

## *The Limits of Violent Resistance*

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The August 15<sup>th</sup> editorial for *SF Bayview* concluded that the only way to stop gentrification in the Bayview is to “go to war.”

Through all our marching and complaining and testifying at City Hall, our “City Fathers” still aren’t listening. At this point, sadly, I don’t think for a minute that anything is going to change if we continue to go the Martin route. I think we need to channel Malcolm and the Panthers—and start making some moves instead of making some noise. I need some soldiers on my side, and as much as I am sure that there are people who are willing to protest, I need some people next to me who are willing to go to war. By any means necessary.

To me, the really sad thing, is that the editorialist, Ebony Sparks, believes that there are only two “routes” or means of opposition to the dominant/white power structure—that pursued by Martin Luther King Jr’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference or that pursued by Malcolm X and West Coast Black Panther Parties. Sparks apparently lumps the very different strategies employed by SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) into those employed by the SCLC and NAACP. She also assumes that “marching, and complaining and testifying” is what constitutes the full range of tactics employed by the SCLC. This could not be further from the truth.

While I am completely sympathetic and share Sparks’ impatience with the lack of people power in the Bay Area, I think she does not appreciate the severe limitations and ramifications of violent resistance to the powers-that-be. In fact, any attempts to resist gentrification violently would be used as an excuse to make all the “undesirable” Bayview residents disappear that much more quickly. The state, especially in the era of Homeland Security and the Patriot Act, can out-gun, out-infiltrate, and out-manipulate any individual or group of people. To “go to war” with City Hall is to attack it at its strongest point, a suicidal Pickett’s Charge, if you will.

Only people-power, over time, can win over violence-power and money-power. From 1955-65, the so-called “Martin route” succeeded in ending apartheid in the South, a system that had been in place as early as 1873, and was responsible for hundreds of lynchings and dozens of race riots annually over an 80-year span. King played a role in dismantling this white power structure. But he did not, by any stretch of the imagination, play the major role. It took hundreds of thousands of people over many decades to create the necessary infrastructure and organization, and tens of thousands more to learn and implement nonviolent resistance during the final decade for the movement to destroy apartheid. A march is not a movement, nor is complaining and testifying. For a social

movement to happen, many people must work at the often tedious and sometimes dangerous tasks of building organizations and alliances, training and educating. Then we need the right historical moment to come along that will allow organizers to mobilize neighborhoods and communities.

This is not very sexy. Those looking for adventure or quick fixes are not the kind of people who build social movements. Those looking for community, value relationships, can learn by doing, and can keep their anger smoldering over a long time, like the back log in a fireplace—these are the kind of people who can get ready or be ready when the time is ripe. Ella Baker knew that freedom is a constant struggle. Bob Moses knew this. We should find the route they took and continue the journey. They have passed the torch to us.