

## MLK Speech in Winnetka Summer 1965

Dr. Martin Bickman:

Fellow Americans, this meeting tonight is a most historic occasion. I think it would be well to ground it in a little bit of history. I hold in my hand a small book that few of you have ever seen. It contains the story of how a brave and intelligent Irishman arose in the British Parliament on March 22, 1775, and spoke of the American colonies...These Americans, he said, love freedom. These Americans, he said, have a fierce passion for civil liberties. These Americans have an enduring ...passion to achieve justice in...their social and economic life...So this movement that we represent here tonight is a movement that is deeply founded in the very basis of American history and American life.

Dr. King, as I walked around this audience tonight...I saw in it the friends that I have worked with for these 40 years in these North Shore towns. We have fought for civil rights, for freedom for every person...Dr. King, these people are here...the grass roots of the freedom movement in the North Shore and in Chicago. We present them to you. God bless you as you carry your message.

Dr. Martin Luther King:

Thank you very kindly, Rev. Dr. Davis, chairman of the North Shore Summer Project, Dr. Bickham, the distinguished citizens of the North Shore communities, ladies and gentleman. It is certainly a delightful pleasure to come to these

Communities...It is a great pleasure to be in Chicago at this tune to lend support to efforts to expose injustices...We have been able to make tremendous strides in the scientific and technological realm, but now we must be sure that we make as many strides in the realm of human relations...We must learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools.

### The American Dream

I would like to say what I have to say tonight...the American dream, because America is essentially a dream- a dream yet unfulfilled. The substance of the dream is expressed in these sublime works: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal: that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights: that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." This is a great dream.

The first thing that we notice about this dream is an amazing universalism. It does not say SOME men, it says ALL men; it does not say all WHITE men, it says all MEN, Which includes BLACK men; it does not say all GENTILES, it says all MEN, Which includes JEWS; it does not say all PROSESTANTS, it says all MEN, which includes CATHOLICS...Very seldom, if ever, in the history of the world, has a socio-political document expressed in such profound, eloquent, unambiguous language the dignity and the worth of human personality...

But ever since the founding fathers of our nation dreamed this dream, America has been something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against herself: on the one hand,

we have proudly professed the great principles of democracy and on the other hand, we have sadly practiced the very antithesis of those principles. Indeed, slavery and racial segregation have been strange paradoxes in a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal. Now more than ever before, America is challenged to realize her great dream. For the shape of the world today does not permit our nation the luxury of an anemic democracy, and then price that America must pay for the continued oppression of then Negro and other minority groups is the price of its own destruction. The hour is late, the clock of destiny is ticking out. And we must act now before it is too late. Those who are working in this area, those who are working to make integration a reality, those who are working to improve the school situation in Chicago and make better jobs a reality for Negro people and for poor people generally, those who are working in the housing area- one of the most serious problems we face, those who are working in this North Shore Summer Project may well be the saviors of our nation. They are not engaged in some passing activity. They are not engaged in meaningless action. (I submit that) they are engaging in action which may well save the soul of our nation... that it is precisely this action that will help our nation rise to its full moral maturity. And I would like to suggest (to you tonight) some of the things that we (all), must do, that all of us must do, to (help) make the American dream a reality.

### Segregation is Evil

First, we must reaffirm with all of the power in our being the essential immorality and evilness of racial segregation. Segregation is evil whether it is in educational institutions, whether it is in the realm of housing, whether it is in

Recreational facilities, whether it is in the church itself. Segregation is the evil system. We must reject segregation not merely because it is sociologically untenable, not merely because it is politically unsound. It is morally wrong. Segregation is wrong, to use the words of the late and great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, because it substitutes an "it" relationship for the "thou" relationship. To use the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, segregation is wrong because it's based on human laws that are out of harmony with the eternal natural and moral laws of the universe...the great Protestant theologian Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. What is segregation but an existential affirmation of man's tragic estrangement, his terrible sinfulness, his awful separation.

And so we must work to get rid of segregation because it scars the soul; it does something damaging to the personality of both the segregator and the segregated...It so often leaves (the segregator) with a sense of superiority while leaving the segregated with a sense of inferiority. And therefore we must make it clear that segregation must go. And it must go in every area...We must go all out to end segregation in housing. We do great injury to our children. Every white person does great injury to his or her child if he allows that child to come up in a world that is two-thirds colored and yet live in conditions where that child never comes in contact on a person-to-person basis with colored people. We must therefore go all out and say all over this vast land that we will no longer adjust ourselves to segregated conditions and segregated facilities because segregation is normally wrong and sinful.

