

# Applying A.J. Muste's Ideas on Social Change in a Modern Context

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FOR PEACE + JUSTICE**

## Who was A.J. Muste?

Abraham Johannes Muste was born in Zierkzee, Zeeland, the Netherlands, in 1885. His family immigrated to America and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1891. He was admitted to Hope Preparatory School in 1898, the youngest student at that time. He graduated from Hope College in 1902 after only three years at the age of 20.

In 1909, Muste graduated from the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, married Anna Huizenga in Rock Valley, Iowa, was ordained in the Reformed Church in America, and was installed as first minister of the Fort Washington Collegiate Church in New York City.

The ultimate pacifist, Muste protested against every major war waged during his lifetime. He joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an inter-faith pacifist organization, in 1916. In 1917, he resigned from the Central Congregational Church because of his pacifistic views, and the next year led the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile workers strike. Among the many places where he protested are famous landmarks like Red Square in Moscow, the United Nations, Times Square, and the White House.

Muste has had an impact on major figures in the peace movement, and many called him the “American Gandhi.” The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was a seminary student when he first heard Muste speak. The fact that the struggle for civil rights in this country has been so bloodless when compared to some other parts of the world is in large part attributable to Muste.

In 1948, Muste stopped paying federal income tax because they were financing the machineries of war. Each year he sent a package to the IRS containing a Bible, a copy of Henry Thoreau’s “Essay on Civil Disobedience,” and a three-page typewritten paper outlining the principles preventing him from contributing to the armaments of the United States. Although in 1961 the United States Tax Court ruled that the government had a right to back taxes, collection against Muste’s small retirement income was never attempted. A.J. Muste died in 1967 at age 82.

### **Several biographies have been produced detailing A.J.’s life including:**

- Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste, by Jo Ann Ooiman Robinson (1981)
- Peace Agitator: The Story of A. J. Muste, by Nat Hentoff (1982)
- American Gandhi: A.J. Muste and the History of Radicalism in the Twentieth Century, by Leilah Danielson (2014)

## **A.J. Muste Foundation for Peace and Justice**

The A.J. Muste Foundation for Peace and Justice (formerly the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute) was founded in 1974. The Foundation provides grants, fiscal sponsorships, and educational resources to hundreds of grassroots projects. We fund innovative organizing and nonviolent direct action for the liberation of all, often with seed funds that give a necessary boost to bold ideas.

# Applying A.J. Muste's Ideas on Social Change in a Modern Context

Peter Muste

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I'm afraid I need to begin by breaking a few "rules." Hopefully you'll recall that A.J. himself was not a big fan of orthodoxy, and you'll forgive me. I know it's considered bad form to begin a presentation with an apology, but that's pretty much what I need to offer in order to properly contextualize my remarks. I'm greatly honored to be here, and to be honest, I don't feel particularly worthy of it. My only credentials for standing here tonight are the fact that I am one of A.J.'s surviving grandchildren, and my work on the Board of the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute. I'm not a scholar, and I'm not a lifelong full-time activist, while I suspect that most of you here are either one or both of those. My career has been as a theatre professional, and I currently work primarily as a public school teacher in New York's capital region. My brother and I were raised to think of A.J. as our grandfather, not as a public figure, and that was the way that we enjoyed our relationship with him. He died in 1967 when I was an adolescent, and just beginning to be aware of the nature of his work.

All of this is to say that my remarks are not intended to be taken as coming from a position of authority. It's much more a personal reflection, or meditation on some of the questions around his work and legacy, and how they might apply to the current moment. A moment which probably seems quite dire to many of us from nearly any perspective.

After I was asked to speak, I began to do some research and to explore some possible topics. I've been asked to speak about A.J. before, but never in this kind of context or with this kind of a group, and I didn't want to cover ground that others at the conference would cover better than I could. The March on Washington has received a lot of attention recently for a variety of reasons, some of which have been discussed here. There was an email conversation among myself, my brother, my cousin Richard and his wife Shirley about the "Rustin" film and Richard mentioned that he was reading David Brooks' book, *The Road to Character*. He said that the chapter about A. Philip Randolph had quite a bit about his work with Bayard, and mentioned A.J. I certainly admit that David Brooks was an unusual place to start looking into ideas about A.J., but I was curious, so I got a copy of the book. I found the relevant passages a very brief but good description and analysis of what passed between the two following one of Bayard's earlier conflicts with the legal system over sexual activity while he was in Federal prison as a Conscientious Objector.

