

# 2015-01-19 Martin Luther King Jr

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good evening. And you know, today's the day we're celebrating Martin Luther King's Junior's I suppose is his birthday but his day and it's my favorite national holiday. I think it's the only as far as I know the only religious person that has gotten such a prominent recognition in our culture to have a holiday and after him and kind of nice to have occasionally have religious heroes suppose to models or there are other people who get prominent treatment in the media.

And so this morning I was I opened up the news. And sure enough, there were the first article that I saw was about Martin Luther King. But then two articles away was an article about the Oxfam report that just came out. And based on data they acquired from the Swiss bank called it sweet Swiss. That said that the kind of eye catching, I say that there are 80 individuals in the world, the only 80 there's probably more of us. They're here then 80 sibling 80 people who possess more well Then the 50% populate our world population, that's the lowest amount of income. So 50%, who are poorest in the world have less money than 80 individuals. Isn't that remarkable? And then, you know, and then this is 1% thing, then they, they have this wonderful graph and they're tracking how it changes over time, over the last 10 years or so. But in them, they said that, can you hear? Okay, so loud enough for everyone? Okay. So they said that, I guess in 2014, I think that's a bit that year. That 1% of the population of the world, which is about 72 million people. There's a lot of folks, but still, there's a lot more people to eyes. For 1% or so, have 48% of the wealth and the rest of people have 52%. But if you take the top 20% of the wealth at the top the 20% of people with the most well, the world they are they have 94.5% of the wealth. So in other words, 80% of the world population gets to divvy up among themselves 5.5% of world wealth. So, you know, I hope to have a good time with it. It's kind of sad. And so, and that income inequality is growing in the last few years. For a number of reasons, that people who are wealthy their wealth grows faster than the money of the people who are poor.

So it's quite something to kind of read these, you know, see Martin Luther King, and then see this article, because Martin Luther King after the, you know, he worked on voter quarters rights getting African Americans to vote, he then a change to focus the end of his life, direction towards income inequality in this country in poverty. That became one of his big drives. And he said that now we were in, we were in the civil rights era. And now we're in the Human Rights era. And so, and then he had very important things he said, that racism in our country is not an isolated phenomenon. But it cannot be addressed without addressing economic issues, and militarism. And back then the Vietnam War was big. And he was quite concerned so he could see saw a direct connection between the money being spent on the Vietnam War and the fight for poverty in this country. And Martin Luther King had to have a holiday after him is a wonderful thing. It's can be inspiring if we study him, but you know, he was a pretty radical person. And his message was, and he wasn't he didn't shy away from stirring things up. You know, he wasn't like polite Exactly. Though he had a glass door right language of it, but his

approach to non violent civil disobedience was to force himself on people. So they wouldn't have to do they have to deal with it. And so, even though he was an apostle of non violence and peace in a certain kind of way, he wasn't avoiding conflict. And in fact, he was willing to step into conflict. And the cost on him was quite, I think was huge. One thing I read, I don't know if this is the best measure of the cost, but after he was assassinated, there was an autopsy, autopsy done and, and it was the report said that this 39 year old man had a heart of a 60 year old and being had to be lived under tremendous stress. And then, you know, some of his stories he collapsed under that stress sometimes because of the death threats that he received. So he started getting death. Threats when he was 26. And then it continued. And there are, I've seen photographs of him, you know, of photographs show him being being hit in the head with bricks and rocks and being forced down across police cars or across police. The police station desks as he's being arrested and it was quite the FBI was after him. Why were they after him? And I mean, that's a pretty heavy FBI to be kind of a personal vendetta. I mean, that's kind of a must be a stressful thing. And so, you know, he put himself in situations where he didn't shy away from conflict. In fact, one of the interesting things he said is that he said something like that. The real impediment to progress he felt was not to Ku Klux Klan but were moderate white people who didn't want upset the order. You know, just do everything politely do everything kind of just do everything kind of follow the right procedures and everything will be okay. And his letter from the Birmingham Jail was a response to that very issue. Powerful letter. Many years ago, when I was a Zen student, my Zen teacher said that the Buddha taught the world the importance of sitting meditation. And Gandhi taught the world. It was important where you sat. And so, you know, and I've known people, I have friends who've sat on you know, literally sat down and meditated on train tracks, you know, when they were to block you know, the transport of nuclear weapons and so where do we sit? Or where do we sit with our heart? What do we open to? What do we pay attention to, in this world of ours? And how much of the world do we see as our world?

