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The Future of Integration

Martin Luther King, Jr.

TH**ERE** seems to be a desperate, poignant question on the lips of thousands and millions of people all over our nation and all over the world. They are asking whether we have made any real progress in the area of race relations.

In seeking to answer this question I always seek to avoid, on the one hand, a superficial optimism and, on the other hand, a deadening pessimism. I always try to answer it by giving what I consider a realistic position. It seems to me that the realistic position is that we have made significant strides in the struggle for racial justice, but that we have a long, long way to go before the problem is solved. And so, as I think about the civil rights movement, and as I think about the future of

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integration, I would like to use this realistic position as the basis for our thinking together.

We have come a long, long way but we still have a long, long way to go before we have a truly integrated and just society. Now there is no disagreement that we have come a long, long way. And I would like to point out that the Negro, himself, has come a long, long way in re-evaluating his own intrinsic worth. In order to illustrate this a little history is necessary.

You will remember that it was in the year 1619 when the first Negro slaves landed on the shores of this nation. They were brought here from the soils of Africa. And unlike the Pilgrim fathers who landed at Plymouth a year later, they were brought here against their will.

Throughout slavery the Negro was treated in a very inhuman fashion. He was a thing to be used, and not a person to be respected. The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrated the status of the Negro during slavery. With this decision the Supreme Court of the United States said in substance that the Negro is not a citizen of the United States—that he is merely property, subject to the dictates of his owner. And it went on to say that the Negro had no rights that the white man is bound to respect.

With the growth of slavery it became necessary to give some justification for it. It seems to be a fact of life that human beings cannot continue to do wrong without eventually reaching out for some thin rationalization to clothe an obvious wrong in the beautiful garments of righteousness. This is exactly what happened. Indeed, religion and the Bible were used—or I should say mis-

used—in order to justify the system of slavery. And so it was argued that the Negro was inferior by nature because of Noah's curse upon the children of Ham. The apostle Paul's dictum became a watchword: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters."

One brother had probably read the logic of the great philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle did a good deal to bring into being what we now know as formal logic in philosophy. And in formal logic there is a big word called a "syllogism" which has a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. And so this brother put his arguments of the inferiority of the Negro in the framework of an Aristotelian syllogism. He came out with his major premise that all men are made in the image of God. Then came his minor premise: God as everybody knows is not Negro; therefore the Negro is not a man. This is the kind of reasoning that prevailed.

While living with the conditions of slavery, and then later with humiliating patterns of segregation, many Negroes lost faith in themselves. Many came to feel that perhaps they were inferior; perhaps they were less than human.

But then something happened to the Negro. Circumstances made it possible and necessary for him to travel more—the coming of the automobile, the upheavals of two world wars, the great depression. So his rural plantation background gradually gave way to urban industrial life. His cultural life was gradually rising, too, with the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. He watched with a deep sense of pride the great drama of his independence taking place on the stage of African

history. And all of these forces conjoined to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself.

Negro Americans all over began to re-evaluate themselves, and the Negro came to feel that he was somebody. His religion revealed to him that God loves all of His children, and that all men are made in His image, and that the basic thing about a man is not the specifics but the fundamentals—not the texture of his hair, nor the color of his skin, but his eternal dignity and worth.

So the Negro, with his fleecy locks and black complexion, could now unconsciously cry out with eloquent force that man cannot forfeit nature's claims. Skin may differ, but affection dwells in black and white the same. If I were so tall as to reach the Pole or to grasp the ocean at a span, I must be measured by my soul.

The mind is the standard of a man, and with this new sense of dignity, and this new sense of self-respect, a new Negro came into being with new determination to struggle, to suffer, and to sacrifice in order to be free. And so we have come a long, long way since 1619.

But if we are to be true to the fact, it is necessary to point out that the whole nation has made strides in extending the frontiers of democracy, the frontiers of civil rights. And there are many things I could say at this point, but time will only permit me to mention one basic change that we have seen over the last ten or twelve years.

