



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr: “The Time is Always Right to Do What is Right”

Materials

- PowerPoint: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Arrest Record Claudette Colvin
- http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/550302-001.pdf
- Arrest Record Rosa Parks
- http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/551201-000.pdf
- Freedom Riders
http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/610521-000.pdf
- Letter From Birmingham Jail https://swap.stanford.edu/20141218230016/http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf
- I Have a Dream <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>
- Our God is Marching On <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>
- Beyond Vietnam <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>
- *The Other America* <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/the-other-america-speech-transcript-martin-luther-king-jr>
- I’ve Been to the Mountain Top <https://www.afscme.org/about/history/mlk/mountaintop>

Plan of Instruction:

1. **Introduction:** In ten years, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote more than two thousand five hundred speeches about segregation, prejudice, and racial inequality. He believed that “the time is always right to do what is right” for humanity and showed this concern through his writings. Readers can find some of these speeches and other documents within the King Paper Project, a cooperative venture of Stanford University, the King Center, and the King Estate. YAAHA chose seven speeches and one event that began King’s laudable career in civil rights from 1955 to 1968.

In March 1955, Claudette Colvin, a member of the NAACP Youth Council led by Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white rider. The NAACP decided not to use her as a test case, so in December 1955, Rosa Parks, an NAACP activist, was chosen to challenge Montgomery’s busing ordinance. Black residents launched a bus boycott, and King was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association. King gained national prominence during the year-long bus boycott.

2. **Lecture:**

a. Slide 1: *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 – 1968)*



b. Slide 2: Before Rosa Parks, There Was Claudette Colvin

Fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin was an active member of the local NAACP Youth Council led by Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama. On March 2, 1955, Colvin tested the city's segregated busing ordinance by refusing to give up her seat to a white rider. She was arrested, fined, and jailed. The NAACP and other activists were excited, initially, at the prospect of organizing a bus boycott. Interest soon diminished when civil rights leaders discovered that Colvin was several months pregnant. Her frequent outbursts and cursing made her less sympathetic to the conservative African-American churches and community. Her arrest record is found at http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/550302-001.pdf.

Nine months later, the NAACP chose a more suitable person to challenge Montgomery's busing ordinance, activist Rosa Parks, "a pillar of the community." Parks participated in strategy sessions and discussions in preparation for the challenge against segregation. Led by Parks, the bus boycott lasted more than a year. Her arrest record is found at http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/551201-000.pdf

c. Slide 3: Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott made gave Dr. King his laudable start in the Civil Rights Movement.

d. Slide 4: Freedom Riders (May 21, 1961)

Dr. King declined an invitation to attend the rally but sent the letter of encouragement to SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). Freedom Riders challenged segregated southern travel at bus terminals. King thought voting rights were more important.

In King's letter to the Freedom Riders, he expresses his horror of the barbarism and racial hatred in Alabama, led by the Democratic Governor, John Patterson. Dr. King continues to write about state rights that undermine the federal laws to protect the rights of the oppressed. He feels that a campaign to intensify voter registration drive will help to integrate the schools, better public parks, and theatres. In the end, Dr. King praises the Riders for the non-violent approach to their cause.

http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/610521-000.pdf

e. Slide 5: Letter From the Birmingham Jail (April 16, 1963)

Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham for a peaceful demonstration. He responded to criticism of his presence in Birmingham as "unwise and untimely." King writes that as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and with an affiliate in Birmingham, he has the right to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program.

The letter includes the struggles that the SCLC had with Democratic segregationists like Bull Connor and Albert Boutwell in the pursuit of freedom from oppressors. King argues that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." He asks, how long must we be denied a cup of



coffee at a lunch counter, or watch our people lynched, be denied going to amusement parks, wait for our schools to obey desegregation, or be denied the right to vote?

Dr. King makes the distinction between unjust laws that maintain segregation and deny citizens of natural rights. “We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did was “illegal.” It was “illegal” to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany.”

“Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever.”

https://swap.stanford.edu/20141218230016/http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf

f. Slide 6: I Have a Dream (August 28, 1963)

Two hundred thousand people joined MLK on the National Mall to share his dream and vision for the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King told the crowd that “the Negro is still sadly crippled by manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination,” but he had a dream that we would all rise to “the sunlit path of racial justice.”

