



NAROPA UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

America, Wake Up and Dream!
President Stuart C. Lord

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Good afternoon!

I am grateful for the opportunity to be with you today. Today is a very special day.

Today is the day that I will ask something of each of you, I ask you, America, to Wake Up and Dream!

It is an honor and privilege to speak at this event. I would like to thank Mayor Susan Osborne, CU Chancellor Philip DiStefano, and the young students who offered their essays on Dr. King. They remind us all of the power of the Dream.

America, Wake Up and Dream—

We are not only honoring the legacy of a great man, but we are witnessing the realization of his Dream!

Our nation last year elected its first African-American President. His victory was not based on the color of his skin, but rather because of the content of his character. Barack Obama was elected because of his vision for America and the global community he was elected because of his ability to connect with people. He was elected because of the diversity of his background and heritage. He was elected because he, like so many of us, has a dream—a dream for a better future for all of us.

I ask you: Could there be a more vivid depiction of the power of dreams?

The Story of my Dream

Allow me to share with you the story on how I came to realize my dream:

On the day that Dr. King died, I was running on the playground at Daniel Webster Elementary School. I remember the principal moving us all into the auditorium. I began to reflect on what this tragic event meant.

In my home, and in my community, Dr. King represented the movement for change for which we all yearned. Immediately after his death I was struck by a sense of fear. What would we do now? What would his dream look like now? But upon reflection, I realized that his death did not mark the end of the movement, but the dawn of a new era. Dr. King's life and mission had become my inspiration—I learned the “I have a dream” speech.

His dream...the Dream, changed my life forever. Because of him in the third grade, I committed myself to becoming an agent for racial healing. Because of him I have committed myself to creating and promoting inclusive communities. Because of him I am a better person. Because of him, his Dream became my dream!

In so many ways, his birthday, today, marks more than just an event honoring the man; it commemorates the columniation of an era. Dr. King fostered a movement based on hope, not fear. Dr. King led a people, with a dream, not a nightmare. Dr. King moved a nation with love, not hate. He was more than a leader; he was an inspiration to us all.

So today, I challenge YOU to make this day your own re-birth—
Pick up the mantle and live up to the dream!

I. We Must Wake Up as a Nation:

Our world today is plagued with many injustices. Yet, as we saw this past year, our collective will to create change, our universal ability to hope for a brighter future, is ever present.

America is defined by its strength—and that strength comes from the diversity and spirit of its people. And today we shall awaken!

We awaken so that our nation can fulfill its promise of being a land where all men and women are equals. We awaken so that the urgency of the dream he preached is not lost upon us. We awaken so that Dr. King's effort throughout this land amount to more than just rousing speeches. We awaken to the promise of a better tomorrow!

I am convinced that if Dr. King was among us today, he would remind us that the struggle goes on. He would tell us that the only reason the Arc of the Moral Compass bends toward Justice is because each day, we awaken, and push for something greater.

This is our destiny; this is our hope as a people. We will always continue to move toward justice. So that we awaken anew each day!

If we wake up, we will discover that King's dream is still growing. What began as a struggle for racial justice in Montgomery ended up becoming a fight to end “separate but ‘equal’.”

So today we must ask ourselves: How will the dream evolve?

Is it our struggle to provide adequate healthcare to all Americans?

Is it our struggle to provide equal rights to all peoples regardless of sexual orientation?

Is it our struggle never to compromise the integrity of the Constitution even if we are at war?

Is it our struggle to work for environmental justice?

Is it our struggle to make sure that all children have access to higher education?

Is it our struggle to tell the Governor to stop cutting funding from education, and, instead, re-invest in the lives our young people?

Is it our struggle to make sure that all children have the five fundamental recourses for success according American's Promise Alliance for Youth, which are:

- A healthy start;
- A caring adult or mentor;
- A quality education;
- A safe place to go grow;
- And an opportunity to give back

It should be our ultimate objective to provide all children with an opportunity to reach their full potential.

Is it simply the continued timeless fight to ensure that basic human rights are provided to all peoples, in all lands regardless of race, sex, religion, and economic status?

Whatever the struggle, the dream can never stand still. The dream must embrace all concerns of dignity and justice. The dream must represent equality and hope. The dream must transcend time and place. The Dream MUST keep us awake!

II. As We Wake Up, We Should Remember the Backdrop of Suffering Against Which the Dream was Envisioned:

Still, this Dream is not without costs. In order to truly celebrate those charming words, "I have a dream...", we must understand the backdrop of suffering against which they were uttered.

We must be aware that the Dream was first envisioned by King and his followers in the face of a social, economic and political system that was closed to them. That system found the Dream to be too costly, too inconvenient, and too disruptive to ever be realized.

