

EIR Feature

U.S. civil rights struggle: a crucial lesson for today

by Carol White

This spring, the Schiller Institute is publishing a new edition of Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson's book, *Bridge Across Jordan*, in which she describes her experiences in building the civil rights movement. This is an event of major importance, because Mrs. Robinson bridges in her person, the more than 200-year fight for freedom by black Americans and the international resistance movement of freedom fighters.

Since 1930 when she moved to Selma, Alabama, she has devoted her life to this cause. Last year, her speeches before East German audiences—just as the Berlin Wall was finally coming down—had a profound effect, emphasizing for them the universal nature of their own struggle against captivity.

Over the last two years in particular, we have seen an upsurge in the resistance movement, beginning in China and then shifting to the East bloc and Germany. The particular quality of that movement is typified by the fact that Friedrich Schiller's great poem the "Ode to Joy," as set by Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony, has become the anthem of that movement.

The civil rights struggle in the United States marched to the song "We Shall Overcome"—surely no great work of art, but still an expression of determination and optimism and of the commitment of that movement really not to *civil* but to human rights. Despite the brutality of American culture today—which extends to every sector of the population, from the ghettos where children are poisoned with drugs and shot while they are at play, to the vast majority of Americans who were willing to cheer George Bush's "victory"—despite this, the civil rights movement which Amelia Boynton Robinson played an important part in building, laid the foundations for the next phase of the freedom struggle in the United States.

Mrs. Robinson's story, the story of the movement which she and her husband Samuel William Boynton, and countless other brave Americans, built along with Martin Luther King, must be understood if we are to succeed in reaching the goal which they set. At the end of his life, Dr. King was moving to universalize the



Amelia Robinson lays a wreath at a statue of the poet Friedrich Schiller in Weimar, Germany, Nov. 10, 1990. With her is Renate Rumpf of the Schiller Institute. Mrs. Robinson's speeches to East German audiences, about her experience in the civil rights movement, gave them a profound sense of the universal fight for human rights of which their struggle is a part.

struggle against discrimination. He recognized that black Americans were not the only victims of oppression in the United States, and he bitterly opposed the resurgence of colonialism as evidenced by the war in Vietnam. For that reason, he was killed. For the same reason today, Lyndon LaRouche is a political prisoner.

Mrs. Robinson has been a freedom fighter for 60 years. Her story is about the continuity between the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the international movement which Lyndon and Helga LaRouche are building today.

In the image of God

The civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s, led by Martin Luther King, was an affirmation that mankind—all men and women—have been created *in imago viva Dei*—in the living image of God. With the murder of Martin Luther King and John and Robert Kennedy, the United States began a turn away from Christian culture, toward cultural barbarism.

The U.S. South, in the post-Reconstruction period, was ruled by a racist, masonic cabal, typified by the white-sheeted, cross-burning Ku Klux Klan. Political brutality against blacks and poor whites, and a backward economy which virtually replicated the economic conditions of slavery, meant that the South was a virtual feudal despotism. Yet it existed under conditions in which the United States claimed to be the “leader of the *free* world” internationally.

Americans then had not accepted the vicious axiomatic assumptions of malthusianism, that some people are useless eaters and have forfeited their right to life. The American population was, by and large, family-oriented, pro-science and technology, and culturally optimistic; they believed in progress. Racism, therefore, was in contradiction to other cherished values, and these values could be appealed to by the civil rights movement.

Martin Luther King's movement was nonviolent. This was not merely a tactic made necessary by the fact that blacks in the United States are a minority of the population; King understood that the civil rights movement could only succeed by reaffirming the central value of Christian culture—love for one's fellow man. This did not mean appeasing evil: To the contrary, King led his followers to put their own bodies on the line, in order to dramatize the fight against injustice and reawaken the conscience of the nation.

In this way, blacks who had internalized their role as a downtrodden people would rise to their full human dignity, and at the same time their oppressors and those who passively tolerated this oppression, would be shaken out of their complacent assumption that they could be moral and yet accept (or tolerate) the degradation of their fellow men and women.

Now, not 25 years later, the moral qualities of broad layers of the population, upon which King relied for the success of his movement, have been blunted. With the spread of the counterculture and the concomitant erosion of family values and moral decency, has come toleration of amoral

brutality, as witnessed by the sports fever cheering by Americans as their pilots reduced Iraq to a rubble heap.

