

CHAPTER 3

Where Do We Go From Here?

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967)



In this speech from 1967, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. identifies and discusses the structural basis of racism, inequality, and poverty. He argues that to address these problems there must be a massive assertion of “dignity and worth” and that such a movement will help to bring about a “restructuring of the whole of American society.”

Dr. Abernathy, our distinguished vice president, fellow delegates to this, the tenth annual session of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, my brothers and sisters from not only all over the South, but from all over the United States of America: ten years ago during the piercing chill of a January day and on the heels of the year-long Montgomery bus boycott, a group of approximately one hundred Negro leaders from across the South assembled in this church and agreed on the need for an organization to be formed that could serve as a channel through which local protest organizations in the South could coordinate their protest activities. It was this meeting that gave birth to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

And when our organization was formed ten years ago, racial segregation was still a structured part of the architecture of southern society. Negroes with the pangs of hunger and the anguish of thirst were denied access to the average lunch counter. The downtown restaurants were still off-limits for the black man. Negroes, burdened with the fatigue of travel, were still barred from the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. Negro boys and girls in dire need of recreational activities were not allowed to inhale the fresh air of the big city parks. Negroes in desperate need of allowing their mental buckets to sink deep into the wells of knowledge were

confronted with a firm “no” when they sought to use the city libraries. Ten years ago, legislative halls of the South were still ringing loud with such words as “interposition” and “nullification.” All types of conniving methods were still being used to keep the Negro from becoming a registered voter. A decade ago, not a single Negro entered the legislative chambers of the South except as a porter or a chauffeur. Ten years ago, all too many Negroes were still harried by day and haunted by night by a corroding sense of fear and a nagging sense of nobody-ness. (Yeah)

But things are different now. In assault after assault, we caused the sagging walls of segregation to come tumbling down. During this era the entire edifice of segregation was profoundly shaken. This is an accomplishment whose consequences are deeply felt by every southern Negro in his daily life. (Oh yeah) It is no longer possible to count the number of public establishments that are open to Negroes. Ten years ago, Negroes seemed almost invisible to the larger society, and the facts of their harsh lives were unknown to the majority of the nation. But today, civil rights is a dominating issue in every state, crowding the pages of the press and the daily conversation of white Americans. In this decade of change, the Negro stood up and confronted his oppressor. He faced the bullies and the guns, and the dogs and the tear gas. He put himself squarely before the vicious mobs and

moved with strength and dignity toward them and decisively defeated them. (Yes) And the courage with which he confronted enraged mobs dissolved the stereotype of the grinning, submissive Uncle Tom. (Yes) He came out of his struggle integrated only slightly in the external society, but powerfully integrated within. This was a victory that had to precede all other gains.

In short, over the last ten years the Negro decided to straighten his back up (Yes), realizing that a man cannot ride your back unless it is bent. (Yes, That's right) We made our government write new laws to alter some of the cruelest injustices that affected us. We made an indifferent and unconcerned nation rise from lethargy and subpoenaed its conscience to appear before the judgment seat of morality on the whole question of civil rights. We gained manhood in the nation that had always called us "boy." It would be hypocritical indeed if I allowed modesty to forbid my saying that SCLC stood at the forefront of all of the watershed movements that brought these monumental changes in the South. For this, we can feel a legitimate pride. But in spite of a decade of significant progress, the problem is far from solved. The deep rumbling of discontent in our cities is indicative of the fact that the plant of freedom has grown only a bud and not yet a flower.

And before discussing the awesome responsibilities that we face in the days ahead, let us take an inventory of our programmatic action and activities over the past year. Last year as we met in Jackson, Mississippi, we were painfully aware of the struggle of our brothers in Grenada, Mississippi. After living for a hundred or more years under the yoke of total segregation, the Negro citizens of this northern Delta hamlet banded together in nonviolent warfare against racial discrimination under the leadership of our affiliate chapter and organization there. The fact of this non-destructive rebellion was as spectacular as were its results. In a few short weeks the Grenada County Movement challenged every aspect of the society's exploitative life. Stores which denied employment were boycotted; voter registration increased by thousands. We can never forget the courageous action of the people of Grenada who moved our nation and its federal courts to powerful action in behalf of school integration, giving Grenada one of the most integrated school systems in America. The battle is far from over, but the black people of Grenada have achieved forty of fifty-three demands through their persistent nonviolent efforts.

