

Transcript of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Speech at Temple Isaiah February 1960

0:00:06 Mrs. Neworth: Good evening and welcome, all of you, to a very important night in the Temple Isaiah forum. I want to call your attention to the back of the brochure that we sent to all of you when we started the forum this year. We categorized our speakers and we have the opening sentence which says: The Community Affairs and Education Committee proudly presents its 4th Annual Forum Series. International Affairs: Daniel Schorr; The World of Literature: Robert Kirsch; Human Rights: The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. And we are indeed proud to have with us tonight Dr. King.

0:00:51 Mrs. Neworth: You know, Central Action Committees of Temples throughout the country have, as one of the chief goals, the enhancement, the protection... Action committee of Temple Isaiah has identified itself strongly with this cause, and in particular, with the cause of the struggle of the Negro for equal human rights. Temples throughout the country, too, lend the moral prestige of their position to the advancement of this cause. And at Temple Isaiah, we are very fortunate in our awareness of the importance and the problems involved in this most important area because Rabbi Lewis is a person who has been dedicated, vehement and unswerving in his beliefs in the importance of the rights and opportunities of each individual. And we have asked Rabbi Lewis to introduce Dr. King to you tonight. They have many things in common. But one of them is the fact, of course, that both of them are ministers. Another and most important is that both of them are dedicated to the concept of the brotherhood of man. Rabbi Lewis...

[applause]

0:02:45 Rabbi Albert M. Lewis: Mrs. Neworth, Elma, and friends, looks like Friday night.

[laughter]

0:03:07 AL: More or less. Well, put two together anyway. It's our pleasure to welcome you here this evening to hear and to exchange thoughts and feelings with our guest speaker for the evening, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He is the gentleman you have come to hear.

0:03:51 (audience member): *(inaudible)*

0:03:54 AL: Well, everybody staying warm, I guess. But you shall hear him very shortly. I would like to say a few words by way of introduction. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., has a most distinguished record. He is the Pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Let's go back a bit previous to his beginnings and development. He was born in Atlanta, Georgia, January 15th, 1929 which makes him just 31 years of age this past month.¹ He was born the son of Dr. and Mrs. Martin L. King, Sr. Dr. King, Sr. is the minister of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

0:05:11 AL: He is married to Coretta Scott. They have two children, Yolanda Denise and Martin Luther III. He was educated in the public schools in Atlanta, received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Morehouse College in 1948, and his Bachelor of Divinity from Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania in 1951. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard University and received his Doctorate in Philosophy at Austin University in 1955 in the field of Systematic Theology. He has a number of honorary degrees, too many to mention.

0:05:57 S2: He has held a number of positions; I mentioned his present church. He is also the President of the Montgomery Improvement Association. He is the President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Vice-President of the National Baptist Sunday School and Baptist Congress. He has published a book, which is for sale in our lobby and which you may purchase after the lecture, *Stride Toward Freedom*, which was published by Harper & Brothers in 1958. His articles have appeared in a number of publications; The Christian Century, Presbyterian Light, [0:06:44] *(unclear)* Magazine and The Fellowship Magazine. There are over 50 awards listed which he has received and some of them of great significance.

0:07:04 S2: In 1957, the Gallup Poll revealed that he was one of the most admired religious leaders of the world. In 1957, Time Magazine selected him as one of the 10 outstanding personalities of the year. I'd like to mention that he received the Spingarn Medal Award of the NAACP at its annual convention in Detroit, Michigan in 1957. Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois awarded him a salutation for distinguished contributions to principles of democracy.

0:07:45 (audience member): We can't hear.

0:07:46 AL: Oh, I'm sorry. You can't hear at the rear?

0:07:50 (audience member): Not at all.

0:07:51 (audience member): It shut off.

0:07:52 AL: It shut off? Well, we'll turn it back on. So, I was depending on the microphone, I don't have to. Two years ago, the Guardian Association of the Police Department of New York City presented him with the Outstanding Citizenship Award. Now, these recognitions, which have come to Dr. King, are the result of his efforts on behalf of his own people, and involved in these efforts for his own people is the development of a better democracy for all of us in the United States. We can only all raise ourselves if everybody is lifted to a new height and a new level.