Rather than being a force for good, the United States today has become the battering ram of a new imperialism. This in no way overshadows the moral premises upon which King built his movement; instead it makes moral regeneration of the population an even more urgently pressing task.

Bridge Across Jordan

Amelia Platts Boynton Robinson and the Rev. James Bevel, two of King's leading associates, are now working with the Schiller Institute, which they see as the lawful continuance of the civil rights struggle of the 1960s to the struggle for human rights today. In the preface to *Bridge Across Jordan*, Mrs. Robinson discusses why she views Lyndon LaRouche as a successor to Martin Luther King:

"I have found such Americans in the organizations associated with Lyndon LaRouche, the political leader and economist, who today is serving a 15-year prison sentence because of his political views. I am a board member of the Schiller Institute, which was founded in 1984 by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, wife of Lyndon LaRouche and a leader in her own right in Germany. The Schiller Institute's goal is to achieve freedom for all nations of the world—"that all men might be brothers"—as Friedrich Schiller, the great German Poet of Freedom, for whom the Schiller Institute is named, stated in his famous *Ode to Joy*.

"I joined the Schiller Institute because I found it to be continuing the civil rights struggle, in the footsteps, as it were, of Martin Luther King. As a board member who has worked with the Schiller Institute since its inception, I have found this organization more able to carry out the program of Dr. Martin Luther King in the economic area than any other that I know. The organization may not be the most popular, but this is because it is continuing the struggle for civil rights throughout the world, fighting drugs, corruption, injustice, and discrimination. It was just such fighting against corruption and challenging the highest political officials for which Dr. King gave his life. The Schiller Institute has picked up the broken pieces of Dr. King's dream.

"Today, as it was during Dr. King's life, members of the Schiller Institute, and of other organizations associated with Lyndon LaRouche, are being persecuted and thrown in prison, as LaRouche himself was, because they have dared to preach the truth about this country and the evil into which it has fallen. Knowing this, I know that this is my fight, too."

Recently, I had the occasion to talk with Mrs. Robinson about her recent series of speaking engagements against the war in the Persian Gulf, which had taken her to a number of college campuses and high schools. I asked her how she viewed LaRouche's contribution, and she gave the following response:

"I think, number one, God makes leaders, and they become strong as they come up against adversities—that is, if

they are real leaders. First they have to purify themselves, and make a turn, in order to look at the world as it should be rather than as it is. That is what all of us who are called to be leaders have to do.

"I think Lyn is a sacrificial person. I think he is the most selfless person I have encountered since the deaths of my husband and Martin Luther King. I think he is a man who has struggled and he knows that in this world, somebody has to make a sacrifice. And he is selfless, he is sacrificial. His aim is to see a change. He knows that if there isn't a change, the whole world is going to collapse. And he is not looking through the eyes of the oligarchies, of the people who are running this world, of the racists, of the selfish. He is giving us to look at people as people, because all men are created equal. All men should have the opportunity to reach their potentials, whatever they might be. There should be no segregation, no discrimination. Everyone should have a chance.

"Now, that's the way I look at Lyndon LaRouche, as far as I can see. And he has proven himself. What other man in this era would be in jail and forget about himself in order to make a ripple in the waters of the improvement of this country and this world? This is how he spends his time, even in jail. But we are going to have to get him out there, so that he can expand his ability to achieve his program, which is built on a solid foundation of human dignity, human respect and love for everybody."

LaRouche has written a foreword to the new addition of Mrs. Robinson's book, situating the civil rights movement in the broader sweep of human history. In particular, he points to the role of the principle of Christian love, *agapē*. LaRouche writes:

"The secret of great revolutions, of great civil rights movements, as Dr. King's example illustrates, is this capacity, which the Greek New Testament called *agapē*, which Latin called *caritas*, which the King James version of the Bible calls *charity*, which we otherwise know as *love*. Whenever this power of love, this recognition of that divine spark, setting us above the beasts, prevails, wherever people can approximate that view of the sum total of their lives, as if from 50 years after their deaths, whenever movements arise which, out of love, produce people who are willing, not fruitlessly, but for a purpose, to *lay down their lives*, so that their lives might have greater meaning, for this purpose—there you have the great revolutions of history.

