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“Selma:’ Lost Time, Lost Opportunity”

Did you see “Selma”? Conceptually and technically, it is an excellent movie that captures the essence of a very important 1965 Civil Rights event. It features the actions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his colleagues as they battle to wrest long-denied social and political justice from an obstinate legal, political, and cultural system.

Fifty years have elapsed since Selma. Have developments since 1965 lived up to expectations? Did the Civil Rights leadership make the best decision for Black Americans?

As a partial answer to the latter question, the movie portrays a telling moment when Dr. King and Dr. Ralph Abernathy are in a Selma jail cell, and King asks Abernathy the question of the day (paraphrasing): “What is the movement achieving, and how do we proceed?” Abernathy responds (paraphrasing): “We build the path as we go, brick-by-brick.”

In our view, this is the wrong answer when the lives of nearly 20 million Black Americans were at stake, along with the future course of history for the larger and smaller nation. The correct answer would have conveyed a current strategy for Selma in the context of a broader and more futuristic long-term strategy that spanned at least 100 years.

This is not the first time that events in Selma and the entire Civil Rights Movement have been called into question. In 1980, I used an essay to ask the question: [“MLK: Messianic or Satanic?”](#) The essay recounts my concern with how the Civil Rights Movement unfolded and produced a decision to integrate unequal entities—which cannot be accomplished theoretically or practically.

The question that King asked in “Selma” (“What’s the use of having a right to sit down at a lunch counter with Whites if you can’t afford the burger?”) still applies today because 27% of Black Americans live below the poverty line.

Realistically, what does it matter that you can attend a predominantly White college when you are not prepared to compete academically with White students, and you cannot afford to pay for the experience? What do you come away with? Student loan debt that will haunt you for 20 years, and a degree in the arts or humanities that does not allow you to benefit from the nation’s economic growth, which is occurring mainly in professional and technological fields.

As a Black American, even if you obtain a job and earn a middle-class income, given the high cost of living, it is unlikely that you will be able to attain the type of wealth that is inherent in the average White American family, which has at least 12 times more wealth than the average Black American family.

On top of that, all of the time that you are spending the income that you earn, you do not help build wealth in the area in which you live. Rather, you transfer your income outside of your area of influence because Black businesses do not operate in key industries, or they are too small to make a difference.

If not integration and Civil Rights, then what should King and his colleagues have demanded? Arguably, they should have sought nation formation for Black Americans. The United States was a lot less developed in the 1960s than it is today. At that time, it may have been possible to convince America to set aside land that we could have used to build our own nation. If we had made that decision, then imagine how much we could have accomplished in the last 50 years building our nation.

At least theoretically, in our own nation, we would not have been subject to a War on Poverty, which helped destroy Black families. We would have not had to endure such high rates of unemployment. We could have avoided a media that has stereotyped us and placed doubts in our minds concerning our innate skills and abilities. We may have avoided the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s. We could have avoided mass incarceration, which has bred homosexuality and AIDS. We would have more mathematicians, scientists, engineers, and artificial intelligence and nanotechnology experts than we have today, simply because we would have had to produce and provide for ourselves. We would have produced more business and political leaders than we have today. We would have our own nation, our own flag, our own currency, and our own constitution, which we could struggle justly to fulfill.

It is unfortunate that so many lives were lost and that so much pain and brutality were endured in order to embark upon racial integration—an effort that was guaranteed to fail, and has failed.

Where do we go from here? There are at least four choices. First, we could do nothing and continue to experience injustices and indignities that we have experienced for nearly 400 years in America. Second, we could press the United States Government to improve the integration process. This will likely result in the disappearance of Black Americans as we are known today. Third, we could reconsider reversing our 1960s decision to call for integration in lieu of separation. This could lead to nation formation for Black Americans, and could be the best alternative for us in the long run. Fourth, some brilliant mind with futuristic and strategic vision might design a totally new alternative for Blacks in America.

To guide our decision-making in this matter, and that of the broader nation, it is important to realize that [“All it Takes is One.”](#) That is, history shows that war and violence always result when two people (one the oppressor and one the oppressed) remain together in one place. No matter how long the two groups may live together in apparent peace, it is highly likely that at least one member of the oppressed group will one day rise up and initiate a call for a violent form of justice.

Therefore, when the time comes to make this decision, let us remember the saying: “Those who remain oblivious to history will find themselves repeating it.”

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