Introduction

I have been writing about Martin Luther King, Jr. for more than three decades, focusing primarily on his roots in, and indebtedness to, black cultural and church traditions.[1] Having heard King, Jr. speak at a voting rights rally at the Antioch Baptist Church in my hometown of Camden, Alabama, the heart of the black belt, in early 1966, when I was only a junior in high school,[2] I have felt, at times, that my emergence as a King scholar is somehow providential. A cultural and religious historian by training, I have functioned on the cutting edge of King scholarship, and would like to think that I have contributed in some way to the development of major trends in the field of King studies. Hopefully, the many books and articles I have penned concerning King, Jr., along with the numerous chapters in books and the articles in journals and newspapers, have been useful and helpful to those who wish to understand and view this phenomenal figure in the proper context and perspective. There is simply no other way to come to terms with the little known southern black Baptist preacher who ultimately achieved national and international fame.

Scores of books have been written about the life, thought, and activities of King, Jr. Biographies highlighting the many events in his

1. My very first essay on the subject was "Martin Luther King, Jr., the Black Church, and the Black Messianic Vision," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 12, nos. 1 and 2 (Fall, 1984/Spring, 1985), 93–108. I went on to publish the first book devoted exclusively to treating King's cultural and religious roots in analytical depth. See Lewis V. Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).
2. Maria Gitin, *This Bright Light of Ours: Stories from the Voting Rights Fight* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 250–51.

life date back to the late 1950s, and have become far too numerous to recall.[3] Studies of King, Jr.'s ideas, concepts, and intellectual sources and categories have also appeared in abundance over the last two decades, thus establishing his importance and contributions as a theologian, philosopher, and ethicist. We are also witnessing the ever increasing number of works concerning King, Jr.'s civil rights leadership and Christian social activism, which speak to his gifts, talents, and effectiveness as a preacher and as a practitioner of creative nonviolent protest and civil disobedience. Equally evident is that rather recent body of scholarship that compels us to treat King, Jr. *beyond* context, taking into account his meaningfulness and/or relevance for contemporary times.[4] But despite the rich outpourings of literature on the civil rights leader, I felt an almost intense desire and need to write *Behind the Public Veil: The Humanness of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, in part, because so little is known about the King, Jr. who functioned behind the public persona. The King, Jr. who spoke from pulpits in every corner of the globe, who appeared on countless television and radio talk shows, and who graced the headlines of newspapers across this nation and abroad is now a fixture in the public mind and imagination, but not the King, Jr. who retreated at times to the private sphere of family life, friendships and other intimate relationships, and the raising of children.

The lives of great figures are often sorted into categories of "public" and "private," and this is most certainly the case with Martin Luther King, Jr. As I thought of King, Jr. in these terms, I turned to Professor Susan F. Wiltshire, a colleague who taught the classics at Vanderbilt University for many years, and who had authored a superb book

3. The first biographical treatment of King in book form is Lawrence D. Reddick, *Crusader without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959). This book reveals much about King's culture and religion, but it is seriously lacking in critical and analytical depth.
4. For examples of this rather recent trend in King scholarship, see Lewis V. Baldwin et al., *The Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Boundaries of Law, Politics, and Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); Lewis V. Baldwin and Rufus Burrow, Jr., eds., *The Domestication of Martin Luther King Jr.: Clarence B. Jones, Right-Wing Conservatism, and the Manipulation of the King Legacy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); and David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Random House, 2014).

entitled *Public & Private in Vergil's Aeneid* (1989). Professor Wiltshire and I met and talked at times about my work on King, Jr. in the late 1980s, and our conversations, along with her book, heightened my sense of just how difficult it was in our increasingly fragmented society and world for King, Jr. to strike a proper balance between his activities in the public arena and his private concerns and loyalties.[5] Professor Wiltshire rightly contends that "Both public life and private life are required for living well, and to choose one and neglect the other deprives us of integrative structures of meaning on the one hand and the life-giving dramas of particularity on the other."[6] Needless to say, this point triggered so many thoughts and questions in my mind as I studied the life of King, who obviously confronted what Wiltshire calls "the public–private dilemma,"[7] and who was never able to meet the demands of his public life and his private life with equal reverence. King, Jr.'s public and private worlds routinely conflicted. His commitments to the public realm of social activism and politics too often exceeded the time and energy he devoted to the continuities of family, friendships, and other intimate associations[8] that make for the fullness of personhood and of daily life.

