



DR. MARTIN
LUTHER KING JR.
QUOTES

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

The quotes in this booklet were selected by the students and staff of the Institute for Community Leadership (ICL) from their intensive study of Dr. King in ICL's class, Reclaim Dr. King: Create Peace, Construct Community and Strengthen Democracy.

EXPLANATION OF THE LETTERS LISTED AFTER EACH BULLET

A few capitalized letters are listed after each Dr. King bullet or quote. They stand for the Dr. King book from which the quote was taken. They are:

The Autobiography of Martin L. King JR. TAOMLKJR
Strength to Love STL Stride Toward Freedom STF
Testament of Hope TOH
The Papers of Martin Luther King, JR., Volume V
TPOMLKJRV
The Trumpet of Conscience TTOC
Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community
WDWGFH
Why We Can't Wait WWCW

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PREFACE

Dr. King was many things at once. He was a General in the Army of Free Persons. He was a great Baptist minister. He was an excellent organizer; a drum major for justice; a soldier for peace; an advocate for the left out, locked out and the hurt and hungry in each of us. He was a husband and a father and a loyal friend to his friends. He was a writer and a great orator. He learned how to make friends with his fear and he learned how to control anger and to befriend his enemies. He learned how to live a life worth dying for.

Dr. King accepted the American promise put forth by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that all persons are created equal, that they are “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” He accepted this unfulfilled promise and he accepted the hypocritical histories of the promisers with agape love and profound, admirable intelligence. He never gave up on his country nor did he give up on the capacity of the people to organize with love and tenacity to make the promise come true.

Dr. King is one of those leaders who never dies. Perhaps we should speak of him not only in the past tense, but also in present and future tenses. Dr. King is an example for each of us, a high standard demanding excellence in our heart and in our head. Let's be like Martin!

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

“The greater the privileges, the greater the responsibilities and sacrifices.” STF

“Whatever career you may choose for yourself-- doctor, lawyer, teacher -- let me propose an avocation to be pursued along with it. Become a dedicated fighter for civil rights.” TOH

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom.” TTOC

“We need organizations that are permeated with mutual trust, incorruptibility and militancy. Without this spirit we may have numbers but they will add up to zero.” WDWGFH

“We need organizations that are responsible, efficient and alert.” WDWGFH

“We lack experience because ours is a history of disorganization. But we will prevail because our need for progress is stronger than the ignorance forced upon us.” WDWGFH

“If we realize how indispensable is responsible militant organization to our struggle, we will create it as we managed to create underground railroads, protest groups, self-help societies and the churches that have always been our refuge.” WDWGFH

“We have inherited a large house, a great “world house” in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.” WDWGFH

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“The shape of the world today does not permit us a faltering democracy.” STF

“He who sells you the token instead of the coin always retains the power to revoke its worth, and to command you to get off the bus before you have reached your destination. Tokenism is a promise to pay. Democracy, in its finest sense, is payment.” WWCW

“All inhabitants of the globe are now neighbors. This world-wide neighborhood has been brought into being largely as a result of the modern scientific and technological revolutions.” WDWGFH

“Wisdom born of experience should tell us that war is obsolete. . . If we assume that life is worth living and that man has a right to survival, then we must find an alternative to war.” STL

“Nothing could be more tragic than for men to live in these revolutionary times and fail to achieve the new attitude and the new mental outlooks that the new situation demands.” WDWGFH

“Today our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.” WDWGFH

“One of the great problems of mankind is we suffer from a poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually.” WDWGFH

“Every (person) lives in two realms, the internal and the external. The internal is that realm of spiritual ends expressed in art, literature, morals and religion. The external is that complex of devices, techniques, mechanisms and instrumentalities by means of which we live. Our problem today is that we have allowed the internal to become lost in the external.” WDWGFH

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“Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” STF

“Actually time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but the for appalling silence of the good people.” WWCW

“We must develop, from strength, a situation in which the government finds it wise and prudent to collaborate with us.” WDWGFH

“When a people are mired in oppression, they realize deliverance when they have accumulated the power to enforce change..... The powerful never lose opportunities--they remain available to them. The powerless, on the other hand, never experience opportunity—it is always arriving at a later time.” WDWGFH

“Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter. As you press on for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the weapon of love.” TOH

“Our nettlesome task is to discover how to organize our strength into compelling power so that government cannot elude our demands.” WDWGFH

“When a new dawn reveals a landscape dotted with obstacles, the time has come for sober reflection, for assessment of our methods and for anticipating pitfalls. Stumbling and groping through the wilderness finally must be replaced by a planned, organized and orderly march.” WDWGFH

“Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself.” WDWGFH

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“When an individual is no longer a true participant, when he no longer feels a sense of responsibility to his society, the content of democracy is emptied.” TTOC

“Racism is a tenacious evil, but it is not immutable.” WDWGFH

“None of us can pretend that he knows all the answers. It is enormously difficult for any oppressed people even to arrive at an awareness of their latent strengths. They are not only buffeted by defeats, but they have been schooled assiduously to believe in their lack of capacity. People struggling from the depths of society have not been equipped with knowledge of the science of social change. Only when they break out of the fog of self-denigration can they begin to discover the forms of action that influence events. They can then embark on social experimentation with their own strengths to generate the kind of power that shapes basic decisions.”