We have seen an absolute crumbling of the system of legal segregation which pervaded so much of the South and the border states for so many, many years. We all know the history of the system of segregation. It had its legal beginning in 1896 when the Supreme

Court rendered a decision as the *Plessey vs. Ferguson* decision. This established the doctrine of "separate but equal" as the law of the land.

Of course, we all know what happened as a result of the Plessey doctrine. There was always a strict enforcement of the "separate," without the slightest intention to abide by the "equal." The Negro ended up being plunged into the abyss of exploitation where he experienced the bleakness of nagging injustice.

But something else happened; it was on May 17, 1954. On that date, after examining the legal body of segregation, the United States Supreme Court pronounced it constitutionally dead. It said in substance that the old Plessey doctrine must go: that separate facilities are inherently unequal—that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law.

After that legal turning point, we noticed the psychological turning point where people by the thousands began to act. They started engaging in direct actions to fulfill the real ends expressed in the legal turning point. So there was the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1956, where 50,000 Negroes decided that it was ultimately more honorable to walk the streets in dignity than to accept segregation and humiliation in the midst of the conditions of life. Then, in 1960, the student movement came into being—the "sit-in" movement. By the thousands, students and adults sat in at lunch counters in order to protest segregated conditions. When they sat in at those lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and carrying the whole nation back to those wells of democracy which

were dug deep by the founding fathers in the formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Then came other movements like the Birmingham movement, the Selma movement.

All of these movements, over the last ten years, had a powerful impact in bringing an end to legal segregation and the humiliation surrounding that system. So we have seen many changes as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. We have come a long, long way since 1896.

Now this would be a very good place for me to end my speech. First, it would mean making a relatively short speech, and that would be a magnificent accomplishment for a Baptist preacher. But beyond that, it would mean that the problem is just about solved now, and that we really don't have much to do. It would be a wonderful thing if speakers all over our country could talk about the problem of racial injustice in terms of a problem that once existed but no longer exists. But if I stop at this point, I would merely be stating a fact and not telling the truth.

You see, a fact is merely the absence of contradiction, but truth is the presence of coherence. Truth is the relatedness of facts. Now it is a fact that we have come a long, long way, but it isn't the whole truth. And if I stopped at this point, I am afraid I would leave you the victims of an illusion wrapped in superficiality, and we would all go away the victims of a dangerous optimism. And so, in order to tell the truth, it is necessary to move on, and not only to talk about the problem in terms of the progress that we have made, but also to

make it clear that we still have a long, long way to go before the problem of racial injustice is solved.

We don't have to look very far to see this. We merely need to look around in our communities, to open our newspapers, and to turn on our televisions. Day in and day out, we are reminded of the fact that no area of our country can boast of clean hands in the realm of brotherhood.

Sometimes, the tragedies of racial injustice are expressed with more overt expressions of man's inhumanity to man as ugly violence. There are some counties in the deep South where murder of a civil rights worker, whether he be white or black, is still a popular pastime. In the state of Mississippi, for instance, over the last four years, more than sixty-two Negro or white civil rights workers have been brutally murdered, and not a single person has been convicted for these dastardly crimes. A few days ago, some were convicted in reference to the murder of three civil rights workers in 1964. We must remember that they were not convicted for murder on the state level. They were convicted through a Federal conspiracy law. No one has yet been convicted in the state of Mississippi for these sixty-two murders that I mentioned earlier.

Over the last two years, some fifty Negro churches have been burned to the ground in the state of Mississippi. Nothing has been done about it. It seems that they have a new motto in Mississippi now—not "Attend the church of your choice," but "Burn the church of your choice." Oh, how tragic this is! It tells us that we still have a long, long way to go.

The problem does not end with physical violence. There is another kind of violence; there is another kind of murder that is as injurious as physical violence to the person that it is inflicted upon. It is possible to lynch an individual psychologically and spiritually. And by the millions in the ghettos of our nation, North and South, Negroes are being murdered and lynched every day in the spiritual and psychological sense.

