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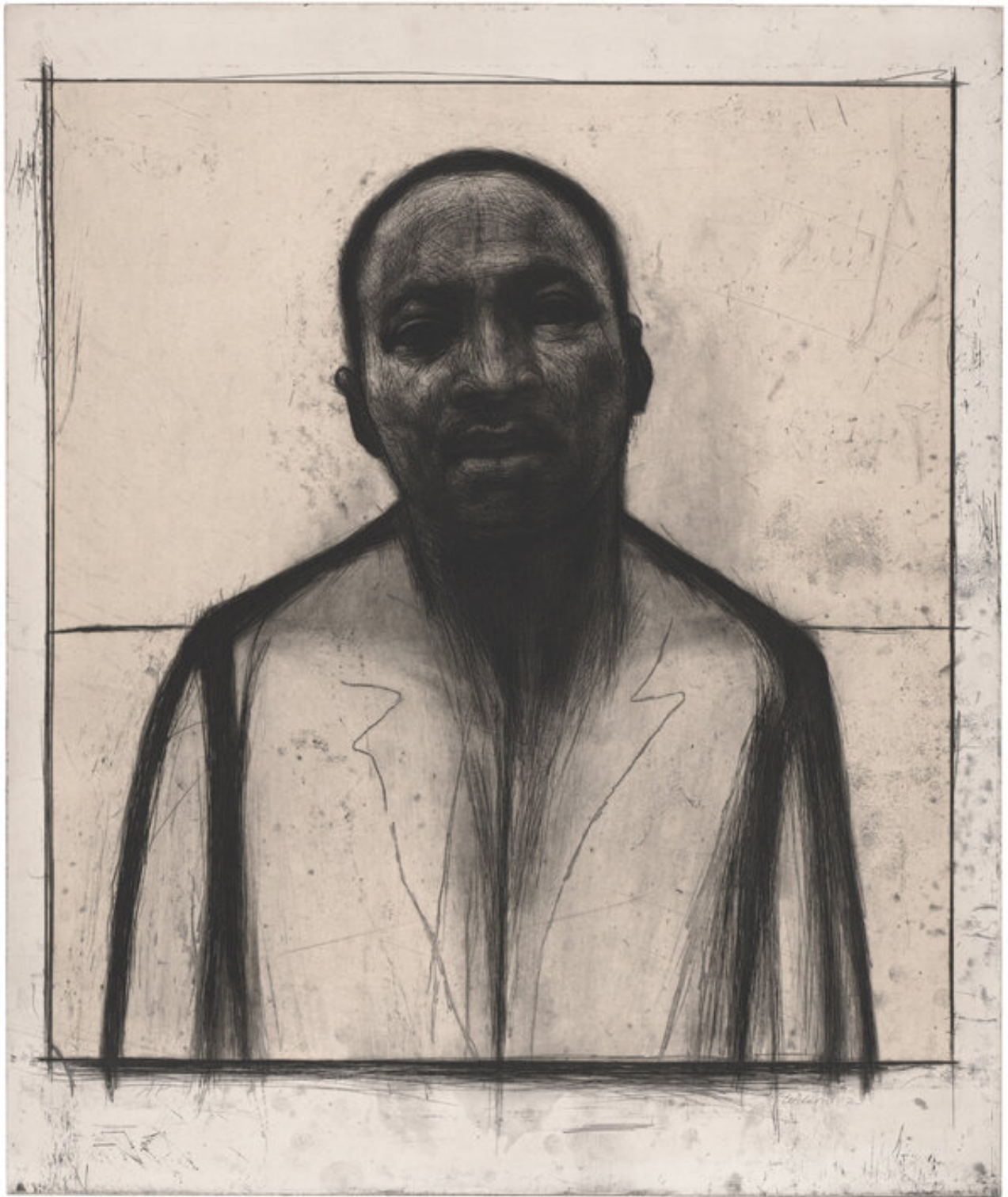
The New York Times

Jamelle Bouie

OPINION

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John Wilson, "Martin Luther King, Jr." (2002). Estate of John Wilson and Martha Richardson Fine Art, via National Gallery of Art



By Jamelle Bouie
Opinion Columnist

The way most Americans talk about the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., more than 50 years after his assassination, you might think that he gave exactly one speech — on Aug. 28, 1963, in Washington — and spoke exclusively about racial harmony and his oft-mentioned dream of integration.