Behind the Public Veil is about King, Jr.'s desire and determination to create and sustain a life, a range of experiences, habits, and associations, beyond the public stage. Its content rests on the conviction that we simply need to know more about those private and largely unknown dimensions of King, Jr.'s life and personality. In other words, what was he like when he was not standing before crowds of people or under the glare of the media spotlight? How did he behave in the presence of his small, inner circle of aides, advisors, and confidantes? Was he more prone to "let his hair down," so to speak, when he was among that few and select group of black clergy with

5. I have given fleeting attention to this in Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 134–36; and Lewis V. Baldwin and Amiri YaSin Al-Hadid, *Between Cross and Crescent: Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Malcolm and Martin* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 202–5.
6. Susan Ford Wiltshire, *Public & Private in Vergil's Aeneid* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 3.
7. Ibid.
8. Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 134–36; and Baldwin and Al-Hadid, *Between Cross and Crescent*, 202–5.

whom he was very close? How did he act around close friends and family? What can we say about his attitude and actions as a husband and father? How did he handle being alone? The answers provided in the chapters of this book should reveal much about the lines that divided King, Jr.'s public and private personas.[9]

The need to make a statement about the polarity between the public and private in King, Jr.'s life was not my only rationale for writing this book. There were other reasons, which will become increasingly clear as readers move from chapter to chapter. One is that I wanted to provide a refreshing approach to King, Jr. Obviously, time and past associations with King have spawned a notable variety of images of the man, but I am tired of being a part of publications and public discussions in which King, Jr. is treated as if he was merely concerned about the world of ideas, the religious life, leading nonviolent demonstrations, and engaging in acts of civil disobedience. This makes King, Jr. accessible only to the well-trained, the religiously inclined, and the socially and politically active sectors of society. Clearly, his own approach to life was far more inclusive, in the sense that it also involved festivity, frivolity, and the ability to celebrate with real abandon. In other words, King, Jr. appreciated and had a festive, celebrative, and feeling-oriented approach to life, which Harvey Cox would characterize as "soul" or "soulful."[10] With this in mind, I wanted to write a book about King, Jr. and human life that would be of interest to ordinary people who delight in life's gusto, and not simply to

9. Brief but insightful references to "dichotomy and public-private persona" as this relates to King are made in Stewart Burns, *To the Mountaintop: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Sacred Mission to Save America, 1955–1968* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2004), 259–60, 264, 346–47. Also writing about King, Richard Lischer comments on "the contradiction between the public mask and the private person." See Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Word that Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 196.

10. Harvey Cox's reflections on how festivity, frivolity, and joyous celebration are paths to a richer, more human and humane style of life were immensely important as I conceptualized this book about King's private persona. Cox highlights black Americans' amazing capacity for festivity and spontaneous and joyous celebration, and he declares that "the ability to celebrate with real abandon is most often found among people who are no strangers to pain and oppression." Cox goes on to note that "The awakened interest of white people in the black experience has enhanced our appreciation for a more festive and feeling-oriented approach to life. We call it 'soul'." See Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 18 and 28.

academics, religious elites, and activists. Hopefully, the picture of King, Jr. painted on these pages will unlock fresh ways of viewing, understanding, and relating to him as a person and/or human being, especially for the uninformed reader, who is never present in spaces in which King, Jr.'s life, thought, and activities are seriously studied, discussed, and debated, and who is bombarded with "bigger than life images" of the civil rights leader via social media.

