

Quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr.

A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.

A lie cannot live.

A man can't ride your back unless it's bent.

A man who won't die for something is not fit to live.

A right delayed is a right denied.

A riot is the language of the unheard.

All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.

All progress is precarious, and the solution of one problem brings us face to face with another problem.

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.

At the center of non-violence stands the principle of love.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.

Everything that we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see.

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies - or else? The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or else we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.

History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

I am not interested in power for power's sake, but I'm interested in power that is moral, that is right and that is good.

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.

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 decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.

I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

If physical death is the price that I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

It is not enough to say we must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it.

It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important.

Law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'

Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.

Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

Means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek.

Never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was legal.

Never succumb to the temptation of bitterness.

Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals.

Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.

Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal.

Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary.

Pity may represent little more than the impersonal concern which prompts the mailing of a check, but true sympathy is the personal concern which demands the giving of one's soul.

Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.

Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.

That old law about 'an eye for an eye' leaves everybody blind. The time is always right to do the right thing.

The art of acceptance is the art of making someone who has just done you a small favor wish that he might have done you a greater one.

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.

The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict.

The limitation of riots, moral questions aside, is that they cannot win and their participants know it. Hence, rioting is not revolutionary but reactionary because it invites defeat. It involves an emotional catharsis, but it must be followed by a sense of futility.

The moral arc of the universe bends at the elbow of justice.

The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows.

The quality, not the longevity, of one's life is what is important.

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

We are not makers of history. We are made by history.

We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.

We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive.

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.

Whatever your life's work is, do it well. A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better.

When you are right you cannot be too radical; when you are wrong, you cannot be too conservative.

If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?