No Inferior or Superior Races

A second point that I would like to bring out is that if we are to solve the problem of racial injustice in our country and make the American dream a reality, we must get rid of the notion once and for all that there are superior and inferior races. Great anthropologists like Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and then late Melvin Herskovitz, and others, have said over and over again as a result of their long studies, that they have found nothing to justify the idea of superior and inferior races. There may be superior and inferior individuals, from an academic point of view, within every race, but there are no superior and inferior races. And yet this idea still lingers around. It lingers around all over our nation. It was out of this idea-- of superior and inferior races—that white supremacy came into being.

At one time, people used to justify, at least they tried to justify, their attitudes on this point on the basis of the Bible and religion to rationalize their prejudices and to crystallize the patterns of the status quo. One brother decided to put his argument for the inferiority of the Negro in the framework of an Aristotelian syllogism. He came out with major premise: All men are made in the image of God. Then came his minor premise: God, as everybody knows is not a Negro. Therefore, the Negro is not a man. This was the kind of reasoning that prevailed. Well, by and large, people are getting away from this kind of thinking. Of course, it isn't gone altogether. I was reading not too long ago where one of our white brothers down in Mississippi said that God was a charter member of the White Citizens council.

But on the whole, we are getting away from the Biblical and the religious arguments. It is done now on a more subtle sociological basis. The Negro is not culturally ready for

Integration, they argue. Or that the Negro, if integrated in schools and other areas, will pull the white race back a generation... And then comes the argument that...Negros are criminals they have the highest crime rate in any major city. And these arguments go on ad infinitum. The individuals who set forth these arguments never go on to say that if there are lagging standards in the Negro community, and there certainly are, they lag because of segregation and discrimination. Poverty, ignorance, economic deprivation, and social isolation breed crime, whatever the racial group may be...and it is a tortuous logic to use the tragic results of segregation as an argument for the continuation of it...

### Massive Action Programs

Thirdly, let me say to you, if we are to make the American dream a reality, we must develop massive action programs all over this country... There are many people who want change, but they think that change can come without cost, without pain and without tension. History is the long story of the fact that change cannot come without paying the price. Change cannot come without some suffering and sacrifice—we must see that. For instance, we must honestly recognize that racism in housing will not be removed until there is an assault on basic structures of power that derive huge profits from the divisions of our society. We must come to see that we will never get rid of discrimination and segregation in housing until we take a stand against these forces that derive profits from it, for what may be profitable to a realtor is not necessarily profitable to a city...

### Two Myths

And so we must work and develop a massive action program. In order to get this massive action program, we've got to get rid of two false ideas, two myths, that are disseminated all throughout our society. One is the myth of time—you've heard this, I'm sure...There are those who still say to the Negro and his allies in then white community, just be nice and be patient and wait a hundred or two hundred years and the problem will work itself out. It takes time to solve the problem. Tonight, as I stand before you, let me say to you my friends, that there is an answer to this myth. It is that time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively. I can assure you that if the friends of freedom were as passionate and zealous about their commitment to freedom's call as the enemies of freedom are to their side we would have ended segregation and discrimination long ago. In other words I'm saying that...the forces of ill will in our nation, the extreme rightists of our nation, the forces committed to negative ends in our nation, have used time much more effectively than the forces of good will. And it many well be that we will have to repent in this generation, not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent action of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people. Somewhere along the way we must come to see that time does not solve all of our problems and that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and then persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to bear co-workers with God; and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation...We must realize that the time is always right to do right.

Now the other myth is the idea that legislation cannot solve the problem, which we face in the area of human relations. Only education and religion can do this, people say...I would be the first to say that if we are going to solve this problem in the United States ultimately, we must come to the point of being obedient not merely to that which the law sets forth, but we must be obedient to the unenforceable. I would be the first to say that if integration is to be a genuine reality, the white man must come to the point of treating the Negro right not merely because it's natural and it's right and because at bottom he knows that the Negro is his brother. But after saying this, it is necessary to go on and give the other side and reveal that it is a half-truth to say that legislation has no place. It may be true that you can't legislate integration, but you can legislate desegregation; it may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me—and I think that's pretty important also. So while the law may not change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men. And when you begin to change habits, pretty soon attitudes will be changed...And so we must support meaningful legislation, and we must support it with our words, and we must support it with our dollars.

Let me say to you, as I move on toward my conclusion, that as we engage in this massive action program, we who have been the victims of discrimination for so many years will continue to initiate programs which will call for the support of all of our white brothers and sisters of good will. There must be a grand alliance of ... conscience. Black and white together, we must solve this problem. We do not fool ourselves about it—we need this support...



