

Abstract

Fredrik Sunnemark: *An Inescapable Network of Mutuality: Discursivity and Ideology in the Rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Dissertation in English. 475 pages. Department of History of Ideas and Theory of Science, Göteborg University, 2001.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) with the focus on its discursive character and ideological elements. This is done through close reading of his speeches and sermons as well as his written books.

I argue that King for long inhabited a specific position in the border area between different cultures in American society that was reflected in the creation of a certain civil rights movement discourse in which the movement was given its identity and meaning. I also argue that this discursive process has certain ideological effects within the contemporary situation in which it exists. The construction and effects of King's civil rights movement discourse is thus the main object of the analysis.

Several areas of this discourse-creation are analyzed during the course of the study. I discuss the traditions that King's rhetoric, and hence the discourse, are related to as a way of pointing out both the eclectic nature of his rhetoric and the constant interplay between religion and ideology that takes place within it. I emphasize how materialistic, idealistic and religious modes of explanation coexist in the discourse, albeit with a certain hierarchical order, and point out the role of God, Jesus, the church and King's term "the Beloved Community". Other parts of the discourse that are analyzed include the function of King's constant use of allusions which show how the history of Western intellectualism as well as the American political tradition are involved in the process, the simultaneity of different meanings of racial identity and the use of international ideas, incidents and tendencies, and the demands this use is subjected to. A thorough analysis of King's development after 1965 where the roots, content and consequences of his so-called radicalization are discussed is also offered. This analysis shows how and why the inclusive pre-1965 discourse withered away after 1965 even if in parts it also remained.

Keywords: Martin Luther King, Jr., United States, African-Americans, twentieth-century history, civil rights movement, race, race relations, segregation, social movements, the South, rhetoric, discourse, ideology, freedom, equality.