Brooks goes into a good bit of detail about Randolph and Rustin's work together on the March on Washington, which I read with interest. In it, he mentions David Chappell's book *A Stone of Hope*, and Chappell's distinction between the "Northern" and "Southern" components of the civil rights movement. Now, I'm not here to debate the

academic virtues or shortcomings of Chappell's work, simply that this idea struck me as significant. To summarize it, the "Northern" movement was predominantly white, educated, and in favor of incremental gains through dialogue with those in power rather than direct action. To quote Brooks, "People in this camp tended to favor conversation over confrontation, consensus over aggression, and civility over political force." They tended to think of themselves as "liberals." The "Southern" folks, on the other hand, were predominantly black, working class, and tied to an "Old school religion" philosophy, which Brooks describes as linked to a "prophetic, biblical tradition." He places Randolph, Rustin and King firmly in that camp. This made me think about A.J., and his own philosophy and approach to activism, and while he was undoubtedly northern, white and educated, he did not identify for much of his life as "liberal," and was much more in line with the "Southern" approach. While his politics were rooted in the intertwined pillars of social and economic justice and active nonviolence, he was also shaped by his Calvinist upbringing which emphasized the individual answering to God for his/her actions. Brooks refers to the Southerners as having a "more austere view of their struggle... If there was to be any progress, it was necessary not just to be engaged, one had to surrender utterly to the movement at the cost of one's own happiness and fulfillment, and possibly one's life." While A.J. never stopped trying to find personal happiness and fulfillment, the sentiment certainly aligns him much more with what Brooks calls the "prophetic realists" like Randolph, Rustin and King.

**C**happell, who is cited by Brooks, points out the fundamentally pessimistic view of humankind found in those Old Testament prophets. Like the Hebrew Prophets, these thinkers believed that "they could not expect that world and its institutions to improve." That outlook allowed them to view their efforts as part of an ongoing struggle that would not be solved by a single "messianic" moment, after which everything would be all right. The human condition would always involve conflict between oppressors and oppressed, those who seek power through fear versus through love, or those who ask "What about me?" as opposed to "What about us?" A single victory was an advance; it was not an end to evil.

In addition, and significantly for me, Brooks also identifies them as Gandhian, and here's how he describes that: "Nonviolence furnished them with a series of tactics that allowed them to remain on permanent offense. Nonviolence allowed the biblical realists to aggressively expose the villainy of their foes, to make their enemies' sins work against them." Further, that Rustin in particular "Saw nonviolence as a means a protester could use to discipline himself against corruption. It demands relentless self-control. The Gandhian protestor must step into race riots without ever striking out, must face danger while remaining calm and communicative, must confront with love those who deserve to be hated." (I won't dwell on the ironies of that statement, but as we heard earlier in this conference, a great deal of this sentiment was forged in conversation with A.J. over the years, and it certainly echoes other ideas that A.J. expressed).

With that, I want to reflect for a moment on the significance of the distinction Brooks draws here, and to compare that to some modern ideas of Leftist activism. It occurred to me that a lot of today's activism doesn't require the kind of sacrifice that Randolph,

King or Rustin were willing to make according to Chappell and Brooks. And perhaps a lot of activism at that time didn't demand it, but beyond that, Brooks points out that those fighting aggression were urged to "aggressively expose the villainy of their foes," while being able to "confront with love those who deserve to be hated." That combination may seem extraordinary or contradictory to many, but I believe it was at the heart of what A.J. and the others mentioned saw as both central to "Gandhian" protest and essential to any success they would have in forcing meaningful change from those in power. It also represented a major shift in thinking from the earlier mainstream protestant nonviolent tradition, which held that bearing witness to injustice and evil was all that was acceptable. The kind of "aggressive" direct action that was involved in activities like the March was viewed by them as coercive, and a kind of violence. A.J. wrestled with these questions, as Professors Robinson and Danielson document well in their work. Even today, the dynamic of the tension between those demands shapes a good deal of the reflection required from those who seek to pursue a "Gandhian" path. And in that model, deep reflection is essential.