Slowly but surely, our southern affiliates continued their building and organizing. Seventy-nine counties conducted voter registration drives, while double that number carried on political education and get-out-the-vote efforts.

In spite of press opinions, our staff is still overwhelmingly a southern-based staff. One hundred and five persons have worked across the South under the direction of Hosea Williams. What used to be primarily a voter registration staff is actually a multifaceted program dealing with the total life of the community, from farm cooperatives, business development, tutorials, credit unions, etcetera. Especially to be commended are those ninety-nine communities and their staffs which maintain regular mass meetings throughout the year.

Our Citizenship Education Program continues to lay the solid foundation of adult education and community organization upon which all social change must ultimately rest. This year, five hundred local leaders received training at Dorchester and ten community centers through our Citizenship Education Program. They were trained in literacy, consumer education, planned parenthood, and many other things. And this program, so ably directed by Mrs. Dorothy Cotton, Mrs. Septima Clark, and their staff of eight persons, continues to cover ten southern states. Our auxiliary feature of C.E.P. is the aid which they have given to poor communities, poor counties in receiving and establishing O.E.O. projects. With the competent professional guidance of our marvelous staff member, Miss Mew Soong-Li, Lowndes and Wilcox counties in Alabama have pioneered in developing outstanding poverty programs totally controlled and operated by residents of the area.

Perhaps the area of greatest concentration of my efforts has been in the cities of Chicago and Cleveland. Chicago has been a wonderful proving ground for our work in the North. There have been no earth-shaking victories, but neither has there been failure. Our open housing marches, which finally brought about an agreement which actually calls the power structure of Chicago to capitulate to the civil rights movement, these marches and the agreement have finally begun to pay off. After the season of delay around election periods, the Leadership Conference, organized to meet our demands for an open city, has finally begun to implement the programs agreed to last summer.

But this is not the most important aspect of our work. As a result of our tenant union organizing, we have begun a four million dollar rehabilitation project, which will renovate deteriorating buildings and allow their tenants the opportunity to own their own homes. This pilot project was the inspiration for the new home ownership bill, which Senator Percy introduced in Congress only recently.

The most dramatic success in Chicago has been Operation Breadbasket. Through Operation Breadbasket we have now achieved for the Negro community of

Chicago more than twenty-two hundred new jobs with an income of approximately eighteen million dollars a year, new income to the Negro community. [Applause] But not only have we gotten jobs through Operation Breadbasket in Chicago; there was another area through this economic program, and that was the development of financial institutions which were controlled by Negroes and which were sensitive to problems of economic deprivation of the Negro community. The two banks in Chicago that were interested in helping Negro businessmen were largely unable to loan much because of limited assets. Hi-Lo, one of the chain stores in Chicago, agreed to maintain substantial accounts in the two banks, thus increasing their ability to serve the needs of the Negro community. And I can say to you today that as a result of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago, both of these Negro-operated banks have now more than doubled their assets, and this has been done in less than a year by the work of Operation Breadbasket. [applause]

In addition, the ministers learned that Negro scavengers had been deprived of significant accounts in the ghetto. Whites controlled even the garbage of Negroes. Consequently, the chain stores agreed to contract with Negro scavengers to service at least the stores in Negro areas. Negro insect and rodent exterminators, as well as janitorial services, were likewise excluded from major contracts with chain stores. The chain stores also agreed to utilize these services. It also became apparent that chain stores advertised only rarely in Negro-owned community newspapers. This area of neglect was also negotiated, giving community newspapers regular, substantial accounts. And finally, the ministers found that Negro contractors, from painters to masons, from electricians to excavators, had also been forced to remain small by the monopolies of white contractors. Breadbasket negotiated agreements on new construction and rehabilitation work for the chain stores. These several interrelated aspects of economic development, all based on the power of organized consumers, hold great possibilities for dealing with the problems of Negroes in other northern cities. The kinds of requests made by Breadbasket in Chicago can be made not only of chain stores, but of almost any major industry in any city in the country.

