

## **The King Legacy**

**John Robert Lewis\***

Professor Rivers, my friend, thank you so much for those kind words of introduction. You make me reminisce a little bit. Thank you. I'm very grateful to you. Thank you for remembering the trip to South Africa. I think we did a little good. To Dean Shields, chairman of the board, Dean Shirley Jefferson, my home girl, let me just say that I am delighted, very happy, and very pleased to be here.

Dean Jefferson, I want to thank you for inviting a poor boy from rural Alabama to come to Vermont where there is a lot of snow and it is cold. It is so good to be here. I don't even know where to start, but I want to say first that I did not grow up in a big city like Bethel. I didn't grow up in a big city like Randolph. I didn't grow up in a big city like Royalton. I didn't grow up in a big city like Burlington, or Boston, or Washington, or Atlanta, or Chicago, or New York. I grew up in rural Alabama, fifty miles from Montgomery, near a little place called Troy in southeast Alabama.

My father was a sharecropper, a tenant farmer. But back in 1944, when I was four years old (and I do remember when I was four), my father had saved \$300, and with the \$300 he bought 110 acres of land. That is a lot of land for \$300. On this farm, we raised a lot of cotton and corn; a lot of peanuts, hogs, cows, and chickens. I know you here at this wonderful law school—Vermont Law School—are very smart. You are gifted. You are talented. Your professors know a great deal about the law. They have taught you to prepare briefs and file motions. You have learned all about contracts. But you don't know anything about growing up on a farm or raising chickens. On this farm, it was my responsibility to raise chickens, to care for the chickens.

Professor Rivers will tell you and Dean Jefferson will tell you that if you come to Washington and visit my congressional office, the moment you walk through the door the first thing the staff will offer you will be a Coca-Cola, because the Coca-Cola Company provides all members of the Georgia Congressional Delegation with an adequate supply of Coca-Cola products. Every now and then, I may have a Diet Coke.

The next thing the staff will offer you will be some peanuts, because in the state of Georgia, like in the state of Alabama, we raise a lot of peanuts. And the Georgia Peanut Commission provides us with peanuts. I don't eat too many of those peanuts. I ate so many peanuts when I was growing up

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in rural Alabama that I don't want to see those peanuts. Years ago I would get on a flight and fly from Atlanta to Washington and from Washington back to Atlanta, and the flight attendant would try to push some peanuts on me!

Now you heard me say something about raising chickens. How many of you know anything about raising chickens? Let me tell you what I had to do as a young, black boy growing up in rural Alabama in the 1940s and '50s. It was my responsibility to care for the chickens, to raise the chickens. I had to take the fresh eggs, mark them with a pencil, place them under the setting hen, and wait for three long weeks for the little chicks to hatch. I know some smart high school student, maybe some smart law student, and maybe some smart professor would say, "now John Lewis, why did you mark those fresh eggs with a pencil before you place them under the setting hen?"

Well, from time to time another hen would get on that same nest, and there would be some more eggs, and you had to be able to tell the fresh eggs from the eggs that were already under the setting hen. Do you follow me? These little chicks would hatch under a setting hen. I would cheat on these setting hens. I would take these little chicks and give them to another hen. I would put them in a box with a lamp, raise them on their own, get some more fresh eggs, mark them with a pencil, place them under the setting hen, and encourage the setting hen to sit on the nest for another three weeks. I kept on fooling these setting hens and cheating on these setting hens because I was never quite able to save \$18.98 to order the most inexpensive hatcher-incubator from the Sears, Roebuck store, and the lamp was like [those little chicks'] home. When I look back on it, it was not the right thing to do, it was not the moral thing to do, it was not the legal thing to do, and it was not the most nonviolent, loving thing to do, but I just kept on cheating on these setting hens.

One of my uncles had sense enough to bring me a Bible, and I learned to read the Bible. And from time to time with the help of my brothers, sisters, and first cousins, we would have church. We would gather all of our chickens together in the chicken yard, like we are gathered here in this hall. The chickens, along with my brothers, sisters, and first cousins, would make up the congregation; and I would start speaking or preaching. When I look back it seemed some of the chickens would bow their heads, and some of the chickens would shake their heads. They never quite said, "amen." I was convinced that some of those chickens that I preached to in the 1940s and 50s tended to listen to me much better than some of my colleagues in the United States Congress. As a matter of fact, some of those chickens were a little more productive. Well that's enough of that story.