I'd also like to examine a little more closely the idea of "confronting with love those who deserve to be hated" in a contemporary context. And in order to do that, I need to take a quick diversion into something that has long fascinated me about A.J. He spoke and wrote frequently about hypocrisy, and a very succinct statement of his attitude toward it is, "I was brought up... to abhor the sham that allows a man to preach what he does not try desperately to practice." ("Sketches for an Autobiography," Essays of A.J. Muste) Now, while he had little use for orthodoxy in any context, he nonetheless had a certain rigidity about how he applied his beliefs. This led, among other things, to one of his better-known quotations that happened during a Friends' meeting in 1940, when he reportedly stood up and said, "If I can't love Hitler, I can't love at all." I take this to mean that in meditating on what Christian love meant to him, he thought of the worst person he could imagine, and demanded that he be able to apply that love to him.

Otherwise, to go back to the previous quotation, he was preaching what he was not trying desperately to practice. Now, to many of us, that may feel like a kind of absolutism that is at best uncomfortable, and is of questionable value in the modern world. And, of course, he was expressing it in a specifically Christian context, although I would suggest that most faiths and philosophies have some version of that sentiment. Gandhi, of course, comes immediately to mind.

For myself, as someone raised in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, our First Principle affirms the "inherent worth and dignity of every person." So, yes. But I would submit that this is a kind of thinking that is often absent today, regardless of one's personal

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faith or philosophy, and is part of the challenge for the Left. I'm reminded of this when, for example, I see or read some of the mockery of Christian Nationalists and their apparent foolishness. This does not seem to "affirm the inherent worth and dignity" of those being ridiculed. Now, when I try to think of the "worst" people in the world today, those who are responsible for human devastation, spreading hate and pursing their own power at the cost of countless lives and so on, I find it difficult at best to apply that idea to them; to consider them as human and as valuable as myself, my family, and those around me. The feelings that arise when we are faced with injustice or hatred are rarely charitable. It takes tremendous effort, at least for me, to focus on the injustice itself rather than the personalities of the folks responsible and to avoid awarding myself a sense of moral superiority.

But I think that's what A.J. would demand of himself, and would ask of us. To quote from his essay, *What the Bible Teaches about Freedom*: "We cannot have it both ways. Either there is a fundamental kinship among all people...or there is not. If there is not, and we are not all fundamentally the same breed, then there can never be any real understanding among people...if people are not members of one family...then the pattern of human society will always be that of domination-subordination. There will always be some top dogs and many underdogs. [And then Hitler and all the imperialists and all the exploiters and exponents of racism are right, and the idea of a democratic society is bunk, as they say it is.]

So if we accept that idea, then it falls to us to look past the apparent "stupidity" of, for example, those who make up the MAGA (Make America Great Again) base, to the very real fear and anger behind their words and actions. Unless we do that, and attempt to understand it and approach it with empathy, we are playing the fascists' game and doing their work for them. We are treating these people as "other," "less than" and any number of other descriptors, which leads to a kind of self-satisfaction and smugness about one's moral superiority that Randolph, Rustin and King, and certainly A.J. were well aware of as a danger to their movement as well as their own identities.

**T**his, to me, is another important theme. To return to Brooks, he points out that, "In their best moments they understood that they could become self-righteous because their cause was just; they would become guilty of smugness as their cause moved successfully forward... the more they altered history, the more they would be infected by pride." I think this is an important lesson. When we treat others with contempt, we cannot expect anything but the same in return. I'm certainly not suggesting that those of us on the Left shouldn't continue to fight the forces of nationalist authoritarianism, racism and oppression. Merely that to do so effectively requires a willingness to engage with those whose ideas differ from ours as equals, not as "fools," "idiots," or "sheep." They are likely to be frightened, angry people and need to be treated as such.

It has been thoroughly documented that the American Left is increasingly perceived as comprised of the "intellectual elite," and disconnected from the values and concerns of working-class people. [The makeup of the Democratic and Republican parties has flipped in recent years. During the 1930's, Republicans were more likely to be college-

educated and relatively affluent and Democrats working class. Today, the reverse is true. This is only one example, but I think it's a telling one [and an article in the New York Times highlights that shift, and suggests that, in terms of percentage, the shift is most dramatic in voters of color.] To return to Chappell's notion of the inherent pessimism of the "prophetic realists" and how it influenced the ways that they approached their activism: they were keenly aware of the risks of the potential for corruption through pride, both of themselves and of their movement.