And so Operation Breadbasket has a very simple program, but a powerful one. It simply says, "If you respect my dollar, you must respect my person." It simply says that we will no longer spend our money where we can not get substantial jobs. [applause]

In Cleveland, Ohio, a group of ministers have formed an Operation Breadbasket through our program there and have moved against a major dairy company. Their

requests include jobs, advertising in Negro newspapers, and depositing funds in Negro financial institutions. This effort resulted in something marvelous. I went to Cleveland just last week to sign the agreement with Sealtest. We went to get the facts about their employment; we discovered that they had 442 employees and only forty-three were Negroes, yet the Negro population of Cleveland is thirty-five percent of the total population. They refused to give us all of the information that we requested, and we said in substance, "Mr. Sealtest, we're sorry. We aren't going to burn your store down. We aren't going to throw any bricks in the window. But we are going to put picket signs around and we are going to put leaflets out and we are going to our pulpits and tell them not to sell Sealtest products, and not to purchase Sealtest products."

We did that. We went through the churches. Reverend Dr. Hoover, who pastors the largest church in Cleveland, who's here today, and all of the ministers got together and got behind this program. We went to every store in the ghetto and said, "You must take Sealtest products off of your counters. If not, we're going to boycott your whole store." (That's right) A&P refused. We put picket lines around A&P; they have a hundred and some stores in Cleveland, and we picketed A&P and closed down eighteen of them in one day. Nobody went in A&P. [applause] The next day Mr. A&P was calling on us, and Bob Brown, who is here on our board and who is a public relations man representing a number of firms, came in. They called him in because he worked for A&P, also; and they didn't know he worked for us, too. [laughter] Bob Brown sat down with A&P, and he said, they said, "Now, Mr. Brown, what would you advise us to do." He said, "I would advise you to take Sealtest products off of all of your counters." A&P agreed next day not only to take Sealtest products off of the counters in the ghetto, but off of the counters of every A&P store in Cleveland, and they said to Sealtest, "If you don't reach an agreement with SCLC and Operation Breadbasket, we will take Sealtest products off of every A&P store in the state of Ohio."

The next day [applause], the next day the Sealtest people were talking nice [laughter], they were very humble. And I am proud to say that I went to Cleveland just last Tuesday, and I sat down with the Sealtest people and some seventy ministers from Cleveland, and we signed the agreement. This effort resulted in a number of jobs, which will bring almost five hundred thousand dollars of new income to the Negro community a year. [applause] We also said to Sealtest, "The problem that we face is that the ghetto is a domestic colony that's constantly drained without being replenished. And you are always telling us to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps, and yet we are

being robbed every day. Put something back in the ghetto." So along with our demand for jobs, we said, "We also demand that you put money in the Negro savings and loan association and that you take ads, advertise, in the Cleveland Call & Post, the Negro newspaper." So along with the new jobs, Sealtest has now deposited thousands of dollars in the Negro bank of Cleveland and has already started taking ads in the Negro newspaper in that city. This is the power of Operation Breadbasket. [applause]

Now, for fear that you may feel that it's limited to Chicago and Cleveland, let me say to you that we've gotten even more than that. In Atlanta, Georgia, Breadbasket has been equally successful in the South. Here the emphasis has been divided between governmental employment and private industry. And while I do not have time to go into the details, I want to commend the men who have been working with it here: the Reverend Bennett, the Reverend Joe Boone, the Reverend J. C. Ward, Reverend Dorsey, Reverend Greer, and I could go on down the line, and they have stood up along with all of the other ministers. But here is the story that's not printed in the newspapers in Atlanta: as a result of Operation Breadbasket, over the last three years, we have added about twenty-five million dollars of new income to the Negro community every year. [applause]

Now as you know, Operation Breadbasket has now gone national in the sense that we had a national conference in Chicago and agreed to launch a nationwide program, which you will hear more about.

