

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Address
“The Other America”
March 12, 1968 - Grosse Pointe, MI
(Recorded by Linda Gruber, Transcribed by Patrick J. Carrenard)

Bishop Emrich, my dear friend Congressman Conyers (Rep. John Conyers Jr., D, MI)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I need not pause to say how very delighted I am to be here tonight and to have the great privilege of discussing with you, some of the vital issues confronting our nation and confronting the world. It is always a very rich and rewarding experience, when I can take a brief break from the day to day demands of our struggle for freedom and human dignity and discuss the issues involved in that struggle with concerned people of good will all over our nation and all over the world. And I certainly want to express my deep personal appreciation to you for inviting me to occupy this significant platform. I want to discuss the race problem tonight and I, want to discuss it very honestly. I still believe that freedom is the bonus you receive for telling the truth. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And I do not see how we will ever solve the turbulent problem of race confronting our nation, until there is an honest confrontation with it and a *willing* search for the truth and a *willing* a willingness to admit the truth when we discover it. And so I want to use as a title for my lecture tonight, ‘The Other America’. And I use this title because there are literally two Americas. Every city in our country has this kind of dualism, this schizophrenia, split at so many points and so every city ends up being two cities rather than one, there are two Americas. One America is beautiful situations. In this America, millions of people have the milk of prosperity and the honey of equality flowing before them. This America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies, culture and education for their minds, freedom and human dignity for their spirits. In this America children grow

up in the sunlight of opportunity. [4:03] But there is another America, and this other America has a daily ugliness about it that transforms ebullency of hope into the fatigue of despair. In this other America thousands and thousands of people, men in particular, walk the streets and search for jobs that do not exist. In this other America, millions of people are forced to live in vermin-filled depressing housing conditions where they do not have the privilege of having wall to wall carpet but all too often they end up with wall to wall rats and roaches. Almost 40% of the Negro families of America live in substandard housing conditions. In this other America thousands of young people are deprived of an opportunity to get an adequate education. By the, every year thousands finish high school reading at a seventh, eighth and sometimes ninth grade level. Not because they are dumb not because they don't have the native intelligence but because the schools are so inadequate, so overcrowded, so devoid of equality, so segregated if you will that the best in these minds can never come out. [6:03]

The first thing I'd like to mention is that there must be a recognition on the part of everybody in this nation that America is *still* a racist country. Now however unpleasant that sounds it is the truth and we will never solve the problem of racism until there is a recognition of the fact that racism *still* stands at the center of so much of our nation and we must see racism for what it is. It is a myth of an inferior people, it is the notion that one group has all of the knowledge, all of the insights, all of the purity, all of the worth, all of the dignity. And another group is worthless, on a lower level of humanity, inferior. To put it in philosophical language, racism is not based on some, ah, empirical generalization which after some studies would come to the conclusion that these people are behind because of environmental conditions. Racism is based on an ontological

affirmation. It is a notice, the notion that the very *being* of a people is inferior. And the ultimate logic of racism is genocide. [7:44]

... we've gotta get rid of two or three myths. We've gotta get rid of two or three myths that still pervade our nation. One is the myth of time. I'm sure you've heard this notion, it is the notion that only time can solve the problem of racial injustice. And, ah, I've heard it from many sincere people, they said to the Negro and to his allies in the white community, you should slow up you're pushing things too fast, only time can solve the problem and if you'll just be nice and patient and continue to pray in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out. There is an answer to that myth, it is that time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively. I'm sad to say to you tonight, that I'm absolutely convinced that the forces of ill will in our nation, the forces on the wrong side in our nation, the extreme righteous of our nation, have often used time much more effectively than the forces of good will. And it may well be that we will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words of the bad people who will say bad things in a meeting like this, or who will bomb a church in Birmingham, Alabama, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say wait on time... Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals who are willing to be coworkers with God and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. And so we must always help time and realize that the time is always right to do right . I'm gonna rush on, one I want to say that if we are to move ahead and solve this problem we must reorder our national priorities. Today we are spending almost thirty-five billion dollars a