0:08:57 AL: The movement to which Dr. King gave birth was the nonviolent direct and positive action which he initiated in Montgomery, Alabama when his people, the Negro people, refused to be segregated on the buses, the public conveyances of that city, and refused to ride them so long as there was segregation. Because they saw this action through and remained united, they were able to force these bars to come down. Now, only Dr. King is responsible for seeing that his people followed through. That is not an easy narrative to begin with.

0:10:01 AL: I think many of you are aware of the story of Moses and the Exodus. I believe it's only half true, but I as a Rabbi, turn to the Old Testament to the story of the Exodus in my remarks introducing Dr. King. Even... Every people throughout history that has sought its own freedom has gone back to the story of the Exodus.

0:10:28 AL: In that story, Moses and his people come, according to the Bible writers, to the borders of the Red Sea. When they get to the borders, the people naturally are frightened. Before them the Red Sea, impassable; behind them, the Egyptians coming after them. And they turn to Moses, their leader for some way out. And Moses turns to God. The Bible says that he cried unto the Lord. In the very next second, without any answer at all on the part of God to Moses, the very next answer is saying "Go forward." The commentary on the Bible saying this is most unusual that through this prayer which Moses gives up, the only answer he gets is saying, "Go forward. Go right into the sea." The Bible writers say that until every Hebrew in the fore had gone into the waters up to his neck, until that happened, the waters didn't recede. Then, once the Hebrews had gone in up to their neck, the waters receded.

0:12:00 AL: But somebody had to do something, directly, immediately, positively. This is what made Moses a hero, that he did it. He saw what was necessary and he did it. And he had the force of character, the will and the strength and the leadership to take the people with him. And supplying, I'm aware, a great deal to Martin Luther King to compare him to Moses. And yet, it isn't done lightly in any sense of the term. We have been dormant for many years. Since the Civil War, there has been no single action that has so galvanized the Negro people and so stirred up the conscience of the Western country as the direct positive action, [0:13:00] *(unclear)*, which Martin Luther King, Jr., initiated in Montgomery, Alabama. And we trust that when he told his people "go" and they went, that it will have the same effect upon the Negro people of the United States, the world, as Moses' command had upon the Jewish people.

0:13:29 AL: Without any further ado, may I introduce to you the Reverend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

[applause]

0:13:53 Martin Luther King, Jr.: Rabbi Lewis, Mrs. Newworth, ladies and gentlemen. I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here tonight and to be a part of this lecture series. And I want to express my personal appreciation to the committee of this Temple for extending the invitation. It's always a great pleasure and privilege to come to California and to Los Angeles and I am especially happy to be here tonight to discuss with you one of the vital issues of our day.

0:14:51: There can be no gain saying of the fact that a great struggle is taking place in our world today. And this struggle grows out of the quest for freedom and human dignity on the part of millions of people who have been forced to walk for centuries through the long night of oppression. Wherever you turn, whether it's in Accra, Nairobi, Johannesburg, New York, Los Angeles, Montgomery, Alabama to Little Rock, Arkansas, the cry is for freedom. To be sure, there have always been isolated, solo voices crying for freedom. But today these voices have been transformed into a mighty chorus. The chorus ringing out with amazing harmony. And that is a real determined quest for freedom and human dignity.

0:16:26: Now as this struggle continues in the world, many people find themselves asking whether we are making any real progress in the area of race relations and human relations. And this is a poignant, desperate question on the lips of our generation. Men are asking everywhere, "Have we really moved progressively toward the goal of racial justice?" And it seems to me that there are three basic attitudes that can be taken toward the question of progress in the area of human relations. First, one can take the attitude of extreme optimism. And the extreme optimist would contend that we have come a long, long way in the area of racial justice. He would point proudly to the marvelous strides that had been made in the area of human rights over the last few decades. From this he would conclude that the problem is just about solved now and that we can sit down comfortably by the wayside and wait on the coming of the inevitable.