But King, of course, is a more complicated figure than his sanctified image would suggest, and his body of work — his writings, speeches and interviews — is deeper and more wide-ranging than most Americans might appreciate. With our annual celebration of King's life on the immediate horizon, I thought it would be worthwhile to look at one of his lesser-known, although by no means obscure, speeches, one in which he discusses the struggle for global peace.

King first delivered “A Christmas Sermon on Peace” on Christmas Eve, 1967, at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where he served as co-pastor. He begins with an observation and a prophetic warning:

This Christmas season finds us a rather bewildered human race. We have neither peace within nor peace without. Everywhere paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Our world is sick with war; everywhere we see its ominous possibilities.

“If we don't have good will toward men in this world,” he goes on to say, “we will destroy ourselves by misuse of our own instruments and our own power.”

King wants his congregants and listeners to experiment with nonviolence in arenas beyond the struggle for racial justice in the United States. But to do that, he says, one's moral and ethical obligations must become ecumenical rather than sectional or parochial:

Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective. No individual can live alone; no nation can live alone, and as long as we try, the more we are going to have war in this world.

“We must either learn to live together as brothers,” he says, “or we are all going

to perish together as fools.”

This sets up the main message of the sermon, which is that all life is interrelated and interconnected. “We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny,” King says. “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.”

This isn’t an idle call for personal decency; it is a reminder that in pursuit of justice, how we relate to each other in our means will affect our eventual ends.

“We will never have peace in this world,” says King, “until men everywhere recognize that ends are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process, and ultimately you can’t reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree.”

As King continues his sermon, he moves to familiar ground. He emphasizes the necessity of love and compassion in the struggle for equality. “I’ve seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and I’ve seen hate on the faces of too many sheriffs, too many white citizens’ councilors, and too many Klansman of the South to want to hate, myself; and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear.”

He also comments on his 1963 speech at the March on Washington, reminding his audience that his famous dream was just that, a dream, and not a reality. “I tried to talk to the nation about a dream that I had, and I must confess to you today that not long after talking about that dream I started seeing it turn into a nightmare,” he says. “I watched that dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw my Black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity, and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negroes’ problem of poverty.”

Nonetheless, King concludes his sermon by reaffirming the dream of his 1963 speech, that “every man will respect the dignity and worth of human

personality,” that “the empty stomachs of Mississippi will be filled,” that “men will beat their swords into plowshares” and “justice will roll down like water.”

I think that this is among King’s most powerful sermons, both rhetorically and in the radical humanity of its message. And although he is speaking to questions of war and peace that may not be as acute to Americans in 2023 as they were to Americans in 1967, I think the larger message of obligation and interconnectedness is as relevant today as ever.

Our problems are global problems: a rising tide of chauvinism and authoritarianism; corruption that touches and distorts representative institutions around the world; and, of course, climate change. King’s observation that for any of us to do anything we must rely on the work and labor of someone halfway around the world — “You go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that’s poured into your cup by a South American” — is truer now than it was then, and demands that we recognize the fact, not for self-flagellation but for solidarity.

To connect to laborers around the world, to see that their struggles relate to ours and ours relate to theirs, is to begin to forge the “network of mutuality” that we will need to tackle our global problems as well as to confront the obstacles to our collective liberation from domination and hierarchy.

Most Americans do not think of Martin Luther King Jr. as a democratic theorist, but he is exactly that. And here, in this sermon, he makes clear that what a peaceful and equal society demands — that is, what a truly democratic society demands — is our mutual recognition of each other, here and everywhere.

What I Wrote

I’m mostly back in the groove of things and wrote two columns this week.

[My Tuesday column](#) was on the importance of social insurance to democracy and why the authoritarian right is opposed to both.

Social insurance and the welfare state are more than a ballast against the winds of capitalism; they are part of the foundation of self-government and the cornerstone of democratic citizenship as we now understand it, where individuals are as free as possible from the arbitrary domination and authority of others.

[My Friday column](#) was on the issue of guns in public places and how open carry threatens the democratic character of society.