We must not overlook the fact that more than 34 per cent of the Negro families of our country live in substandard housing conditions. In most instances, they do not have wall-to-wall carpets, but rather wall-to-wall rats and roaches. Conditions are so depressing that they would humiliate anyone facing them.

And all over our country, young Negro students are forced to attend inadequate, overcrowded, segregated schools. That is not only still true of the South, but it is still true all over the country. So often, year after year, thousands of Negro boys and girls finish high school reading at an eighth or ninth grade level—not because they are dumb, not because they do not have native intelligence, but because the schools are so inadequate, so overcrowded, so devoid of quality, so segregated if you will, that the best in these minds have never come out.

Then there is the other problem, which is probably the most crucial problem—namely, the economic problem. The vast majority of Negroes in America are still perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. More than 40 per cent of the Negro families of our country are poverty stricken, in the sense that they make wages less than

the poverty level. Eighty-nine per cent of the Negro families of America earn less than \$7,000 a year.

The unemployment rate in the Negro community is still at a depression level. Government figures would say that unemployment in Negro communities is about 8.8 per cent nationally, but these figures would only deal with individuals who were once in the labor market and who still go down to the employment office to try to find a job. These figures do not deal with what we refer to as the discouraged—thousands and thousands who have given up, who have lost hope, who have had so many defeats and so many doors closed in their faces that they have lost motivation—the people who have come to feel that life is a long and desolate corridor with no exit signs. If you add these, the unemployment rate would probably be 16 or 17 per cent of the Negro community. And when we come to Negro youth the unemployment rate is between 30 and 50 per cent. In some cities it goes as high as 50 per cent.

I was working in Cleveland last summer with our organization, and day after day I would walk through the hub area which is the Negro ghetto. It didn't take me long to discover that 15 per cent of the people, the adults in the hub, are unemployed. It didn't take me long to discover that 58 per cent of the young Negro men of Cleveland are either unemployed or make wages below the poverty level. This can be duplicated in cities all over America.

The problem is not only unemployment but it is underemployment. The fact is that most of the poverty stricken people in our country work every day, but they make wages so low that they cannot begin to function

in the mainstream of economic life of our nation. They work in our hospitals; they work in our hotels; they work in our laundries. The vast majority of them are in domestic service—working every day, long hours, and yet earning so little that they cannot begin to function in the mainstream of the economic life of the nation. This has made for a great deal of despair.

The economic, the housing, the educational problems have made for a great deal of bitterness. We have seen angry explosions of this bitterness in the form of violence over the last two or three summers.

I need not give a long explanation or exposition of my position on the question of violence versus non-violence. I am still convinced that non-violence is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity. I am still convinced that violence creates many more social problems than it solves. And if the Negro in America succumbs to the temptation of using violence as his problematic strategy, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness. And our chief legacy to the future will be an endless strain of meaningless chaos.

So I will continue to raise my voice against violence, against riots, because they tend to intensify the fears of the white majority, while relieving their guilt. And we need a method that will somehow disarm the opponent, expose his moral defenses, and at the same time work on his conscience.

But after saying this, I must say that it would be an act of moral irresponsibility for me to condemn riots and not be as vigorous in condemning the continued

existence of intolerable conditions in our society, which cause people to feel so angry and bitter that they conclude they have no alternative to get attention but to engage in this kind of violence.

What we must see is that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? She has failed to hear that the plight of the Negro poor has worsened over the last few years. She has failed to hear the promises of freedom and equality that have not been met. America has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, humanity, and equality. And so it is still true that our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. As long as justice is postponed, we will be on the verge of social destruction.

Now let me rush on to say that if we are to go the additional distance to make justice a reality, and truly integrated society a reality, we are going to have to do something about it. And may I remind you that the struggle now is much more difficult. Over the last ten or twelve years, we were struggling to end segregation and the syndrome of deprivation surrounding that system. Many people supported us in that struggle. They were honestly outraged when they saw the brutality that we faced from a Jim Clark in Selma, or a Bull Connor in Birmingham. So out of a sense of decency they rose up and supported that struggle.

