Plagiarism, Culture, and the Future of the Academy

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In the 1980s it was still possible to defend proudly and with impunity the traditional definition of plagiarism and the commonsensical delineation of scholarly standards and responsibilities. Take, for example, Peter Shaw's 1982 essay on "Plagiary" in *The American Scholar*. His contentions and conclusions were simple and straightforward: that a plagiarist remains as Lord Chesterfield described him, "a man that steals other people's thoughts and puts 'em off for his own"; that "literary critics and scholars must bear the responsibility to affirm that there is indeed such a thing as plagiarism and that they are capable of identifying it if necessary"; and that "the attempt to evade professional responsibility when a case of plagiarism arises only makes for further complications."[1] Thomas Mallon echoed these traditionalist views in *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (1989).[2] But the cultural climate has changed, even since the 1980s, and defenders of literary standards and contemners of plagiarism now stand in stark contrast to the writers, scholars, editors, and publishers who have abandoned their responsibility as critics and watchdogs, forgone the unpleasantness of upholding propriety, and opted instead for a kinder and gentler conception of plagiarism that facilitates life for pilferer and critic alike. According to this "new thinking" about literary theft, plagia-

[1] Peter Shaw, "Plagiary," *The American Scholar* (Summer 1982), 325-37.

[2] Thomas Mallon, *Stolen Words: Forays into the Origins and Ravages of Plagiarism* (New York: Tickner and Fields, 1989).

rism must go the way of other taboos that have been modified and redefined in deference to sensitivity and social progress.

To appreciate the gravity of this situation, it is important to understand, one, that plagiarism remains a serious social and cultural problem; two, that the current push to redefine plagiarism is directly tied to how famous cases of pilfering have been handled and mishandled throughout recent history; and, three, that at issue here is not just the definition of literary theft but the conceptions of authorship and originality on which scholarship and composition have been based for two centuries.

Rising incidence of plagiarism.

That plagiarism is relevant to our times can hardly be disputed. Senator Joseph Biden's bid for the presidency ended after he plagiarized a speech by British Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock in 1987. We now know that Martin Luther King, Jr., routinely plagiarized not only in his college, seminary, and graduate school essays, including his doctoral dissertation, but in many of his most famous speeches and published works as well, including the legendary "I Have a Dream" oration. "Plagiarism and Theft of Ideas" was the exclusive topic of the June 1993 conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. A 1990-91 study by Donald McCabe of the Center for Academic Integrity indicates that over a third of undergraduates now admittedly plagiarize. Over the last decade or so plagiarism scandals have embroiled some of the most popular authors and their most popular works, including Alex Haley, for his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Roots*; Dee Brown, for *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*; Gail Sheehy, for *Passages*; Ken Follett, for *The Key to Rebecca*; and Norman Mailer, for his biography of Marilyn Monroe.

Promoting impropriety.

Fraud and plagiarism in the literary, scientific, and scholarly worlds are more prominent and prolific than generally realized, and the way in which many cases of impropriety have been ignored, whitewashed, and covered up by the press, by editors, by publishers, and by universities has only aggravated the problem and encouraged such perfidy. Historian Stephen Nissenbaum spent years trying to convince both publishers and universities that his book *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America* had been brazenly plagiarized by a young historian at Texas Tech named Jayme Sokolow. As Nissenbaum wrote in the March 20, 1990, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "though Mr. Sokolow's activities first came to light nine years ago . . . not one of the institutions that have learned of them has openly condemned what he did. That includes two uni-

versities, at least seven publishing houses, and three major national organizations."[3] Though Professor Nissenbaum finally succeeded in publicizing the theft, students can still find Sokolow's *Eros and Modernization* right alongside Nissenbaum's legitimately researched book in the library, the two works now shelved together because of the "similarity" of their topics.

Fraud in the sciences.

A new controversy in the field of American history is brewing over the charges of Walter Stewart and Ned Feder of the National Institutes of Health. Stewart and Feder became famous (or notorious) in the mid-1980s, when their research uncovered serious fraud in the sciences, and since then they have devised a computerized method of detecting plagiarism. This spring they filed with the American Historical Association a 1,400-page report on the alleged plagiarisms of historian and best-selling biographer Stephen Oates. According to the *Chicago Tribune* (May 10, 1993), the association has admitted to improper citations in Oates' biography of Abraham Lincoln but refused to call them plagiarism.[4] The new evidence reportedly demonstrates widespread plagiarisms throughout Oates' biographies of William Faulkner and Martin Luther King as well. The charge is serious and potentially damaging to the profession, as Oates' writings have long been staples of college courses in American history.

