

# **TRANSCRIPT**

***Martin Luther King, Jr.***

***February 6, 1964***

**American Race Crisis**

**Lecture Series**

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**Question and Answer session following Opening Address**

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Dr. King: —urge him to compromise on certain basic issues, particularly the public accommodation section of the Civil Rights bill. And I think this is where the real commitment of the President will be tested; for if he will stand firm in the midst of this kind of pressure and these constant and persistent attempts to make compromises, then we will know that he is thoroughly committed. But up to now, he has demonstrated that he wants this bill, and he has demonstrated that he has a concern for civil rights.

Moderator: Dr. King, because you may need a little moral support in answering this clinker (LAUGHTER) before I give it to you, I would like to introduce a gentleman who was not introduced earlier. He is Madison Jones, director of the New York City Human Rights Commission, who is happily working along with us as a technical consultant for public affairs in New York City particularly. Madison, would you mind rising and taking a bow?

(APPLAUSE)

And the question is this one, which I think many of us have thought about in the past. Do you believe, Dr. King, that the black Moslem movement — or Muslim, as it is called, I think, correctly — can make a positive contribution to the civil rights movement?

Dr. King: I guess to answer this, one, again, has to determine what is meant by a "positive contribution." (MURMURING IN AUDIENCE) If a positive can come through a negative, there may be some possible contribution, that this movement can make. It may frighten some people enough to cause them to see that we'd better hurry up and get this problem solved.

(LAUGHTER)

They think of me as a pretty bad fella down in Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi, and say a lot of bad things about me. But even I have become a little more respectable (LAUGHTER) when they discovered some of the ideals of the Muslim movement.

(LAUGHTER)

But very seriously, it is known, I'm sure, I've made it very clear, that I disagree with the philosophy of this movement, if it is a philosophy that advocates a doctrine of black supremacy. I think this is wrong. I think black supremacy is as dangerous as white supremacy, and that we must never seek to rise from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage, thereby subverting justice, substituting one tyranny for another. But we must be concerned about democracy for everybody.

If this movement advocates racial separation, which it does, then I would have to disagree, because I think our nation will come to its full maturity through racial integration. And I haven't come to the point of despairing; I believe this can be achieved, and I think there are many people working in many ways to make this a possibility. So that the despair that grows out of the philosophy that the problem can be solved within, and that you must separate yourself in other states is something that I would not advocate at this time.

But I do feel that this movement does remind the nation of something. And if, in reminding the nation of this something that it so desperately needs to hear and to know, there may be some contribution, it did not come into being out of thin air; it is symptomatic of the deeper unrest, discontent, and frustration of the Negro. And I think it is an indictment on the laxity of Christianity and the laxity of democracy that a movement like this came into being. And I think that the challenge of this movement is not so much to condemn its philosophy, as I will continue to do, but go out and work harder to get rid of the conditions that brought it into being.

(APPLAUSE)

Moderator: Dr. King has had a long day. My wife and I sat on a marble floor for two hours last night, as two of 5,000 people who couldn't get into a hall to hear him at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. So I know that he's been more active than simply what he is doing here tonight. However, this is an important question, Dr. King.

(LAUGHTER)

Why has there been a bog down in civil rights activities since the march on Washington in which you so eloquently spoke?

Dr. King: Here again, I think you have some inevitable to contend with and to recognize. I don't think anyone should interpret what appears to be a lull as a slowing up on the part of the Negro in his quest for freedom and justice. I think several things explain this. One is a very human thing, that after a whole season of demonstrations, you just get a little tired, and you need to get some rest.

(SLIGHT LAUGHTER)

I say this jokingly, but this is serious. I don't know any movement that we've had that didn't have a period when you reach the height of that movement, and you had a sort of temporary pause. After the sit-in movement in 1960, there was this period, but it didn't

mean stopping, for the next year, the freedom rides came. After the freedom rides, we had a few months when things held up for a bit, but that didn't mean stopping. We had the Albany movement in 1962. After the Albany movement, things slowed up a bit, for a little while, but then came the Birmingham movement in 1963.

Now, I think that we are facing now the inevitable lull that develops in a movement when you recognize a need for pausing to assess and reassess, to have introspection, and to look at the movement, and put yourself in a better position to make greater leaps in the future. I think this is what we faced right after the march on Washington, and I don't think at any point this represented slowing up, for you can see that the movement is now gaining new momentum, and I'm sure that the progress made in '63 only whetted the appetite of the Negro for greater progress in 1964. And I think we will see more intensified activity in the civil rights movement, and that the movement will gain even greater momentum in 1964.