Some of the people that have supported that struggle are not supporting it so well today. It really boils down to the fact that they were doing the right thing for the wrong reason. T. S. Eliot says somewhere that

there is no greater heresy than to do the right thing for the wrong reason. A lot of people supported us in Selma and Birmingham because they were against Bull Connor and they were against Jim Clark—and not because they were for genuine equality for the black man. And the new era of the struggle is now a struggle for genuine equality.

A lot of people supported us there in those struggles because it didn't cost the nation anything. It did not cost the nation one penny to integrate lunch counters. In fact, it helped the business community. It did not cost the nation one penny to guarantee the right to vote or to have access to public accommodation. And now we are dealing with problems that can only be solved by the nation providing billions of dollars to do it. Therefore, it is much easier to integrate a lunch counter than it is to eradicate slums. It is easier to guarantee the right to vote than it is to guarantee an annual income. And yet these are the better things that must be tackled.

If the problem is to be solved in the days ahead, let me make some suggestions about things that I consider necessary. If we are going this additional distance, we are in dire need of a massive action program all over our country to get rid of the last vestiges of racism and its external effects. In short, the problem will not work itself out. We must continue to work at it with zeal and with determination.

In order to develop the kind of action programs that I am thinking about, we must get rid of two or three myths that are still being disseminated around our society. One is what I refer to as the "myth of time."

I am sure you have heard this notion. It is the notion that only time can solve the problem. And I know there are those sincere people who say to civil rights leaders and persons working for civil rights, "You are pushing things too fast; you must slow up for a while." And then they have a way of saying: "Now just be nice and be patient and continue to pray, and in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out, because only time can solve the problem."

Well, I think there is an answer to that myth. And it is that time is neutral. Time can either be used constructively or destructively. And I am sad to say that I am absolutely convinced that the forces of ill will in our nation, the people on the wrong side in our nation—the extreme rightists of our nation, have often used time much more effectively than the people of good will. And it may well be that we may have to repent in this generation, not merely for the vitriolic words and violent action of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say "wait on time."

Somewhere, we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless effort and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God. Without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation.

And there is another myth that is disseminated a great deal. It is the notion that legislation has no role to play in establishing justice and in moving toward an integrated society. The argument here is that you must change the heart of man and you cannot change the

heart through legislation. You cannot legislate morals. I would be the first one to say that hearts must be changed.

I said earlier that I am a Baptist preacher. That means that I am in the heart-changing business. I preach Sunday after Sunday about the need for conversion and regeneration—the new birth, so to speak. So I believe in the changing of hearts. I realize that, if we are to have a truly integrated society, white people are going to have to treat Negro people right—not just because the law says it, but because it is natural, and because it is right, and because the Negro is the white man's brother. I would be the first to say that we will never have a truly integrated and brotherly society until men and women rise to the majestic heights of being obedient to the unenforceable.

But after saying that, I must point out the other side. It may be true that morality can not be legislated. But behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart. But it can restrain the heartless. It may be true that the law can not make a man love me. But it can restrain him from lynching me, and I think that is pretty important, also. And so while the law may not change the hearts of men, the law can change the habits of men if it is vigorously enforced.

There is need for civil rights legislation all over the country in various areas—in the economic area, still in the educational area, and in the housing area.

There is a great problem facing our nation today, and we see it in almost every city in the country. It is the constant growth of predominantly Negro central cities, ringed by white suburbs. If the pattern continues,

it will invite social disaster. The only way this problem can be solved is through strong fair housing bills. Right here in the state of Kansas this issue is being dealt with, but there are still recalcitrant forces seeking to defeat a fair housing bill which this state desperately needs. And I am so happy that there are those who are working with determination to bring this into being. Every state in this Union needs a fair housing bill that will make it possible for people to live together and not face discrimination in housing.