When marchers sang: "We Shall Overcome", "Walk Together Children, Don't You Grow Weary", "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child a Long Way from Home", and "Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty I am Free at Last", they did this not only to build a sense of solidarity but also because they recognized the height of the walls of discrimination and exploitation that they had to overcome.

The utterance of those timeless words 'I have a Dream' was preceded by a stirring story, in which King said, "we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. In a sense we have come to our nation's Capital to cash a check."

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check that has come back marked "insufficient funds."

Thus, we cannot speak of the Dream without understanding the suffering reality in which it was envisioned.

Our struggle today is not one of sentimentality or nostalgia. We cannot afford to be asleep while honoring the Dream. We must Wake Up and Dream!

III. Remember the Dream was Envisioned Against Suffering; It Inspired a Nation to Wake Up, and We Too Must Follow the Dream:

But in order to live the Dream effectively, we must know the costs that await us—

Tell me this: If the cost means increased taxes and a reduction of our luxuries and conveniences, will we protest?

If the cost means sharing more and having less, will we protest?

If the cost means we must relinquish our advantaged position, so that another can be our equal, will we protest?

If the costs means that we must deprive ourselves of the comforts to which we have grown accustomed, will we protest?

If the costs means we cannot reside in our beautiful homes, and enjoy our favorite meals, and earn our respectable wages, WILL WE PROTEST?

For those of us, who like King, are led to the point of saying "yes" there is no reason to be asleep.

Still, be aware, our journey is not without—risks, disappointments, setbacks and extraordinary sacrifices. Because as King said, "the demons of racism, economic oppression and militarism are experienced in turning the people's dreams into nightmares."

So—are we willing to follow the moving dream? If we should be hesitant in our response, that is understandable. Saying “yes” didn't come easy for anyone who meant it.

This is because the sheer magnitude and commitment of the Dream requires only the best of us. Still, I see only strength here today. Celebrating today shows our commitment. In so many ways, we should remember that we are, in fact, blessed to have today as a holiday, which calls us to wake up and dream once a year.

IV. The Injustices of Our Time Demand we Wake Up. We Should Be Conscious of the Suffering of Our Time. We should Follow the Dream, and Rise to the Call for Action:

As we understand the message of Dr. King it is clear that in his voice we heard the Prophets, speaking to us as if they were standing right here today In America. Dr. King thought us that prophetic religion erases all complacency, all senses of self-satisfaction.

We also learned to recognize false prophets. Religious leaders who are inflamed with moral self-righteousness rather than on fire with righteous indignation over injustice. We learned from Dr. King that those who are deaf to the poor have not read the bible. Those who plunder, exploit and cheat and imprison their hearts are false, says Hosea!

Those who wage war cannot hope to build a moral country. Just as God warned King David, you have abundant blood on your hands, and have made great wars, but you shall not build a house in my name.

But it is not only we who need liberation and redemption. Let us liberate God, from the mendacity, and exploitation of politicians.

Dr. King forged a courageous path when he spoke against the war in Vietnam at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967. He did so out of the integrity of America. He said if America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read Vietnam. He spoke of Vietnam as we speak of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Dr King spoke of the pain of the Vietnamese. Millions killed, including women and children. And yet each day we still are creating thousands of enemies in are wars today. Dr King says we are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless for the victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy.

He says that here is the true meaning of compassion and nonviolence: when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view; to hear his questions; to know his assessment of us.

Let us recall that Dr. King's final efforts were on the behalf of garbage workers in Memphis and for poor people he campaigned and marched on Washington. He intended to make his message an international message.

Yet America grows cruel as prison hangs over our heads. 10% of our population has been or is under the jurisdiction of the prison system. Our prison system has become its own government, its own regime within our own...threatening precisely those most in need of help and compassion.

It is the American way of enslaving the poor, this new industry called prison management. We are expanding our prisons throughout the world and those whom we deem enemies are locked up with out the rights of habeas corpus.

Let us create the society that Dr. King wanted: a society of justice, not intuitions of punishment. In the Bible injustice is not met with punishment rather it is met with compassion. In our anger we must remember our mercy.

Conclusion

It is not enough to remember Dr. King simply to live off the inspiration of the past. For this is spiritual plagiarism. It is not enough to celebrate him or to be proud that we knew of him. But instead we must go out and do as he did.

Let us shake off our compliancy and demonstrate our courage. Let there be a grain of prophet in every human being who is saving the soul of America today!

We should remember, in the end, Dr. King is like all of us...he was just a person. A person, with a great dream. The American Dream, the peoples dream. So, today, as we remember Dr. King's great dream. We are now ready to join. Let's never forget that we are all like him—and, we too, can Dream!