

**Speech for Reg Weaver, President of the NEA  
For Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, January 16, 2006  
At 11:00 a.m. in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Danville, Illinois  
Theme: “Unfinished Business”**

Written by: Woody Goulart, January 9, 2006

Opening of the Speech: [Thank-you remarks that you may wish to make of a personal nature regarding your introducer, Gladys Jones, president of the Danville Chapter of the NAACP. End with remarks you may wish to make of a personal remarks about being invited to speak today at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Danville, Illinois.]

Body of the Speech: I know that you all feel as I do. Blessed to be here. Blessed to be here on this day. In this holy place.

Because we are here to celebrate a birthday. A special birthday. We celebrate the birth and life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on this day.

There will be many of this day who remember what he said. And what he stood for.

As it should be.

He was – above all else – here on this earth to inspire us to a greater glory. And so he did.

He dreamed of a better day. His vision about what could be “in spite of the difficulties and the frustrations of the moment” – as he put it – was a vision for all of us. His vision inspired us. And his vision lives on.

But, we have some unfinished business. The vision was set forth over 40 years ago. Dr. King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC in the summer of 1963. His “I Have a Dream” speech is immortal. So, perhaps, is his vision. But, Dr. King’s vision doesn’t take care of itself. There is no autopilot for his dream.

We who live in this new century must tend to some unfinished business.

Not only here in Danville, where I was born. And not only here in the state of Illinois. But all across this great land. There is still much we must do.

Dr. King spoke of what he called “the whirlwinds of revolt.” He was referring, of course, in the early 1960s to the civil rights movement.

I think it would be fitting to remind ourselves today of other words that he spoke on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that August day in 1963. He said, “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. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”

Because we look back upon what he said about the struggle for equality, this is why we must admit there is still much work to be done. This is why we admit there is unfinished business.

Each of us – in our own way – has to choose. We have to choose how we will help bring about the vision that he spoke so eloquently about.

I have made certain choices in my life. I chose the path of education – not only as a career, but as a way of fulfilling my deep and lifelong desire to give back to my community.

I speak out whenever I can about what I see as the importance of public education. I see public education as an essential component of equality and opportunity. Every child needs these things. And that’s why I do all that I do in my professional life.

But, I am here with you today in my hometown to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on his day. And it is precisely because this is his day that I call upon all of us to remember his vision of equality.

In his memory, we all must do what that we can in our lives. In his memory, we must continue to work wherever we must for equality. Because even though Dr. King’s words were, indeed, powerful, his words were meant to inspire and guide us all to action.

The things that he spoke about – dreams of a better day “when all of God’s children” would be free – these things will come to be only by way of what we here in this new century do or don’t do. Whether we live and work in Danville, Illinois or in Washington, DC.

Dr. King’s dream must be carried into the future accompanied by action on our part. Each of us. Each in our own chosen way. Each wherever we may live.

And your path, and your location, and your choices may be different from mine. That’s okay. What matters is that you choose to act. Each in your own way.

We are the one who carry the dream forward. And although he told of his dream over 40 years ago, we must be inspired and enthusiastic and we must continue as if we heard him tell us just yesterday.

I can think of no better way to express our joy and our gratitude for him telling us how to dream as he did. I can think of no better way to observe his birthday today.

Closing of the Speech: [Thank-you remarks that you may wish to make of a personal nature regarding Danville, this congregation, and particular people who are present with you today.]

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