If an armed society is a polite society, it's because an armed society is a fearful society, where we train our children in "lockdown drills" to evade shooters and go about our lives with an eye on the nearest exit. Democracy might be able to survive in that kind of society, but it will never thrive there.

You may notice a theme here, and it is intentional. Last year, I spent a lot of time thinking and writing about the structure of American democracy and the terms of American freedom, and I plan to do even more of that this year, as I explore my beliefs and try to answer my questions about the past, present and future of egalitarian democracy in the United States.

Now Reading

[David Waldstreicher](#) on the radical historian Gerald Horne and his new book, "The Counter-Revolution of 1836: Texas Slavery & Jim Crow and the Roots of U.S. Fascism" for Boston Review.

[Zadie Smith](#) on "Tár" for The New York Review of Books.

[An interview with Leigh Phillips](#) on growth and climate change in Jacobin magazine.

[Sam Thielman](#) on Warner Bros., Looney Tunes and the future of American cultural memory for Slate magazine.

[Nina Burleigh](#) on campus speech for The New Republic.

Photo of the Week



Jamelle Bouie

One of the many murals in Richmond, Va. I took this during a recent trip, using my Yashica twin-lens reflex camera and Kodak film.

Now Eating: Soy-Steamed Fish With Scallions and Pistachio

We have been on a real steamed fish kick in the Bouie household, in large part because the meals are easy to throw together, and I've embraced the wonder of frozen fish, which — for someone living in the middle of Virginia — is typically fresher and higher quality than the “fresh” stuff. This recipe is a favorite for both parents and kids and doesn't require much in the way of ingredients beyond what you probably already have in your pantry. Serve with steamed rice. Recipe comes from [New York Times Cooking](#).

Ingredients

- ¾ pound fish fillet, such as sea bass, halibut or cod, about 2 inches thick
- salt
- 2 tablespoons light soy sauce or tamari
- 1 tablespoon Shaoxing wine (Chinese rice wine) or dry sherry
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon sesame oil
- 2 scallions, white and pale green parts only, cut into fine julienne
- 2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
- 1 1-inch chunk fresh ginger, peeled and cut into fine julienne
- 2 tablespoons toasted chopped pistachios, for garnish
- Cilantro sprigs, for garnish

Directions

Put fish fillet on a sturdy heatproof plate, salt lightly and set aside.

In a small bowl, mix together soy sauce, wine, sugar, sesame oil and bean paste.

Set up a steamer, large enough to accommodate the plate, with 2 inches of water in the bottom. Alternatively, use a large wok or deep, wide skillet fitted with a rack to keep the plate above the water.

Bring water to a rapid boil over high heat. Lay the plate in the steamer. Spoon soy sauce mixture evenly over fish and cover with lid. Steam fish for 8 to 10 minutes, until cooked through. (It should flake easily when probed with a fork.)

Using a large spatula, carefully remove plate from steamer and set on a kitchen towel to blot moisture. Arrange scallions over the fish fillet.

In a small pan, heat pistachio oil over medium-high heat until rippling. Add ginger, let sizzle for about 15 seconds, then spoon ginger and hot oil over fish.

Garnish with pistachios and cilantro sprigs, and serve immediately.

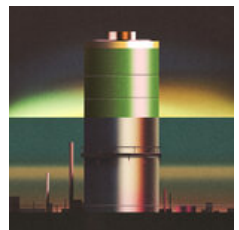
IN THE TIMES

DAVID WALLACE-WELLS

Electric Vehicles Keep Defying Almost Everyone's Predictions

The revolution is also a case study in how much further we have to go.

By David Wallace-Wells



GUEST ESSAY

Kevin McCarthy Can't Give Republican Rebels What They Really Want

The G.O.P. is afraid of demographic and social change. But Kevin McCarthy can't do anything about that.

By Peter Beinart



GUEST ESSAY

Lina Khan: Noncompetes Depress Wages and Kill Innovation

The chairwoman of the F.T.C. argues in favor of a proposal to eliminate noncompete clauses from employee contracts.

By **Lina M. Khan**



MICHELLE GOLDBERG

DeSantis Allies Plot the Hostile Takeover of a Liberal College

Chris Rufo's "long march through the institutions" starts in Florida.

By **Michelle Goldberg**



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