

## **"Justice Without Violence"**

*Shortly after returning from his trip to Ghana, where he participated in the independence celebrations of the new nation, King delivers the following address to the Institute of Adult Education at Brandeis University for the Helmsley Lecture series. In the speech, King offers a rationale for the use of nonviolent resistance in challenging segregation. As he closes, King emphasizes the role of his personal faith in the struggle.*

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Thank you so much Dr. Himelhoch, to the President of this great university, members of the student body, ladies and gentlemen.

I need not pause to say how happy I am to be here this evening, and to be a part of this lecture series. I have had a great deal of admiration for Brandeis University from its very beginning. From its liberalism and for its rich academic emphasis. I will always appreciate that, and I am sure that people all over this nation will be grateful, they are grateful now, and they will be in the future, for what Brandeis is doing for the cultural life of the nation.

I want to speak this evening about the race problem in a general sense, and more specifically about non-violence. We hear a great deal about non-violence when we speak of Montgomery, Alabama, and since I come from Montgomery, people expect me to say something about non-violence from time to time. And so this evening we are using as a subject "Justice Without Violence". It is impossible to look out into the broad arena of American life without noticing a real crisis in the area of race relations. This crisis has been precipitated on the one hand by the determined resistance of reactionary elements in the south to the Supreme Court's momentous decision outlawing segregation in the public schools, and as you well know, this resistance has often risen to omnibus proportions. Many states have risen up in open defiance, and the legislative halls of the south ring loud with such words as inter-position, and nullification. In many states the Klu Klux Klan is alive again; and also in many states we find the modern version of the Klu Klux Klan in the form of so-called respectable white citizens' councils. And all of these forces have conjoined to make for massive resistance. The crisis has been precipitated on the other hand by the radical change in the Negro's evaluation of himself. It is probably true to say that there would be no crisis in race relation if the Negro thought of himself in inferior terms and patiently accepted injustice and exploitation that it is in this area, it is precisely here that the change has come. If we will but look at the history of the Negro in America we will see this change in terms that are crystal clear.

It was in the year of 1619 that the first slaves landed on the shores of this nation. They were brought here from the shores of Africa. Unlike the Pilgrim Fathers who landed at Plymouth a year later, they were

brought here against their will. 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 merely a depersonalized cog in the vast plantation machine. Certainly the famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrates the status of the Negro during slavery. It was within this decision that the Supreme Court of the nation said in substance that the Negro is not a citizen of this nation; he is merely properly subject to the dictates of his owner. Even after his emancipation in 1863, the Negro still confronted oppression and inequality. It is true that for a period, while the Army of occupation remained in the south, and reconstruction ruled, the Negro enjoyed a period of eminence and political power, but he was soon overwhelmed by the white majority. And pretty soon after that he experienced a new kind of slavery, covered up with certain niceties of complexity. And you will remember that in 1896 the Supreme Court came out with another decision, known as the Plessy-Ferguson Decision. In this decision the Supreme Court established the doctrine of separate beliefs and of the law of the land. And we all know the results of this oppressive doctrine. There was always a strict enforcement of the separate, without the slightest intention to abide by the equal. And so as a result the world kept the doctrine. The Negro ended up by being plunged across the brink of exploitation, rather than experience the bleakness of nagging despair. Living under these conditions the Negroes lost faith in themselves. They came to feel that perhaps they were less than human, which is always the tragedy of physical slavery. It always ends up in the paralysis of mental slavery. And so long as the Negro accepted this place assigned to him, so long as he thought of himself in inferior terms, a sort of racial peace existed. But it was an uneasy peace, it was a negative peace. **So you see true peace is not merely the absence of some negative force, it is the presence of justice.** And the peace that existed at that time was a negative peace, an obnoxious peace, devoid of any positive meaning. But then something happened to the Negro and circumstances made it necessary for him to travel more. His rural plantation background was gradually being supplanted by migration to urban and industrial communities. His cultural life was gradually rising through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. Even the economic life of the Negro was gradually rising to decisive proportions. And all of these factors came together to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. The Negro masses all over began to reevaluate themselves, and the Negro came to feel that he was somebody; his religion revealed to him that God loved all of his children, and that all that are made in his image. And so he came to see and to feel in his own soul that the significant thing about a man is not his specificity but his fundamentals, and not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but the texture and quality of his soul. And with this new evaluation, with this new self respect, the negative peace of the nation and of the south was gradually undermined. The tension which we witness in the southland today can be explained in part by the revolutionary change in the Negroes evaluation of his nature and destiny, and his determination to struggle and sacrifice and suffer

