

The Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Juanita Pierre-Louis
January 17, 2018



Editor's note: Vice President Pierre-Louis gave this speech in 2015 at the Martin Luther Towers in New York City, and it is being shared here again in honor of the recent MLK, Jr. day.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did not put down America, but rather he lifted up her humanity in pursuing the "equality of the many opportunities she had to offer for people with no voice." Fifty years ago on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee, a single rifle shot pierced the air, a shot that was heard around the world, silencing the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

However, fifty years later, his words of truth, light, and justice still wake us up from a slumbering sleep. Generations now and to come will never stop honoring his words, because his words were of one crying in the wilderness, making clear the "will of God:" to let my people go!

Legacy is about establishing in one's life and work that which will endure and last for generations to come. Dr. King's legacy remains a battleground, full of shocking new images and almost as many questions as answers. He had fire in his soul that no one or nothing could put out.

Dr. King was a shrewd leader and organizer. He chose compromise and reason rather than locking horns with reaction; he chose peace and civil disobedience rather than direct and open confrontation; he chose dialogue and compassion rather than bloodshed.

Dr. King spoke to black Americans in a thoughtful tone with deep feelings, saying, "In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred."

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. King exhorted, "We must hold on to the principles, values, commitment, and love that we have inherited from God and our ancestor, so that we can pass them on to future generations. I want you to know tonight, that as a people we will get to the Promised Land. Mine eyes have seen the glory of coming of the True God."

For this reason, WFWP Co-Founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon, said "Dr. King was the greatest American in the 20th Century."