University officials as accomplices.

Nor have university administrators escaped such contretemps. In May 1991, the dean of Boston University's College of Communication, H. Joachim Maitre, delivered what many observers called a moving and powerful commencement address. It focused on how movies and television glorify both the ugly and the beautiful at the expense of religion and traditional values. There was only one problem: Dean Maitre had taken significant sections of the speech virtually verbatim from an article by film critic Michael Medved. Considering that Medved's article had already appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* and *Reader's Digest*—two more widely circulated publications could hardly be found—the dean's actions left commentators wondering whether plagiarism constituted the real offense. As Francis Getliffe suggests in C.P. Snow's novel *The Affair*, which deals

[3] Stephen Nissenbaum, "The Plagiarists in Academe Must Face Formal Sanction," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (28 March 1990), A52.

[4] Ron Grossman, "Silencing the Whistle: Plagiarism Cops Lose Their License to Embarrass," *Chicago Tribune* (10 May 1993), Tempo Section, 1.

with a case of scientific fraud, "there are times when stupidity seems to me the greater crime."[5]

In light of the Maitre incident and the controversy over the thesis that Martin Luther King plagiarized at Boston University in 1955, one might think that an encyclopedia's entry on "Plagiarism" would today end with the words "See also 'Boston University,'" but there is and has been plenty of chicanery on our campuses to go around. Regarding plagiarism in particular, the University of Oregon perhaps takes the gold. As the *New York Times* reported on June 6, 1980:

> Stanford University said today it had learned that its teaching assistant's handbook section on plagiarism had been plagiarized by the University of Oregon. Stanford issued a release saying Oregon officials conceded that the plagiarism section and other parts of its handbook were identical with the Stanford guidebook. Oregon officials apologized and said they would revise their guidebook.[6]

Of course, cribbing a faculty handbook is hardly an offense of staggering cultural consequence, but there are signs of more serious fraud, deception, and plagiarism among academics that seldom receive much press and scrutiny. This seems especially true with regard to the sciences, as a number of recent studies indicate. We have tended to view scientists since the Civil War and particularly in this century as paragons of objectivity and as champions of truth who are selfless in motivation, dispassionate in research, and immune to the lure of coin and convention. Just how often this image falls short of reality is now painfully clear. The investigations of Stewart and Feder, for example, were indispensable in uncovering the extent of the transgressions in the now-famous cases of John Darsee of the Harvard Medical School (the widely acclaimed rising star of biomedical research who, after publishing 122 journal articles in a little over two years, was found to have faked data in nearly every paper) and of Dr. David Baltimore (the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who signed on to and then embarrassingly defended to the eleventh hour an article based on faked data).

The potential danger of such fraud cannot be overstated. Robert Bell, in *Impure Science: Fraud, Compromise, and Political Influence in Scientific Research*, cites the example of Dr. Stephen Breuning of the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, who pleaded guilty in Sep-

[5] C.P. Snow, *The Affair* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 123.

[6] "Plagiarism Book is Plagiarized," *New York Times* (6 June 1980), A28.

tember 1988 to two charges of filing fake reports on projects funded with federal money.[7] The bogus reports had not only been relied on nationwide for determining drug therapy for severely retarded and institutionalized children, but they had even endorsed and recommended the exact opposite treatment from that proven sound and safe by legitimate studies. Marcel C. LaFollette, in *Stealing into Print: Fraud, Plagiarism, and Misconduct in Scientific Publishing*, echoes Bell's concern and shows how the peer-review process and political grandstanding have greatly hindered attempts to crack down on fraud and plagiarism. The latter now appears to be the more prevalent form of malfeasance. "Both the NSF [the National Science Foundation] and NIH [National Institutes of Health] now report that they investigate substantially more allegations involving plagiarism and stolen ideas than allegations involving falsified or altered data," she notes.[8]