His dream would include dignity, justice, where former slaves and sons of former slaveowners could sit together, where his children would not be judge by skin color but by the content of their character, “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” He persuaded all of God’s children to create a “beautiful symphony of brotherhood.”

“With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing we will be free one day.” We will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

‘Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>

g. Slide 7: Our God is Marching On: (March 25, 1965)

Dr. King gave this speech upon the completing of the voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. He noted that more than 2000 people walked fifty-four miles for the right to secure the right to vote. They stood before the forces of power in Alabama and proclaimed, “our feet are tired, but our souls are rested.”

Ten years after the boycott’s conclusion in Birmingham, Alabama, Dr. King shares a new philosophy that was born for the Negro struggle. Montgomery was a united effort of blacks to face their oppressors. The march from Selma to Montgomery was instrumental in forcing



Congress to write legislation to eradicate Birmingham's stain. The whole campaign in Alabama was about the right to vote.

Dr. King also warns the races about the interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided. He praises the marchers, and notes that "we are on the move and no wave of racism can stop us."

King wrote, "Let us march on ballot boxes until the Wallaces of our nation tremble away in silence. Let us march on ballot boxes until we send to our city councils, state legislatures, and the United States Congress, men who will not fear to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>

h. Slide 8: Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence (April 3, 1967)

On April 4, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a speech on the Vietnam War at a clergy meeting at Riverside Church in New York City. He could no longer be silent and made a connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle that he and others waged in the Civil Rights Movement.

In this speech, Dr. King said, "There is at the outset a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I, and others have been waging in America. A few years ago, there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor-both black and white-through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam and I watched the program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So, I was increasingly compelled to see the war as the enemy of the poor and to attack it as such."

Dr. King wanted the government to seek atonement for the sins and errors in Vietnam and suggested several ideas that would extricate the United States from the terrifying conflict: end all bombing in North and South Vietnam; declare a unilateral cease fire; curtail military buildup in Thailand and other battlegrounds in Southeast Asia; and set a date for removal of foreign troops.

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>

i. Slide 9: The Other America (April 14, 1967)

Martin Luther King gave this Stanford University speech to illustrate the disparity within the black and white communities. Some communities grew up in the sunlight of opportunity, and others grow up in despair and poverty. King explains that the other America grows up in a triple ghetto: a ghetto of race, a ghetto of poverty, and a ghetto of human misery.



Dr. King was still convinced that nonviolence was the essential weapon for the oppressed in their struggle for freedom and justice. He gave continued versions of the Other America throughout 1967 and 1968.

<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/the-other-america-speech-transcript-martin-luther-king-jr>

j. Slide 10: I've Been to the Mountain Top (April 3, 1968)

Dr. King gave this speech in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. King thought Memphis was not fair to these one thousand three hundred workers. King's speech was pensive and highlighted his many accomplishments and challenges.

He ended the speech by saying: "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

The next day, April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

<https://www.afscme.org/about/history/mlk/mountaintop>

K. Slide 11: Summary

Dr. King was a prolific writer, and his 2,500 speeches covered ten years as a civil rights leader. These seven milestone speeches explore his leadership through that time.

He was criticized for not riding with the **Freedom Riders** who challenged segregated southern travel at bus terminals. He sent this letter to the Freedom Riders to praise their efforts and to explain how vital the voting rights issue was. **Letter From Birmingham Jail** enlightened America to the injustices that plagued blacks in the South. **I Have a Dream** is one of his most familiar speeches and is hopeful of what the future could bring to America. **Our God is Marching On** is defiant and filled with encouragement to keep up the fight for voting rights. **Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence** expressed his concerns for the war's cost and its effect on the war on poverty for poor blacks and whites. **The Other America** illustrates the disparity and lack of opportunity for blacks and whites. **I've Been to the Mountain Top** is a speech supporting the striking sanitation workers in Memphis. It is a reflective speech of his work over the last decade, and eerily a prophecy, as he was assassinated the next day.