until the saddened walls of segregation has finally been crushed by the battering rams of surging justice. This is the meaning of the crisis.

Now this determination on the part of American Negroes to free themselves from every form of discrimination and oppression, stems from the same deep longing for human dignity, and for freedom expressed by oppressed people all over the world. The rhythmic beat of the deep rumblings, the discontent that we hear from Asia and Africa can be explained by the determination to break loose from the shackles of colonialism and imperialism, and stand up with dignity and with honor. As we face this problem we must think of two basic facts. Whenever you have a struggle sometimes it takes a long time to develop, and this struggle has taken a long time to develop certainly. It has been developing over the years. But let us remember this, that the struggle will continue. Why? On the one hand, history seems to prove and it seems to be sociologically true that privileged classes do not give up their privileges without strong resistance. It also seems to be historically and sociologically true that once oppressed people rise up against that oppression there is no stopping point short of full freedom. We must face the fact that the struggle will probably continue until freedom is a reality for the oppressed people of the world.

Now the question that we face this evening is this: In the light of the fact that the oppressed people of the world are rising up against that oppression; in the light of the fact that the American Negro is rising up against his oppression, the question is this: How will the struggle for justice be waged? And I think that is one of the most important questions confronting our generation. As we move to make justice a reality on the international scale, as we move to make justice a reality in this nation, how will the struggle be waged? It seems to me that there are two possible answers to this question. One is to use the all too prevalent method of physical violence. And it is true that man throughout history has sought to achieve justice through violence. And we all know the danger of this method. It seems to create many more social problems than it solves. And it seems to me that in the struggle for justice that this method is ultimately futile. If the Negro succumbs to the temptation of using violence in his struggle for justice, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate life of bitterness, and his chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. And there is still a voice crying into the vista of time saying to every potential Peter put up your sword. And history is replete with the bleached bones of nations and communities that failed to follow this command.

So let us move from this method this is one method, this is one way to seek justice through violence, but it seems to me that the weakness of this method is its futility, it creates many more problems than it solves. But there is an alternative to violence. We may think of this alternative as a method of non-violence, of non-violent resistance, for you see it is possible to achieve justice through non-violence. This

method has been made famous in our generation by the work of Mohandas K. Gandhi who lived in India not many years ago, and who used this method to free his people from the political domination, the economic exploitation and humiliation inflicted upon them by Britain. And he, I imagine proved more than anybody else in the modern world that this can be an effective method, in seeking justice, in seeking to break loose from oppression.

Now let us look at this method and analyze it a bit and see what it says and see if it might not be used in the midst of the crisis which we confront in race relations in America, and the crisis which we confront all over the world with oppressed people rising up against their oppression.