Finally, SCLC has entered the field of housing. Under the leadership of attorney James Robinson, we have already contracted to build 152 units of low-income housing with apartments for the elderly on a choice downtown Atlanta site under the sponsorship of Ebenezer Baptist Church. This is the first project [applause], this is the first project of a proposed southwide Housing Development Corporation which we hope to develop in conjunction with SCLC, and through this corporation we hope to build housing from Mississippi to North Carolina using Negro workmen, Negro architects, Negro attorneys, and Negro financial institutions throughout. And it is our feeling that in the next two or three years, we can build right here in the South forty million dollars worth of new housing for Negroes, and with millions and millions of dollars in income coming to the Negro community. [applause]

Now there are many other things that I could tell you, but time is passing. This, in short, is an account of SCLC's work over the last year. It is a record of which we can all be proud.

With all the struggle and all the achievements, we must face the fact, however, that the Negro still lives in the basement of the Great Society. He is still at the bottom, despite the few who have penetrated to slightly higher levels. Even where the door has been forced partially open, mobility for the Negro is still sharply restricted. There is often no bottom at which to start, and when there is there's almost no room at the top. In consequence, Negroes are still impoverished aliens in an affluent society. They are too poor even to rise with the society, too impoverished by the ages to be able to ascend by using their own resources. And the Negro did not do this himself; it was done to him. For more than half of his American history, he was enslaved. Yet, he built the spanning bridges and the grand mansions, the sturdy docks and stout factories of the South. His unpaid labor made cotton "King" and established America as a significant nation in international commerce. Even after his release from chattel slavery, the nation grew over him, submerging him. It became the richest, most powerful society in the history of man, but it left the Negro far behind.

And so we still have a long, long way to go before we reach the promised land of freedom. Yes, we have left the dusty soils of Egypt, and we have crossed a Red Sea that had for years been hardened by a long and piercing winter of massive resistance, but before we reach the majestic shores of the promised land, there will still be gigantic mountains of opposition ahead and prodigious hilltops of injustice. (Yes, That's right) We still need some Paul Revere of conscience to alert every hamlet and every village of America that revolution is still at hand. Yes, we need a chart; we need a compass; indeed, we need some North Star to guide us into a future shrouded with impenetrable uncertainties.

Now, in order to answer the question, "Where do we go from here?" which is our theme, we must first honestly recognize where we are now. When the Constitution was written, a strange formula to determine taxes and representation declared that the Negro was sixty percent of a person. Today another curious formula seems to declare he is fifty percent of a person. Of the good things in life, the Negro has approximately one half those of whites. Of the bad things of life, he has twice those of whites. Thus, half of all Negroes live in substandard housing. And Negroes have half the income of whites. When we turn to the negative experiences of life, the Negro has a double share: There are twice as many unemployed; the rate of infant mortality among Negroes is double that of whites; and there are twice as many Negroes dying in Vietnam as whites in proportion to their size in the population. (Yes) [applause]

In other spheres, the figures are equally alarming. In elementary schools, Negroes lag one to three years behind whites, and their segregated schools (Yeah) receive substantially less money per student than the white schools. (Those schools) One-twentieth as many Negroes as whites attend college. Of employed Negroes, seventy-five percent hold menial jobs. This is where we are.

Where do we go from here? First, we must massively assert our dignity and worth. We must stand up amid a system that still oppresses us and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values. We must no longer be ashamed of being black. (All right) The job of arousing manhood within a people that have been taught for so many centuries that they are nobody is not easy.