0:18:02: The second attitude that can be taken is that of extreme pessimism. The extreme pessimist would argue that we have made only minor strides in the area of human relations. He would contend that the rhythmic beat of the deep rumblings of discontent from Africa, the uprisings in Asia, and the racial tensions in the United States, are all indicative of the fact that we are going backwards instead of forward. He will contend that at bottom, human nature cannot be changed. At times, he will get a bit intellectual with his arguments and he may turn to the realm of psychology and seek to show the inflexibility of certain attitudes once they had been molded. He may even turn to the realm of theology and seek to show that hovering over every man is the taint of original sin. And so at bottom, human nature cannot be changed. From all of this, the extreme pessimist would conclude that there can be no progress in the area of human relations or better race relations.

0:19:43: Now, it is interesting to notice that the extreme pessimist and the extreme optimist agree on at least one point. They both agree that we must sit down and do nothing in the area of race relations. If it's in the struggle in the United States, the extreme optimist would say, "Do nothing because integration is inevitable." The extreme pessimist would say, "Do nothing because integration is impossible."

0:20:20: But there is a third attitude that can be taken; namely, the realistic position. Like the synthesis, in Hegelian philosophy, the realist seeks to combine the truths of two opposites while avoiding the extremes of both. And so, the realism area of race relations would agree with the optimist that we have come a long, long way. But he would seek to balance that by agreeing with the pessimist that we have a long, long way to go. And it is this realistic position that I would like to use as a basis for our thinking together, as we think about the stride towards freedom in our world, as we think about the struggle for racial justice.

0:21:21: Let us notice first that we have come a long, long way. We can certainly see this on the international horizon. There are approximately 2,500,000,000 people in the world. And a vast majority of these people live in Asia and Africa. About 500 million in India and Pakistan, about 200 million in Africa. About 600 million or more in China, almost 100 million in Indonesia, about 96 million in Japan. And for years, most of these people have been dominated politically, exploited

economically, segregated and humiliated by some foreign power. But if we will go back and look today, we will discover that most of these people, more than 1,300,000,000 of the former 1,600,000,000 colonial subjects have their independence today.

0:22:38: We can think about the fact that just 40 years ago, the British Empire had under its domain more than 600 million people. But today, the British Empire has less than 80 million. And at the end of this year, it will be cut down to about 20 or 25 million. Just about 20 years ago or 30 years ago, there were only two independent countries in the whole continent of Africa; Ethiopia and Liberia. 10 countries have now been added, 10 new independent countries, and this year four additional countries will be added: Nigeria, the Cameroons was added on the first of January, the Togolands, Somalia and the Belgian Congo. And so as we look out on the international horizon and the colonial struggle, we can say that we have come a long, long way in breaking down the barriers of colonialism and imperialism.

0:24:06: It was my good fortune, to journey over to West Africa in 1957 to the independence celebration of the new nation of Ghana. And I never will forget the experience which came to me the night that the new nation was to come into being. We were standing there, and some 200,000 people stood around, and finally Prime Minister [Kwame] Nkrumah mounted the platform and he spoke to his people saying "We are now a free and independent nation." And at that moment, over that vast crowd of people we could hear old men and old women, young boys and young girls crying, "Freedom. Freedom. Freedom."

0:25:09: And then we looked back and we saw an old flag coming down and a new flag going up. The old flag coming down was the Union Jack flag and the new flag going up was the flag of the new nation of Ghana. And I turned around and said to my wife who was standing next to me and Dr. Ralph Bunche and Congressman Powell that this means something, and it is not merely a meaningless drama taking place on the stage of history, but it is a symbol of something profoundly meaningful. The old flag coming down is the symbol of an old order passing away, and the new flag going up is the symbol of a new age coming into being. And so in our world, we have been able to see the old order of colonialism pass away and we notice a new order of freedom and equality coming into being.

0:26:23: And not only have we come a long, long way in the area of colonialism as it expresses itself in Asia and Africa, we have come a long, long way in our own nation. The Negro himself has come a long, long way in reevaluating his own intrinsic worth. Now, in discussing the Negro problem, I would not want to give the impression that this is the only racial problem that we have in our nation. But I'll only use this because it is the problem that we hear a great deal about at this time, and since the Negro happens to be the largest minority, a great deal of attention is focused on him.