## The Way of Non- Violence

And we are going to continue with the faith that non-violence is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom...I know the agonies, and I know the moments of seething desperation that cause some to feel that (they must use) violence in the defense of (their freedom.) (But) after understanding this, I must say (that) the line of demarcation between defensive violence and aggressive violence is very thin. WE must come to see and we must continue to see (that) new have an answer (to this) in non-violence. This method has a way of disarming opponents. It exposes his moral defenses, it weakens his moral, and, at the same time, it works on his conscience...You develop a quiet courage of accepting blows without retaliating. If he doesn't put you in jail, wonderful, nobody with any sense loves to go to jail; but if he puts you in jail, you go into that jail and transform it from a dungeon of shame to a haven of freedom and human dignity. Even if he tries to kill you, you develop the inner conviction that there are some things so dear, some things so precious, some things so eternally true, that they are worth dying for. And if a man has not discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live. This is what non-violence says...This is the positive power of creative love. When I say love at this point, I'm not talking about a sentimental outpouring. I'm talking about a strong love, love that the New Testament call agape, love that seeks nothing in return...creative, redemptive goodwill for all men, the love of God operating in the human heart. I think that this is what Jesus meant when he said "Love you enemies"—and I'm so happy he didn't say "like your enemies," because "like" so

Affectionate, and it would be nonsense to urge oppressed people to like their oppressors... those who are bombing their homes and threatening their children. It would be nonsense to tell oppressed people to love those people in an affectionate sense. When Jesus talks about love at this point, he's talking about something much deeper. He's talking about creative redemptive goodwill for all men...

With this kind of love, we will go bravely into the new age which is emerging. We will stand up—I will not fool you; we are going to continue to stand up. If it requires picketing, if it requires mass non-violent marches, if it requires boycotts, and all other non-violent creative techniques, we are going to be engaged in them, and we hope that you will understand why we have to do it. But as we do them, we will go into the new age with the right attitude. We have non-violence instilled in our hearts. We will go into the new age which is emerging not seeking to rise from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage, thereby subverting justice; we will not seek to substitute one tyranny for another; we will know that a doctrine of black supremacy is as evil as the doctrine of white supremacy. (For) God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men and brown men and yellow men, but God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race the creation of a society where all men will love together as brothers, where every man will respect the dignity and worths of human personality.

### The Present Opportunity

So this is the challenge, here is the opportunity to make the American dream a reality. And this is what our struggle is all about. On tomorrow afternoon, we're going to march from

Buckingham fountain to the city hall. Oh, I wish I could depend on everyone under the sound of my voice tonight being present for that march-- Negroes and White persons. I don't want to see an all—Negro march. I don't want our struggle in the United States to ever degenerate to a struggle between blacks and white. This isn't the struggle at bottom. The tension that is taking place in our nation is at bottom a tension between justice and injustice between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. The more we have white persons in our demonstrations, the more we point out the fact that this is a struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, and not a struggle between racial groups.

And so we are going to march for freedom and justice and an improvement of school conditions. Our children are still facing inadequate educational opportunities. They find themselves crippled at a very early stage. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to compete in an age that is technological, in a cibernated and automated age. We are going to protest until school systems all over our country are built up so that all of the children who go to receive a good solid quality integrated education...Let us not be detached spectators. Let us not be silent onlookers. But let all of us be involved participants. And we will speed up that day when this great dream of our nation will be a reality.

### I Still Have Faith in America

And let me say to you in conclusion that I still have faith in America—I know there are still difficult moments ahead, but I still have faith that this problem will be solved. I still believe that there are enough people of good will in this country to

bring an end to the long night of man's inhumanity to man; and end the mistakes of dark yesterdays so we can rise to brighter tomorrows. I believe this firmly, I believe it sincerely. And this is why I can sing today, more than ever before, "we shall overcome."

Now I know that before the victory's won, some more will get scarred up a bit, but we shall overcome. Now I know that before the victory is won, some will be called bad names, some will be misunderstood, some will even be falsely accused, called Reds and Communists, simply because they believe in the brotherhood of man, but we shall overcome. Before the victory is won, some more will be thrown into crowded jail cells. Before the victory is won, somebody else, like a Mrs. Liuzo, Rev. James Reeve, Jimmy Lee Jackson, Medgar Evers, may face physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children and their white brothers from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive. We shall overcome! We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carl is right, "No lie can live forever." We shall overcome because William, Cullen Bryant is right, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right, "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above his own." We shall overcome because the Bible is right, "You shall reap what you sow."

And with this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to speed up the day when "every valley shall be exalted, every hill

and mountain will be made low, the rough places will be made plain and the crooked places straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.” With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. That will be a great day. We will speed up the day when all of God’s children all over this nation, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last.”

[Link to original MLK Speech in Winnetka in the Summer of 1965.](#)