Another myth surrounding us is what I call an exaggerated use of the "boot-strap" philosophy. People say to the Negroes: "You must lift yourself by your own boot straps." So often I hear people saying: "The Irish, Italians—and they go right down the line of all other ethnic groups—came to this country and faced problems. They had difficulties, and yet they lifted themselves by their own boot straps. Why can't and why won't the Negro do this?"

It does not help the Negro for unfeeling, insensitive whites to say to him that ethnic groups that voluntarily came to this country 150 years ago have now risen beyond the Negro, who has been here more than 344 years but was brought here in chains involuntarily. The people who project this argument never seem to realize that no other ethnic groups have been slaves on American soil. They do not stop to realize that America made the Negro's color a stigma.

Making color a stigma had the support of the semantics or linguistics structure, so to speak. Even the language conspired to give the Negro the impression that something was wrong with his color. Open *Roget's*

Thesaurus and you will see the 120 synonyms for "black." All of them are low and degrading, or represent smut or dirt. Then look at the 130 synonyms for "white." They are all high, noble, chaste, pure. So in our society when somebody goes wrong in the family, you don't call him a "white sheep"; you call him a "black sheep." If you tell a lie, it's better to tell a "white lie" than a "black lie," because a white lie is a little better. If you know something about somebody and you use that as a means of bribing him for money, and you would expose him if you don't get it, you don't call it "whitemail"—you call it "blackmail." Now this is a bit humorous, but it is a fact of life.

Many things conspired to make the Negro feel that he was nobody because of his color. But the other thing that refutes this myth is the notion that anybody, any ethnic group, lifted itself totally by its own boot straps.

The Negro was freed from the bondage of physical slavery in 1863 through the Emancipation Proclamation. But the Negro was not given any land to make that freedom meaningful. It was something like keeping someone in prison for many years, and then suddenly discovering that he is not guilty for the crime for which he was convicted. Then you go to him and say, "Now you are free," but you do not give him any bus fare to get to town, or any money to buy clothes to put on his back, or any money for shoes to put on his feet. Every code of jurisprudence is against this. And yet this is exactly what America did to the black man. In 1863 America just said, "You are free"; and he was left penniless, illiterate, with nothing.

Here is the story that is not often told. At the same

time America refused to give the Negro any land, by Act of Congress she was giving away millions of acres of land in the West and the Midwest, which meant that America was willing to undergird her white peasants from Europe with an economic floor. Not only did the nation give the land, it built land-grant colleges to teach these people how to farm. It provided county agents to further their expertise in farming. It provided low interest rates so that they could mechanize their farms. And today many of these people are being paid through federal subsidies *not* to farm.

These are the very people who, in many instances, are saying to the Negro that he should lift himself by his own boot straps. I guess this is all right to say to a man that he should lift himself by his own boot straps, but it is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he should lift himself by his own boot straps.

The nation has a debt that it must pay. The longer it refuses to pay that debt, the more problems there will be—the more we will see the crises in our cities, developing and developing. There should be a massive program, a kind of Bill of Rights for the disadvantaged, that will really grapple with the slums, the economic problem generally, and all the things that I have tried to outline. We have the resources as a nation to do that. The question is whether America has the will. I am afraid that we have such mixed-up priorities nationally that without hard work we will not respond to this crisis.

I submit to you today that we spend \$500,000 for every Viet Cong we end up killing in Vietnam, and yet we spend only \$53 a year for every person characterized as poverty stricken in the so-called war against poverty.

I am afraid that the national administration is more concerned about winning what I consider an unjust, ill-considered war in Vietnam than it is about winning the war against poverty right here at home.

I raise my voice against that war because I have seen the damage that it has done to our nation. I see values being corroded and destroyed every day as a result of the war in Vietnam. It has diverted attention from civil rights. It has strengthened the military-industrial complex. It has destroyed the Geneva Accords. It is a war that places our nation in a position of really being against the self-determination of the Vietnamese people. It has placed us in a position of being what Mr. Fulbright has called "arrogant," of being victimized with the arrogance of power. This war has played havoc with our domestic destiny. For all of these reasons I have to take a stand against it.

