

[April 5, 1968]

MR. MONDALE. Mr. President, more than any other man in this nation's history Martin Luther King brought the Negro to America's conscience. He became the visible of the invisible men. It took a man of unquestioned courage and conviction, a man of irreproachable character, a man of unmatched eloquence, a man of God to first confront us with the racism and repression in our own country.

Martin Luther King led his people to new self-respect. Like Moses, he was a man with a vision of the promised land. Moses at the close of his life stood on a mountaintop and looked upon the better land he had envisioned. To Moses, scripture says, the Lord spoke, saying, "I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not go over there." Alluding to these words two nights ago in Memphis, King spoke, "it doesn't matter with me because I've been to the mountain top. . . I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land."

Martin Luther King died in his fight to make men free. The foremost proponent of a non-violent confrontation between the races is dead. His generosity to the white man, his belief in the basic good will of all men, and his dramatic, non-violent action enabled him to speak to both races. His death, strangely, vindicates the black nationalists. Now we are confronted with increasing militancy, with lessening tolerance.

This day of mourning for him brings to a climax history's sweep through a decade -- from early years of hope for an integrated America to this year of self-consuming rage. In 1963 Martin Luther King spoke for the country from the Lincoln Memorial: "I have a dream," a dream of racial brotherhood, of a nation where Americans are judged not "by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Last month the dream seemed farther from reality than ever when the Riot Commission warned, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white -- separate and unequal."

King himself, speaking here in Washington on Sunday and despairing

the response of white Americans and of Congress to programs for the poor, warned, "we cannot afford to remain asleep. There are two challenges to America. The challenges are racism and poverty."

We can pray today that the death of the non-violent leader will not bring violence to life. In the days ahead we must act to fulfill King's dream.

A sick white American yesterday conceded and admitted the argument of the black militants -- the argument that white America is basically dishonest and indecent. It is up to the Congress today to lend powerful support to the argument of black moderates by immediately passing the 1968 Civil Rights bill, and by moving quickly to provide employment and housing opportunities for all blacks and whites. Last night on nationwide television, Whitney Young told the nation that moderate black leadership has suffered by this deed a grave setback -- and that the response today cannot come from black moderates. It must come from white America -- and the representatives of white America in the Congress.

It may indeed be too late for white America -- too late to peacefully and calmly repair the hideous destruction to man and spirit wrought by a hundred years of slavery and discrimination. But that should no longer be our guiding principle.

We can only move now by doing what is right.

Even talk and speeches of regret -- however genuine -- are insufficient. We need to keep faith with our black brothers in the same way that Martin Luther King kept constant faith with white America. In the midst of the most outrageous violence and brutality, Martin Luther King constantly reminded his followers that there were masses of decent white people who would rise up to give blacks their rights and equality.

He gave to white America a presumption of innocence and good faith. But the burden has now shifted -- on our heads is a terrible presumption of guilt and inhumanity, which we can erase only by deeds, not words. By legislation, not speeches. And by programs, not talk of calm and good will.



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