At the same time, I wanted to produce a work that would be of some benefit to scholars and students. While some may question the need for a work that shifts the research focus from King, Jr.'s academic pilgrimage, the usual configuration of the sources of his life and thought, and the essentials of his social justice activism toward a greater appreciation of his private life, there is still something here for academics and scholars who are open to enriching and deepening, and perhaps even rethinking, their understanding of the man who is variously known and celebrated as "the dreamer," "an American Gandhi," and "a drum major for justice."[11] This may apply even more to King scholars, whose interest in King, Jr.'s private life so far has been limited primarily to claims about marital infidelity.[12] *Behind the Public Veil* should push the conversation regarding King, Jr.'s private persona forward, beyond the charges of philandering and also his alleged

11. Lewis V. Baldwin and Paul R. Dekar, eds., *"In an Inescapable Network of Mutuality": Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Globalization of an Ethical Ideal* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), xxi (introduction); and Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, eds., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1998), xviii–xix (introduction).
12. While I understand the need to tell the story about this side of King private life, especially if we are to get a clearer sense of his "humanness," I am literally baffled by the longevity of the published works concerning his infidelity. Over the last three decades, numerous books about King have devoted pages and even chapters to his private sex life. I have often wondered why so much attention has been devoted over time to King's philandering when, comparatively speaking, we have seen so little in print about the sex lives of great men such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, the founding fathers, who reportedly had sex and even fathered children by their slave women. Perhaps this says something about what Calvin Hernton, Nat Hentoff, and others view as our continuing struggle, perhaps unconsciously, with the intertwining myths of race and sex in this country. See Calvin C. Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), 4–5; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986), 374–76; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1988), 239, 242, and 860–62; Rufus Burrow, Jr., *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 8–12; Baldwin and Burrow, eds., *The Domestication of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 120–40; and Chappell, *Waking from the Dream*, 149–74.

intellectual dishonesty, toward broader and more inclusive approaches to the man behind the public image. If this happens, this book could possibly become an indispensable *vade mecum* for future King scholars.

I was compelled, for yet another reason, to write *Behind the Public Veil*. I wanted to separate the man that was Martin Luther King, Jr. from the myth that has been created in the decades since his death. The King, Jr. captured in myth has little or no resemblance to the real person who walked this earth, who had human needs, and who made human choices. To use King, Jr.'s sister Willie Christine King Farris's comment, which were made in reference to one of her own essays on her brother's life, "I hope" what is presented here "will help to demythologize one of our heroes."[13] The national holiday, the 30-foot stature on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and the occasional nominations for sainthood, have stripped King, Jr. of his basic, down-to-earth humanity, and have made the myth much larger than the man himself. The content of *Behind the Public Veil* humanizes King. Absolutely no uncritical adulation of King, Jr. is expressed or intended in the pages that follow. I have also tried to avoid any hint of a hagiographical tone, or any suggestion that King, Jr. was a saint who was literally obsessed with the common, daily problems that beset what he called "the least of these." King the human being should be retrieved, reclaimed, affirmed, and celebrated, and not so much the King who has been transformed to satisfy our obsessive and often unrealistic craving for heroes in this capitalistic society and culture.

This book consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 covers King, Jr.'s childhood and adolescence years—critical time frames that have long received inadequate attention even in the works of major King biographers. The central point here is that King, Jr. was essentially no different from any other boy growing up in the South in the 1930s and 40s, and that his boyhood and adolescence years constitute the appropriate point of departure for any serious assessment of his "humanness," or the quality of his life as a human being. This chapter

13. Christine King Farris, "The Young Martin: From Childhood through College," *Ebony*, Vol. XLI, no. 3 (January, 1986), 56.

will reveal the ways in which King, Jr. was quite human as a boy, even as he struggled to better understand what it meant to be human in theoretical terms. Considerable attention is also devoted to King, Jr.'s years at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia (1944–48), Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania (1948–51), and Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts (1951–54), and how his studies in these academic settings, along with personal experiences, helped him to mature and to make the transition from childhood and adolescence to adulthood.