Even semantics have conspired to make that which is black seem ugly and degrading. (Yes) In Roget's Thesaurus there are some 120 synonyms for blackness and at least sixty of them are offensive, such words as blot, soot, grim, devil, and foul. And there are some 134 synonyms for whiteness and all are favorable, expressed in such words as purity, cleanliness, chastity, and innocence. A white lie is better than a black lie. (Yes) The most degenerate member of a family is the "black sheep." (Yes) Ossie Davis has suggested that maybe the English language should be reconstructed so that teachers will not be forced to teach the Negro child sixty ways to despise himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of inferiority, and the white child 134 ways to adore himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of superiority. [applause] The tendency to ignore the Negro's contribution to American life and strip him of his personhood is as old as the earliest history books and as contemporary as the morning's newspaper. (Yes)

To offset this cultural homicide, the Negro must rise up with an affirmation of his own Olympian manhood. (Yes) Any movement for the Negro's freedom that overlooks this necessity is only waiting to be buried. (Yes) As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. (Yes) Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery. No Lincolnian Emancipation Proclamation, no Johnsonian civil rights bill can totally bring this kind of freedom. The Negro will only be free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive manhood his own emancipation proclamation. And with a spirit straining toward true self-esteem, the Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and to the world, "I am somebody. (Oh yeah) I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. (Go ahead) I have a rich and noble history, however painful

and exploited that history has been. Yes, I was a slave through my foreparents (That's right), and now I'm not ashamed of that. I'm ashamed of the people who were so sinful to make me a slave." (Yes sir) Yes [applause], yes, we must stand up and say, "I'm black (Yes sir), but I'm black and beautiful." (Yes) This [applause], this self-affirmation is the black man's need, made compelling (All right) by the white man's crimes against him. (Yes)

Now another basic challenge is to discover how to organize our strength in to economic and political power. Now no one can deny that the Negro is in dire need of this kind of legitimate power. Indeed, one of the great problems that the Negro confronts is his lack of power. From the old plantations of the South to the newer ghettos of the North, the Negro has been confined to a life of voicelessness (That's true) and powerlessness. (So true) Stripped of the right to make decisions concerning his life and destiny he has been subject to the authoritarian and sometimes whimsical decisions of the white power structure. The plantation and the ghetto were created by those who had power, both to confine those who had no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness. Now the problem of transforming the ghetto, therefore, is a problem of power, a confrontation between the forces of power demanding change and the forces of power dedicated to the preserving of the status quo. Now, power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change. Walter Reuther defined power one day. He said, "Power is the ability of a labor union like UAW to make the most powerful corporation in the world, General Motors, say, 'Yes' when it wants to say 'No.' That's power." [applause]

Now a lot of us are preachers, and all of us have our moral convictions and concerns, and so often we have problems with power. But there is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly.

You see, what happened is that some of our philosophers got off base. And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites, polar opposites, so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. It was this misinterpretation that caused the philosopher Nietzsche, who was a philosopher of the will to power, to reject the Christian concept of love. It was this same misinterpretation which induced Christian theologians to reject Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power in the name of the Christian idea of love.

Now, we got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic.

(Yes) Power at its best [applause], power at its best is love (Yes) implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. (Speak) And this is what we must see as we move on.

Now what has happened is that we've had it wrong and mixed up in our country, and this has led Negro Americans in the past to seek their goals through love and moral suasion devoid of power, and white Americans to seek their goals through power devoid of love and conscience. It is leading a few extremists today to advocate for Negroes the same destructive and conscienceless power that they have justly abhorred in whites. It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our times. (Yes)

Now we must develop progress, or rather, a program—and I can't stay on this long—that will drive the nation to a guaranteed annual income. Now, early in the century this proposal would have been greeted with ridicule and denunciation as destructive of initiative and responsibility. At that time economic status was considered the measure of the individual's abilities and talents. And in the thinking of that day, the absence of worldly goods indicated a want of industrious habits and moral fiber. We've come a long way in our understanding of human motivation and of the blind operation of our economic system. Now we realize that dislocations in the market operation of our economy and the prevalence of discrimination thrust people into idleness and bind them in constant or frequent unemployment against their will. The poor are less often dismissed, I hope, from our conscience today by being branded as inferior and incompetent. We also know that no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands, it does not eliminate all poverty.