WDWGFH

“In our society power sources are sometimes obscure and indistinct. Yet they can always finally be traced to those forces we describe as ideological, economic and political.” WDWGFH

“Nonviolent direct action will continue to be a significant source of power until it is made irrelevant by the presence of justice.”

WDWGFH

“(The black community has) already started on this road in creating the protest movement, but this is only a beginning. We must involve everyone we can reach, even those with inadequate education, and together acquire political sophistication by discussion, practice and reading.” WDWGFH

“Informal discussions and reading at home or in the streets are educational; they challenge the mind and inform our actions.”

WDWGFH

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“Midnight is the hour when men desperately seek to obey the eleventh commandment, Thou shalt not get caught.” According to the ethic of midnight, the cardinal sin is to be caught and the cardinal virtue is to get by.” STL

“Education without social action is a one-sided value because it has no true power potential. Social action without education is a weak expression of pure energy. Deeds uninformed by educated thought can take false directions. When we go into action and confront our adversaries, we must be as armed with knowledge as they. Our policies should have the strength of deep analysis beneath them to be able to challenge the clever sophistries of our opponents.”
WDWGFH

“Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective. No individual can live alone, no nation can live alone, and as long as we try, the more we are going to have war in this world.” TTOC

“Violence, even in self-defense, creates more problems than it solves. Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men can live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.” TOH

“To attempt radical reform without adequate organization is like trying to sail a boat without a rudder.” WDWGFH

“Recognizing that no army can mobilize and demobilize and remain a fighting unit, we will have to build far-flung, workmanlike and experienced organizations in the future if the legislation we create and the agreements we forge are to be ably and zealously superintended.” WDWGFH

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“Creation is so designed that my personality can only be fulfilled in the context of community.” STF

“Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It is a weapon unique in history, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the [person] who wields it.” WWCW

“Our hope for creative living in this world house that we have inherited lies in our ability to re-establish the moral ends of our lives in personal character and social justice. Without this spiritual and moral reawakening we shall destroy ourselves in the misuse of our own instruments.” WDWGFH

“Among the moral imperatives of our time, we are challenged to work all over the world with unshakable determination to wipe out the last vestiges of racism.” WDWGFH

“.....one cannot hope to keep people locked out of the earthly kingdom of wealth, health and happiness. Either they share in the blessings of the world or they organize to break down and overthrow those structures or governments which stand in the way of their goals.” WDWGFH

“Racism can well be that corrosive evil that will bring down the curtain on Western civilization.... If Western civilization does not now respond constructively to the challenge to banish racism, some future historian will have to say that a great civilization died because it lacked the soul and commitment to make justice a reality for all [people].” WDWGFH

“The first step in the world-wide war against poverty is passionate commitment.” WDWGFH

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“It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.” TTOC

“Modern man is presently having a rendezvous with chaos, not merely because of human badness, but also because of human stupidity.” STL

“If Western civilization continues to degenerate until it, like twenty-four of its predecessors, falls hopelessly into a bottomless void, the cause will be not only its undeniable sinfulness, but also its appalling blindness.” STL

“If American democracy gradually disintegrates, it will be due as much to a lack of insight as to a lack of commitment to right.” STL

“Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force.” STF

“Fortunately, history does not pose problems without eventually producing solutions. The disenchanting, the disadvantaged and the disinherited seem, at times of deep crisis, to summon up some sort of genius that enables them to perceive and capture the appropriate weapons to carve out their destiny. Such was the peaceable weapons of nonviolent direct action. . .” WWCW

“If Americans permit thought-control, business-control, and freedom-control to continue, we shall surely move within the shadows of fascism.” STL

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“Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for civil rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.” TOH

“[Nonviolence] first does something to the souls of those committed to it. It gives them a new self respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality.” STF

“We must use time creatively in the knowledge that the time is always right to do right.” WWCW

“These are revolutionary times; all over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. . . We in the West must support these revolutions. It is a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of Communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch-antirevolutionaries.” TTOC

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” STL

“The dispossessed of this nation--the poor, . . . live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty.” TTOC

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“Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate.” STF

“It’s one of the strangest things that all the great military geniuses of the world have talked about peace. The conquerors of old who came killing in pursuit of peace. . . And the leaders of the world today talk eloquently about peace. . . What is the problem? They are talking about peace as a distant goal, as an end we seek, but one day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means. All this is saying that, in the final analysis, means and ends must cohere because the end is pre-existent in the means, and ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends.” TTOC