"If we were to project events on the basis of what is taught in the schools about revolutions and other struggles of the past, then the human race at present were doomed. If we say that people struggle against this and that oppression, and so forth, and out of rage or whatnot, overthrow their cruel oppressor, we should lose; the human race would lose. However, if we touch the force of *love*, the spark of divine reason, we unleash a force, a creative force, a divine force, which is greater than any adversary, and we win.

"Those revolutions, which are based upon the appeal to

this divine spark of reason within the individual, prevailed. Those which worked otherwise produced abominations, or simply failed.

“Yes, we must struggle against injustice. But it is not enough to struggle out of anger. We must struggle out of love. And that we learn best, who have had to walk as leaders of one degree or another, through our own Gethsemane, with the image of the Cross before us.

“That is the best I can say. I might say it better, but what I try to say with these poor words, is the best I can say summarily, on the subject of current history. I believe, that the great upsurge of humanity, implicit in the optimism I express, is now in progress. I am persuaded that we shall win, provided, that each of us can find in ourselves, that which makes us the right arm of the Creator, a man, a woman of Providence, within the limits of our own capacities and opportunities.”—*Dictated from prison, Rochester, Minnesota, Jan. 17, 1990.*

Mrs. Robinson’s story

Mrs. Robinson’s life and that of her late husband Samuel William Boynton are a testament to precisely that quality of the human spirit. The Boyntons had organized in Selma, Alabama for more than 30 years before the great Selma marches of 1965. She introduces the first chapter of her book, with a quotation from Dr. Booker T. Washington, “Cast down your bucket where you are,” which guided her and her husband in their decision to fight the long fight, despite apparent setbacks.

Reflecting on this long fight, in which she is still active, she opens the chapter with these words:

“I was born in 1911 and reared in Savannah, Georgia, in a family of mixed heritage, like most Americans—African, Indian, and German on both sides. As I grew to be a young adult, the principle of ‘doing unto others as you would have them do unto you,’ and the religious training we received in our little church, Church of God, made an impression upon me, which prepared me for whatever the future held for me.

“Now I am neither a tot nor a young adult, but a seasoned, experienced woman, having climbed through many thorns, thistles, and rough and rugged mountains of life. Despite many adversities, I am still here, endowed by our Creator with more than a reasonable portion of health, strength, and presence of mind. I believe that, surely, God means for me to work toward spreading his message of truth and justice.”

In Savannah, her mother was active in the fight to give women the vote. She describes this introduction to political activism in the book: “I clearly remember going about with mother in her horse and buggy in the city of Savannah in 1921, when I was 10 years old. My induction into politics was knocking on doors and ringing doorbells, giving women the proper information, taking them to the registration board and/or taking them to the polls to cast their votes.”

After attending Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Ala-

bama, Amelia Platts became a home extension agent in Selma, Alabama, where she met her future husband, also employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture extension services to teach black farmers how to improve their farming techniques. Life in Selma for the Boyntons was difficult. From the beginning, they tried to organize the black community to fight brutal political and economic oppression which they faced. Because the Boyntons were uncompromising opponents of the feudal plantation system, they not only ran up against the white supremacists who were in political control, but they were repudiated by members of the black community who feared reprisals in a place where whites could murder blacks with impunity.

In her book, Mrs. Robinson recounts one particularly poignant incident where she had to struggle with herself for *agapē*, the higher form of love, in the face of injustice.

The incident involved the frameup of two black youths, while the white murderer of a black woman was let off scot-free. She writes:

“In spite of the many people who were involved in atrocities and who told me nothing would be done even if an African-American took a white man to court, I could not believe it. But although I knew the white man’s ideas of justice were warped, I saw some things in the courthouse that defied comprehension.

“Almost everybody involved in the major court cases as offenders was known to my husband or to me. We took special interest in the cases of those we felt were not guilty or who had no legal guidance. Many were members of the farm groups or clubs in the rural section where we had worked for so long.”

The two cases were tried on the same day.

The case against the two boys was precipitated by violence against them and their family. Because they had refused to work on their day off, the overseer of their plantation had gone to their farm with some white friends to *discipline* them. Not finding the boys at home the gang began to beat their mother and a younger brother, whereupon the boys emerged from hiding and began peppering the gang with birdshot to drive them away. They were arrested and subsequently tried and sentenced to 30 years in prison, at hard labor.