0:27:16: Now, in order to give some understanding of how the Negro has come a long, long way in reevaluating his intrinsic worth, a little history is necessary. You will remember that it was in the year 1619 that the first Negro slaves landed on the shores of this nation. They were brought here from the soils of Africa. Throughout slavery, the Negro was treated in a very inhuman fashion; he was a thing to be used, not a person to be respected. He was a depersonalized cog in a vast plantation machine. The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrates the status of the Negro during slavery.² And in this decision, the Supreme Court of the United States said, in substance, that the Negro is not a citizen of this nation, he is merely property, subject to the dictates of his owner. And this was the attitude that prevailed.

0:28:34: 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 into beautiful garments of righteousness. Psychologist William James used to talk a great deal about the stream of consciousness. He says, "One of the interesting and unique things about human nature is that man is able to temporarily block the stream of consciousness and place anything in it that he wants to." And so we have the

capacity of justifying the rightness of the wrong. This is exactly what happened during the days of slavery.

0:29:29: Many of the slaves almost fell victim to the danger that forever confronts religion and a too literalistic interpretation of the Bible. There is a danger that religion and the Bible, not properly interpreted, will be used as instruments to crystallize the status quo. And this happened. And so, from pulpits all over the nation, it was argued that the Negro was inferior by nature because of Noah's curse upon the children of Ham. The apostle Paul's word became a watchword, "Servant, be obedient to your master." And then one of the brethren had probably read the logic of Aristotle and he could put his argument in the framework of an Aristotelian syllogism. "All men are made in the image of God," this was his major premise. "And God, as everybody knows, is not a Negro." This was a minor premise. Therefore, "the Negro is not a man." This was the type of reasoning that so often prevailed. And living under these conditions, many Negroes lost faith in themselves. Many came to feel that perhaps they were inferior or perhaps they were less than human.

0:30:57: But then something happened to the Negro. Emancipation became a reality. Not only that, years later, other things developed and circumstances made it necessarily and possible for him to travel more. The coming of the automobile, and the upheavals of two world wars, and the Great Depression. His rural plantation background gave way to urban industrial life. His cultural life was gradually rising through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. And his economic life was gradually rising through the growth of industry and the influence of organized labor and other agencies. All these forces conjoined to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. And Negro masses all over began to reevaluate themselves. 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. That the basic thing about a man is not his specificity, but his fundamentum³. Not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but the texture and quality of his soul.

0:32:31: And so with this new interpretation, and with this new evaluation, the Negro could now unconsciously cry out with the eloquent poet,

Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim.
Skin may differ, but affection
Dwells in black and white the same.
Were I so tall as to reach the poles,
Or to grasp the ocean at a span,
I must be measured by my soul.
The mind is the standard of the man.⁴

And with this, a new Negro came into being with a new sense of dignity and destiny, and a new determination to struggle and sacrifice until justice and freedom had become realities.

0:33:32: And so I can say that we have come a long, long way since 1619. And not only has the Negro come a long, long way in reevaluating his own intrinsic worth, we've come a long, long way in this nation in the area of civil rights. And if we are to be honest, we must admit that. Fifty years ago, or less than that, a year hardly passed that numerous Negroes were not brutally lynched by some vicious mob. But lynchings have about ceased in the United States today. There are still some isolated cases, but lynchings have about ceased. 50 years ago, 25 years ago, most of the Southern states prevented Negroes from becoming registered voters through several means, and one was the poll tax. And the poll tax has been eliminated now in all but four states, and there is great hope now that it will be eliminated in all of these states through the Congress of our United States.

0:34:51: Even in the area of voter registration we've come a long, long way. Certainly not far enough, but a long, long way. At the turn of the century, there were very few Negro registered voters in the South. By 1948, that number had leaped to 750,000 and today the number stands at about 1,300,000. The Negro has come a long, long way in achieving economic justice. The average

Negro wage-earner today makes 10 times more than the average Negro wage-earner of 20 years ago. The national income of the Negro is now more than 17 billion dollars a year. That's more than all the exports of the United States and the national income of Canada. And so we've come a long, long way.