The problem indicates that our emphasis must be twofold: We must create full employment, or we must create incomes. People must be made consumers by one method or the other. Once they are placed in this position, we need to be concerned that the potential of the individual is not wasted. New forms of work that enhance the social good will have to be devised for those for whom traditional jobs are not available. In 1879 Henry George anticipated this state of affairs when he wrote in *Progress and Poverty*:

The fact is that the work which improves the condition of mankind, the work which extends knowledge and increases power and enriches literature and elevates thought, is not done to secure a living. It is not the work of slaves driven to their tasks either by the, that of a taskmaster or by animal necessities. It is the work of men who

somehow find a form of work that brings a security for its own sake and a state of society where want is abolished.

Work of this sort could be enormously increased, and we are likely to find that the problems of housing and education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished. The poor, transformed into purchasers, will do a great deal on their own to alter housing decay. Negroes, who have a double disability, will have a greater effect on discrimination when they have the additional weapon of cash to use in their struggle.

Beyond these advantages, a host of positive psychological changes inevitably will result from widespread economic security. The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his life are in his own hands, when he has the assurance that his income is stable and certain, and when he knows that he has the means to seek self-improvement. Personal conflicts between husband, wife, and children will diminish when the unjust measurement of human worth on a scale of dollars is eliminated.

Now, our country can do this. John Kenneth Galbraith said that a guaranteed annual income could be done for about twenty billion dollars a year. And I say to you today, that if our nation can spend thirty-five billion dollars a year to fight an unjust, evil war in Vietnam, and twenty billion dollars to put a man on the moon, it can spend billions of dollars to put God's children on their own two feet right here on earth. [applause]

Now, let me rush on to say we must reaffirm our commitment to nonviolence. And I want to stress this. The futility of violence in the struggle for racial justice has been tragically etched in all the recent Negro riots. Now, yesterday, I tried to analyze the riots and deal with the causes for them. Today I want to give the other side. There is something painfully sad about a riot. One sees screaming youngsters and angry adults fighting hopelessly and aimlessly against impossible odds. (Yeah) And deep down within them, you perceive a desire for self-destruction, a kind of suicidal longing. (Yes)

Occasionally, Negroes contend that the 1965 Watts riot and the other riots in various cities represented effective civil rights action. But those who express this view always end up with stumbling words when asked what concrete gains have been won as a result. At best, the riots have produced a little additional anti-poverty money allotted by frightened government officials and a few water sprinklers to cool the children of the ghettos. It is something like improving the food in the prison while the people remain securely incarcerated behind bars. (That's right) Nowhere have the riots won any concrete improvement such as have the organized protest demonstrations.

And when one tries to pin down advocates of violence as to what acts would be effective, the answers are blatantly illogical. Sometimes they talk of overthrowing racist state and local governments and they talk about guerrilla warfare. They fail to see that no internal revolution has ever succeeded in overthrowing a government by violence unless the government had already lost the allegiance and effective control of its armed forces. Anyone in his right mind knows that this will not happen in the United States. In a violent racial situation, the power structure has the local police, the state troopers, the National Guard, and finally, the army to call on, all of which are predominantly white. (Yes) Furthermore, few, if any, violent revolutions have been successful unless the violent minority had the sympathy and support of the non-resisting majority. Castro may have had only a few Cubans actually fighting with him and up in the hills (Yes), but he would have never overthrown the Batista regime unless he had had the sympathy of the vast majority of Cuban people. It is perfectly clear that a violent revolution on the part of American blacks would find no sympathy and support from the white population and very little from the majority of the Negroes themselves.

This is no time for romantic illusions and empty philosophical debates about freedom. This is a time for action. (All right) What is needed is a strategy for change, a tactical program that will bring the Negro into the mainstream of American life as quickly as possible. So far, this has only been offered by the nonviolent movement. Without recognizing this we will end up with solutions that don't solve, answers that don't answer, and explanations that don't explain. [applause]

And so I say to you today that I still stand by nonviolence. (Yes) And I am still convinced [applause], and I'm still convinced that it is the most potent weapon available to the Negro in his struggle for justice in this country.