I think one of the important legacies of someone like Martin Luther King, is to see the whole world is our family. He said that after he got the Nobel Peace Prize, that he then now felt he had responsibility for people outside the United States and he was champion for their cause as well. And that was one of the reasons why he did he posed to Vietnam War. And, you know, nowadays maybe it seems like what that you know, everyone should have opposed the Vietnam War now that we know more what was going on, but when he did a lot of people turn their backs on him. A lot of people felt that he shouldn't oppose the war, but he should keep his focus on the civil rights and, and all that. So I want to play for you. Seven minutes of his speech by Martin Luther King, I think that's probably the respectful thing to do is let him speak for himself. And it's from a very famous speech called Beyond beyond Vietnam. So I think I gave in 1967 and, though I have some doubts whether this is this little clip is really completely from this. I think so whoever made it on YouTube right? It looks I think it's it doesn't doesn't correspond with the full text that I read of the speech. So I wonder if God you know, kind of splice together different parts of it, but it's still still him. And it's, it's kind of quite interesting and, and it's interesting to read his route here his rationale for why he opposes the Vietnam War. And I think a lot of what he has to say, is painfully relevant for our society today. So we'll see if this works by just, you know, put the mic in front of the computer.

The time has come for America to hear the truth about this tragic world. I've chosen to preach about the war in Vietnam today because I agree with Dante, that the hottest places inhale are reserved for those who are in a period of moral crisis. Maintain that neutrality. There comes a time when silence is betrayal. Even when pressed by the demands of in a true men do not easily assume the task of opposing that government's policy, especially in time of war. Knock course one of the difficulties and speaking out today grows out of the fact. There are those who are seeking to equate dissent with disloyalty. It's a dark day in our nation. When high level authorities will seek to use every method to silence dissent.

There is at the outset a very obvious answer. Almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been waging in America, our society gone mad own world. And I knew that America would never invest the necessary from images in rehabilitation of its poor. So long as it ventures like Vietnam continue to draw men and skills and money, like some demonic, destructive suction to you may not know it, my friends. It is estimated that we spend \$500,000 to kill each enemy soldier while we spend only \$53 well each person classified is poor and much of that \$53 goes for salaries to people who are not poor. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and attack. It is such perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality to place when it became clear to me that the wall was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and die in extraordinarily high proportion relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by society. sending them 8000 miles away the guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia, which they have not found in southwest Georgia then East column. So we have been repeatedly faced with a cruel irony watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as a kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same school room. And I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly. Who the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government that's something strangely inconsistent about a nation and oppress that we're praying You when you say be non violent toward Jim Clark, but will cursing Damn you, when you say be non violent toward little brown Vietnamese children, there will be no meaningful solution until some attempt is made to know these people and hear that broken crime, a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. Now, my hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism and militarism. Let me say fine oppose one Vietnam, because I love America. I speak out against this wall, not in anger. But within zeiten saara in my heart, and above all, with a passionate desire to see our beloved country stand as the model example of the world. I speak out against this wall because I'm disappointed with America. That can be no great disappointment. Where there is no great love. I'm disappointed with our failure to deal positively and forthrightly with the triple evils of racism, economic exploitation and militarism. We are presently moving down a dead end road that can lead to national disaster. It is time for all people of conscience to come Upon America, come back home. God has a way of standing before the nations with judgment. And it seems that I can hear God saying to America, you are to Africa. I have lost faith. across all of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. We Shall Overcome because the Bible is right. You shall reap what you sow. With this faith, we will be able to speed up the day when all over the world we will be able to turn hands and singing the words of the old nipro spiritual, Free at last, Free at last Thank God. We have free last with men will be fast swords into plowshares and that spears into pruning boots. nations will not rise up against nations need so the study wall anymore. And I don't know about you, I ain't gonna study wall normal.