Even the grand old man of the sea—Jacques Cousteau—appears to fall short of our vision of the sainted scientist. French journalist Bernard Violet, in *Cousteau: A Biography* (1992), has touched off a fierce controversy in his country with his contention that numerous sea scenes in Cousteau's movies were secretly staged in a Marseilles studio, that divers faked illnesses and equipment failure for dramatic effect, and that animals were purposely harmed to induce a desired response for the camera. Now, the possible torture of sea animals is hardly germane to a discussion of plagiarism, but what is certainly relevant is how Violet felt upon uncovering such inglorious information about a man whom he and his countrymen have long revered as a national icon. The shock and disappointment he experienced are, in fact, similar to that which Clayborne Carson, the editor of the King Papers Project at Stanford University, reportedly felt upon learning of the evidence of Martin Luther King's plagiarisms. "I had admired Cousteau since the age of seven," says Violet, "when my father took me to see *Le monde du silence*, Cousteau's first film and winner of the Cannes Film Festival in 1956. Now I feel like an orphan."[9]

Orphans are often found in the wake of famous plagiarism scan-

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[7] Robert Bell, *Impure Science: Fraud, Compromise, and Political Influence in Scientific Research* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992), 105-110.

[8] Marcel C. LaFollette, *Stealing Into Print: Fraud, Plagiarism, and Misconduct in Scientific Publishing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 48-49.

[9] From a 1993 interview of Bernard Violet by Pierre Prier of *The European*.

dals, and the disillusionment they experience is nothing to take lightly, as I learned firsthand. The occasion was a Chicago talk-radio show in the fall of 1990. I was being interviewed about an article of mine on King's plagiarized dissertation, which at the time was the only article to describe in detail how and what King had pilfered. My argument was twofold: that, regardless of how one felt about King's historic role as leader of a social movement, his blatant plagiarizing in pursuit of America's highest academic degree—specifically, his stealing of large sections of a dissertation by Jack Boozer—was an indefensible act that should warrant the revocation of his Ph.D.; and that Boston University could posthumously award King an honorary doctorate for his contribution to civil rights but that it had an obligation as an institution devoted to the pursuit of truth to revile and revoke what was fraudulently earned. One female caller's response: "People like you should be 'taken out'!" And she did not mean to dinner and a movie.

Bad news unwelcome.

This woman's impulse to behead (in my case, perhaps literally) the bearer of the bad news instead of dealing with the bad news itself is a feature common to famous plagiarism cases since the time of Coleridge. Why the age of Coleridge, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is relevant to this discussion may not be obvious without remembering when the idea of plagiarism first began to challenge the classical notion of imitation that had long reigned in the West as the preferred method of composition. As George Kennedy explains in *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, classical writing and oratory were

> to a considerable extent a pastiche, or piecing together of commonplaces, long or short. . . . The student memorized passages as he would letters and made up a speech out of these elements as he would words out of letters. . . . In the Middle Ages handbooks of letter-writing often contained formulae, such as openings and closes, which the student could insert into a letter, and a whole series of formulary rhetorics existed in the Renaissance.[10]

Imitation or plagiarism: a question of deceptive intent.

Rhetoricians, however, expected these models, formulae, pastiches, and commonplaces to be recognized by their auditors and accepted for what they were—either clichés of basic oratory or time-honored excerpts of the masters. There was no attempt to deceive or

[10] George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980), 28-29.

to pass off the genius of others as one's own, which, of course, a plagiarist aims to do. As Seneca the Elder said of Ovid, "as he had done with many other lines of Virgil [he] borrowed the idea, not desiring to deceive people, but to have it openly recognized as borrowed."[11]

Romantic obsession with originality.

This classical tradition of imitation was not significantly challenged until the eighteenth century. It was then that authorship, originality, and plagiarism became for the first time prime issues of debate, and by the age of Coleridge and Romanticism, an obsession with originality and a fanatical crediting of literary property had become defining features of Western culture. This development was not to everyone's liking. Tennyson was appalled by the "prosaic set growing up among us—editors of booklets, bookworms, index-hunters, or men of great memories . . . [that] will not allow one to say, 'Ring the bell' without finding that we have taken it from Sir P. Sidney, or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean 'roars' without finding out the precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarized it."[12] This "prosaic set" that Tennyson, Pope, and others railed against was the new breed of scholar—the "pedants without insight, intellectuals without love"—who trivialized literature, distorted aesthetics, and sought prestige and honor not through originality but by impugning the originality of men of proven talent.