“When a subject people moves toward freedom, they are not creating a cleavage, but are revealing the cleavage which apologists of the old order have sought to conceal.” STF

“It is no longer merely the idealist or the doom-ridden who seeks for some controlling force capable of challenging the instrumentalities of destruction. Many are searching. Sooner or later all the peoples of the world, without regard to the political systems under which they live, will have to discover a way to live together in peace.” WWCW

“The call for intelligence is a call for openmindedness, sound judgment, and love for truth. It is a call for [people] to rise above the stagnation of closedmindedness and the paralysis of gullibility. One does not need to be a profound scholar to be openminded, nor a keen academician to engage in an assiduous pursuit for truth.” STL

“The movement for peace and justice can only be a success if it has both a mass and a militant character.” STF

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“Cowardice asks the questions, “Is it safe?” Expediency asks the question, “Is it politic?” And Vanity comes along and asks the question, “Is it popular?” But Conscience asks the question, “Is it right?” And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.” TAOMLKJR

“We can all get more together than we can apart. And this is the way we gain power. Power is the ability to achieve purpose, power is the ability to affect change, and we need power.” TAOMLKJR

“The present spontaneous, largely disorganized and spasmodic methods of piecemeal approaches, differing from city to city, and with a variety of tempos, will have to give way to broad national planning. A nation which could put more than eleven million men in arms in a few short years, which poured torrents of sophisticated munitions from hundreds of thousands of coordinated facilities and deployed them in war, has the capacity to master a problem of much less complexity. It needs only the same will it possessed when it felt its existence threatened.” TOH

“It seems glaringly obvious to me that the development of a humanitarian means of dealing with some of the social problems of the world--and the correlative revolution in American values that this will entail--is a much better way of protecting ourselves against the threat of violence than the military means we have chosen.” TOH

“More and more, the civil rights movement will become engaged in the task of organizing people into permanent groups to protect their own interests and to produce change on their behalf. This is a tedious task which may take years, but the results are more permanent and meaningful.” TOH

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“. . . If you have never found something so dear and so precious to you that you will die for it, then you aren't fit to live. You may be thirty-eight years old, as I happen to be, and one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid. You refuse to do it because you want to live longer. You're afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house. So you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are ninety, but you are just as dead at thirty-eight as you would be at ninety. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. You died when you refused to stand up for right. You died when you refused to stand up for truth. You died when you refused to stand up for justice. . .” TPOMLKJRV

“Recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's your new definition of greatness. . . The thing that I like about it. . . by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great because everybody can serve.” TOH

“If only to save myself from bitterness, I have attempted to see my personal ordeals as an opportunity to transform myself and heal the people involved in the tragic situation which now obtains. I have lived these last few years with the conviction that unearned suffering is redemptive.” TOH

“Tension and conflict are not alien nor abnormal to growth but are the natural results of the process of changes. A revolution is occurring in both the social order and the human mind.”

TPOMLKJRV

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“One of the sure signs of maturity is the ability to rise to the point of self criticism.” TPOMLKJRV

“Increasingly, by choice or by accident, this is the role our nation has taken--the role of those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that come from the immense profits of overseas investments.” TOH

“We must rapidly begin the shift from a “thing-oriented” society to a “person-oriented” society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.” TOH

“Our present urgent necessity is to cease our internal fighting and turn outward to the enemy, using every form of mass action yet known---create new forms--and resolve never to let them rest. This is the social lever which will force open the door to freedom. Our powerful weapons are the voices, the feet, and the bodies of dedicated, united people, moving without rest toward a just goal.” TAOMLKJR

“You can never stand in a position of leadership without opposition. My attitude is that this can sometimes be healthy because it keeps you in a constant state of examining yourself, your motives and methods. I always try to take criticism in a positive sense. . . There can be unity when there isn't uniformity.” TPOMLKJRV

“But the danger point is that we will become so involved in the profit-making and profit-getting aspects . . . that we will forget certain ends of life. There is always the danger that we will become more concerned about making a living than making a life---that we will not keep that line of division between life and one's livelihood.” TPOMLKJRV

“And I’m simply saying this morning, that you should resolve that you will never become so secure in your thinking or your living that you forget the least of these. . . In some sense, all of us are the least of these, but there are some who are least than the least of these. I try to get it over to my children early, morning after morning, when I get a chance. As we sit at the table, as we did this morning in morning devotions, I couldn’t pray my prayer without saying, “God, help us, as we sit at this table to realize that there are those who are less fortunate than we are. And grant that we will never forget them, no matter where we are.” And I said to my little children, “ I’m going to work and do everything that I can do to see that you get a good education. I don’t ever want you to forget that there are millions of God’s children who will not and cannot get a good education, and I don’t want you feeling that you are better than they are. For you will never be what you ought to be until they are what they ought to be.”

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EDITED BY CLAYBORNE CARSON