Brooks sees Reinhold Niebuhr's influence in that stance, and in the "easy conscience of modern man. He reminded readers that we are never as virtuous as we think we are, and that our motives are never as pure as in our own accounting." Although A.J., Rustin, and most of the others had broken with Niebuhr during the War, they continued to be cautious of any self-aggrandizing gestures, and worried about "believing their own hype" as my generation might put it. And this, to me, is another example of something that we could reflect on today. It's not my intent to critique the various technologies that have transformed our world and the ways that we communicate. But I think it wise to acknowledge that we are living in an age where the so-called "cult of personality" is rampant, and that it is one of the influences that fuels the increasing polarization in today's world.

While I certainly don't have any "magic wands" to offer, I did take one other thread from my reading on the March on Washington and its preparations that I think is worth exploring. That idea comes directly from its official title: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. "Jobs" came first in the title. (One nugget that my research has given me is that there were originally two separate marches – King was organizing a "march for freedom" while Randolph and Rustin were working on a "march for jobs." The decision to combine them and the contentious process of doing that might provide lessons for today's organizers.)

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I don't think it's an accident that the March, which was arguably the signal moment of the Civil Rights movement, combined both economic and social issues as a focus. I was reminded that A.J. first came to public notice for his leadership of the Lawrence, Mass. Textile workers' strike. Gandhi himself, at the beginning of the fight for India's independence, led the famous "Salt March" that protested the British prohibition on local salt production and distribution outside of their monopoly. I can go on, but I hope these examples illustrate the point I'm trying to make: historically, the Left has been most successful in those moments where social or cultural issues are tied directly to economic issues. I'd go further and suggest that virtually any successful pro-democracy effort has too been part and parcel of efforts to address economic inequality. A.J. recognized

that there could be no meaningful “peace” without economic justice, and that achieving economic gains through violent means could not reconcile the actual causes of the disparity being addressed. But to return to my earlier point, today’s Left is increasingly being portrayed as elitist, focused on itself, and out of touch with the working class of all races, both in the U.S. and abroad. I suspect that as long as that is the case, its effectiveness will be limited.

Perhaps I’m being cynical, but it seems to me that the “big money” on the Right is only happy to pour resources into the “culture wars” that are being used to divide Americans. I don’t say this in any way to belittle cultural issues; there are critical fights going on in a wide variety of arenas. But as long as we’re focusing on those issues in isolation, we’re not connecting them to the fact that the world’s wealth continues to be concentrated more and more in the hands of a very few individuals and corporations, that poverty, particularly among children, is increasing, and that working class individuals of every race and culture are struggling.

The other point I’d make about any instances of success for the Left is that they have been the result of broad coalitions. Coalition-building is one of the things that A.J. was known for, and there are numerous instances of people talking about his ability to listen effectively to their concerns and to find common ground with them. As many, including Professor Danielson in her outstanding work, *American Gandhi*, as well as Professor Robinson in *Abraham Went Out* have pointed out, A.J.’s ability to reconcile the philosophies and concerns among various factions was essential to whatever achievements those organizations and coalitions had. And, I might add, he often did so in part by citing Gandhi and his work. But one of the other things that I think made him effective is that the common ground he found was often over economic concerns. And frankly, I don’t think that combination of approaches can be stressed enough.

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The good news about that, to me, is that there is a focus on labor issues today that is simultaneously grassroots and international, and the interest in those issues should be developed and shared. Headlines about the UAW’s recent wins and new organizing efforts in the south, Starbucks’ agreement to negotiate with a national collective bargaining unit, and other examples are encouraging. But the people involved in those efforts don’t necessarily see themselves as “Leftist.” And I’m certainly not suggesting that there is a massive “wave” of gains being made. Even as union organizing in the United States has been increasing, union membership overall has continued to fall. This is due to a number of factors, of course, but the gains are largely being driven by young,

relatively well-educated workers who have been forced into lower-paying jobs because pathways to better paying and more satisfying jobs continue to shrink. Right now, under 10% of U.S. workers belong to a union, and that number has declined steadily since the 1980s. A majority of Americans outside the wealthiest income brackets are increasingly pessimistic about the U.S. economy, as we're told on the news almost daily. The Right has done an excellent job of speaking to the fear and anger felt by those folks, and putting the blame on the "woke" agenda that wants to "destroy their way of life," or is "weak." And (again, oversimplifying) if they can keep people focused on what books can and can't be in the local bookstore or library, they're not going to be as concerned about the fact that the corporations they work for and buy from are making record profits while the workers experience increasing wage theft and feel their economic power shrink. Again, I don't say this to minimize the importance of what the media has termed the "culture wars," merely that approaching those issues in isolation makes it difficult to succeed in making systemic change.