I'm delighted, very happy, and very pleased to be here as you celebrate and commemorate the legacy and the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Almost thirty years ago, the moral leader of this nation was taken from us by an assassin's bullet. So it's difficult for me to find the right words to express my feelings about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was a man I knew personally and regarded as a brother, a friend, a colleague, a prophet, my hero, and just a simple human being filled with love, peace, and compassion for all human kind.

I'll never forget my first impression of the man, Martin Luther King Jr. When I was at home in rural Alabama, near Troy, I was fifteen years old, in the tenth grade in 1955, when I heard about Rosa Parks. I heard the voice of Martin Luther King Jr. on an old radio. The action of Rosa Parks, the action of the black people of Montgomery, and the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. inspired me. I followed the progress of the drummer of Montgomery just fifty miles away. I had seen the signs that said "white men," "colored men"; the signs that said "white women," "colored women"; the signs that said "white waiting," "colored waiting." I tasted the bitter fruits of racism, and I didn't like it.

Sometimes on a Saturday afternoon I would go downtown with my brothers, sisters, and first cousins to the movie theater. And all of us little black children had to go upstairs to the balcony, while all of the little white children went downstairs to the first floor. I used to ask my mother, my father, my grandparents, and my great-grandparents, "why segregation, why racial discrimination?" And they would say: "That's the way it is. Don't get in trouble. Don't get in the way."

Martin Luther King Jr. inspired me to find a way to get in the way. He inspired me to find a way to get in trouble, and I got in trouble. It was good trouble. It was necessary trouble to make our country a better place. In my mind, Martin Luther King Jr. was a modern day Moses, using organized religion and the leaders within the black church as an instrument, as a vehicle toward freedom.

Not long following the successful end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, I wrote a letter to Martin Luther King Jr. In 1957, I was seventeen years old, and I had just finished high school. I wanted to attend a little school called Troy State College, now known as Troy University, only about ten miles from my home. I submitted my application and my high school transcript, but I never heard a word back from the college, so I wrote a letter to Dr. King. I didn't tell any of my teachers, my mother, my father, or any of my brothers or sisters that I wrote a letter to Dr. King. I told him I wanted to attend Troy State College, and I needed his help.

He wrote me back, sent me a roundtrip Greyhound bus ticket, and invited me to come to Montgomery. In the meantime, I'd been accepted at a little college in Nashville, Tennessee. In September 1957 my uncle gave me a hundred-dollar bill, more money than I'd ever had. He gave me a footlocker, and I put everything I owned in that footlocker—my books, my clothes, everything except those chickens. I went off to school in Nashville, and after being in Nashville for about two weeks I told one of my teachers that I'd been in touch with Martin Luther King Jr. This teacher, who had been a friend and colleague of Dr. King at Morehouse College in Atlanta, informed Dr. King that I was in Nashville. Martin Luther King Jr. got back in touch and suggested that when I was home for spring break that I come and see him.

In March of 1958, by this time I was eighteen years old, my father drove me to the Greyhound bus station. I boarded the bus and traveled the fifty miles from Troy to Montgomery. I had never seen a lawyer before. A young black lawyer, the lawyer for Rosa Parks, for Martin Luther King Jr., and for the Montgomery Movement, a young man by the name of Fred Gray, met me at the Greyhound bus station. He was sent by Martin Luther King Jr. and drove me to the First Baptist Church in downtown Montgomery pastored by the Reverend Ralph Abernathy, a colleague of Dr. King. He ushered me into the office of the church.

There I saw Martin Luther King Jr. and the Reverend Ralph Abernathy standing behind a desk. I was so scared. Dr. King spoke up and said: "Are you the boy from Troy? Are you John Lewis?" And I said: "Dr. King, I am John *Robert* Lewis."

That was the beginning of a beautiful, long relationship. After that, our paths were to cross often—at the sit-ins, during the Freedom Rides, as a board member of his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and again in 1960 organizing the 1963 March on Washington, in Mississippi in the summer of 1964, and on the march from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. I was with him at the Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, when he spoke out against the war in Vietnam. I was with him in March 1968 in Atlanta when he was organizing the Poor People's Campaign.