Chapter 2 is an attempt to answer, with some specificity, the question that drives this volume: who was this man called Martin Luther King, Jr.?[14] The answer provided is essentially twofold. First, that King, Jr. was endowed with a basic, rich, and genuine "humanness" which determined the direction and quality of his life, and which informed his outreach to both ordinary persons and the elites in our society and world. In more precise terms, according to this chapter, King, Jr.'s "humanness" suggests that he was fully capable of mistakes and weaknesses, which he frequently acknowledged, and yet, a deeply courageous, committed, and sensitive individual who really tried to liberate, uplift, and empower humanity.

Second, this chapter shows that the public realm did not define nor frame all of King, Jr.'s choices in life. Put another way, King, Jr. was not so public in his social mission and goals that be became completely oblivious to the equally compelling demands of his private sphere. Home and family were always on his mind, he devoted "quality time" to the fulfillment of his roles and responsibilities as a husband and father,[15] and friends and comrades in the struggle were never more than a letter or a telephone call away. Thus, the demands of the private side of King's life—however limited by time, commitments,

14. Interestingly enough, this question is raised in the interesting biography of Vernon Johns, who preceded King as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. See Patrick L. Cooney with Henry W. Powell, *The Life and Times of the Prophet Vernon Johns: Father of the Civil Rights Movement*, unpublished version (1998), http://www.vernonjohns.org/tca1001/vjtofc.html, Chapter 26, 4.
15. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 200–201, 257, and 312; and Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 135–36.

circumstances, and other factors—were never entirely lost, even as he was catapulted into the international spotlight.

Chapter 3 explores King, Jr.'s abiding love for southern cooking, and especially soul food, which is one of those largely unplumbed dimensions of his private life that calls for further exploration. This chapter benefited from my conversation with John Egerton, and also, from a reading of Egerton's outstanding book, *Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History* (1987). Egerton shares a lot in his book about foodways in the American South,[16] and our exchange of ideas on this subject helped me to write perceptively in this chapter about King, Jr.'s appreciation and enjoyment of soul food in all of its glorious variety, and about how King, Jr., through his sharing of good food with family, loved ones, and friends, was actually participating in a long history and a culture and tradition that claim continuity.[17] Much attention is given to King, Jr.'s eating habits as they developed from childhood to his adult years, to his favorite food and drink, to those times he spent in his kitchen cooking during the first year of his marriage, to his appreciation for family-style dining, and to how he understood and appreciated the social significance of food and eating.[18]

Perhaps more than anything that has been written so far, this chapter captures King, Jr.'s sense of the immeasurable importance of food and eating as essentials of culture, and as a vital force in cementing family ties, in creating a spirit of human community, and in forging bonds and obligations between black people in the midst of oppression. It is not difficult to imagine how all of this took shape in King, Jr.'s consciousness, especially since the ideal of community was not only "the capstone" of his thought, but also, "the organizing principle" of all of his activities.[19]

Chapter 4 focuses on another significant and woefully neglected aspect of culture that figured prominently in King, Jr.'s youth and

16. John Egerton, *Southern Food: At Home, on the Road, in History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987), 1–345; and *A Private Interview with John Egerton*, Nashville, Tennessee (27 June 1986).
17. Baldwin Interview with Egerton (27 June 1986).
18. Only fleeting attention is given to these concerns in Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 35.
19. Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974), 119.

adult life—namely, major forms of sacred and secular music, or what might be called "expressive culture."[20] The main point is that great vocal and instrumental music, which was almost always tied to flexed, fluid bodily positions and movements in black communities, was part of King, Jr.'s cherished family, church, and folk heritage, and thus, central to the narrative of *who* and *what* he was.[21] The development of King, Jr.'s attitude and feelings toward music over time is traced in some detail, and so is his struggle to reconcile certain secular musical and dance forms with both the single-minded moralism of his church culture and his own personal religious values.[22]

This chapter affords a glimpse into the spiritual heart of King, Jr. It is largely a celebration of King's voice and life in song. It establishes, beyond doubt, that King, Jr.'s deep love and appreciation for the spirituals of his slave forebears, for the great hymns of the Christian church, for gospel songs, and for other musical forms, reveal the soul of a man who saw great art as inseparable from labor, from struggle, and indeed, from life. This helps explain why King, Jr. was so instrumental in bringing the rich musical forms and talents present in his family, in the church, and in the larger culture refreshingly to life in the context of the civil rights movement.