And the other thing is, I'm concerned about a better world. I'm concerned about justice; I'm concerned about brotherhood; I'm concerned about truth. (That's right) And when one is concerned about that, he can never advocate violence. For through violence you may murder a murderer, but you can't murder murder. (Yes) Through violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish truth. (That's right) Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate through violence. (All right, That's right) Darkness cannot put out darkness; only light can do that. [applause]

And I say to you, I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. (Yes) And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. (No) And I'm not talking about

emotional bosh when I talk about love; I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. (Yes) For I have seen too much hate. (Yes) I've seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the South. (Yeah) I've seen hate on the faces of too many Klansmen and too many White Citizens Councilors in the South to want to hate, myself, because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces and their personalities, and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear. (Yes, That's right) I have decided to love. [applause] If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we aren't moving wrong when we do it, because John was right, God is love. (Yes) He who hates does not know God, but he who loves has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.

And so I say to you today, my friends, that you may be able to speak with the tongues of men and angels (All right); you may have the eloquence of articulate speech; but if you have not love, it means nothing. (That's right) Yes, you may have the gift of prophecy; you may have the gift of scientific prediction (Yes sir) and understand the behavior of molecules (All right); you may break into the storehouse of nature (Yes sir) and bring forth many new insights; yes, you may ascend to the heights of academic achievement (Yes sir) so that you have all knowledge (Yes sir, Yes); and you may boast of your great institutions of learning and the boundless extent of your degrees; but if you have not love, all of these mean absolutely nothing. (Yes) You may even give your goods to feed the poor (Yes sir); you may bestow great gifts to charity (Speak); and you may tower high in philanthropy; but if you have not love, your charity means nothing. (Yes sir) You may even give your body to be burned and die the death of a martyr, and your spilt blood may be a symbol of honor for generations yet unborn, and thousands may praise you as one of history's greatest heroes; but if you have not love (Yes, All right), your blood was spilt in vain. What I'm trying to get you to see this morning is that a man may be self-centered in his self-denial and self-righteous in his self-sacrifice. His generosity may feed his ego, and his piety may feed his pride. (Speak) So without love, benevolence becomes egotism, and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride.

I want to say to you as I move to my conclusion, as we talk about "Where do we go from here?" that we must honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society. (Yes) There are forty million poor people here, and one day we must ask the question, "Why are there forty million poor people in America?" And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you

begin to question the capitalistic economy. (Yes) And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's marketplace. (Yes) But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. (All right) It means that questions must be raised. And you see, my friends, when you deal with this you begin to ask the question, "Who owns the oil?" (Yes) You begin to ask the question, "Who owns the iron ore?" (Yes) You begin to ask the question, "Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that's two-thirds water?" (All right) These are words that must be said. (All right)

Now, don't think you have me in a bind today. I'm not talking about communism. What I'm talking about is far beyond communism. (Yeah) My inspiration didn't come from Karl Marx (Speak); my inspiration didn't come from Engels; my inspiration didn't come from Trotsky; my inspiration didn't come from Lenin. Yes, I read Communist Manifesto and Das Kapital a long time ago (Well), and I saw that maybe Marx didn't follow Hegel enough. (All right) He took his dialectics, but he left out his idealism and his spiritualism. And he went over to a German philosopher by the name of Feuerbach, and took his materialism and made it into a system that he called "dialectical materialism." (Speak) I have to reject that.

What I'm saying to you this morning is communism forgets that life is individual. (Yes) Capitalism forgets that life is social. (Yes, Go ahead) And the kingdom of brotherhood is found neither in the thesis of communism nor the antithesis of capitalism, but in a higher synthesis. (Speak) [applause] It is found in a higher synthesis (Come on) that combines the truths of both. (Yes) Now, when I say questioning the whole society, it means ultimately coming to see that the problem of racism, the problem of economic exploitation, and the problem of war are all tied together. (All right) These are the triple evils that are interrelated.