The second case, tried by the same judge, involved a 70-year-old woman who had been beaten to death in her own house by an officer of the law. He was trying to seduce her granddaughter, and the woman refused to tell the officer where the girl was living.

Mrs. Robinson writes about this case:

“When the court reconvened, the officer charged with the killing was calm, cool, perfectly at ease. Few witnesses were called. The defendant was never called to the stand, and neither of the lawyers seemed to have been digging deeply into the practice of law. In summarizing to the jury, the lawyer for the defense said, ‘Gentlemen, this was a poor, old, ignorant nigger. Her days were just about done, she had

nothing to offer the world.' In other words, he was saying that old people, especially blacks, are rejects; worn-out tools. That was bad enough, but when he ended his summation, I was even more shocked. He said, 'Gentlemen, if you find this officer of the law, this fine, promising gentleman, this white man, guilty, then no white man will have the freedom to go to any nigger's house.'

"During the 20 to 30 minutes the jury was out, I had a strange feeling—frightened and sick. I could not afford to get sick; I must see this through. Will they give him the electric chair? No, I am sure that would be too much like justice. Would they give him life? I was sure not, because it was a black he killed. But they are bound to give him more than they gave the two brothers, who were sentenced to 30 years each. They would have to give more to justify their discrimination, I thought.

"Here comes the verdict, I said to myself. I held my breath, and heard, 'We find the defendant *not guilty*,' from the foreman. How in the name of God's green earth can a man be found not guilty when his uniform, his gun, and his shoes were spattered and soaked with the blood of the dead woman? How? How? How?

"I was as angry as I have ever been in my life and it did something to me inside. It seemed as though it tore from me all trust and confidence I had in the law, the courts, the judge, the jury, and the *white man*. They were all rotten and unjust and I hated all of them now for the first time, and I wished I could go some place where there were no white people at all. Oh, how I hated them!"

Mrs. Robinson sees this incident as a turning point in her life. She was in danger of allowing bitterness at injustice to warp her own soul. Her husband, Bill Boynton, rescued her by recalling her to *agapē*. She concludes with this passage:

"Several hours passed before Bill could get me to talk rationally. He finally said, 'Amelia, you have damaged yourself so terribly that your heart seems to be just as bad or worse than those who dish out injustice to our people. Who are you hurting by feeling like you do? Are you hurting the white people or are you hurting yourself? Hatred is one thing that hurts the hater, not the hated.'

"I now listened to his admonition with an open mind, and I had to admit that I was damaging myself and becoming worse than those who would take a gun and blow my brains out. I didn't want to be like those people; hate caused them to do as they did. I should do differently, otherwise I was a black white-hater, whereas they were white black-haters—and what is the difference?

"This was the turning point of my life. I had to change within. Just as all blacks are not alike, certainly all white people couldn't be alike. Little did I realize that, later in my life, I would have such close communication with a different segment of the white race, and that I should learn to love them as my sisters and brothers."

The fight to face injustice without becoming crushed by

it, was not only fought by blacks on the political battlefield, but fought within each family, as loving parents faced the challenge of explaining racial segregation to their children. How in the South of that day, to raise children who would have confidence in their God-given potential to become creative and useful adults, in face of the abuse meted out to them and their fellows on a daily basis; how to do this while encouraging and yet tempering their child's bitterness and urge to revolt against injustice?

Marching for freedom

This was the setting for the great Selma marches of 1965. These were the conditions which led parents and children together to courageously face the terror tactics of the local white power structure and Gov. George Wallace, and to overcome them. Mrs. Robinson was one of the great heroes of this struggle.

She describes this high point of the civil rights movement in her book at length. Here it is only possible to excerpt a few quotations. She begins her account with a tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"Dr. King was not a self-made leader. He was one like Moses who was chosen by God. He reminded us many times of the most meaningful Negro spiritual, 'When Israel was in Egypt's land, let my people go. Oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go. Go down Moses, way down in Egypt's land, tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go.'"