Somebody said to me not too long ago: "Dr. King, don't you feel that you will have to talk more in line with the administration's policy from now on, because many people who once respected you will lose respect for you and this will hurt the budget of your organization. Don't you think you are going to have to change and stop talking against the war?" And I had to look at that person and say: "I am sorry, sir, but you do not know me. I am not a consensus leader. I do not determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of my organization, or by taking a Gallup poll of majority opinion. Ultimately, a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus."

On some positions, cowards ask the question: "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question: "Is it politic?"

Vanity asks the question: "Is it popular?" But conscience asks the question: "Is it right?" There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular. He must take it because conscience tells him that he is right. And that is where I stand today. Suffice it to say the economic problem is real. If we are to go this additional distance, we must work passionately and unrelentingly.

There are certain technical words in every academic discipline that soon become stereotypes and clichés. Every academic discipline has its technical nomenclature. Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word in psychology. It is the word "maladjusted." This is the ringing cry of the child psychologist. Certainly we all want to avoid a maladjusted life in order to avoid neurotic or schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things in our society and in our world to which I am proud to be maladjusted—to which I call upon all men of good will to be maladjusted until the good society is realized.

I never intend to become adjusted to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessity from the many to give luxury to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism or to the self-defeating effects of physical violence in a day when Sputniks, Explorers, and Geminis are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere.

No nation can ultimately win a war. It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence. It is either

non-violence or non-existence. The alternative to disarmament, the alternative to a suspension of nuclear testing, the alternative to strengthening the United Nations and thereby disarming the whole world, may well be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation. And our earthly habitat will be transformed into an inferno that even the mind of Dante could not envision.

Maybe our world is in dire need of a new organization, the International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment—an association of men and women who will be as maladjusted as the Prophet Amos who, in the midst of the injustices of his day, cried in words that echo across the centuries: "Let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream"; as maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who, in the midst of his vacillations, finally came to see that this nation could not survive half-slave and half-free; as maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson who, in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery, etched across the pages of history words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"; as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth, who could say in the midst of the military machine of the Roman Empire: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Through such maladjustment, we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, to the bright and glittering day-break of freedom and justice.

I must admit that there are times when I get rather

discouraged in the midst of set-backs—in the midst of what I see as constant vacillations and ambivalences of American white society. There are times that some of us begin to wonder whether this problem can be solved. But whenever I go out and around the colleges and universities of our country, and talk with many young people, I must honestly say to you that my hope is always renewed in those settings. I think that you who sit today under the sound of my voice may well have the answer, for it is the student generation that is saying to America that there must be a radical reordering of priorities. It is the student generation that is saying to America there must be a revolution of values, and is forcing America to review its values.

President Johnson in his State of the Union message wondered why there is so much restlessness. He talked about material prosperity. He talked about the highways and the beautiful cars flowing on those highways. He talked about the seventy million television sets. And then he wanted to know why there is so much restlessness. I would like to answer the President by saying that there is restlessness in this society because we have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live.

Young people are restless because they are tired of killing. They want to make love not war. Young people are restless today because they are tired of the processes that are unfolding. Our national purpose and our national priorities are being questioned, and I see the hope within the young people of our generation.

I conclude by saying our goal is freedom. And I believe we are going to get there. However much

America strays away from it, the goal of America is freedom.

Our destiny somehow is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before Jefferson wrote the beautiful words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. Before the words of the Star Spangled Banner were written, we were here. And for more than two centuries our forebears labored here without wages. They made cotton kings, and they built the homes of their masters, in the midst of the most humiliating and oppressive conditions. Yet, out of bottomless vitality they continue to grow and develop. If the inexpressible coat of slavery could not stop us, the opposition that we now face—including the white backlash—will surely fail.

We are going to win our freedom, because both the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of the Almighty God are embodied in our echoing demands.

And so I can still sing, "we shall overcome." We shall overcome because the universe bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carlyle is right—no one can live forever. We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right—"Truth, crushed to earth, shall 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.

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mounting despair the stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this

faith we will be able to 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!"

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