

Five Martin Luther King Jr. Quotes That Are Still Relevant Today

Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most influential U.S. civil rights leaders of the 20th century. In honor of his birthday, we've chosen 5 quotes from his speeches and letters that still resonate with us today.

1

“FREEDOM IS NEVER VOLUNTARILY GRANTED BY THE OPPRESSOR.
IT MUST BE DEMANDED BY THE OPPRESSED.”

CHICAGO FREEDOM MOVEMENT RALLY SPEECH, JULY 10, 1966

2

“I AM NOT UNMINDFUL THAT SOME OF YOU HAVE COME HERE OUT OF GREAT TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS. SOME OF YOU HAVE COME FRESH FROM NARROW JAIL CELLS. SOME OF YOU HAVE COME FROM AREAS WHERE YOUR QUEST FOR FREEDOM LEFT YOU BATTERED BY THE STORMS OF PERSECUTION AND STAGGERED BY THE WINDS OF POLICE BRUTALITY. YOU HAVE BEEN THE VETERANS OF CREATIVE SUFFERING. CONTINUE TO WORK WITH THE FAITH THAT UNEARNED SUFFERING IS REDEMPTIVE.... LET US NOT WALLOW IN THE VALLEY OF DESPAIR.”

“I HAVE A DREAM” ADDRESS, AUGUST 28, 1963

3

“YOU MAY WELL ASK: ‘WHY DIRECT ACTION? WHY SIT-INS, MARCHES, AND SO FORTH? ISN’T NEGOTIATION A BETTER PATH?’ YOU ARE QUITE RIGHT IN CALLING FOR NEGOTIATION. INDEED, THIS IS THE VERY PURPOSE OF DIRECT ACTION. NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION SEEKS TO CREATE SUCH A CRISIS AND FOSTER SUCH A TENSION THAT A COMMUNITY WHICH HAS CONSTANTLY REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE IS FORCED TO CONFRONT THE ISSUE. IT SEEKS SO TO DRAMATIZE THE ISSUE THAT IT CAN NO LONGER BE IGNORED.”

“LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL,” WRITTEN APRIL 12–20, 1963

4

“INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE. WE ARE CAUGHT IN AN INESCAPABLE NETWORK OF MUTUALITY, TIED IN A SINGLE GARMENT OF DESTINY. WHATEVER AFFECTS ONE DIRECTLY, AFFECTS ALL INDIRECTLY. NEVER AGAIN CAN WE AFFORD TO LIVE WITH THE NARROW, PROVINCIAL ‘OUTSIDE AGITATOR’ IDEA. ANYONE WHO LIVES INSIDE THE UNITED STATES CAN NEVER BE CONSIDERED AN OUTSIDER ANYWHERE WITHIN ITS BOUNDS.”

“LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL,” WRITTEN APRIL 12–20, 1963

5

“...THE ARC OF THE MORAL UNIVERSE IS LONG, BUT IT BENDS TOWARD JUSTICE.”

SELMA MARCH ADDRESS, MARCH 25, 1965



Martin Luther King Jr.

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