Chapter 5 examines King, Jr.'s playful attitude toward and approach to life—a side that remained essentially unknown outside of his circle of relatives and close friends. King, Jr. continued to play, in the sense of displaying a keen and enduring love for fun and frivolity, throughout his life, and not just during his childhood.[23] This chapter concludes that playfulness was one of King, Jr.'s greatest and most attractive

20. This term comes from Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 6.
21. Important references to the place of music in King's life and thinking are provided in Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 32–35; Lewis V. Baldwin, *To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 62–66; and Lewis V. Baldwin, *The Voice of Conscience: The Church in the Mind of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103–5.
22. I have noted elsewhere that the young King, Jr. found it difficult to justify his appreciation for secular music and dance "in light of the objections and teachings of the church." See Baldwin and Al-Hadid, *Between Cross and Crescent*, 16.
23. King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 59, 78, and 89; and "'I Remember Martin': People Close to the Late Civil Rights Leader Recall a Down-to-Earth and Humorous Man," *Ebony*, Vol. 39, no. 6 (April, 1984), 33–34, 36, 38, and 40.

character traits. Serious consideration is given to the ways in which he injected playfulness into his interactions with family and friends, thereby creating stronger bonds of mutual love, respect, and support while also contributing positive emotions to those relationships. It should become clear that for King, Jr., playing was not only personally enriching, gratifying, and fulfilling, but also, a powerful ingredient in enhancing the character of community.

This chapter raises and seeks to answer probing questions about the impact of King, Jr.'s tendency to bring his own, unique playful attitude and actions into the range of his life situations: What did this say about King, Jr.'s sense of himself and his philosophy of life?[24] Did his lifelong spirit of playfulness prove that he was secure, happy, and content? In what precise ways did this enhance the quality of his relationships? Was King, Jr.'s playfulness a source of love, of tenderness, of warmth, and of his connection to others? How did this translate into his robust love for and involvements with sports and sports heroes? How are we to reconcile King, Jr.'s often carefree and playful moods with the more popular image of the serious and responsible crusader, committed to the improvement of the human condition through nonviolent direct action? Was playing King, Jr.'s way of releasing negative energy and coping with life in the midst of all the drama, heartbreak, tension, stress, and threats against his well-being and life? Was being playful his recipe for freeing himself from worry and fear? How did this impact his physical and mental health? The answers afforded in Chapter 5 constitute further evidence that King, Jr. was steeped in black culture, and that his greatness cannot be fully grasped apart from his basic "humanness."

Chapter 6 examines King, Jr.'s genuine and enduring appreciation for folk wit, humor, and laughter, which means, in part, that the

24. While writing this chapter, I came across one of James Evans's most recent books, which explains playing as a key to the recreation of the self. Evans discusses playing as frivolous, but declares that "it is really the pulse of life itself." Evans's insights were quite helpful as I sought to frame my thoughts about King's playful attitude and approach to life. See James H. Evans, Jr., *Playing: Christian Explorations of Daily Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 2–4. For a very early, but equally important work on the subject, see Karl Groos, *The Play of Man* (New York: D. Appleton, 1916), 2–3.

relaxed and playful side of his personality will be explored in greater depth. Here, the focus is on King, Jr.'s respect for his people's ability to perceive, to express themselves, and to act in an ingeniously humorous manner, and also on King, Jr.'s humor as a form of playfulness. King, Jr.'s image as a good-natured and humorous person who delighted in the gift and power of folk wit and who told jokes to experience greater joy and laughter, and to amuse and lift the spirits of others, is highlighted. Attention is also given to some of the many comic anecdotes King, Jr. knew and shared freely concerning preachers, the church, ordinary people, and daily life itself.[25] Equally important in this chapter are the ways in which King, Jr. poked fun at white bigots, at the system of Jim Crow, and also at himself, relatives, friends, and others with whom he interacted and worked on a day-to-day basis. The conclusion is that the many personal and social problems and challenges King, Jr. faced never eroded his predisposition to play, wit, humor, and laughter.