She situates the struggles of the 1960s in the broader framework of the decades-long struggle that she and other black leaders had been fighting. "The fight against segregation began, as I have said, many years before Dr. King came to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama. It began in little ways all over the South, as African-Americans, spurred by the initial successes of the nascent civil rights movement in the 1950s, awakened to their rightful heritage and began to fight for the rights which were guaranteed them in the U.S. Constitution."

One instance of this was Amelia Boynton's own campaign for Congress, in 1964, which she and her friends used to spur on the movement for voter registration.

"By running for Congress," she writes, "I hoped to accomplish two things: First, to release the African-American from his fear of the white man and get him to go down in large numbers and register, recalling that he is a tax-paying citizen; and second, to arouse the African-American to the fact that nonviolent resistance and going to jail were God-given rights, be he black or white. If the African-American reclaimed his duty to fight to register and vote, bad government could be voted out and good government put in office." Needless to say, in a state in which the ballot box was controlled by Governor Wallace, and few blacks were registered voters, she did not win. The next step by her and her friends was to confront the governor directly.

She recounts the story of the march:

“We knew that the crux of the trouble in Alabama lay in our governor, George Wallace, and we decided to march the 50 miles to the state capital [of Montgomery] and hand our grievances to him. The march would begin the next day, Sunday, March 7, 1965.

“The city knew of our plans for the march, but did not know how to stop it. Meetings were held day and night to map out strategy by which we could appeal to the conscience of the diehards. People had begun to come in from all over the country to lend assistance in the registration and voting drive. The county board of registrars refused to permit African-Americans to vote, the county officials kicked them about for asking to register, the governor of the state gave them mountains of legal questions that were impossible to answer, and the Congress in Washington was still filibustering and allowing the Southern bigots to twist their arms. We were left no alternative but to walk 50 miles to the capital, not to ask, not to plead, but to demand the right to register and vote.

“The night before the march, we gathered at the church and talked with the citizens, asking them to walk with us regardless of the cost, even if it meant ‘your life.’ I was afraid of being killed and I said to myself, ‘I cannot pay the supreme price, because I have given too much already.’ But I also then thought, ‘Other mothers have given their lives for less in this struggle and I am determined to go through with it even if it does cost my life.’ At that moment, a heavy burden fell from my mind and I was ready to suffer if need be.

“The next morning I rose early, cooked breakfast, and fed the 15 guests staying with me. I went to Brown’s Chapel to offer my assistance before the march. Little did I know that that day would mark one of the greatest struggles for freedom in modern times. Little did I visualize what would really take place, and what effect it would have on the nation at large. That day I met such people as the former governor of Florida, LeRoy Collins; Walter Reuther, labor leader; and other dignitaries, and I began to understand more deeply than before that we were not alone. . . .

“As we approached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which spans the Alabama River, we saw the sheriff, his posse, deputies, and men plucked out of the fields and stills to help ‘keep the niggers in their place.’ As we crossed the bridge, I saw in front of us a solid wall of state troopers, standing shoulder to shoulder. I said to my friend Marie, ‘Those men are standing so close together an ant would get mashed to death if it crawled between them. They are as lifeless as wooden soldiers.’ Marie pointed to the troopers on the sides of our marching lines and said, ‘It doesn’t take all of them to escort us.’ But a second look convinced us that trouble was brewing for the nearly 1,000 marchers.

“Each officer was equipped with cans of gas, guns, sticks, or cattle prods, as well as his regular paraphernalia. Beyond them, men on horses sat at attention. I remembered the words of a little girl, who wanted to go with us because

she wanted to be free, and prayers that were being offered on our behalf, and the old lady who said she would stay on her knees while we were away. I knew we would need all those prayers as I looked on the faces of these men, who were just waiting for a chance to shed human blood.

“Part of the line being across the bridge, we found ourselves less than 50 yards from the human wall. The commander of the troops, on a sound truck, spoke through a bullhorn and commanded us to ‘stop where you are.’ Hosea Williams of SCLC and Cong. John Lewis and all the line behind them halted. Hosea said, ‘May I say something?’

“Major Cloud retorted, ‘No, you may not. Charge on them, men.’

“The troopers, with their gas masks on and gas guns drawn, then began to shoot gas on us and the troopers in front jumped off the trucks. Those standing at attention began to club us. The horses were brought on the scene and were more humane than the troopers; they stepped over the fallen victims.