That said, there is a lot of important work going on in this area, building coalitions among groups with diverse but intersecting concerns. A few examples of this are Cooperation Jackson and Action Jackson, a network of cooperatives and worker-owned businesses that's also engaged in social justice work in and around Jackson, Mississippi, and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, who have made gains in improving working conditions and wages through their "Fair Food" campaign, which targets the farmworkers' employers' customers, the fast-food chains that use the tomatoes they grow. An even more striking example is a broad coalition of labor and other groups that's been developing for several years in Minnesota. A recent article in both *In These Times* and *Workday* does an excellent job of detailing the history, strategies, and accomplishments of this group of over 10 union locals plus tenants' and immigrants' rights groups and many others. In many ways, this group offers a broad blueprint for what contemporary "Gandhian" organizing might look like. I'd like to quote from the article at length, if I may, with some examples of what I'm talking about.

Greg Nammacher, President of SEIU Local 26, which represents janitorial workers explained, "We have learned over and over again that when we try and push for justice in each of our own separate lanes, we are not as successful as if we push for justice together across our different organizations."

But the trust they have built goes beyond policy goals, and that is in part, Nammacher said, because the movement has built spaces for working people to bring their whole selves, suffering and all, into the room. "Obviously that's really hard, but over and over again, we have found if we create the democratic spaces for members to come and put their issues on the table and be heard and collectively make decisions about how we're going to turn that personal pain into public demands, either on our government or on our employers, that people have an incredible capacity to find empathy in each other and to come together in incredibly powerful ways."

He continued, "Only when we take the time to do that and to let people put that pain in the room and to work through that process and find those places of common ground

can we then fight together. Only when we do that are we able to stand together when it comes to the hard moments when the employers or the politicians will try to divide us. If we haven't done that work, we are much more vulnerable to that division." (Sarah Jaffe, In These Times)

**S**everal things stand out to me about this. They are looking for coordinated efforts and the ability to work in loose alignment rather than lock-step around goals. The "model" is to accept multiple models based on the issues and goals of the member organizations. All of their strategies are inherently non-violent, and the member organizations keep a great deal of autonomy within the coalition, maintaining their own identities while benefiting from each other's support. And while their focus is primarily local, they connect to much broader global issues such as climate change, immigrant justice, housing reform and police violence.

All of which, to me, makes this work profoundly "Gandhian." Not because it mimics the specific actions or tactics of Mohandas Gandhi, but because it shares the basic approach of forcing those in power to confront the injustices of their systems through direct nonviolent strategies, recognizing the various ways that different people in different places are affected by those injustices. And importantly, that the means one uses to achieve one's ends often determine what those ends will really be, while keeping the economic aspect of those issues in the foreground.

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All of those things were part of Gandhi's appeal to A.J., King, Rustin and many, many others, along with the spiritual aspect that gave reason and shape to the personal discipline it required. And one other aspect of Gandhi's work that deserves recognition, as it was part of what drew people to it: It was focused on specific policy change demands, and it was successful in changing much of public opinion and often the policies themselves. The Salt March brought international attention to the injustice of Britain's salt monopoly in India and marked the beginning of the Indian Independence Movement. And while the ways that Independence and Partition evolved and the state of India's democracy today is a stark reminder that there is no such thing as a perfect, fixed or unchangeable political or economic system, Gandhi's work achieved profound change through nonviolent means, which made it tremendously attractive to the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement and others like A.J. And, I might add, it does so today, as we see through examples like those I've mentioned, although they might not necessarily identify as specifically "Gandhian." But really, I'm much more concerned with what these groups do and how they do it than any labels they or others might apply to them.

