

Ignore the Hard Part

James G. D'Angelo

When it comes to regulation and enforcement, climatologists focus on congress with near obsession. Martin Luther King, Jr. shows us that the best way to solve these problems might be to ignore them completely.

Few climatologists feel a kindred spirit with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Indeed, it seems impossible to conceive that as King wrote from a jail cell in Alabama in April of 1963, he struggled with many of the same problems facing climatologists today.

King's genius was to resist the tempting olive branch of a democratic congress.

Many of us will recall that King fought racism and civil rights abuses, thorny problems indeed. But few recall that King's now famous 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' was not directed at the vitriolic racists of the deep South, instead, he pointed his rancor at the educated white liberals of the North. It was the white moderates, King determined, who were holding his movement back. And in spectacular candor, King addressed the problem head on.

"I have reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice."

King explained that the liberals chastized him from their armchairs. They belittled his decisions, pushing him to stop rabble-rousing with his 'direct actions' while chiding him to embrace the 'correct way' to confront civil rights abuses – the democratic channels offered by congress and courts. Their naiveté inflamed King. In paragraph after paragraph, King raged on, convinced that his critics lived on 'different timelines' and viewed the suffering of the blacks much

James D'Angelo's first memories are of growing up in Atlanta. His father taught at Morehouse and his family attended King's Ebenezer Church where he played with King's children. In the years following, James has designed electronics for NASA, traveled the world as a grunt environmentalist and speaks frequently about Bitcoin. Contact him 617-449-8968. worldbitcoinnetwork@gmail.com

as one might consider a parking ticket.

Importantly, King spoke from experience. By 1963, in his mid thirties, he had been steeped in civil rights concerns for well over ten years. Further, from history books, he had noted how congress continually sidestepped any confrontation with civil rights. By the time he penned his letter in Birmingham, King was convinced that congress would never act willfully and more troubling still, he was aware that any laws they devised would lack teeth and enforcement. In short, King needed to budget his time, and lobbying congress offered too little a reward.

But, his disappointments with congress are just one of the similarities between King's movement and modern climatologists. Playing with the jargon of the two campaigns can be illustrative. If we reimagine King as a scientist (a worthy assumption), and we exchange civil rights for carbon, his kindredship becomes clearer.

For example, King knew that civil rights abuses needed to be *capped*. But he also knew that the abuses themselves were anti-scarce, pervasive and near impossible to police. Indeed when compared to 'countable' and 'measurable' carbon, civil rights abuses appear to be the more confounding and slippery problem.

Further, both carbon emissions and civil rights abuses are problems of large scale and endless scope. Indeed, even at face value, it has been suggested that climate change politics are rife with underlying racism incentivized by economics. And while this *globality* clearly troubled King in Birmingham, it is difficult to read the words of his letter without con-

templating the concerns of climatologists today.

"I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial 'outside agitator' idea."

Suffocating Indifference

But no concern was greater to King (and surely modern climatologists) than the suffocating indifference of his core constituency. Arriving in Montgomery as a young, unknown pastor in 1955, King was immediately struck by this challenge.

Inflamed by the rapes, lynchings and rigged elections of the time, King wanted to inspire change, yet, he observed nothing but inaction and blithe acceptance from his neighbors and congregation. His fiery sermons at church, which took him fifteen hours apiece to prepare, generated hardly a buzz.

But unlike today's climatologists

King's path was clear. Lobbying congress was out of the question, so, in order to craft real power, he had no other option, he had to enlist the people. Yet, stirring the masses into action was something he knew nothing about. Without flinching, he stepped into the void like a scientist, reading everything he could get his hands on, bought dozens of books at a time, and solicited advice everywhere. He steeped himself in the theory and history of movements – the Bible, Magna Carta, Thoreau, Paul Tillik, Gandhi and others. Further, instead of disdain for the masses, he moved closer, studying human interactions more closely, engaging with people like Rosa Parks, who had



been in the movement for years.

It is hard to imagine today, but King faced a challenge almost beyond human capacity. At the center of the problem wasn't just indifference, but burning concerns with communication (which effects unification) and trust. In the '50s, the black community was fearful, isolated and poor with no centralized resources. Factions sprung up daily (of both blacks and whites), many of them rebellious and angry. Fooled by the racist media, bribed by hate groups, or genuinely ignorant of King's intentions, they assailed King at every step.

While rumors, gossip, spying and bad press challenge any campaign, it is difficult to imagine the scope of King's problem. Often single-handedly, he confronted the racist majority in the 1950s before most of his constituents had landlines or reliable mail. And his troubles appeared to get worse when King was first arrested (he was eventually arrested 29 times), but, ingeniously, he flipped this equation on its head.