The coming of the professional writer.

The other factor contributing to this heightened concern for authorship stemmed from a socioeconomic, not aesthetic, change: the profitability of putting pen to paper had given rise to that dubious lot known as professional writers. It is not surprising, then, that the first detailed discussions and definitions of plagiarism issue from this period and from the likes of Johnson, Pope, Goldsmith, and De Quincey. Thomas Mallon, in *Stolen Words*, describes the transition this way:

> A modern world was printing and distributing itself into existence. Literary "careers" would be "made," and writerly goods would get sold, not because they were skillful variants of earlier ones but because they were *original*. . . . Eventually a bourgeois world would

[11] *The Suasoriae of Seneca the Elder*, iii, 7. Quoted in Harold Ogden White, *Plagiarism and Imitation During the English Renaissance: A Study in Critical Distinctions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 5-6.

[12] From a 24 November 1882 letter to Mrs. S.E. Dawson. See Sir Edward Cook, *More Literary Recreations* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 177-84 and Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952), 52-53.

> create its own new genre, the novel, and authors would be brand names, the "new Scott" asked for like this year's carriage model.[13]

It is also at this time that we find an increased interest in the detection of forged documents and the first serious calls for copyright statutes.

Two famous cases.

The continuity between this period and our own in the handling of famous cases of plagiarism can most readily be seen by juxtaposing two of the most prominent filchers of the last two centuries: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Martin Luther King, Jr. That Coleridge boldly plagiarized—not in his famous poems but most blatantly in his *Biographia Literaria* and in his lectures on Shakespeare—is still not widely known among the general public. What Peter Shaw wrote 11 years ago in the *The American Scholar* remains largely true:

> Today the general reading public remains for the most part unaware that Coleridge was a plagiarist, while literary critics and professors of English—outside of those who specialize in the study of Romantic poetry—are largely unaware of the extent and significance of his plagiarism. The manner in which the present state of ignorance came about bears directly on the literary world's current unwillingness to deal with contemporary cases of plagiarism.[14]

Though these two men differ in ways that are as numerous as they are obvious, their similarities as plagiarists are nevertheless striking and useful for highlighting how famous cases of pilfering typically play out. Both men plagiarized some of their most influential prose and were publicly exposed as pilferers only after death. The plagiarisms of both men were widely rumored and whispered about prior to their exposure and were secretly known by numerous individuals who suppressed the story. Both men had spirited celebrants for whom no excuse, justification, or rationalization was too fantastic to enlist in the defense of their hero's work and reputation. And both men publicly defended their purloined property as their own.

The apologists' ingenious attempts to palliate the plagiarisms can be entertaining. Both Thomas Mallon and Peter Shaw summarize the arguments of Coleridge's principal defenders. In rebutting J.C. Ferrier's relentless documentation of Coleridge's thefts, for example, Thomas McFarland contends that "it is surprising and rather anti-climactic to find that when the firing is over Ferrier has discov-

[13] Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 5.

[14] Shaw, "Plagiary," 334.

ered no more than nineteen pages of plagiarism in the hundreds that make up the *Biographia Literaria*."[15] The committee that Boston University convened to investigate King's plagiarisms adopts a similar argument in its September 1991 report. Because King stole only 45 percent of his thesis's first half, and only 21 percent of the second, the dissertation remains an "intelligent contribution to scholarship," and "no thought should be given to the revocation of Dr. King's doctoral degree."[16] As Peter Shaw wondered in regard to McFarland's defense, "If nineteen pages are anticlimactic, it is not clear what would have impressed McFarland in the circumstances—twenty-one pages copied? Twenty-five? Fifty?"[17] Similarly with Boston University's handling of King's plagiarisms. What kind of numbers would have to be posted to impress that university? Say, plagiarism covering 65 percent of the first half and 45 percent of the second?

Euphemisms for plagiarism.