As this last chapter in this books shows, folk wit, humor, and laughter are social and cultural phenomena that tell a lot about a people's spirit and philosophy of life. This was most certainly the case with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the black South that produced and nurtured him. King, Jr. shared his people's capacity to laugh even in the midst of adversity and pain, and this begs the question: Why? To answer this and other questions about King, Jr.'s love and need for fun and laughter, I read parts of John Morreall, ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (1987), Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1978), and Howard Clinebell's *Well Being: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life* (1992).

The Morreall volume, which includes selections from philosophers, appraises the value of traditional theories of wit, humor, and laughter, giving special attention to Plato and Aristotle's view of laughter as an expression of an attitude of superiority over another person, Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer's sense of laughter as a human reaction to the perception of some incongruity, and Herbert Spencer and

25. Some of these jokes are discussed in Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 303–10.

Sigmund Freud's idea that laughter is about releasing superfluous nervous energy.[26] I found insights here that proved useful in explaining King, Jr.'s keen sense of humor and his wonderful capacity for hearty laughter, but the Levine book proved more beneficial, especially since the author treats folk wit, humor, and laughter in the context of black history, life, and culture. Levine's insights build substantially on what James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, W. E. B. DuBois, Jessie Fauset, and others said about the Negro's capacity to rise above the pain, ambiguities, uncertainties, and ironies of life through "the gift of laughter."[27] Casually dismissing the stereotypical view that black laughter is an indication of a "vacuous, happy-go-lucky" personality, which harks back to slavery, Levine, a cultural historian, concludes that laughter has long been a compensating mechanism which enabled black people to transcend the ironies and contradictions of life, to confront oppression and hardship without bowing to insanity and genocide, and to exert some degree of control over their environment.[28] King, Jr.'s humor, which found its fullest expression in his own familial circles, among close friends and associates, and in black church settings, increasingly made sense as I engaged Levine's reflections on "the economy of laughter," and on humor as "an interactive process" among people "who share a sense of commonality of experience and situation."[29]

Clinebell, an authority in pastoral psychology and counseling, provided yet another angle from which King, Jr.'s humorous side is

26. See John Morreall, ed., *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 1–7 and 9–126.
27. See Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 298–366.
28. Ibid., 298–366 and 488n1. The Jewish scholar Lawrence Levine actually draws on the insights of Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. DuBois, Jessie Fauset, Thomas Talley, and other black and white thinkers who made significant references to the unique ability of black people to laugh in the face of misfortune, and who struggled to know more about the philosophy of laughter as it related to people of African descent in the United States. Also see Jessie Fauset, "The Gift of Laughter," in Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 161–67 and 214–15; James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: The Viking Press, 1933), 118–20; W. E. B. DuBois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971; originally published in 1940), 148–49; and Thomas Talley, *Negro Folk Rhymes* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1968; originally published in 1922), 244–45.
29. Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 303–10; and Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 320–21 and 358–59.

examined and explained in this book. Clinebell asserts that experiencing "the healing energy of playfulness and laughter" is an "important and joyful way" to "health" or "wellness." "Laughing at yourself and the absurdities of life, and with others," he adds, "is an inexpensive, easily available, drug-free form of stress reduction that certainly can add life to your years and probably some years to your life. It's one of the simplest, healthiest, and most liberating health gifts you can give your mind, body, and spirit."[30] Such observations are quite relevant to any discussion of the ways in which King, Jr. employed humor, especially since, as stated earlier, he often laughed at life and at himself—at the way he looked, dressed, and ate.[31] This book will reveal that the healing effects of this kind of humor and laughter are difficult to exaggerate, especially for a widely known and celebrated public figure such as King, Jr., who constantly lived under the threat of death. The findings and insights of Clinebell, Levine, Morreall, and other scholars came together in my consciousness as I examined the needs and uses of wit, humor, and laughter for King, Jr.