As a pastor, before his first arrest, he watched the early actions he had instigated (1955 Montgomery bus boycott) from his living room window. Yet, as images of his arrests (policemen bullying him into the backs of their cars) were featured in newspapers and on television, King noticed the ironic effect. The more he was arrested, the more he was trusted and respected by the community. In this well-

spoken fire-brand, blacks saw someone they felt closer to, who they could finally trust. King's desired unification had begun.

King used other 'tools' as well (he liked the word 'tools'). He employed sit-ins and marches, now staples of any civil disobedience campaign. And, as public interest rode the euphorias and lulls created by the press, King decided that he couldn't let the noise die down. He jammed the calendar with events. He travelled furiously. But most importantly, he learned that the people themselves needed these actions. They craved commitment and participation. Everywhere King went, thousands of whites and blacks came out for the first time, clamouring to be involved.

And King provided. He gave them excitement, interaction, focus and investment. His outward appearance was

as refined as the best statesmen, but inside, he understood the theatrics of professional wrestling, raising the stakes by challenging his opponents, calling them out, turning their religion and laws on themselves, meeting them on their turf. It was a spitting contest in silk clothes.

Through King, the movement became daily and alive in a way that no congressional lobby could ever achieve.



The newspaper became King's personal Facebook page, with daily updates, and his arrests were the orchestrated, fiery blog posts.

Still, while the numbers in his movement soared, the critics assailed him. Instead of *capping* or lowering, the brutality increased under King's tenure. Throughout the states, authorities tore into blacks with their firehoses, lynchings increased, rapes continued, and cities burned.

From the POV of 1963, one could reasonably claim that King had done nothing to police or enforce against brutality. In short, he had ignored the hard part. Further, without building a legal infrastructure for enforcement, his efforts might soon be fade. But from the POV of 2014, we know better. We see the petty mistake in judgement. A year after King stepped out of the Birmingham jail he was standing proud, in a suit, in the White House, looking over the shoulder of Lyndon B. Johnson. And that day, under King's watch, the president signed the most powerful piece of civil rights legislation to date. King's strides, in hindsight, were more than just actions of expedience, they were geniously crafted.

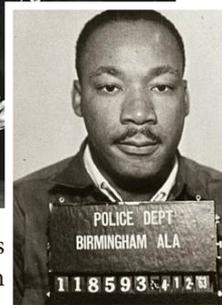
Still, there is no doubt, if you could have asked King in 1955, eight years before Birmingham, he would have told you that he wanted nothing more than tough laws and cracking enforcement. But King knew his history, the strongest laws are built from the bottom up, and the bottom is raised by incentivizing interaction, mass participation and excitement.

Indeed one of the tragedies of climate

change is an individual's sense of powerlessness. The entirety of cap-and-trade efforts seem to happen as if on a trapeze above the heads of the disenfranchised citizens – governments creates the shares and deliver them straight to the corporations to trade among themselves. As a result, the citizens lose interest, and like King's neighbors, behave with a seemingly suffocating indifference.

The Forgotten Solution

Currently, MIT and others are offering big prize money to incentivize national and global cap-and-trade schemes. But, in the submission guidelines (see climatecolab.org), MIT has pigeonholed the discussion and eliminated possibility. Instead of offering prize money for simply creating a functioning cap-and-trade, they instead ask for submissions that will somehow incentivize congress to act. No other possibility is offered. Clearly, MIT has



bought into the idea that only a top down approach can work, and that congress is the only available authority. It is a shame that one of the world's premier technological universities, seems so blatantly pessimistic about invention.

If King was still around, he might have written another letter reminding MIT and climatologists of their painful assumptions. History has shown them that congress will not act, yet they move forward as if there is no other answer. Ironically MIT and scientists seem unaware of how profoundly new technology is changing how humans interact, providing massive capabilities to build trust, unify and exchange. Further, as developing countries increasingly come on line, signing up for things like Bitcoin, Twitter and Facebook, it seems foolish to think that congress could provide the same might and scope that a people's movement, built online, might be able to build.

King ignored congress and the siren call of instant and all encompassing enforcement via top-down regulations. Further, he raged at those who insisted he approach his goal otherwise. But in less than ten years, working to build coalitions and energize the people, King got the legislation he was looking for. He did this by building tools that excited and incentivized people. With 'The People's Cap-And-Trade,' we are offering to do the same for carbon. ■

One tragedy of climate change is an individual's sense of powerlessness.