0:35:53: And more than anything else, in our generation we have been able to see the walls of segregation gradually crumble. We know the history of segregation came into being, on a legal basis, in 1896. And the Supreme Court of the nation rendered a decision known as the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision.⁵ And the Supreme Court, at that time, established a doctrine of "separate but equal" as the law of the land. But since 1896, many things have happened. May 17, 1954, came into being.⁶ The Supreme Court of the Nation rendered a new decision saying, in substance, that the old Plessy doctrine must go, that separate facilities are inherently unequal, and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. And so, if I can put it in Old Testament language, we've broken loose from the Egypt of slavery and we've moved through the wilderness of 'separate but equal' and now we stand on the border of the promised land of integration. And certainly there is hope that we will be able to enter this new and great land of integration. And so, we've come a long, long way since 1896.

0:37:42: Now this would be a wonderful place to stop. It would be marvelous to be able to stop here. First, it would mean making a relatively short speech and we all like short speeches. And I'd really like to stop at this point but if I stop here, I would merely be stating a fact and not telling the truth. Now, it is a fact that we've come a long, long way but it isn't 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. Not only have we come a long, long way, but we have a long, long way to go. And if I stopped at this point, I would leave you the victims of a dangerous optimism. If I stop here, I would leave you the victims of an illusion wrapped in superficiality. And so in order to tell the truth, I must go on and say not only have we come a long, long way but we have a long, long way to go.

0:38:45: If we look over in Africa today, and Asia, we can see that we have a long, long way to go. This is particularly true of Africa. In spite of the marvelous progress, there's still strong resistance, there's still recalcitrance in East Africa and Central Africa. If we will turn our eyes to South Africa we will see that millions of black men and black women segregated on two percent of their own land and having to have passes to walk the streets. And this reveals that we have a long, long way to go before colonialism is finally removed.

0:39:37: In our nation, we have a long, long way to go. I mentioned the fact that lynchings have about ceased, but other things are happening just as bad. We can turn to one section of our country and we find there that the legislative halls ring loud with such words as interposition and nullification. Organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizen's Council are on the march and they are saying that they will never comply with the Supreme Court's decision.

0:40:20: We have a long, long way to go in the area of voter registration. I said we have come a long, long way but we have a long, long way to go, for conniving methods are still being used to keep Negroes from voting. And there are 5 million eligible Negro voters in the South and yet, there are only 1,300,000 registered. This reveals that we have a long, long way to go. Not only that, violence is a reality in many instances. Even though, there are not as many lynchings, we find that individuals who are merely concerned and merely determined to have equal rights face physical violence, court injustices stand supreme in so many southern situations. And both Negro and white persons who dare take a stand for justice and freedom constantly face violence and abuse and persecution and arrest and bombings. Not only are individual homes bombed, but churches and synagogues and schools are being bombed. This reveals that we have a long, long way to go.

0:41:48: In the area of economic justice, we have a long, long way to go even though we've come a long, long way. And this is interesting. It is interesting to notice that 40% of the Negro families of America still make less than \$2,000 a year. And compare that with the fact that only 21% of the white families of America make less than \$2,000 a year. 20% of the Negro families of America

make less than \$1,000 a year. While just 7% of the white families of America make less than \$1,000 a year. 88% of the Negro families of America make less than \$5,000 a year while just 60% of the white families make less than \$5,000 a year. And so this reveals that we have a long, long way to go in making economic justice a reality. And then we have a long, long way to go before segregation is finally defeated in the United States.

0:43:10: Now, it is true, as I said a few minutes ago, and if I can speak figuratively now, that Old Man “Segregation” is on his deathbed. But history has proven that social systems have a great last-minute breathing power and the guardians of the status quo are always on hand with their oxygen tanks to keep the old order alive. So segregation is still with us. We still confront it in the South in its glaring and conspicuous forms. We still confront it in New York and Los Angeles and Chicago and Philadelphia in its hidden and subtle forms. We all know that if democracy is to live, segregation must die. Segregation is a cancer in the body politic, which must be removed before our democratic health can be realized.