“As I stepped aside from the trooper’s club, I felt a blow on my arm that could have injured me permanently had it been on my head. Another blow by a trooper as I was gasping for breath knocked me to the ground and there I lay unconscious. Others told me that my attacker had called to another that he had the ‘damn leader.’ One of them shot tear gas all over me. The plastic rain cap that Margaret Moore gave me may have saved my life; it had slipped down over my face and protected my nose somewhat from the worst of the fumes. Pictures in the paper and those in the possession of the Justice Department show the trooper standing over me with a club. Some of the marchers said to the trooper, ‘She is dead.’ And they were told to drag me to the side of the road.

“There were screams, cries, groans, and moans as the people were brutally beaten from the front of the line all the way back to the church—a distance of more than a mile. State troopers and the sheriff and his men beat and clubbed to the ground almost everyone on the march. The cry went out for ambulances to come over the bridge and pick up the wounded and those thought to be dead, but Sheriff Clark dared one of them to cross the bridge. At last a white minister and a black citizen told him, ‘If you don’t let the ambulance over the bridge, these people are going to retaliate by killing some of you and you may be the first one.’ The ambulance was then permitted to pick us up. I also heard that I was taken to the church after being given first aid on the way, but when I did not respond, I was taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital.”

Finally, after another march just to the bridge, which occurred without incident, on March 20, the demonstrators received assurances of federal government protection, and planned the successful, third Selma to Montgomery march. “This,” she writes, “was the signal we were waiting for. Dr. King said the long-planned and twice-blocked trek would be the most massive march ever staged on a state capital in the

South. He had called on friends and well-wishers to meet him in Selma, and preparations were made for 3,000 people to start out the next morning, Sunday, March 21. The route would take us through the downtown section, across the Edmund Pettus Bridge again, down Highway 80 to Montgomery. . . .

“It was a beautiful scene. Black and white and backed by the armed might of the United States, 3,200 persons marched out of Selma on the first leg of an historic venture in nonviolent protest. Hundreds of army and federalized state troops stood guard in Selma and lined the highway out of the city to protect us. The troops were authorized by President Johnson, after Governor Wallace said that Alabama could not afford the expense of protecting the marchers. With federalized troops on each side, helicopters over our heads, and being led by Almighty God through our leader Dr. King, I felt that no harm could befall us now.”

From then to now

Martin Luther King was murdered on April 4, 1968, at a point when he was moving to broaden the civil rights movement to become a human rights movement for all people. In particular, he bitterly opposed the Vietnam War. What he had to say then, against the brutality of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, stands true today against the equally unjust war against Iraq.

In the 24 years since King spoke out against the Vietnam War, things have only gotten worse—domestically in the United States, and most emphatically in the whole of Africa, and throughout the so-called developing sector. The following excerpted statement by King is taken from the biography of him by Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpets Sound*. It is from a speech given at Riverside Church in New York City, on April 4, 1967.

King said, answering critics who claimed that the fight against the war and for civil rights did not mix: “Since I am a preacher by trade, I suppose it is not surprising that I have several reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others, have been waging in America. A few years ago there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both black and white—through the Poverty Program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demoniacal destructive suction tube.”

But the war was doing more than merely blasting the hopes of the poor who longed for a real war against poverty

at home. The war, King said, “was sending their [black] sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village but we realize that they would never live on the same block in Detroit.”

In the speech he made the broader criticism as well. The war in Vietnam was not a just war. “And as I ponder the madness of Vietnam and search within myself for ways to understand and respond in compassion, my mind goes constantly to the people of that peninsula. I speak now not of the soldiers of each side, not of the junta in Saigon, but simply of the people who have been living under the curse of war for almost three continuous decades now. I think of them too because it is clear to me that there will be no meaningful solution there until some attempt is made to hear their broken cries.”

“They must see Americans as strange liberators,” King said, recounting how the United States forced Ho Chi Minh into the arms of the Soviet Union by supporting the French in their post-World War II efforts to recolonize Vietnam. Then he described the atrocities committed by the U.S. forces against the Vietnamese population. Water supplies were poisoned, huts were razed to the ground, bombing was unrelenting. He also charged that the United States was using Vietnam as a test ground to demonstrate the capabilities of new weapons, just as the Nazis had tested new medicines and tortures in Europe’s concentration camps.