The first thing that we can say about this method that seeks justice without violence is that it is not a method of cowardice or stagnant passivity; it's not a method to be used by persons filled with fear; by persons who are merely lacking in weapons of violence. It is not a method of cowardice. As Mohandas Gandhi used to say "If the only alternative is that between violence and cowardice, I would say use violence", but it is good that there is another alternative. And this is not a method of cowardice, and I also said that it is not a method of stagnant passivity. Sometimes the word passive misleads us because it gives the impression that this is a sort of sit-down do nothing method. The sort of method that is non-active. But non-violence does not mean non-activity. The non-violent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is protesting against, as the violent resister. This method does resist. Now it is true that this method is passive in the sense that the non-violent resister is not aggressive toward his opponent in a physical sense, with physical violence, but the mind and emotions are always active, and every moment seeking to convince and to persuade the opponent that he is wrong. This method is passive physically but strongly active spiritually. It is non-aggressive physically but dynamically aggressive spiritually. There are certain things we can say about this method that seeks justice without violence. It does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. I think that this is one of the points, one of the basic points, one of the basic distinguishing points between violence and non-violence. The ultimate end of violence is to defeat the opponent. The ultimate end of non-violence is to win the friendship of the opponent. It is necessary to boycott sometimes but the non-violent resister realized that boycott is never an end within itself, but merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor; that the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption. And so the aftermath of violence is bitterness; the aftermath of non-violence is the creation of the beloved community; the aftermath of non-violence is redemption and reconciliation. This is a method that seeks to transform and to redeem, and win the friendship of the opponent, and make it possible for men to live together as brothers in a community, and not continually live with bitterness and friction.

A third thing that we can say about this method is that it directs its attack at systems of evil rather than individuals who maybe caught up in the system. In other words this method seeks to defeat evil rather than individuals who may happen to be evil, who may happen to be victimized with evil. And this is the thing that we must see in race relations it seems to me. As I like to say to the people in Montgomery--The tension in this city is not so much between Negro people and white people, but the tension is at bottom between justice and injustice; between the forces of life and the forces of darkness--and if that is the victory cry in Montgomery it will not be a victory merely for the fifty thousand Negroes, but it will be a victory for justice; a victory for the forces of life; a victory for goodwill. We must come to see that the festering sort of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro. It gives the Negro a false sense of inferiority; it gives the white man a false sense of superiority, thereby distorting the personality of both. As we seek to remove the barrier of segregation it must always be stressed that it is not sought merely to straighten out conditions for the Negro, but for all people; for all people involved in the system affected by it. We seek to defeat the evil system, rather than individuals who happened to be caught up in the system. And I think that is a vital aspect with the method of non-violence. Violence defeats individuals, and so often fails to get back to the causal factor. The non-violence goes beneath the surface and seeks to remove the cause or basis which is the evil system itself.

There is another basic thing about this method which seeks to achieve justice through non-violence. It not only avoids external physical violence, but also internal violence of spirit. The non-violent resister realizes that love should forever be at the forefront of his thinking. And as we struggle for justice as oppressed people all over the world struggle for justice and freedom and human dignity, it is my great hope that we will never succumb to the temptation of indulging in hate campaigns or becoming bitter. For if we hate for hate, if we try to solve the problem by hating in return, we do nothing but intensify the existence of hate in the universe, and somebody has to have some sense in this world and cut off the chain of hate. That is done through loving. So this is a method that not only avoids external physical violence, but also internal violence to the spirit which is hate and bitterness and malice. Oppressed people must continue to fight for justice passionately. Fight at all times with clean hands, always avoiding malice and hate; bitterness and falsehood.

Now I know you are looking at me and saying, somebody is saying that this is pretty difficult. To say love your enemies, to love those people who seek to oppress you, to love those people who are trampling over you everyday; that is almost impossible some of you are probably saying. Well I guess it is pretty difficult and it's pretty impossible and I guess it's almost absurd for me to say to anybody--love those who oppress you in any affectionate and sentimental sense,--and so when I speak of love here I am not talking about something affectionate and sentimental; I am talking about understanding goodwill for