(APPLAUSE)

Moderator: Dr. King has seated himself, which I must take as a hint that he is finished.

(LAUGHTER)

However (LAUGHTER)

Dr. King: I can go on if you have another one.

Moderator: Would you like to hear him answer just one more question, audience?

(APPLAUSE)

And I think this is one which is on the minds of all of you. Dr. King, do you think preferential treatment of the Negro is a solution in any way to the race problem?

Dr. King: That requires a long answer, really, because I do think we are battling at points with the problem of semantics here, and I do think it needs to be interpreted in a very real sense. It is one of the areas where we have a great deal of misunderstanding. So it is a matter of interpretation.

Let me say first that the Negro has been inflicted with 244 years of slavery and 100 years of segregation. And so with the legacy of these two unjust systems facing him, it is only natural that he is way behind. And he has been out of the main stream of American life, he has been on the periphery of American life, for all of these years. And it would really be a miracle that history hadn't seen for someone to start exactly 344 years behind in a race and get ahead or catch up, rather, unless something special is done.

We've had special treatment in the negative sense for 344 years. Now we've got to get a little special treatment in the positive sense, in order to catch up and improve these lagging standards. Now one immediately raises the question, "Isn't this discrimination in reverse?"

I don't know, but I know society does this over and over again. It is a part of the social consciousness of our great democracy, I think. We have many things that we do; if we deprive somebody of something, we do give something special to make up for that deprivation.

If we take a man away from school and his family and send him off to the army, if he makes it back, we do have special things that we do. We deprive them of something, so we make it possible for him to get veteran's loans. He can build a house with certain stipulations that I can't get because I'm not a veteran. He can start a business with certain help that others can't get. If he wants to go to college, he has help from the government with the G.I. Bill of Rights. This is nothing new. It happens, and we see subsidies in many areas.

And unemployment compensation: this is nothing new. You compensate those who have been deprived of something. And certainly the Negro has faced a great deprivation, and I'm convinced that America must do something to grapple with this problem.

I'd like to mention an experience I had in India not long ago. I was talking with Prime Minister Nehru, and I was very interested in studying the problem of caste untouchability, which is quite similar to our problem here in the United States, and the realm of racial injustice. And I was very happy to see the progress that had been made in dealing with this problem, and he was telling me some of the reasons.

First, when the new nation came into being and gained its independence, they placed it in the Constitution that to discriminate against an Untouchable is a crime punishable by imprisonment. Not only that, India had a great symbol in Mahatma Gandhi, who adopted an Untouchable as his daughter. And the issue was always kept on moral levels through great symbols.

But then he went on to say another thing, which was very interesting. He said, "You may find in India," he said, "I doubt if you can find 100 people in the whole of India who would make a public statement endorsing caste untouchability." Out of a population of 400,000, he said you couldn't find 100. He said, "They may still have prejudices within, but they're certainly afraid to echo this without."

And he went on to say that we spend millions and millions of rupees a year to improve the conditions of the Untouchables, the conditions that were much lower, and India is a poverty-stricken country as a whole, but when you think of the poverty of the Untouchables, it's really unthinkable. And even in this poor country, the government spends millions and millions of rupees a year to improve the lot of the Untouchables. And then he went on to say if two individuals apply for a university, one an Untouchable, and one a member of the higher caste, and they don't have but one opening, that university has to accept the Untouchable.

I said, "Well now, isn't this discrimination in reverse?"

He said, "It may be. But this is our way of atoning for the thousands of years of sins and injustices that we have inflicted on these people."

I think America somehow must face her moment of atonement. Not just atonement for atonement's sake, but we must face the fact that we're going to pay for it somehow. If we don't do it, we're going to pay for it with the welfare rolls, we're going to pay for it in many other ways. And I think that this matter of preferential treatment is just a way of saying that some crash program must be developed to improve the lot of the Negro.

Now, I would be perfectly willing to call it something that goes beyond the Negro, because I'm concerned about poor white people, too. I think that the problem of poverty must be dealt with beyond racial lines. So I don't want to give the impression that I feel that Negroes ought to put white people out of jobs. I'm concerned about full employment for everybody. And I think the war against poverty is a move in the right direction, for it will help the Negro, who is more poverty-stricken than anybody else, but it will help also the poor whites and poor members of other racial groups. And I think it will bring America to that great day, when all of us will have a sort of moral balance, where everybody can know that we can sit on or under our own vine and fig tree and not be afraid, knowing that we do live in a country where equality of opportunity is a reality.

(APPLAUSE)

**END OF RECORDING**