As I grew to know Dr. King in the life of the Movement, my admiration for the man also grew. He was a spokesperson not only for blacks but for all of those who had been left out and left behind. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the hearts and conscience of all of us who believed in nonviolence and love.

This good man, this God-fearing man, gave us hope in a time of hopelessness. This man, this son of America, this citizen of the world, produced light in dark places. Martin Luther King Jr. had the ability to bring the dirt and the filth out from under the American rug, out of the cracks and the corners into the open light.

Martin Luther King Jr., I believe, more than any other American of the twentieth century had the power to bring people together to do good—black and white; rich and poor; young and old; Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. Martin Luther King's message was love, his weapon was truth, and his method was creative nonviolence. His goal was the *Beloved Community*, a community of justice, a nation at peace with itself.

I'm not talking about something I read about in *The Boston Globe*, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, or *The New York Times*. It's not something I saw on NBC, CBS, or ABC. Back then we didn't have CNN. I don't think we had Fox. This man that I marched with, worked with, went to jail with; this man that I got to know was so sensitive and so caring. He was a beautiful human being, exemplifying the best of humankind. He could speak to the masses, and they believed that they were somebody. He was a gentle man who used the teaching of the Great Teacher and the tools of Gandhi. In a sense, he spoke a strange language: the philosophy of passive resistance to evil and the use of nonviolence in the struggle.

So I say to you, my friends, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did not kill the dream of peace. It did not kill the dream of an open society. It did not kill the dream of the Beloved Community. Just think, a few short years ago in the American South blacks and whites could not sit down together in a restaurant at a lunch counter, couldn't stay in the same hotel, and couldn't ride in the same taxi cab. Whites sat in the front of the bus, blacks in the back of the bus.

Dr. King told us how to sit in, how to sit down. And by sitting down, we were standing up, as Rosa Parks did. We would go down to the lunch counter in Nashville, in Montgomery, in Birmingham, and in Selma, sitting there in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion—black and white college students—and someone would come up and put a lighted cigarette out in our hair, spit on us, pour hot water on us. Dr. King taught us not to strike back but to believe in the power of love and the power of nonviolent resistance.

Just think, just a few short years ago in eleven states of the old Confederacy from Virginia to Texas it was almost impossible for people of color to register to vote, to participate in the democratic process. Some places you had to pay a poll tax, interpret certain sections of the Constitution, and in the states of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi you

had to pass a so-called literacy test. On one occasion there was a black man in Tuskegee, Alabama, who had a Ph.D. degree; he flunked the so-called literacy test. He was told he could not read or write well enough. On another occasion a man was asked to give the number of bubbles in a bar of soap. On another occasion a man was asked to count the number of jelly beans in a jar. All across the South, in the hometown of Dean Jefferson, in Selma, Alabama, people stood in unmovable lines. In a state like the State of Mississippi, that state had a black, voting-age population of more than 450,000, but only about 16,000 blacks were registered to vote. There was one county in Alabama, between Selma and Montgomery, Lowndes County, the county was more than eighty percent African American, but there was not a single registered African American voter in the county.

I was working on my speech for the March on Washington on August 28, 1963; I had been reading a copy of *The New York Times*. I saw a photograph of a group of black women in South Africa carrying signs saying “one man, one vote.” So in my March on Washington speech I said something like, “One man, one vote is the African cry. It is ours too. It must be our cry.” The young people in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, in the fall of 1963 and the summer of 1964, went to Selma. On October 8, 1963, we stood in line trying to get a group of elderly black men and women inside the Dallas County Courthouse to get a copy of the so-called literacy test. We stood there for several hours, but no one made it inside.