So he talks about being an act of love, his disappointment. One of the things that came in my reading of his speeches and his writings was he seemed to be very devoted to some of the ideals that United States is built on. And, you know, and he was in love with it. He was very meaningful for him and he was trying to let everyone share in those dreams here and those rights here and that vision that He saw as a foundation of this country, and the idea of everyone. The idea that we're family all together, we're connected, that somehow can we get out of our self centered life force or a self contained life, and become aware of the people who we share this life with, and care about them. And learning to care for everyone, I hope is a consequence of settling, seeing ourselves and opening up our hearts that talk through this, this speech we listened to, you know, was very much sound like a preacher. But in that it's a much longer speech than beyond Vietnam. And since he kind of ended with this part, at least with this, you know, quote from the Bible and stuff, reference to it. I thought that he had He actually quotes

in the speech from Vietnam, Vietnamese Buddhist teachers. And I don't know it could be taken out Han For we know. See if Oh, here it is. Yeah. So he doesn't say who it's from. But so this is. This is the message of the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam. Recently one of them wrote these words. Each day. The war goes on the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese, and the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that Americans who calculate so carefully in the possibility of military victory, do not realize in the process they're incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be an image of her Evolution, freedom and democracy, but an image of violence and militarism. So, you know, since the Vietnam War, America has been involved in wars, just almost, you know, continuously and to have be in conversations about the justice of the wars, the brokenness of the wars, that gets to be things like very complicated. And we can be in all kinds of disagreements about what has to happen. But I think it's very tragic that the conversation always focuses almost always focuses on the wars that are occurring. And that conflict between what we should do and shouldn't do happens around the question about the current war. Let's stop the next war. Can we stop the next war what is what are the causes and conditions that we need to take into into take care of now? So that we don't have more wars. And one of the causes of war all over the world is economic inequality, that people who feel like they can't get, make any bands that can't make a life for themselves. And so how do we take care of that? How do we as a nation, take care of it? And coincidentally, the hints the suggestions is that our president is going to address this issue tomorrow. So it's kind of nice. I hope you listen. I hope he has something good to say and I hope that he's able to, you know, stand up right in the face of the blistering opposition that will receive the blistering opposition, you know, so the last thing I'll say about Martin Luther King, his Blitz the blistering opposition. I'll say it this way. Maybe some of you were here a few years ago. on a Monday night I think it was Helen Sanok he is a Buddhist teacher in Berkeley, he gave a talk on Martha King. And he asked that evening, if anybody ever seen Martin Luther King or numurkah. And the man that I know known for years and been part of this group for a long time, very nice man, lovely sweet men. And I would trust deeply said Oh, yes.

I was there. The I guess it was the march in the Selma March. They walked right by my house. And I stood on my porch with my buddies and cursed him. quite something. So it was quite sad, you know, and he's come a long way since then. You know, to be able to admit it was quite something. But and, you know, you see some of these photographs. Some of the film footage is of the time of the white people who were protesting against the protesters. And the hate and the spite that they carried the level of hostility and hate that people are capable of in this world even to this day, right? I mean, what's going on in Europe and all kinds of places is quite strong. So how do we address hate? How do we how do we stop the next door? How do we stop the next wave of this kind of hate? How do we live our lives so we make a difference for the future? Or as tick not Han said, How do we live our lives now? So that a future is possible? And is it only someone else's responsibility? So those 80 people, they better those 80 people better do something about their wealth.

So I kind of celebrate month of the King Day in memory of his radicalism, his revolutionary radicalism which was stirring things up. And he continued to do that right to the end, then, you know, is the thing that he was working on most most in the last couple years of his life was poverty. And I celebrate that he did it with a beautiful heart Even though it was 60 years old. Beautiful devotion and love friendship to a lot of people.

And I think we're lucky to have people who stir things up that force us to ask questions force us to study to look more deeply because if we're all guys too easy to be complacent, too easy, kinda like our bins, okay, and okay enough, but things are not okay. And in the way that all these issues are connected, I think is very important to appreciate. Like the issue of certainly racism is still an issue in our society, but

