

Martin Luther King

A staged reading or play based on Amos 5:24 and the King sermon, "I Have a Dream"

By Dorian Scott Cole

RSV Amos 5:24 "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

RSV Isaiah 40:4-5 : "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Verses used by Martin Luther King in his "I Have a Dream" sermon.

The actual words of King, Cleaver, Stokely Carmichael, and Malcolm X are shown in quotes. While the ideas of these men are represented, this play does not reflect a historical chronological timeline, and the events are fictitious.

Key concepts:

- The equality of humanity in Christ.
- Justice, human dignity.
- Non-violent protest.

As a staged reading this is presented with minimal props, minimal action, and lines may be read.

As a short play, minimal props are required.

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Props

- None

Cast

- Martin Luther King
- Eldridge Cleaver
- Commentator

Setting

Martin Luther King speaks from the podium. Eldridge Cleaver is in the audience.

Time: Present day.

Blocking

Cleaver sits in the front pew, to the right or left of the podium so both can be observed.

Costumes

None are necessary.

Time

12 to 15 minutes, depending on reading speed.

ACT 1 (of 1)

KING IS STANDING ON A STAGE, DELIVERING A SPEECH.

KING

(Powerfully delivered)

"There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

"We cannot be satisfied as long as the negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by a sign stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.'

"Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

"And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

"I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

"I have a dream today!

"I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

"This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

"With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into 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 that we will be free one day." –

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER STANDS, INTERRUPTING KING, WITH HIS ARM RAISED IN A BLACK POWER FIST SALUTE – FULL OF ANGER. CLEAVER GIVES THE BLACK POWER SALUTE EACH TIME HE MENTIONS BLACK POWER, THROUGHOUT THIS PRESENTATION.

CLEAVER

Let me tell you about getting free. Freedom isn't something you get by dreaming and speeches. No white man is ever going to just give it to you. You want freedom, you got to take it.

KING

Who are you?

CLEAVER

Eldridge Cleaver. Black Power is the only way we're ever going to get free.

KING

The same Eldridge Cleaver that spent 8 years in jail for crimes we won't even mention? Well, we see where violence gets you – you *lose* your freedom.

CLEAVER

Where do think cozying up to white presidents and all these white institutions is going to get you? Nothing but hot air – that's what! If it comes from white people, it's a trap and we don't want it.

KING

Black Power – you have to know how to use power. You have to protest *non-violently*. *Civil disobedience*. You stare inhumane treatment in the face, and refuse to participate in it. Like Rosa Parks, you refuse to give up your seat to a white man or sit in the back of the bus.

CLEAVER

Yeah, well, 'scuse me for refusing to get arrested in some protest. Stokely Carmichael said: "This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested and I ain't going to jail no more! The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. What we gonna start sayin' now is Black Power!"

KING

"I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice."

CLEAVER

You set down with those white people, they're going to kill you. Malcolm X said, "...don't teach me to be nonviolent until you teach some of those crackers to be nonviolent."

KING

"Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation."

CLEAVER

The only thing *sure* in this world is that the white man has the power and he's going to keep us down unless we force change. Malcom X said, "I realized racism isn't just a black and white problem. It's brought bloodbaths to about every nation on earth at one time or another."

KING

You come with me, brother. We're going to march and we're going to keep on marching until they're tired of looking at us and start listening. We're going to get arrested for civil disobedience, and we're going to keep on getting arrested until they're sick of arresting us and start treating us like human beings. We're going to get every black the right to vote. We're going to get the schools and hotels and stores and the buses ... everything in this America desegregated. We're going to get labor rights and our basic civil rights.

CLEAVER

Why do you want things from white America. You're black. You got to be proud of who you are and strong enough to get it. You got dreams. I got power. Black power.

KING

"I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; 'and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.'

"This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

"With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into 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 that we will be free one day.

"And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, 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!"

AS KING SAYS "FREE AT LAST," HE MIGHT SUMMON CLEAVER TO JOIN HIM AND THEY SAY "THANK GOD ALMIGHTY, WE ARE FREE AT LAST!" TOGETHER AND SIT DOWN TOGETHER. OR THEY CAN BOTH JUST FADE AWAY TO THEIR SEATS AS KING CONCLUDES AND THE COMMENTATOR COMES FORWARD TO SPEAK.

COMMENTATOR

In the struggle between the Nation of Islam, Black Power, Segregationists, the government, and the non-violent protest movements, many people lost their lives, including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, both of whom were assassinated. The Nation of Islam group killed Malcolm X. Government agencies and segregationists took part in the conspiracy to kill King.

Eldridge Cleaver, once an advocate of violence, after prison joined the militaristic Black Panther party as its Minister of Information. Later he renounced the Black Panthers, became a Christian, and then became a conservative Republican, endorsed Reagan, and even ran for President.