all men. A type of love that seeks to redeem. It is very interesting if you will notice that the Greek language has three words for love. And it might give us a little clearance at this point. The Greek language talks for instance about Eros. You know Plato talks about Eros in his dialogue. In Platonic philosophy this is a sort of yearning of the souls for the realm of the Gods. For us it has come to be a sort of romantic love. For Plato it was an esthetic love for us it has become a sort of romantic love and it's vital. Eros is a vital type of love. We read about beautiful Portia and it seems to express something of Eros. I guess that's what Shakespeare was talking about when he said "love is not love, exalted as exaltation finds; abins with the removal to remove, it is an ever fixed mark that looks on Tempus and is never shaken; it is a star to every wonder in bark." You know I can remember that because I used to quote it to my wife when we were courting. That's Eros. Then the Greek talks again about Philia. A sort of love, the type of love we have for personal friends; a sort of reciprocal love. And that is vital also. A love that loves because it is love. On this level we love because we are loved. This, This is maybe the type of love that you have for your roommate you see. A sort of, well it is an affectionate type of love. And here you love because you are loved. The reciprocal love we have for personal friends. But then the Greek language comes out and talks about Agape and that is another interesting word. The New Testament places it as one of the highest forms of love. This is more than Eros, more than Philia, it's a redeeming type of love, it's a transforming type of love. The biblical theologians would say this is the love of God working in the lives of men. It is a love that seeks nothing in return; it loves everybody not because they are particularly likeable but because God loves them. And it is at this point that I think love can be very vital. And so we come to love all men not because they're likeable, not because we like the way they act. And it is interesting that there is a passage in the Bible which says "Love your enemies", and I am very happy it doesn't say like your enemies. It's pretty difficult to like some people. Like is an affectionate sort of thing. You like to be with some people, you like their attitudes, you like the way they think, you like the way they act, that's an affectionate sort of thing and you like them. But there are some people that it is pretty difficult to like. I find it rather difficult to like Senator Eastland, I find it difficult. But there is an ethical something which says to me love Senator Eastland, and love is greater than like. And this is what we seem to stress here when we talk about non-violence on this level of the internal side, where we cease not only to shoot a man but we cease to hate a man. It is a type of love that loves the individual who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. And I think that when we rise to this level non-violence becomes quite meaningfully right.

There is a final thing that I want to say, and then I will leave it with you to ask questions. And there is a thing about this method that at least holds me together, and I have to stress it because I think it is very basic, at least it has been for my life. This method seems to stress the fact that the universe is on the side

of justice. Sometimes it is very difficult to believe that. This is why the non-violent resister can accept suffering without retaliating with violence, because he knows the universe is on the side of justice and it gives one a great faith in the future. A non-violent resister knows that in his struggle for justice he is not alone but that he has cosmic companionship. And that the moral laws of the universe somehow work together for the molding of justice and freedom and goodwill. Now I realize that there are those that believe in non-violence who do not necessarily believe in a personal God. But I believe that even those persons, if they believe firmly in non-violence believe that at least there is something that moves toward justice in the universe. It so happens that I have deep faith, an abiding faith in a personal God. Not some Aristotelian unmoved mover who merely contemplates upon himself. Not only a self knowing God, but an ever-loving God who is concerned about the affairs of history. It is my conviction that God works through history for the salvation of man. And there is something in this universe that works for the molding of justice and goodwill and freedom. There is something in this universe which justifies Carlyle in saying "no lie can live forever." There is something in this universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying "truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways a future; and behind the dim unknown stands God within the shadow keeping watch above his own". And I am sure that is why down in Montgomery we can walk and never get weary, because we realize that that is a great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and justice. And so this is the method of non-violent resistance, it seems to me that this is the method that can achieve justice, a method that can achieve it without violence, a method that can bring justice into being, and bring us to the point where we can all live together as brothers. It is my deep prayer that as we struggle together in Montgomery and all over the south, as people all over the world struggle for justice and freedom they will struggle with this weapon of love and non-violence. It seems to me that is we will do this with dignity, with the proper attitude, and the proper discipline we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate mid-night of man's inhumanity to man, to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice. That will be the day when we can all cry figuratively speaking, that a new day has come into being. And that will be the day figuratively speaking, when the morning stars will sing together and the sons of God will shout for joy. Thank you.

*Transcriptions are intended to reproduce the source document accurately, adhering to the exact wording and punctuation of the original. In general, errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar have been neither corrected nor indicated by [sic].*

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