McFarland refers to Coleridge's "mode of composition—composition by mosaic organization." This language is similar to Walter Jackson Bate's and James Engell's comparison of Coleridge's plagiarisms to "a chemical compound." But such phrases are merely euphemisms for plagiarism. They are typical of the rhetorical mufflers with which apologists for plagiarists swathe and bedizen themselves in an effort to suppress the cold reality of theft. At one point Clayborne Carson even forbad everyone at the King Papers Project at Stanford to utter the dreaded "p-word." He spoke instead of "similarities," "paraphrasing," and "textual appropriations" as part of King's "successful composition method." To the credit of the *Journal of American History*, when Carson submitted an article about King's plagiarisms that was replete with duplicity of this kind, the journal rejected it for disingenuousness, for a lack of forthrightness with the truth. But Carson, Bate, Engell, and McFarland are neophytes in comparison with the versatile Keith Miller of Arizona State University, a professor of English and the author of *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources*.[18] Though Miller's research is indispensable for ascertaining the

[15] *Ibid.*, 335.

[16] "Report of the Boston University Committee to Investigate Charges of Plagiarism in the Ph.D. Dissertation of Martin Luther King, Jr." (September 1991), 2-4.

[17] Shaw, "Plagiary," 335.

[18] Keith D. Miller, *Voice of Deliverance: The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

sources of stolen material in King's most famous speeches and published works, it employs rhetorical tricks and semantical sophistry to an extraordinary extent. King's pirating was not "plagiarism," but rather "voice merging," "intertextualizations," "incorporations," "borrowings," "consulting," "absorbing," "alchemizing," "overlapping," "quarrying," "yoking," "adopting," "synthesizing," "replaying," "echoing," "resonances," and "reverberations."

Time-honored excuses.

Bate and Engell eventually rely on the most time-honored excuse for plagiarism, that the improprieties were unintentional and merely stemmed from careless notetaking and hasty writing. Surprisingly, historian Eugene Genovese adopts this very line in his exculpation of King. While acknowledging the thefts—often verbatim thefts of entire paragraphs—that King committed throughout college and graduate school, Professor Genovese, in *The New Republic*, discounts their significance and argues that King simply "misquoted in a manner that suggests impatience with scholarly procedures," a "sloppiness" that was "not an expression of laziness or an unwillingness to do the required work."[19] When verbatim plagiarism became a legitimate way of doing "the required work" at our universities—let alone a method of completing a doctoral dissertation, which by definition means an original work of scholarship—and how an "impatience with scholarly standards" accounts for the plagiarisms King committed throughout the decade and a half after he left academia, Professor Genovese does not say. What could have affected the judgment of so fine a scholar?

S. Paul Schilling, who was the second reader of King's dissertation at Boston University, follows a similar path of palliation. As he states in a letter that the university reproduces in its September 1991 report, "it should be recognized [that King] was operating on a very crowded schedule during most of the work on his dissertation," as if plagiarism is acceptable or at least excusable if one is busy and in a hurry. Schilling adds, "it should be recognized that [King's] appropriation of the language of others does not entail inaccurate interpretation of the thought of writers cited."[20] Apparently a plagiarist deserves praise for stealing accurately.

Another characteristic common to plagiarism cases is the role and fate of the exposer of the misdeeds. When, in Rex Stout's *Plot It*

[19] Eugene D. Genovese, "Pilgrim's Progress," *The New Republic* (11 May 1992), 35.

Yourself, Nero Wolfe's assistant interrogates a literary agent about a case of "plagiarism upside down"—the planting of a back-dated manuscript of a published work for purposes of blackmailing the legitimate author as a plagiarist—he senses "from [the agent's] tone that anyone who made a plagiarism claim was a louse."[21] Here, in a nutshell, is the typical fate of the whistleblower. No one suffers the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune like the exposer of a famous plagiarist, for it is he, not the sinner and certainly not the sin, who becomes the center of debate, the target of abuse, and the victim of the hot and harsh lights of public scrutiny. Walter Stewart and Ned Feder know this all too well. In May the National Institutes of Health confiscated their files and computer terminals and discs, forbad them to address the issue of plagiarism for the foreseeable future, and reassigned them to such tasks as folding protein before placing them on leave. "My partner was told," Stewart told the *Chicago Tribune* (May 10, 1993), "that it would be inappropriate for him to comment on any errors or problems he might see in published scientific literature. We think that's just what someone who monitors research projects funded with the government's money ought to be doing."[22] And what precipitated this clampdown? It seems pressure was exerted on NIH via a tie to the Clinton administration, a person close to one of the scholars Stewart and Feder had recently investigated. A better example of political intrigue could hardly be found, and yet the story remains buried.

