspect his carbine and keep it clean, nonviolent soldiers are called upon to examine and burnish their greatest weapons—their heart, their conscience, their courage, and their sense of justice.

We did not hesitate to call our movement an army. But it was a special army, with no supplies but its sincerity, no uniform but its determination, no arsenal except its faith, no currency but its conscience. It was an army that would move but no maul. It was an army that would sing but not slay. It was an army to storm bastions of hatred, to lay siege to the fortresses of segregation, to surround symbols of discrimination. It was an army whose allegiance was to God and whose strategy and intelligence were the eloquently simple dictates of conscience.

In the complex dilemma of fast-paced progress and persistent poverty, the Negro has emerged as a dissatisfied, vibrant and powerful element, armed with a method for articulating and acting out his protest. His example has not gone unobserved by others, of all races, who live in equally desperate circumstances. Inevitably, before long a broad-based legion of the deprived, white and Negro, will coalesce and restructure an old order based too long on injustice.

## Questions:

**Topic:** Building a Multiracial Nonviolent Army or 'Freedom Church' of the Poor, A New and Unsettling Force

1. Why did MLK, Jr. utilize the metaphors of the "nonviolent army" of the poor and the "freedom church" of the poor in order to describe the unity of the poor?
2. Discuss the meaning of MLK, Jr.'s concept of "a new and unsettling force" and the concept of the leadership of the poor as a united and organized force.

3. Discuss how the MLK, Jr.'s understanding of the need for "a revolution of values" relate to the strategic concept of the "unity of the poor across color lines."
4. What does the tactic of struggling for economic human rights have to do with the building of a "multiracial nonviolent army of the poor" and the winning of the hearts and minds of the American people?
5. Discuss the different strategic concepts symbolized by the charity organization—The Salvation Army, and those expressed in the slogan: "a Multiracial Nonviolent Army of the Poor."
6. Why does building such an army and broader movement begin with the development of an "officer corps" or "leadership core"?
7. At one extreme, educational efforts and studies not connected to the building of an Army of the poor and the ending of poverty amount to nothing more than "mental masturbation." At the opposite extreme, organizing and social activities not connected to the building of an army of the poor and the ending of poverty amount to nothing more than acts of "militant do-gooderism." Discuss whether and/or why these two extreme cases are true or false. Give examples.
8. Discuss problem of resources and the task MLK, Jr. set out when he talked about helping the poor "to take action together... with a freedom and a power that will be a new and unsettling force in our complacent national life."

## Appendix: (Charity breed slavery; Redneck Manifesto)

### *Charity breeds slavery*

Charity as an institution--not the inherent "milk of human kindness," began in Great Britain as an offshoot of the slave trade. For instance, John Cary, a leading slave trader, was celebrated far and wide for founding the "Incorporation of the Poor." Bryan Blundell of Liverpool, a very prosperous merchant due to slaving and plantation holdings, was the chief patron of the charity hospital, Blue Coat Hospital. Another prominent slave trader, Foster Cunliffe of Liverpool, was one of the main funders of the hospital.

Charity then served the same purpose as it does now: To promote weeping about a problem while insisting that it cannot ever be solved. To deflect righteous anger from those who steal the wealth of humanity and, as a result, ascend to society's elite. Perhaps most pernicious, charity warps and misdirects the human instinct to help our brethren, creating safe and politically innocuous harbors for our highest hopes to flow into. And, of course, today we see that those who run charities all earn six figure

salaries from the ill-gotten gains of their benefactors, just as was true during the height of the slave trade.

To escape from this trap, we have to embrace the human urge to help and, through patient, effective education, turn it into a weapon against the charity-mongers who now trade in human misery no less eagerly than the British slave traders who masqueraded as charitably-motivated humans in the 18th century. It is hardly a coincidence that, at a time when there is a tremendous increase in human slavery around the world, there is also a tremendous increase in the charity/"non-profit"/non-governmental organization activity of our mortal enemies.

Slavery breeds charity. Charity breeds slavery. Can we escape the matrix?

Quotes from:

## The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats

By *Jim Goad*, copyright 1997

The working class doesn't write a lot of history books. The working class doesn't produce many movies or radio shows. The working class doesn't tend to hire media consultants or theatrical agents. The working class has played an itty-bitty role in fashioning its popular image. ...That's because the working class was too busy working... The working class has plenty of reasons to be angry. Unfortunately, only the working class realizes it. (pg. 101)

Classism, however, remains a largely unscratched pimple on our nation's swinish ass. If every American thought about class instead race for only five minutes a day, some revolutionary things might happen. And by thinking about class, I don't mean in a detached role-playing, Marxist Trivial Pursuit sort of way---I mean seriously pondering the degree to which inherited economic status affects actual human lives. This obsessive focus on rednecks vs. niggers---far out of proportion to any demonstrable racial unrest---successfully obscures the possibility of what might happen if everyone phrased things in terms of workers vs. bosses. (pg. 105)

For the great part of America that is one paycheck away from picking through garbage cans, it may be wise to consider the strength of organized trash. The 'minorities' plus the rednecks equals the majority. It always has. And the power jockeys have always known this, so they've historically pitted these groups as adversaries. Imagine a rainbow mound of trash. The whole spectrum of societal shit. I dream of a day when people of all races can hate each other for being assholes rather than for the color of their skin. I dream of a day when a million hillbillies march on Washington, demanding equal rights. I have a dream---one day po' whites and blacks will stand together and be able to say, "It's a class thing---you wouldn't understand." (pg. 229)