

If you go back about thirty years, when Martin was still leading marches, you realize, as you look back, as I do, as a veteran of the Second World War, that in the entire postwar period, the one great thing which happened in these United States, were the Civil Rights reforms, and the movement led by Martin in those years.

Now, there were many other things that were done, like the space program and so forth, which were achievements of our country and other countries. But, this is the one fundamental change in our system of government which has been beneficial. Up to this time, many people have continued to benefit from those political changes of the Civil Rights movement. But, after Martin died—was murdered—we have been treading water. Many people have benefitted from the Civil Rights gains and political rights; *but the physical conditions of life of our people have been worsening, especially over the past fifteen years.*

For example, those of you who remember back in the 1960's, and compare that with conditions today: You will know that many American families which lived decently on one income in the household, back thirty years ago, have to have two to three jobs in the household, *not* to achieve the same condition today. The productivity of this nation has collapsed, *per* person employed. The rate of employment, in reality, has dropped. The quality of employment opportunities provided to most people has dropped, our tax revenue base has dropped—which means our schools are poorer, our municipal facilities are poorer, we are losing hospitals—which we have been losing over the past twenty years.

Everything is getting worse around the world, and our children who are under fifteen, or under twenty, are looking at us and saying, “*Do we have a future?*” Young people under

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Learning the Lesson of the 1960's Time To Put This Country on the March Once Again

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thirty are looking at the world and saying, “Do we have a future? Do our children have a future in this country and this world?” Most of them believe we do not.

So, while we're very happy to celebrate the achievements which the Civil Rights movement accomplished, with the Civil Rights bill, the Voting Rights Act, and other things that were done—largely through this state, in Alabama, the movement here, which was a sparkplug for the entire nation—, we say, the benefits are wearing down. The good is being taken away. Civil Rights politically are now in danger, economic rights are in danger. In our cities, where once people lived in houses, they now have ghettos, which are mad places to live in, where children are killing children. Things are becoming worse. Do we have a future?

It is time for us to learn the lesson of the 1960's, and realize that once again, in one way or another, we have to put this country on the march,

because things are becoming impossible. We have to put the country on the march, to rebuild a future for our children and our grandchildren. Otherwise, they won't have one.

A Man of Providence

Now, Martin was an unusual person. You don't get many Martins. He was, in some senses, an ordinary person; but, in another way, a very extraordinary person. And that began to show, after somebody in a ministers' meeting picked him out to lead the Civil Rights movement here in Alabama. And, he showed that he could accept that responsibility, and behaved as a man sent by God, a man of Providence, who never failed to fulfill his mission as a leader of the movement. And, it was Martin's personal dedication, and leadership, which was key to the movement's success. Because, after Martin was killed, many of the same people who otherwise led the movement were still around. The same beliefs were around. The Civil Rights movement today in the United States, in some senses, is stronger than it was

then: we have more people in influential positions now, than then. We have leaders who know how to govern, at state levels and other levels. But, we are poorly organized. We are not together; we are not moving, we are not shaking and moving the nation, as we were then.

What was the key? What was different about Martin, which made the rest of the Civil Rights movement work the way it did?

Martin was a Christian, in a very special way. There were many people in the Civil Rights movement who *weren't* Christians, and their contribution is valued. But, Martin was a Christian, and that was the key for him; not just a minister, but a Christian.

Because he understood—and the genius of his leadership was this understanding—he understood the message of Genesis, that *every man and woman is made in the image of God*, and given the power, as persons, which enables mankind to exert dominion over the universe.

Martin understood that this was a great nation, founded on a great principle. But, this nation and its greatness was spoiled by one thing: By a rottenness which is typified by the legacy of slavery, a legacy which this nation is not free of yet. And, it was this corruption in our nation, which caused it to fail to live up to its original promise.

Martin saw the Civil Rights movement as a means of restoring this nation to what Lincoln knew it had to become, and using the Civil Rights movement as a way of transforming this nation—its role at home and its role in the world—accordingly. And, he succeeded, in significant degree, in doing that. That was the power of the Civil Rights movement: To give meaning to the Declaration of Independence, to give meaning to the Constitution. To recognize that there are no races, there is only one race, the human race; and, racism is only a form of injustice. We had to unify ourselves, we had to go through a great act of atonement, where we would recognize that every child born, is made in the image of God, and that that child must be educated, and nurtured, and given opportunities accordingly.

The Secret of True Courage

Martin also understood something else. He understood the secret of true courage. See, most of us become too attached to our physical lives, in the wrong way. Our physical life is a very good thing to have. It is bad for it to be taken away from us, particularly prematurely, as it was from Martin. And, he understood that, as he said.

But, the important thing is that when you die, you don't take anything with you, except what you leave behind. And, therefore, if you have lived a life so that you, as Martin was, are a person of Providence, a man, a woman, of Providence, that your life enriches mankind in some way, that you do something as a vocation, as a dedication, to transform the

world around you to be a better place; so that you came, newborn, as a stranger, and you left as a mourned friend, but you left something behind: You left behind the impression that your life was needed.

People who understand that, and value that, value their sense of identity. "I am a person of Providence. I am here to do something good for all humanity." You have *infinite courage*. Martin *had* that kind of courage. Martin took people of dedication and talent around him, and he became a rallying point for them to find the same courage, by marching together, saying, "We are going to change this planet. We are going to make things better."

And, as Amelia has said many times, in characterizing the movement, who were some of the people who were the guts of the Civil Rights movement, as Amelia has said: the have-nots! People on the street, people who had nothing, people who had no lives, no education, nothing. Their lives would seem to be totally wasted. But, they rose up, like Lazarus, and they marched. Because they knew that in marching, they had cheated the Devil, they had found a meaning for their lives. And, it was they—the have-nots—who rose, in a sense, to the highest position in a moment of our history, to give our nation its soul and dignity.

What we need today, is to understand Martin in that way. Martin was a man of God, a man of Providence, who understood that the meaning of his life—his last great speech—the meaning of his life, was to go to the mountain-top, and to see what was there, and to bring others to the understanding of that, so that when he passed, he would leave behind a legacy, so we'd say, "This stranger came amongst us, and when he left, a great thing had had happened to us. This man was sent by God."

If we can find that in ourselves, if we can assemble together and discover that mutually in ourselves, then we can recreate the kind of movement which will address the problems which threaten our children's future today. And the time is now, to do it.

I could tell you many things about what the problems are. They're numerous. This world is suffering. The greatest genocide in the Twentieth century is right now occurring in the Great Lakes district of Africa. I could tell you about many other parts of the world that are suffering. I could tell you about the suffering in the United States. It's all there.

But, those are the negative things. The positive thing is: How do we change it? How do we look at the children's faces and say, "Yes, grandson, great-grandson, great-granddaughter, you will have a future, and we are going to see to it you have it"?

And, if we find the courage and dedication that Martin represented, or found in himself, we can do it. We have the movement; it just isn't together. We need to find that unified principle of courage that brings us together, and enables us, once again, to do what has to be done.

Thank you very much.