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'Violence is not the Answer'

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Below are excerpts of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1964 speech at the University of Dayton Fieldhouse. Follow the related story link to read about how the tape was discovered.

NON-VIOLENCE

"I am still convinced, while we must work passionately and unrelentingly for first-class citizenship, we must not use second-class methods to gain it. No matter which preacher says it, no matter who believes it, I'm going on and believe the other way. No matter who believes that preachers of violence can solve our problems, I'm going to, if I have to be a minority of one, to say that violence is not the answer."

"You don't have to live with the old philosophy that the end justifies the means... If you use hate-filled power, evil methods to get to the good end of a great society, then you will have destroyed the end in the process... In the long run of history, destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends. This is what the non-violent discipline says."

"Even if they try to kill you, you develop the inner conviction that there're 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 would die for, he ain't fit to live."

LOVE

"Then the Greek language comes out with another word called agape. Agape is more than eros. Agape is more than friendship. Agape is more than romantic or aesthetic love. Agape is understanding created redemptive goodwill toward all men. It is an all-flowing love that seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart."

RACE RELATIONS

"On the one hand, I must affirm that we have come a long, long way in the struggle to make civil rights a reality for all of God's children. But on the other hand, I must say that we still have a long, long way to go before the problem is solved."

"And as slavery grew 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 call the darkness wrong and the beautiful garments of righteousness. This is exactly what happened during the days of slavery. Even the Bible and religion were misused in order to crystallize the patterns of the status quo."

SEGREGATION

"This has always been the great tragedy of slavery, the great tragedy of segregation — not merely what it does to one physically, but what it does to the soul, what it does to one psychologically. It ends up giving the segregator a false sense of superiority while leaving the segregated with a false sense of inferiority. This is the tragedy of it. It scars the soul."

"So I'm convinced my friends that we've come a long, long way to put it figuratively in biblical language — we've broken loose from the Egypt of slavery, and we have moved through the wilderness of legal segregation and now we stand on the border of the promised land of integration, and I am absolutely convinced that the system of segregation is on its deathbed today, and the only thing uncertain about it is how costly the segregationists will make the funeral."

"But I want to give you the other side, and that is segregation is still with us... Growing up in every city of our nation in a de facto sense, much more difficult than the legal segregation that we've had across the years in the South. Where do we see it? We see it in housing... It's because of this, residential segregation developed segregation in the public schools and in the whole way of life. And so we find ourselves (with) a new form of segregation coming into being, which in form is much more difficult to grapple with because it is subtle, because it is not legal, because it is not open."

MYTHS OF TIME AND LEGISLATION

"(Some say) time will solve the problem. The only answer that I can give to that myth is that time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively... We've come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts, the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be co-workers with God."

"Now it may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. You see, it may be true that you can't legislate integration, but you can legislate desegregation. It may be true that the law can't change the heart, but it can restrain the hardness. It may be true that the law can't make a man love me, but it can restrain him from lynching me and I think that's what the law ought to do... It may be true that legislation cannot change the hearts of men, but it does change the habits of men. And when you change the habits of men, pretty soon the hearts and attitudes will be changed."

VOTING

"At the turn of the century there were very few Negroes registered to vote in the South. By 1948 that number had leaped to 750,000. When we started out in the election in 1960, that number had leaped to 1.2 million. Then when we went into the elections just a few days ago, the number had passed 2 million which means that we had more than 800,000 new Negro registered voters in the South since 1960. Far from what it ought to be, but it reveals that we've made some strides."

"I mentioned the strides that have been made in voter registration. Let me give you the other side... In 1964 A.D. there are counties in our country where Negroes cannot register without fear of economic reprisals, without fear of death, without facing all types of conniving methods to keep them from registering."

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