And if you will let me be a preacher just a little bit. (Speak) One day [applause], one night, a juror came to Jesus (Yes sir) and he wanted to know what he could do to be saved. (Yeah) Jesus didn't get bogged down on the kind of isolated approach of what you shouldn't do. Jesus didn't say, "Now Nicodemus, you must stop lying." (Oh yeah) He didn't say, "Nicodemus, now you must not commit adultery." He didn't say, "Now Nicodemus, you must stop cheating if you are doing that." He didn't say, "Nicodemus, you must stop drinking liquor if you are doing that excessively." He said something altogether different, because Jesus realized something basic (Yes): that if a man will lie, he will steal. (Yes) And if a man will steal, he will kill. (Yes) So instead of just getting bogged

down on one thing, Jesus looked at him and said, "Nicodemus, you must be born again." [applause]

In other words, "Your whole structure (Yes) must be changed." [applause] A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will "thingify" them and make them things. (Speak) And therefore, they will exploit them and poor people generally economically. (Yes) And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and it will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together. (Yes) [applause]

What I'm saying today is that we must go from this convention and say, "America, you must be born again!" [applause] (Oh yes)

And so, I conclude by saying today that we have a task, and let us go out with a divine dissatisfaction. (Yes)

Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. (All right)

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice. (Yes sir)

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until those who live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security.

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history (Yes), and every family will live in a decent, sanitary home.

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until the dark yesterdays of segregated schools will be transformed into bright tomorrows of quality integrated education.

Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.

Let us be dissatisfied (All right) until men and women, however black they may be, will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, not on the basis of the color of their skin. (Yeah) Let us be dissatisfied. [applause]

Let us be dissatisfied (Well) until every state capitol (Yes) will be housed by a governor who will do justly, who will love mercy, and who will walk humbly with his God.

Let us be dissatisfied [applause] until from every city hall, justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Yes)

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until that day when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together (Yes), and every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid.

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes), until men will recognize that out of one blood (Yes) God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. (Speak sir)

Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, "White Power!" when nobody will shout, "Black Power!" but everybody will talk about God's power and human power. [applause]

And I must confess, my friends (Yes sir), that the road ahead will not always be smooth. (Yes) There will still be rocky places of frustration (Yes) and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. (Yes) And there will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. (Well) Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. (Yes) We may again, with tear-drenched eyes, have to stand before the bier of some courageous civil rights worker whose life will be snuffed out by the dastardly acts of bloodthirsty mobs. (Well) But difficult and painful as it is (Well), we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. (Well) And as we continue our charted course, we may gain consolation from the words so nobly left by that great black bard, who was also a great freedom fighter of yesterday, James Weldon Johnson (Yes):

Stony the road we trod (Yes),
 Bitter the chastening rod
 Felt in the days
 When hope unborn had died. (Yes)
 Yet with a steady beat,
 Have not our weary feet
 Come to the place
 For which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way
 That with tears has been watered. (Well)
 We have come treading our paths
 Through the blood of the slaughtered.
 Out from the gloomy past,
 Till now we stand at last (Yes)
 Where the bright gleam
 Of our bright star is cast.

Let this affirmation be our ringing cry. (Well) It will give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. (Yes) When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair (Well), and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights (Well), let us remember (Yes) that there is a creative force in this universe working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil (Well), a power that is able to make a way out of no way (Yes) and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. (Speak)

Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. (Oh yeah) Whatsoever a man soweth (Yes), that (Yes) shall he also reap." This is our hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome! (Yes) We have overcome! Deep in my heart, I did believe (Yes) we would overcome." [applause]

Discussion Questions

1. Reverend King's speech was written in 1967. What are some of the problems that he identified? Do you think that these problems are still significant today (more than 40 years later)? Why or why not?

Instructors should first review Martin Luther King's list of social problems and discuss if any progress has been made. Class discussion may also involve distinguishing between U.S. and global social problems, for example, war and terrorism, AIDS, and global warming.

2. What solutions did Reverend King offer for these problems? Would these solutions be effective today? Why or why not?

Students should note King's commitment to nonviolence and to the creation of political and economic power among African Americans.

Source: From King, M. L., Jr. (2001). Where do we go from here? In C. Carson & K. Shepard (Eds.), A call to conscience: The landmark speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. New York: Intellectual Properties Management. (Reprinted from Annual Report Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, 1967, August 16). The words of Martin Luther King, Jr. are copyrighted by the King Estate.