At the same time, we started organizing in the State of Mississippi. We brought more than a thousand of our students, lawyers, teachers, ministers, priests, rabbis, and others to work in the Freedom Schools trying to prepare people to pass the so-called literacy test. Three young men that I knew—Andy Goodman, Mickey Schwerner (both white), and James Chaney (African American)—went out on a summer night, June 21, 1964, to investigate the burning of an African American church. These three young men were arrested by the sheriff and taken to jail. Later that same Sunday night they were taken from jail by the sheriff and his deputy, turned over to the Klan where they were beaten, shot, and killed. As students you must understand that these three young men didn’t die in Vietnam, they didn’t die in the Middle East, they didn’t die in Eastern Europe, and they didn’t die in Africa, or Central or South America. They died right here in our own country trying to get all of our citizens to become participants in the democratic process. It was a sad and dark hour for the Movement, but we didn’t give up, we didn’t give in, and we didn’t get lost in the sea of despair. We kept the faith because Martin Luther King Jr. taught us not to give up; to take the long, hard road.

Dean Shields said our struggle is not a struggle that lasts for one day, one week, or one school year; it's the struggle of a lifetime. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He won a landslide election in November 1964. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. received a Nobel Peace Prize in December of 1964. He came back to America and called a meeting at the White House with President Johnson. He told the President that we needed a strong Voting Rights Act. President Johnson told Dr. King in so many words: "I just signed the Civil Rights Act. We don't have the votes in Congress to get a Voting Rights Act passed." But Martin Luther King Jr. said: "We will go to Selma, and we will write that act."

My organization had been involved in Selma even before 1963, as early as 1962. In Selma, we had a sheriff by the name of Jim Clark. He was a very big man, and he was mean. He wore a gun on one side and a night stick on the other side. He carried an electric cattle prod in his hand, and he didn't use it on cows. He wore a button on his left lapel that said "Never." It was my day on January 18, 1965, to lead a group of elderly black men and women (about sixty) to the courthouse. Sheriff Clark met us at the top of the steps. He looked at me and he said: "John Lewis, you are an outside agitator. You are the lowest form of humanity."

At that time I had all my hair and was a few pounds lighter. I looked Sheriff Clark straight in the eye, and I said: "Sheriff, I may be an agitator, but I'm not an outsider. I grew up only ninety miles from here. We are going to stay here until these people are registered to vote." He said: "You are under arrest." He arrested me along with a few other people and took us all to jail. A few days later, Martin Luther King Jr., Reverend Ralph Abernathy, and others came to Selma and organized another march. Schoolteachers; schoolchildren; elementary, high school, and college students; farmers; doctors; and lawyers all lined up.

More than three hundred people were arrested. We filled the city jail, the county jail, and the city stockade. Then, about two weeks later, in a little town called Marion, Alabama, in Perry County—Perry County is in the heart of the "black belt", it is the home county of Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr., Mrs. Ralph Abernathy, and also the home county of the late Mrs. Andrew Young, Jean Young—there was a march to the courthouse and a confrontation occurred. A young man by the name of Jimmy Lee Jackson, trying to protect his mother, was shot in the stomach by a state trooper. A few days later, he died at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma. Because of what happened to him, we made the decision—the Movement did—that we would march from Selma to Montgomery to dramatize to the nation and to the world that people of color wanted to register to vote.

Sunday, March 7, 1965, about six hundred of us met up at a little church called Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church. We went out on the grounds and conducted a nonviolent workshop. We lined up in twos to walk in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion from Selma to Montgomery. Hosea Williams was asked to lead the march on behalf of the SCLC, and I was asked to walk with Hosea on behalf of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Sheriff Clark had requested the night before, that Saturday night, that all white men over the age of twenty-one become deputized to become part of his posse to stop the march.

We started walking through the streets of Selma. No one said a word. We came to the edge of the Alabama River, preparing to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

Hosea Williams said to me: "John, can you swim?" He saw all this water down below in the Alabama River.

I said "no." I said: "Hosea do you swim?"

And he said "no." He said: "Well there's too much water down there. We're not going to drown, and we're not going back. We're going forward." And we continued to walk. I was wearing a backpack before it became fashionable to wear backpacks. I thought that we were going to be arrested and that we were going to jail, so in the backpack I wanted to have something to read; I had two books. I wanted to have something to eat; I had an apple, and I had an orange. And since I was going to be in jail in close contact with my friends, neighbors and colleagues, I wanted to be able to brush my teeth, so I had toothpaste and a toothbrush.

We continued to walk. We came to the highest point on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, crossing the Alabama River, and further down we saw a sea of blue—Alabama state troopers. And behind the state troopers we saw Sheriff Clark's posse, on foot, on horseback. We continued to walk.