0:44:13: Segregation is immoral, unethical, and evil because it substitutes an ‘I/It’ relationship for the ‘I/Thou’ relationship.⁷ Therefore, we are challenged as people of goodwill and committed to the ethical insights of the ages to work with renewed vigor and to remove all of the barriers of segregation, discrimination, bigotry from our nation and indeed from the world. We must do many things in order to do this. First, on the international scale, the former colonial powers must realize that the day for colonialism is over and that the movement for independence is an unstoppable movement. And to stand against it is like... Smarter to live creatively in this period. It also means that people everywhere will have to rise above the narrow confines of their individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

0:45:31: And in a real sense, if we do not learn to live together as brothers in the world, we will all perish together as fools. For we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. And whatever affects one nation or one individual directly, affects all nations or individuals indirectly. John Donne caught this years ago and put it in graphic terms, “No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main.” And then he goes on to the end to say, “Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”⁸

0:46:28: There are many specific things that we must do in the United States if the problem is to be solved, and certainly there is a great role to be played by the federal government. And I say to you this evening that the leadership that we should have from the federal government has come mainly from the judicial branch. The legislative and executive branches of the government have been all too apathetic, and sometimes hypocritical in this area. And if the problem is to be solved, all branches of the government must work with bold and grim determination to implement the law of the land.

0:47:22: This means that Congress must produce a strong Civil Rights bill this year, realizing that the civil rights issue is not just some evanescent domestic issue that can be kicked about by vociferous politicians, but it is an eternal moral issue which may well determine the destiny of our nation.⁹ The hour is late, and the clock of destiny is ticking out and we must act now before it is too late. And if America misses this opportunity she will be relegated to a second rate power in the world. And all of her achievements will be null and void and all of her words will be a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And so the government must take a strong stand.

0:48:21: And legislation has a powerful role. Many people will say this isn’t important, that you can’t legislate morals, it must be done by education. And I would rather say that we need both education and legislation. It’s not either/or but it’s both/and. Certainly, you can’t change attitudes and you can’t change the hearts of men through legislation, I recognize that, but this really isn’t the purpose of legislation. We have legislation to control behavior. Now, it is true that religion and education will have to change a man’s heart but it’s an immoral act to ask people to wait generations and sometimes centuries until people’s hearts have changed and they still go on

accepting the same injustices. And so through religion and education we seek to change internal attitudes that may be bad and misguided, but through legislation, we seek to control the external effects of the those internal attitudes.

0:49:35: So it may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me. It is quite true that the law cannot make an employer have compassion for the employee, but it can keep the employer from refusing to hire persons on the basis of their color or on the basis of their religion. This is what we seek to do through the law. We seek to regulate behavior. And through religion and education, we seek to change attitudes. And we must never underestimate the power of legislation in regulating behavior. I've seen this in so many instances. Just five months ago Mrs. King and I had the privilege of traveling through India. And while in India I took a good deal of time talking with Harijans, the untouchables. Gandhi changed the name to Harijans, which meant children of God. I spent a lot of time talking with these people and studying this problem of caste untouchability. And I say that India has made much more progress on this question of untouchability than we have made on the question of segregation in the United States.

0:50:51: And one of the reasons is this, first India had a powerful symbol in Mahatma Gandhi, who had adopted an untouchable girl as his daughter against the will of his wife and the will of other people. He fasted in many instances and said, "If the untouchables cannot go in the temple, I will never go and will not eat again." But not only of this powerful symbol, there came a day when there was an amendment to the constitution of India. And there today, untouchability is a crime punishable by imprisonment. And Prime Minister [Jawaharlal] Nehru said to me that he doubted seriously if you could find 100 people out of the whole population of India, some 400 million people, who would make a public statement endorsing untouchability. And that is because of the powerful symbol on the one hand and because of legislation on the other. And so legislation has a great role to play.

0:51:58: And that is a role to be played by liberals all over the nation, and that is a role to be played by moderates in the South. And I would not say to you at all that all of the white people in the South stand against integration. There are hundreds and thousands and millions of white people of goodwill in the South. Many of them are silent today because they are afraid; afraid of the political, social and economic reprisals, and God granted, something will happen so that these people can take over the leadership in this tense period of transition.