Of course, the "burying" of the unpalatable and politically sensitive is hardly an anomaly in American journalism. Thanks to Charles Babington's article "Embargoed" in the January 28, 1991, issue of *The New Republic*, we now know that numerous publications—including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, as well as *The New Republic*—had long known about King's thefts but deliberately suppressed the story.[23] There are also more subtle ways to stifle scholarship and debate. For example, in mid-1990 *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture* received, accepted, and set for publication a short article from a scholar praising King and the civil rights movement but mildly rebuking him for plagiarizing his dissertation. The author, however, pulled the piece at the last moment because of information that con-

[20] "Report of the Boston University Committee," Appendix D.

vinced him that the publication of the article was about to kill his forthcoming chance for tenure at his university. It was then—when faced with this clear sign that the American academy had ceased to be a bastion of free speech, propriety, and scholarly standards—that this writer ordered the two dissertations and went public with detailed evidence of King's plagiarisms.

The reader might think that, after two centuries, the conventional conceptions of literary property and literary theft would be safely and securely embedded in our culture and beyond reproach, dilution, or subversion. As Thomas Mallon wrote in 1989, "Originality—not just innocence of plagiarism but the making of something really and truly new—set itself down as a cardinal literary virtue sometime in the middle of the eighteenth century and has never since gotten up."[24] Unfortunately, we now encounter challenges from within the academy itself to subvert the traditional conceptions of authorship and originality that have persevered for two centuries as the standards for scholarship and composition. Most disturbing, this potential paradigm shift of serious consequence is occurring amid the silence of the scholarly community.

Defining away standards.

What Professor Mallon could not have foreseen is the rise of Keith Miller and his application of the new "voice merging" theory. Miller contends that plagiarism by certain minorities should not be condemned but rather "understood" in the context of their cultural experience. For example, because King was black as well as a preacher, and because black preachers have traditionally "voice merged" with one another by freely swapping sermons without attribution, Miller concludes that King's plagiarisms must have derived from an inability to distinguish the classroom from the pulpit, to separate himself from this homiletic tradition, and to comprehend the standards of an alien white culture—still apparently alien to King after 11 years of higher education (often at predominantly white institutions), three academic degrees, and a graduate school seminar on plagiarism and scholarly standards. Miller extrapolates from this reasoning that, since many minorities come from cultures rich in oral traditions, we must redefine plagiarism to accommodate these "excluded" groups. Put more bluntly, all legal claims to original thought and the interpretation of ideas must now yield in deference to multiculturalism, diversity, cultural relativism, and human

[21] Rex Stout, *Plot It Yourself* (New York: The Viking Press, 1959), 164.

rights. As Miller argues in "Redefining Plagiarism" in the January 20, 1993, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "the process of securing fundamental human rights such as those King championed . . . outweighs the right to the exclusive use of intellectual and literary property."[25]

Miller's second reason for wanting to redefine plagiarism stems specifically from King's pilfering. "We face a contradiction," he suggests in his essay. "We wish to lionize a man for his powerful language while decrying a major strategy that made his words resonate and persuade." Miller then issues a startling non sequitur: "How could such a compelling leader commit what most people define as a writer's worst sin? The contradiction should prompt us to rethink our definition of plagiarism."[26] Should we also rethink drunk driving in light of Chappaquiddick and redefine adultery to account for King's philandering?

Apparently Miller is not alone in holding such views. In fact, one professor in the February 23, 1993, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* not only praised Miller's essay but regretted that he "did not go far enough." For "when the purpose is to use ideas—for inspiration, practical value, clarity of purpose, good fellowship, or whatever—it can only hinder us to wonder who deserves credit for them."[27] Clayborne Carson wrote in a similar vein in the January 16, 1991, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. While "recognizing that textual appropriation was one aspect of [King's] successful composition method," King's "legitimate utilization of political, philosophical, and literary texts—particularly those expressing the nation's democratic ideals—inspired and mobilized many Americans, thereby advancing the cause of social justice."[28] Such statements, in essence, say the end justifies the means, that if one steals for the right reason—whatever "right" may be, as defined by whomever—then the vice is excusable if not sanctionable and commendable. Note the publication in which these arguments have appeared. Sinons with Trojan horses have clearly passed through the gates of academe.