year to fight what I consider an unjust, ill-considered, evil, costly, unwinnable war at Vietnam. I wish I had time to go into the dimensions of that... I wish I had time to go into all of the dimensions of this but I must say that the war in Vietnam is playing havoc with our domestic destinies. That war has torn up the Geneva Accord. It has strengthened, it has substituted... Those of us who oppose the war in Vietnam I feel are opposing it for many reasons. Many of them are moral reasons but, ah, one one basic reason is that we love our boys who are fighting there and we just want 'em to come back home. But I don't have time to go into the history and the development of the war in Vietnam. I happen to be a pacifist. But, ah, if I had had, ah, to make a decision about fighting a war against Hitler I may have temporarily given, given up my pacifism and taken up arms. Ah, but nobody is going to compare what is happening in Vietnam today with that. Ah, I am convinced that this is clearly an unjust war and is doing so many things not only ah on the domestic scene it is carrying the whole world closer to nuclear annihilation. So I found it necessary to take a stand against the war in Vietnam and I appreciate Bishop Emrich's question. And I must answer it by saying that for me the two issues cannot be divided. It's nice for me to talk about... [12:44] it's alright to talk about integrated schools and integrated lunch counters, ah, which I will continue to work for but I think it would be rather absurd for me to be concerned with integrated schools and not be concerned for the, about the survival of the world in which to integrate. I have been working too long and too hard now against segregated public accommodations to end up at this stage of my life segregating my moral concern. Justice is indivisible injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Now for the first thing... I think the war in Vietnam has hurt civil rights much more than my taking a stand against the war.

And I could point out so many things to say that. Ah, a reporter asked me some time ago when I first took a strong stand against the war didn't I feel that I would have to reverse my position, ah, because so many people disagreed and people who once had respect for me wouldn't have respect. And he went on to say that I hear that its hurt the budget of your organization and don't you think that you'll have to get in line more with the administration's policy. And of course those are very lonely days when I first started speakin' out and not many people were speakin' out but now I have a lot of company. I'm not as lonesome now. Ah, but anyway I had to say to the reporter, "I'm sorry sir but you don't know me. I'm not a consensus leader." And I do not determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Or by kind of taking a look, ah, at a Gallup poll and getting the expression of the majority opinion. Ultimately, a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus. On some positions, cowardice asks the question is it safe. Expediency asks the question is it politic. Vanity asks the question is it popular. The conscience asks the question is it right, and there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right...

[15:31]

Now let me finally say something in the realm of the spirit and then I'm gonna take my seat. Let me say finally, that in the midst of the hollering and in the midst of the discourtesy tonight we've gotta come to see that however much we *dislike* it, the destinies of white and black America are tied together. Now the racists don't understand this apparently, but our destinies are tied together. And somehow, we must all learn to live together, together as *brothers* in this country. Or we're gonna all perish together as

fools. Our destinies are tied together. Culturally and otherwise, every white person is a little bit Negro and every Negro is a little bit white, our language... our language, our music, our material prosperity and *even* our food are an amalgam of black and white. And so there can be no separate black path for power and fulfillment that does not intersect white roots. And there can ultimately be no separate white path for power and fulfillment short of social disaster, without recognizing the necessity of *sharing* that power with black aspirations for freedom and human dignity, we must come to see. Yes we do need each other. The black man needs the white man to save him from his fear, and the white man needs the black man to free him from his guilt. John Donne was right, 'No man is an island entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. And he goes on toward the end to say, 'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. Therefore send not to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee'. And somehow, we must come to see that in this pluralistic, interrelated society we are all tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And by working with determination, by realizing that power must be shared, I think we can solve this problem and may I say, in conclusion, that our goal is freedom. And, ah, I believe we're gonna get there. It's gonna be more difficult from here on in, but I believe we're gonna get there. Because however much she strays away from it, the goal of America is freedom. And our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the pilgrim fathers landed in Plymouth *we* were here. Before Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, *we* were here. Before the beautiful words of the star-spangled banner were written *we* were here. And for more than two centuries our forbears labored here without wages. They made cotton

king. They built the homes of their masters in the midst of the most humiliating and oppressive conditions. And yet out of a bottomless vitality they continue to grow and develop. And if the inexpressible cruelties of slavery couldn't stop us, the opposition that we now face including the white backlash will surely fail. We are going to win our freedom because both the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of the almighty God are embodied in our echoing demands. And so however *difficult* it is during this period, however difficult it is to continue to live with the agony, the continued existence of racism, however difficult it is to live amidst the constant hurt and the constant insult and the constant disrespect, I can still say we shall overcome. We shall overcome because the arc of the Moral Universe is long but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carlyle is right, 'No lie can *live* forever'. We shall overcome because William Collard Bryant is right, 'Truth pressed to earth will rise again'. We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right, 'Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future'. We shall overcome because the bible is right, 'You shall reap what you sow'. And 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 discourse of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when all of God's children all over this nation 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'.