0:52:41: But I would not like to make it appear that these forces must work, that Negroes and colored people in general do not have a role to play themselves. That's why I would like to stress this point, that if integration is to become a reality in our nation, racial justice [to] become a reality all over the world, colored peoples of the world will have to play a significant role.

0:53:18: There are three ways that oppressed people can deal with their oppression. One way is to just accept it, to acquiesce. One way is to resign oneself to the fate of oppression. And to go back to Moses, Moses hadn't gone too far in the wilderness to discover that some people really don't want to be free. They preferred the fleshpots of Egypt to the challenges and glories of the Promised Land.¹⁰ Some people you see conditioned themselves so much to the old order that they become adjusted to it. I remember when I was coming up in Atlanta, I used to hear a man playing his guitar, and one day I stopped and he was singing a little song as he was playing, and it was something like this, "Been down so long that down don't bother me." Now some people get in this situation. They achieve the freedom of exhaustion. They have just been down so long that it just doesn't bother them.

[laughter]

0:54:23: So this is one way to just acquiesce and accept oppression. But this isn't the moral way because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. And religion at its best says that every man is his brother's keeper, and his brother's brother. And if I

make my brother feel that segregation is right and find myself adjusting to it, I am not being true to him and I am not his keeper. And so this isn't the moral or the ethical way.

0:54:59: There's another way that oppressed people can deal with their oppression, and that is to rise up against the oppressor with violence and corroding hatred. Well, this has happened and I'm not here tonight to say that violence hasn't ever worked, I know that nations have received their independence through violence. Even the United States received its independence and became a nation through rising up violently against the British Empire. So I'm not here to say that violence never works, but I can say this that, particularly in this area, violence could only achieve a temporary victory, but not permanent or ultimate peace, and it ends up creating many more social problems than it solves. And, therefore, I am convinced that if the Negro succumbs to the temptation of using violence in his struggle, 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 reign of meaningless chaos. So this isn't the way.

0:56:13: But there is a third way, namely non-violent resistance. Where the individual can stand up with as much courage, and with as much determination as the individual who uses violence, and yet he refuses to hate in the process. And I believe this is the creative challenge before oppressed people all over the world today, this ability to rise up on the one hand in protest, but on the other hand being cognizant of right methods. We must work passionately and unrelentingly for first class citizenship. We must never use second-class methods to gain it. And I am convinced that the means that are used are just as important as the end we seek, because the end is pre-existent in the means. And, therefore, the means must be non-violent so that we can achieve the end of brotherhood.

0:57:19: And this is why I say to my Negro brothers and sisters all across the country that our aim must never be to defeat or to humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding. We must not seek to rise from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage thus subverting justice. Our aim must be to achieve democracy for all. We must never substitute a black supremacy for white supremacy, for black supremacy is as bad or worse than... Black supremacy is as bad or worse than white supremacy. And I am convinced that God is not interested merely in the freedom of black men, and brown men, and yellow men, but God is interested in the freedom of the whole human race and the creation of a society where all men will live together as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. And this is the challenge of the hour.

0:58:23: It is a great opportunity for people of goodwill all over the nation and all over the world. And I can assure you that this problem will not be solved in America, cannot be solved in the world, until people of goodwill will rise up and people of great determination will take a stand realizing that wherever there is hate, wherever there is a lack of brotherhood, wherever there is a lack of real community, chaos will ultimately set in. And so somebody must come to the point of being dissatisfied.

0:59:11: Professor Bixler, formerly of Harvard University, some years ago used to talk a great deal about "the well-adjusted life." He said that we all want to live a well-adjusted life, but he went on to say that this could be dangerously misused. And I would like to close by re-emphasizing that fact.

0:59:40: We know every academic discipline has its technical words, words that become a part of the technical nomenclature of that particular discipline. And modern psychology has a word that is used more than any other word. In modern psychology, there's a word "maladjusted"... And this is a cry to modern child psychology, maladjusted. And certainly we all want to live the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But I close my talk this evening by saying to you there are some things in our social order to which I'm proud to be maladjusted, and I call upon you to be maladjusted.