We came within hearing distance of the state troopers and a man identified himself and said: "I am Major John Cloud of the Alabama State Troopers. This is an unlawful march. You will not be allowed to continue. I give you three minutes to disperse and return to your church."

In less than a minute and a half, Major John Cloud said: "Troopers advance."

We saw these men putting on their gas masks. They came toward us, beating us with night sticks and bull whips, trampling us with horses, and releasing the tear gas. I was hit in the head by a State Trooper with a nightstick. I thought I was going to die. I thought I saw death. I had a concussion at the bridge, and more than forty years later I still do not recall how I made it back across that bridge and back to that church. But I do recall being back at the church that Sunday afternoon. The church was full

to capacity, more than two thousand people outside were trying to get in to protest what had happened on the bridge. Someone asked me to say something to the audience.

I stood up and said something like: "I don't understand it. How can President Johnson send troops to Vietnam and not send troops to Selma, Alabama, to protect people whose only desire is to register to vote."

The next thing I knew I had been admitted to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma. That following Monday morning, early that Monday morning, Martin Luther King Jr. and Reverend Ralph Abernathy came by to visit me.

And Dr. King said: "Don't worry John. We will make it from Selma to Montgomery. The Voting Rights Act will be passed." He said: "I'll send out an additional call for religious leaders to come to Selma."

Two days later, March 9th, more than one-thousand ministers, priests, and rabbis came to Selma and marched to the point where we had been beaten two days earlier. And even one young minister, Reverend James Reed from Boston, came down. After the march three or four of the ministers went out to try to get something to eat at a local restaurant. On their way back to Brown Chapel Church, part of the black community, they were attacked by members of the Klan. Reverend Reed was so severely beaten that he died two days later at a local hospital in Birmingham, Alabama.

There was a sense of righteous indignation all across America. People couldn't believe it. There was a demonstration at the White House, the Department of Justice, on every major college campus in America, and in every major city. People didn't like what they saw in Selma, Alabama. President Johnson was so disturbed, he invited Governor Wallace to come to Washington to try to get assurance from him that he would be able to protect us if we decided to march again.

We went into federal court before Judge Frank M. Johnson, a wonderful judge. I had testified in his court during the Freedom Rides in 1961, and I was back in his court again testifying in 1965. He gave us everything we asked for to make it possible for us to march three hundred strong from Selma to Montgomery. And on that last day, there were more than ten thousand people, and when we arrived in Montgomery, there were more than twenty-five thousand citizens from all different nations. But because of what happened on *Bloody Sunday*, President Lyndon Johnson came to the Congress and made one of the most meaningful speeches that any American President has made in modern times on the whole issue of civil rights and voting rights.

We call it the “We Shall Overcome” speech. He gave it on March 15, 1965. He started off that speech that night by saying: “I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy.”<sup>1</sup> President Lyndon Johnson went on to say: “At times, history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man’s unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.”<sup>2</sup> He condemned the violence in Selma, he introduced the Voting Rights Act, and before he ended that speech he said, “And we shall overcome. . . . [W]e shall overcome.”<sup>3</sup>

I was sitting next to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the home of a local family in Selma as we watched and listened to President Johnson. I looked at Dr. King, and tears were coming down his face. He started crying, and we all cried a little. And he said again: “We’ll make it from Selma to Montgomery and the Voting Rights Act will be passed.”

And he was right. Congress debated the act, passed the act, and President Johnson signed it into law on August 6, 1965.

I say to you, because of the action of hundreds of thousands and millions of our citizens following the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we live in a different country, in a better country. We are in the process of laying down the burden of race. We have come a distance—Dean Shields is right—we have come a distance. We have made a lot of progress, but we still have a great distance to go. What happened in New Orleans with Katrina dramatized so clearly that the issue of race and poverty is still with us.

If Dr. King could speak to us today, he would say: “Shame on America. You can do better. Stop spending our limited resources, our millions and billions of dollars, on a war that was unnecessary.” Dr. King would say: “We must learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or we will perish as fools.” He would heed the words of Gandhi: “It is nonviolence or nonexistence.” He taught us to believe in nonviolence not simply as a technique, simply as a tactic, but as a way of life, as a way of living. When you accept nonviolence simply as a technique or as a tactic, it becomes like a faucet. You can turn it on, and you can turn it off. He would tell us today that war is obsolete as a tool of our foreign policy. And as a great nation, as a great people, we can do better. We can do much better, and we can build a Beloved Community, a community at peace with

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1. President Lyndon B. Johnson, “We Shall Overcome” Speech (Mar. 15, 1965).

