

## Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2023 Program (Part of our “Three American Foundings Series”)

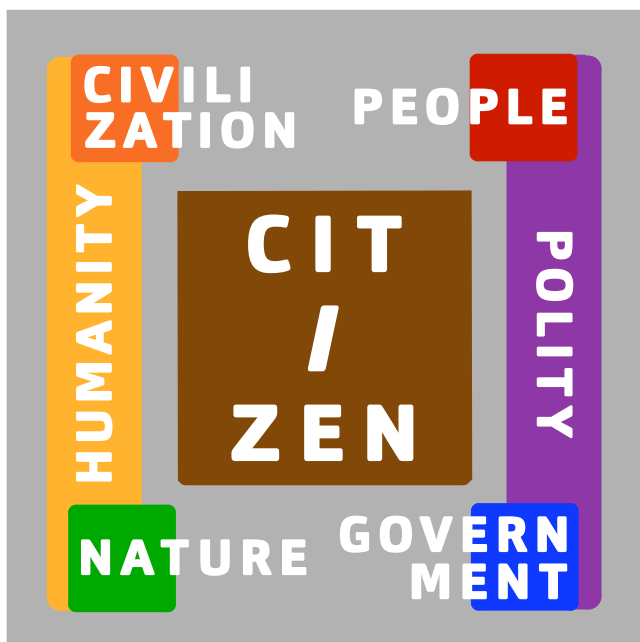
### ***Beyond, and Better Than, “DEMOCRACY”*** The Possible World of America’s Third Founding

Mon., Jan. 16, 2023, 2:30 – 4 p.m. ET (on-site and online)

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**AS WE LOOK HOPEFULLY**, but realistically, forward to the fresh months of a new year, there is still room in the time before us to ready ourselves for prospects of movement toward a more authentic **Civil Rights America**. As this vision was sketched in the aftermath of the Civil War and renewed during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, in significant part because of the resourcefulness of the **Sit-In Movement** that began in this Museum’s landmark **F.W. Woolworth’s** building, **it opens up this country to an ever-new future** marked by mutual equality of persons and full citizenship under the Constitution’s regenerative 14th Amendment. Here we honor this peace treaty with its **promise of a just national community where members “already belong” if they support the full belonging of others**. That right of diverse inclusion is the lesson of the peaceful lunch counter sit-ins that is proclaimed at this Museum. This is a message of universal significance for the enduring value of non-violent direct action on behalf of the dignity of all human beings.



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**DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.’s** civil rights mission was not just to fix a morally diseased country but to **re-imagine it as a whole new thing**, with a radically transformed life. Mere fixes simply shift the ingenious motives of human oppression to different venues. And so the clever devisings of subordination will reappear strengthened for their having to be more creative. **Only a greater creativity** — pushing persistently toward full re-creation — can overmatch innovative and improved ways of practicing and instituting self-righteous wrongfulness in public affairs.

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As a civic “founder,” therefore, Dr. King and his fellow civil rights leaders looked not only to their accustomed biblical resources of re-envisioning the world from the stories of the Prophets, Deliverance, Incarnation, and Resurrection, but also to **the solemn promises of fundamental reconstruction from the post-Civil War Amendments to the Constitution**, which secularly track some of the same themes. These Amendments function as the Peace Treaty to recover the nation’s future. **The core-three include the 13th, the 15th, but especially the key to a New America — the 14th, which establishes the category of “citizenship” (configured for the first time in the Constitution), nested in fundamental rights of the person (citizen or not).**

But to build a Better America for the community of equal persons who are included in it, **you need a better form of polity, the basic design of organized public life.** From the initiation of the United States with its First Founding in the years around 1776, the dominant political model has rested on the paradigm of legitimate government which animated the revolutionary vision of that period. That idea has indeed evolved — and even in some ways beyond the logic of its inception — from a modified idea of a “republic,” to a distorted concept of “democracy,” **focused these days primarily on majority rule, based on popular voting and elections, as a means of legitimizing government officials.** The Second Founding, which gave us the Constitution of 1787-9 and, more importantly, **the very concept of a Constitution as the instrument for designing new forms of polity,** has typically been submerged in the regulative themes of the First, so that its capacity for inventiveness has been constrained to the past.

After the disaster contributed to substantially by the political ways accruing from the First and Second Foundings, **a Third Stage from the period around 1868 was necessary to re-configure the country in accordance with a new political form.** And that projected invention has been substantially suppressed in fact and in imagination for a century and a half. So we urgently need a **“Project 1868.”**

What the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s put in serious play again, as a constitutional prospect for the nation, **is a different idea for the organized civic life of the full set of American persons.** Instead of a preoccupation with **the connections of government and a majority of voters** (which arose from the First Founding), and as a practical advancement beyond the undeveloped but promising **relationship of a sovereign People with a particular Constitution** (from the Second Founding), the fondest project of the Third Founding is **to establish a new form of polity.** Let’s call it, **“America as a Citizen Association.”** If we can bring our minds to understand its civic character and make it happen in regular practice — as being, in fact, an alternative basic political genre — **this transformatively new version of ourselves, with the 14th Amendment as its keystone, can lead us to recover the original centerpiece of polity itself.** After all, we derive the term from the ancient Greek word, *politeia*, which means not “government,” or “constitution,” but literally, **“an association of citizens.”**

A “republic” may well indeed be centered on **the accountable functioning of government** (First Founding, 1776). But an authentic “democracy” is preoccupied with **the constitutional attributes of a people** (Second Founding, 1787). Neither of these, alone or together, has served us terribly well in times of real crisis. The Third Founding, as yet unimplemented and not even honorably imagined, requires us **to refocus the entire subject of a well-ordered human community on the ones who fully belong.**

We will talk about this change in perspective on Jan. 16 of this new year, **in honor of one who envisioned its necessary possibility.**

*Register at [www.sitinmovement.org](http://www.sitinmovement.org)*

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