The Black Power movement, and the associated Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, didn't accomplish anything specific, but they weren't without value. They helped organize scores of community self-help groups and institutions that did not depend on whites. They helped establish black studies programs at colleges, mobilized black voters to elect black candidates, and encouraged greater racial pride and self-esteem. But Black Power did not become the uniting force dreamed of by King.

King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led blacks to great victory. They hammered away at the establishment with nonviolent protests, even though violence sometimes occurred and cost activists their lives. They continued their efforts until they won the right to vote, gained desegregation, won labor rights and civil rights, all of which were enacted into US law with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Today we remember a great man who changed the course of this nation, Martin Luther King, and the cause that he stood for – the humanity and equality of us all, and his God given courage to take that stand despite the opposition that he faced from powerful individuals, society, government, and even from many of his own people.

Racism continues today in many disguises, and it is up to us to stand against discrimination and oppression and make justice to roll down like waters.

Research

Martin Luther King

From the Martin Luther "I Have A Dream" speech

"Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

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I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."²

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.....

And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, 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!³

“Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation.”

Wikipedia article:

“On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to comply with the Jim Crow laws that required her to give up her seat to a white man. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, urged and planned by E. D. Nixon (head of the Montgomery NAACP chapter and a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters) and led by King, soon followed. (In March 1955, a 15 year old school girl, Claudette Colvin, suffered the same fate, but King did not become involved.[3]) The boycott lasted for 381 days, the situation becoming so tense that King's house was bombed. King was arrested during this campaign, which ended with a United States Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation on all public transport.”

“King organized and led marches for blacks' right to vote, desegregation, labor rights and other basic civil rights. Most of these rights were successfully enacted into United States law with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

King and the SCLC applied the principles of nonviolent protest with great success by strategically choosing the method of protest and the places in which protests were carried out in often dramatic stand-offs with segregationist authorities. Sometimes these confrontations turned violent.”

Black Power

Wikipedia: “...the movement emphasized racial pride and the creation of black political and cultural institutions to nurture and promote black collective interests, advance black values, and secure black autonomy.”

Stokely Carmichael said: "This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested and I ain't going to jail no more! The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. What we gonna start sayin' now is Black Power!"

“SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) also saw racists had no qualms about the use of violence against blacks in the U.S. who would not "stay in their place," and that "accommodationist" civil rights strategies had failed to secure sufficient concessions for blacks. As a result, as the Civil Rights Movement progressed, increasingly radical, more militant voices came to the fore to aggressively challenge white hegemony. Increasing numbers of black youth, particularly, had come to reject the moderate path of cooperation, integration and assimilation of their elders. They rejected the notion of appealing to the public's conscience and religious creeds and took the tack

articulated by another black activist more than a century before. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote:

Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. ...Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will.[3]"

"Black Power exerted a significant influence. It helped organize scores of community self-help groups and institutions that did not depend on whites. It was used to establish black studies programs at colleges, to mobilize black voters to elect black candidates, and to encourage greater racial pride and self-esteem."

Civil Disobedience (nonviolent)

Wikipedia: "Civil disobedience is the active refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands of a government, or of an occupying power, without resorting to physical violence. It is one of the primary tactics of nonviolent resistance. In its most nonviolent form (known as ahimsa or satyagraha) it could be said that it is compassion in the form of respectful disagreement.

Civil disobedience has been used in many well-documented nonviolent resistance movements in India (Gandhi's social welfare campaigns and campaigns for independence from the British Empire), in South Africa in the fight against apartheid, in the American Civil Rights Movement, and in peace movements worldwide. One of its earliest massive implementations was by Egyptians against the British occupation in the nonviolent 1919 Revolution.

The American author Henry David Thoreau pioneered the modern theory behind this practice in his 1849 essay Civil Disobedience, originally titled "Resistance to Civil Government". The driving idea behind the essay was that of self-reliance, and how one is in morally good standing as long as one can "get off another man's back"; so one doesn't have to physically fight the government, but one must not support it or have it support one (if one is against it). "

"...one may choose to deliberately break certain laws, such as by forming a peaceful blockade or occupying a facility illegally. **Protesters practice this non-violent form of civil disorder with the expectation that they will be arrested, or even attacked or beaten by the authorities.** Protesters often undergo training in advance on how to react to arrest or to attack, so that they will do so in a manner that quietly or limply resists without threatening the authorities."

"He will, however, never retaliate. Retaliation includes swearing and cursing. Therefore a civil resister will never insult his opponent, and therefore also not take part in many of the newly coined cries which are contrary to the spirit of ahimsa. "

Malcolm X

Wikipedia "...don't teach me to be nonviolent until you teach some of those crackers to be nonviolent."

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