1:00:31: I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to become adjusted to religious bigotry and malice and communism. I never intend to adjust myself to violence in any form in the madness of militarism. I never intend to become adjusted to economic conditions

that will take necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to adjust myself to anything short of brotherhood, and all of its reality. And I call upon you, and men everywhere to be maladjusted.

1:01:21: For you see, it may well be that the salvation of our world lies in the hands of the maladjusted.¹¹

[laughter]

1:01:28: Let us be maladjusted.¹² As maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who, in the midst of the injustices of the day could cry out in words that echo across the centuries, “Let judgment run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”¹³ And maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not exist half slave and half free. As maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson, who, in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out in words lifted to cosmic proportions, “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.”¹⁴ As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth who would say to the men and women of his day, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.”¹⁵

1:02:34: And it may be that through such maladjustment we will be able to move out of the bleak and desolate midnight of man’s inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice. And this will be the day when men everywhere will be able to join hands and sing a new song. Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to come together and sing anew, “Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”

[applause]

¹ This confirms that the speech took place in February of 1960. Interestingly, neither Lewis or King make mention of the lunch counter sit-ins that took place in Greensboro and Durham, North Carolina in the first two weeks of February. On February 16, 1960, King and Ralph Abernathy toured lunch counters in Durham, North Carolina and King spoke at White Rock Baptist Church. (If this speech is from before then, the sit-ins were still happening. If the speech is from after, King could have mentioned having been in North Carolina recently.) The Temple Isaiah archives have no information about when King’s speech occurred, and it is not clear whether King was in Los Angeles before or after his trip to Durham. (We do know that the speech did not take place on February 5, 12, 19, or 26, since it would not have been held on a Friday evening in deference to Shabbat.)

² *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857)

³ “Fundamentum” is a Latin word. It means foundation, beginning, basis.

⁴ The first four lines are quoted from the “The Negro’s Complaint” (1788) by William Cowper, and the remaining lines are quoted from Horae Lyricae, “False Greatness” (1706), by Isaac Watts.

⁵ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896)

⁶ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). (The Supreme Court handed down its unanimous decision in the case on May 17, 1954. King assumes the audience picks up this reference.)

⁷ This is a reference to Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* (1923). MLK famously cites Buber, using almost identical language, in “Letter from Birmingham Jail”:

Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an “I it” relationship for an “I thou” relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of

things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful.

[Martin Luther King, Jr., "[Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)" (April 16, 1963).]

This speech – delivered more than three years earlier – may in fact be King’s earliest explicit mention of Buber (at least by name). The next earliest reference seems to be in September, 1962. [See *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948-March 1963*, Clayborn Carson, Ed. (2007), pp. 438-439.] The earliest mention in the archives of the The King Library and Archives at the King Center in Atlanta Georgia is in a speech entitled "[An Analysis of the Ethical Demands of Integration](#)," delivered in December, 1962.

King’s earliest allusion to Buber is probably in "[Conquering Self-Centeredness](#)," a sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church (August 11, 1957) in which he mentions "I-Thou", but not in relation to segregation, and without mentioning Buber by name.

⁸ John Donne, "Meditation XVII" from *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1623).

⁹ Congress did pass The Civil Rights Act of 1960 (Pub.L. 86-449, 74 Stat. 89), which was awaiting a vote in the House at the time of this speech. It was approved by the House in late March, by the Senate in April, and signed by President Eisenhower on May 6, 1960. The final bill was almost certainly not what King or the movement wanted, since it dealt only with very limited voting rights. King would have to wait for Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 for the kind of legislative change to which he is referring here.

¹⁰ Exodus 16:2-3

¹¹ See Harry Emerson Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person* (Harper & Brothers, 1943), pp. 205-206, and *The Hope of the World* (Harper & Brothers, 1933), p. 112.

¹² The "maladjusted" paragraph also appears in King’s speech "[A Look to the Future](#)," delivered at Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee (September 2, 1957).

¹³ Amos 5:24

¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence" (July 4, 1776).

¹⁵ Matthew 5:44