In a stirring call for a change in U.S. policy, he concluded, “We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice through the developing world—a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.”

It is striking that George Bush has seen the slaughter in Iraq as completing the unfinished business of Vietnam. For Bush, the only thing wrong with U.S. conduct of the war against the Vietnamese people, was the fact that we did not win. The truth is that both in Vietnam and in Iraq, the United States fought an unjust war in the interest of a racist Anglo-American oligarchy. This is the message which Mrs. Robinson has been bringing before student audiences, black religious and secular leaders, and supporters of the Schiller Institute.

Since August, when the United States landed its troops in Saudi Arabia, she has been touring the United States and Europe. She is an international spokesman for the Schiller

Institute of which she is a director. She is also a member of the board of the Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change.

In Norfolk, Virginia, on Feb. 19, she issued the following call, which was endorsed by the audience:

“We deplore the refusal of the government of the United States to negotiate an end to the bloody war now being waged in the Middle East.

“We further deplore the targeting of civilian populations in the area and the senseless destruction of water and electrical supplies, thereby causing great harm and needless suffering.

“While we support our soldiers as citizens, we believe the only appropriate action is to end the conflict immediately and bring the troops home. Thus we call upon President Bush to declare an immediate cease-fire and initiate a process of extensive negotiations to resolve the conflict.

“Negotiations must begin with the immediate restoration of all water and electrical generating facilities to halt the dying.

“We recommend a longer term reconstruction of the region along the lines of a new Marshall Plan which should be accompanied by a comprehensive solution to all the outstanding political issues.

“We call upon all civil rights leaders and other responsible citizens to join our efforts to end this conflict.”

Where the movement stands

At the point last summer when George Bush began to send American troops to the Gulf, he appeared to be in serious trouble at home, due to the growing awareness that the U.S. economy was in deep crisis. There was the congressional budget crisis, the failure of the banking system, and the fact that state and local governments were facing bankruptcy. Basic industries were shutting down; unemployment was increasing. Now the war is over, but the same problems remain, and as people begin to wake up from the temporary euphoria of the victory in the Gulf, this reality is sinking in.

The strongest domestic opposition to George Bush's immoral war against the Iraqi nation, came from the black community. Partly this was because they were disgusted by the racist stench of Anglo-American imperialism. They rejected the idea that black Americans should die to preserve in power a Kuwaiti royal family which owns slaves. They recognized that the all-volunteer Army which was being sent to the Gulf had a disproportionate number of blacks and Hispanics in its ranks, because they were driven to join the Army by the fact that they could not get work elsewhere. Blacks' opposition to the war was reflected by the Black Caucus, after the rest of the Congress by and large joined in the cheering section for Bush. Now black political officials are voicing the mounting discontent among Americans at the economic crisis, which is throwing white and black alike out of work, and closing down state and local governments.



Amelia Robinson in Dresden, Germany, Nov. 22, 1989, shortly after the Berlin Wall was opened.

Since 1968, the United States has been on a downward track economically, politically, and morally. The problems which King tried to address remain with us. Even before his death, the civil rights movement was in trouble. For all the real gains of the movement in protecting fundamental rights of black citizens—from the right to vote, to freer access to schools and public facilities—the fact remains that blacks (and Hispanics) still suffer economic discrimination. More to the point, they suffer from the overall deterioration of the U.S. economy, in which the standard of living of the poorest is becoming untenable.

The prospect of unemployment looms for all working people, but it is so bad for blacks, that in major U.S. cities, 50% of employable black males cannot find work. Similarly, the cuts in public services such as hospital emergency rooms, food stamps, and Medicare, hit them hardest.

One might perhaps be tempted to conclude, therefore, that the life work of Martin Luther King and Amelia Boynton Robinson was a failure—but that would be tragically in error. King did not find a solution to the problems facing his nation—that remains for us to do—but he left a heritage which has ennobled us all. The most important transformation which occurred as a result of the civil rights movement which he catalyzed, was not in the institutions of the United States, but in the people who joined the movement, who learned how to fight for what they knew to be right, regardless of the consequences for them personally, and in accordance with the principle of Christian love, *agapē*. It is his commitment to this same principle, which has drawn civil rights leaders such as Mrs. Robinson to Lyndon H. LaRouche, and to the Schiller Institute, founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche.