

This is why the riots in our cities and on our campuses are regarded with terror. They reveal a total contempt for the law — the law which stands between our civilization and the total collapse of all we value.

Ironically, it is the best of our society and not the worst of it that must bear a great portion of today's guilt. I am speaking of those who were and are intellectual, spiritual, civic and political leaders within our communities and throughout our nation. I am speaking of parents who were too permissive and students who failed to discipline their idealism. None of these people wanted anything but the best, yet they have reaped the worst.

As a nation we preached equality under the law, yet allowed laws and practices that were unequal to exist. There were no national laws that legislated discrimination but neither were there national laws to forbid discriminatory practices.

Dr. Martin Luther King was to lead movements that dramatically revealed this lack. First, through the power of the purse in the Birmingham bus boycott; later through marches and sit-ins aimed at segregated facilities. At a time when discriminatory State and local laws and practices were prevalent in the South, civil disobedience was quickly acclaimed as worthy doctrine. Intellectual and spiritual leaders hailed the cause of civil rights and gave little thought to where the civil disobedience road might end. But defiance of the law, even for the best reasons, opens a tiny hole in the dike and soon a trickle becomes a flood.

In America, Constitutional government provides for elected officials responsible to their electorate to change the law. Defiance of the law allows cynical leaders responsible to none to exploit the madness of a mob. Rapidly, civil disobedience fell prey to civil disorder. Passive resistance gave way to erosive force. Logical leadership was obscured by the demagogue's harangue.

This phenomenon is apparent in our cities and on our college campuses where high ideals have disintegrated and legitimate causes all but disappeared. And while no thinking person denies that social injustice exists, no thinking person can condone any group's, for any reason, taking justice into its own hands. Once this is permitted, democracy dies; for democracy is sustained through one great premise: the premise that civil rights are balanced by civil responsibilities. My right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is secure only so long as I respect your right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I can claim no right as a human or a citizen that you cannot claim equally under the law.