it's connected to economic inequality. Exactly a connection to militarism right now, I'm not so sure it's more obvious in the Vietnam time. But I think Surely there's a connection the way he talked about the money being spent on that rather than bettering people. And then to add to this list, I think that gender and gender inequality is also still a huge issue in our society. And you know, how many women are in that group of at least very few. And I think until we have a little bit more equality in many different ways. You know, there's a lot of work to be done. And I put my hope the most In the goodness of people's hearts and so if we could find how to really, really uncover and give voice to the goodness in our hearts and let that become in the forefront and not to act with hostility not to act with anger, about things we can say I'm not angry said but the taking come with the best of our hearts. But But don't be Don't be the kind of good person who doesn't challenge the status quo. Be the back of your goodness. It makes a difference where you sit with your goodness and makes a difference. Who you take into your heart who you become aware of what's your know. This morning I was I went to Trader Joe's and as I was leaving I was walking by I guess the delivery door they had they had big big door where trucks come and stuff and there was Somewhat beat up old SUV car van nightmares, we make a van and they were carrying all this what looked to me like, unsold probably expired food, bread all kinds of stuff and just in bags and putting in the back of this van. So I asked you know, where is this going? And the men said it's going to a shelter here in Redwood City on Spring Street.

Go on the Second Harvest website and read their statistics for how many people are hungry in Silicon Valley. There is a lot of people are hungry in one of the richest communities in the country. You don't have to go very far. To find challenges, but you know, we were busy with our lives and don't notice what goes on that get a little snippet walking past Trader Joe's and asking, you know, what was that? where's this going? Where is this going? Right here in Rapid City. So any of you meet Martin Luther King? Yes, but your story? Yeah, but your story.

So I voted for Barry Goldwater in 64. But it was also the year that I started teaching in the Chicago ghetto. And so I was lucky enough to really experience what was going on and firsthand basis and became a pretty, majorly liberal person, politically and so on economically, but anyway, he spoke at the Chicago City Symphony Hall on Michigan Avenue. And the power was so palpable in that room and probably has maybe seating for 1500 or something people. And I just remember that the, the walls felt sort of like they were pulsating. I mean, the whole place was just hugely electric, with his amazing oratory. Right. So I feel very grateful for that experience. My kids would wear three hats, or sometimes they were from mother Cabrini green, which has now been leveled a project and there were no locks on the door. So whatever they cared about, they had to bring with them to school. So multiple coats or multiple hands, whatever. Doesn't 64

Anybody else? Yes. Trudy?

Well, in the early 60s, I was a part of the Catholic interracial Council in San Francisco. And after Bloody Sunday, the word went out that people were needed to come and stand and, and march with the P with the black people. And so the bishop invited us to go. And we did there were six of us in my group. And we did march with Martin Luther King and we heard him speak on the steps of Browns chapel before we started the march and was just thinking about the fact I learned in Selma, that staying alive is not the most important thing.

Great. Thank you.

Anybody else?

Yeah, yeah.

You can use the mic otherwise people can't hear.

Good evening. No, I have not encountered Martin Luther King personally but there is actually a fact about him that is often miss taught in schools. And as someone earning a social science credit credential, I went too, I learned it in my urban and social justice program at USF, which is that the March on Washington wasn't about civil rights. It's often miss taught in schools in this country that the main thrust of that march was about civil rights. It wasn't. If you look closely at the photographs and the signs that people are holding, it was about the right to have jobs.

I see the well, you know, it's kind of a convenient thing to only remember the civil rights part. Because it's because it's less disturbing. It's less challenging, right, because the civil rights was taken care of if that was settled, wasn't it?

Or that somehow the two are connected, and that's too complicated of a conversation to have with our children. And so it's been simplified, and a lot of our curriculums. And so I felt that since you mentioned that that was really what he looked forward to and really what the march in Washington was about, I know

he was planning a second to march in Washington, and 68 there was specifically focusing on economics and economic inequality, but it kind of happened a bit. He was assassinated before it. Before that March happened. They built a shanty town, on the Mall, Washington, Lincoln mall. So

I hope that those of you who are engaged in Buddhist practice, mindfulness practice, that it's my it's my really my heartfelt hope in being a teacher and offering this is that somehow the practice doesn't just make us more happy or settled or peaceful in ourselves. But it really makes us agents for change and we support the change and make it our lives and make a difference for the lives of others and make this a better world. And it begins by learning about it, then Opening up and seeing what goes on around you. And who knows what you'll see outside of Trader Joe's if you look, as you know, to anyone what I mean, but what I mean by that in the small details of your life, things pop out and you can see pay attention to your neighbors and your friends and fellow citizens notice what goes on and then see what how your heart responds. So thank you all this evening and wish you well