[22] Grossman, *Chicago Tribune*, Tempo Section, 3.

[23] Charles Babington, "Embargoed," *The New Republic* (28 January 1991), 9-11.

[24] Mallon, *Stolen Words*, 24.

Transforming plagiarism into a virtue in light of King's pilfering is Miller's aim. He accomplishes this goal through three stages in his book. He first sets the "proper" tone by opening with an epigraph from Quintilian—the first-century rhetorician whose *Institutio Oratoria* is the masterwork on the subject of classical imitation.[29] The implication is clear, that both his arguments and King's plagiarisms are nothing more than a continuation of a hallowed Western tradition. His "voice merging" theory follows and prepares the reader for his bold conclusion: that King's plagiarisms were perhaps his greatest gift to the country. For by "intertextualizing" stolen works into his popular speeches and essays, and by stealing in particular the words and writings of liberal white preachers, King "foolproofed his discourse" and was able to "change the minds of moderate and uncommitted whites" toward solving "the nation's most horrific problem—racial injustice." In fact, "Not only did voice merging keep Jefferson's dream alive, it also helped compel the White House to withdraw from the nightmare of Vietnam. Then in the wake of his movement came the second wave of American feminism, the campaign for gay rights, and the crusade to save the environment."[30] All this owed to plagiarism! Miller offers, however, no proof whatsoever that King intentionally plagiarized white sources or that he did so specifically to further the aims and popularity of the civil rights movement.

Pilferage as virtue.

Miller's ideas are spreading among minority groups and are now even vying for legal sanction. "A lawyer asked me for advice in defending a Native American student charged with plagiarizing papers in law school," he writes in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. "The student came from an oral culture, and could not immediately understand or obey the rules of written English. . . . King's example thus is not an isolated case."[31] Indeed, the number of such cases will doubtless multiply: "voice merging" is a godsend to plagiarist and lawyer alike.

To the hundreds of individuals who have asked me in recent years, in prosecutorial tone, why I or anyone should be interested in plagiarism and in the Martin Luther King, Jr., plagiarism story in particular, I point out that, in the country with ostensibly the freest and most adversarial press in the world, many of our leading jour-

[25] Miller, "Redefining Plagiarism: Martin Luther King's Use of an Oral Tradition," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (20 January 1993), A60.

[26] *Ibid*.

nals and newspapers knew about King's plagiarisms and the extent of the transgressions but deliberately spiked and suppressed the story; that Keith Miller and his followers and their propositions, if left unchallenged and allowed to root, will undermine scholarship and composition as traditionally conceived; and that Clayborne Carson and the King Papers staff uncovered evidence of King's plagiarisms in 1987, misrepresented the evidence to the public for three years thereafter, and—after eight years on the public payroll as editors and scholars with over a half-million dollars of the taxpayers' money via the National Endowment for the Humanities—have still published only one volume of an expected 14-volume set.

But there is a deeper, more significant reason to be interested in this story. As Anthony Grafton of Princeton University eloquently concludes in *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, "The exercise of criticism is a sign of health and virtue in a civilization; the prevalence of forgery is a sign of illness and vice."[32] What Professor Grafton states about forgery holds equally true for plagiarism, and considering the duplicity, disingenuousness, and disrespect for free debate that are now overwhelming our approach to criticism and higher learning, it would be wise to heed Professor Grafton's remarks. Harboring fraud and deception is bad enough. Calling them scholarship and truth signals the end of the academy and intellectual discourse as we know them.

[27] Ken Lebensold, "Plagiarism, Copyright, and Ownership of Ideas," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (24 February 1993), B4.

[28] Clayborne Carson, "Documenting Martin Luther King's Importance—and His Flaws," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (16 January 1991), A52.

[29] See in particular Book X of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*.

[30] Miller, *Voice of Deliverance*, 195.