**S**o how does that square with the notion of the Left as weak, elitist, and disconnected from the concerns of the working class? First, we need to be careful how we think about

“strength” and “weakness.” Every system of organization has strengths and weaknesses; being aware of both, and building on the strengths of democratic, relatively “flat” organization models is essential. I also think it’s important to acknowledge the truths within those accusations. Many folks who identify as “progressive” or “Leftist” claim a kind of moral superiority while disparaging or demeaning those who have different views. Posting humorous Tik-Tok videos that point out the contradictions in statements by Christian nationalists will not change minds; those kinds of activities can only reinforce the sense of contempt felt by those who are the targets of those jokes, and justify their verbal and physical attacks on the smug “woke” folks who are mocking them while reinforcing that smugness in their intended viewers. [And this is not a problem that’s unique to the U.S. Recent articles from U.K. publications with titles like “In an Age of Mass Protest, Why Aren’t We Winning?” and “What a Legendary Historian Tells Us about the Contempt for Today’s Working Class” (E.P. Thompson) come to mind as examples.] For me, this includes a reminder to try to speak to others as I’d like to be spoken to.

**T**he idea of confronting hate with love has been described by others much better than I could, but something that stuck with me from the Brooks and Chappell books was the importance of recognizing the fear and anger in their opponents that made their acts of oppression seem not only acceptable, but necessary. To confront them effectively meant acknowledging that fear, and that its basis is most often in a sense of disempowerment and economic loss – that is, they feel genuinely oppressed. The Right has succeeded in largely framing this as a matter of cultural dictatorship by a vast Left-wing conspiracy, or “the deep state” trying to take what white middle-class workers have earned to give to lazy, criminal brown and black people. To address that in meaningful ways will likely involve both treating the fears of the white working class as real, and re-framing the conversation to first emphasize the shared economic concerns – that is, the reasons behind the wage theft they are experiencing. It means working together to address the systems that encourage record corporate profits at the expense of those who are actually doing the work that creates those profits. Let me be clear about this: Emphasizing the economic aspects of an issue in creating dialogue is likely to be more fruitful than addressing cultural issues in isolation. Also, economic issues themselves have progressive sides – conservative populism is economically repressive, and what I will call economic populism may be effective in fighting that.

This sounds “pie in the sky,” and perhaps it is. But it’s important to first be able to imagine those conversations, or they can’t happen at all. And doing so makes it much more difficult to pretend to the moral superiority that people on both sides claim as justification for demeaning the other.

The other thing that those successful examples share is that they look for issue-specific affinities and build on them while those collaborating maintain their identities. They look for partners close to home, as it were, and they are intentional about that. They look for specific instances and issues where they can win, and build on those. It’s much easier to convince others to work with you on a shared concern if you can demonstrate moments of success, or that you can help someone else with their

struggles. It's also essential to recognize the sacrifices that may be required, and to be able to accept them. This is easy to say, but can be extraordinarily difficult to do. Grassroots organizers understand that all of those small actions are potentially significant; recognizing that truth helps carry them through the difficult, daunting work they're engaged in. But that doesn't make it easy, and I think it's foolish to pretend otherwise. True leadership requires a willingness to embody the values one espouses.

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The key things to me are to continually look for ways to build coalitions and consensus around specific issues, and to highlight the economic components of those issues. Begin with those who have existing affinities, and build from there. That means intentionally re-connecting with the working class, which is going to be a struggle for many on the Left. It means maintaining respect and acceptance of the humanity of my opponents, even (or especially) when they deny mine. And to live in the fluidity of all political and social change work. A.J. was a champion of experiments in nonviolence. Orthodoxy and stagnation lead to decay. Our structures and tactics need to evolve as the world does, even as we maintain our commitments to nonviolence and social and economic justice in all their facets. Look around for the people who are doing that work, and find ways to support and collaborate with them, even if your priorities or philosophies aren't identical. And I suspect that I don't need to point out to anyone here the urgency of that work. Enough has been said the past two days on that; I can only echo the awareness of that urgency I know we all feel.

Finally, I don't know if A.J. would agree with those sentiments or with my assessment of the challenges we face. But I hope he would accept and appreciate my sincere effort to wrestle with those issues and to find meaningful ways to engage with them. It is a part of my own effort to, if I may paraphrase A.J.'s words, try desperately to practice what I preach.



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