2. *Id.*

3. *Id.*

itself.

If it hadn't been for Martin Luther King Jr., I don't know what would have happened to the American society. I fear what would have happened to many of us if it hadn't been for this one man. He taught us how to live. He taught us how to die. Yes, I was arrested and jailed forty times, and beaten a few times, but because of Dr. King, I don't hate. I don't have any ill feeling or malice toward anybody.

We went back to Selma for the thirty-fifth anniversary five years ago. You must keep in mind that forty years ago, there was not one single black police officer, not one black state patrolman, not one woman, not one Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American. But when we went back there five years ago, President Clinton walked across that bridge with us for the thirty-fifth anniversary. And the state troopers lined up on both sides of the bridge, and they stood and they saluted us. They were black and white and Hispanic. They were women and men. When we got on the other side, the Governor of Alabama reached out and said: "Welcome home, John Lewis, welcome home." He teared up, I teared up, and the President of the United States teared up. We crossed that bridge; there are still other bridges for us to cross.

I say to you, the young people here, that you have an obligation. You have a mission and mandate to do what you can to cross and build other bridges, to build the Beloved Community.

I am going to close with one little story. When I was growing up outside of Troy, Alabama, fifty miles from Montgomery, I had an aunt by the name of Seneva. And my aunt Seneva lived in what we called a shotgun house. I know here in the State of Vermont you have these beautiful, lovely homes. You do not have shotgun houses. My aunt did not have a green, manicured lawn. She had a simple, plain, dirt yard. And sometimes at night you could look up through the holes of this old house, through the tin roof, and count the stars. From time to time, she would walk up into the woods and take branches from a Dogwood tree and tie those branches together, and she would make a broom. And she called that broom the brush broom. And she would sweep this dirt yard very clean sometimes two and three times a week, but especially on a Friday or Saturday because she wanted that dirt yard to look very good in case we had some guests.

For those of you who are so young and never lived in the rural South, you may have never seen a shotgun house. Let me tell you what a shotgun house looks like. It's an old house, maybe with a tin roof, with one way in and one way out. You can bounce a basketball through the front door, and it would go straight out the back door. My aunt Seneva lived in a shotgun

house. One Saturday afternoon, a group of my brothers and sisters, and few of my first cousins, about twelve or fifteen of us young children, were out playing in my aunt Seneva's yard. An unbelievable storm came up. The wind started blowing. The thunder started rolling. The lightning started flashing, and the rain started beating on the tin roof of this old shotgun house. My aunt became terrified. She started crying. She thought this old house was going to blow away. She gathered all of us little children together and told us to hold hands, and we did as we were told. The wind continued to blow, the thunder continued to roll, the lightning continued to flash, and the rain continued to beat on the tin roof of this old shotgun house. And we cried and we cried, and we kept crying.

And when one corner of this old house appeared to be lifting from its foundation, my aunt had us walk to that corner of the house to try to hold it down with our little bodies. When the other side appeared to be lifting, she had us walk to that side to hold down the house with our little bodies. We were little children, walking with the wind, but we never left the house.

Martin Luther King Jr., who must be looked upon as one of the founding fathers of the new America, never left the American house. That is what the Civil Rights Movement was all about—trying to hold the American house together, trying to hold the American house down. The storms may come, the winds may blow, the thunder may roll, the lightning may flash, and the rain may beat on the house. Call it the house of the Vermont Law School, call it the house of Washington DC, call it the house of Georgia, call it the American house, call it the world house. We all live in the same house. Maybe our foremothers and forefathers all came to this great land in different ships, but we are all in the same boat now. It does not matter whether we are black, white, Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American. We are one people. We are one family. We are one house.

And so I say to you, hang in there, keep the faith, keep your eyes on the prize, and walk with the wind. And let the spirit of the law, let the spirit of justice and freedom, let the spirit of history, and the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. be your guide. Thank you very much.