The picture of King, Jr. coursing through chapters 5 and 6 of *Behind the Public Veil* contrasts sharply with the characterizations projected in even the most respected, innovative, and celebrated works on this colorful figure. Apparently drawing on a different body of evidence, some of the most reputable King scholars have described King, Jr. as a man who was "always worried," "tortured," "torn up on the inside," chronically "self-critical," plagued by mounting "inner tension" and "self-doubts," and haunted by "consuming guilt" and "the menacing threat of despair." They have also written in touching language about King, Jr.'s "underlying loneliness," his "growing pessimism," his "deep" and "nearly incapacitating depression," his "persistent despondency, confusion, and doubt," the difficulties he faced "persevering" and living "comfortably," and how he "drank more" in the final days of

30. Howard Clinebell, *Well Being: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life—Mind, Body, Spirit, Love, Work, Play, the Earth* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 159. Clinebell also make a fleeting but important reference to "the healing energy of laughter" in Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 344.
31. Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 309.

his life.[32] The purpose of *Behind the Public Veil* is not to question nor refute this seemingly one-dimensional view of King, but, rather, to call the reader's attention to that side of King, Jr.'s life and personality which has gotten lost in all of the aforementioned claims made by King, Jr. scholars—that side that had to do with unfettered festivity, enjoying and celebrating the many pleasures of life in the moment without worrying unnecessarily, the ability to sing, dance, play, and laugh, and the capacity "to see the humor in even the most difficult situations."[33] King, Jr.'s voracious appetite for soul food; his deep and lasting appreciation for different kinds of music; his strong and abiding love for play and sports; his keen sense of the power of folk wit, humor, and laughter; his amazing, lifelong openness to merrymaking and a celebrative and feeling-oriented approach to life and living—these are vital and amply attested elements of King, Jr.'s "humanness," which accounts about his personal defects and struggles should not be permitted to overshadow.

Behind the Public Veil was never designed to provide a complete portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr., and nor is it an attempt at a revisionist use of King, Jr. The book is simply an effort to humanize King, Jr. and to bring to light that largely unknown side of *who* and *what* he was. It reclaims the man who smiled, laughed, and cried, and who, by the power of his presence and personality, made others smile, laugh, and cry. It refocuses attention on a man who identified with ordinary people, who did the kinds of things they did, and who simply wanted to

32. Burns, *To the Mountaintop*, 225–27, 260–61, 265, 280, 287, 345–47, 355, 377–78, 394, 403, 406–7, 421–22, 427, 429–30, and 435–37; David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 216–19; Baldwin and Burrow, *The Domestication of Martin Luther King Jr.*, 126–27, 131, and 137; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 114–15 and 603–4; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 702; Lischer, *The Preacher King*, 167–72; Chappell, *Waking from the Dream*, 13, 186n7, 187n12, and 188n26–27; and Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 194–95 and 641. Interestingly enough, even Coretta Scott King characterized her husband as guilt-ridden. See King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 169–70. I have taken issue with this limited view of King in Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 309–10. Rufus Burrow appears to challenge the claims about King's growing pessimism. See Rufus Burrow, Jr., *Extremist for Love: Martin Luther King Jr., Man of Ideas and Nonviolent Social Action.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 309.

33. King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 89; Baldwin, *There is a Balm in Gilead*, 303–10; and "'I Remember Martin,'" 33–40.

be seen and treated as a human being. Strangely, this man remains "an enigma"[34] for all too many in our nation and world.

It is not excessive to suggest that humanizing King, Jr. makes him more, and not less, heroic. In fact, it is in his humanity that we discover the sheer quality of his character, life, soul, and spirit. Here lies the essence of his heroism and greatness.

34. "'I Remember Martin,'" 33.