

“The Birth of a New Nation,”
Sermon Delivered at
Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

7 Apr
1957

[7 April 1957]
Montgomery, Ala.

Upon returning from Ghana, King used several occasions to share his experiences with friends and supporters in Montgomery.¹ In his first sermon following his return, King draws upon Exodus to frame his impressions of Ghana's battle against colonialism. He elaborates on the spiritual and political significance of the new nation's independence movement: "Ghana has something to say to us. It says to us first, that the oppressor never voluntarily gives freedom to the oppressed. You have to work for it." King asserts that desegregation would not occur without the same determination. The following text is taken from an audio recording of the event.

I want to preach this morning from the subject: “The Birth of a New Nation.” And I would like to use as a basis for our thinking together, a story that has long since been stenciled on the mental sheets of succeeding generations. It is the story of the Exodus, the story of the flight of the Hebrew people from the bondage of Egypt, through the wilderness and finally, to the Promised Land. It's a beautiful story. I had the privilege the other night of seeing the story in movie terms in New York City, entitled the “Ten Commandments” and I came to see it in all of its beauty. The struggle of Moses, the struggle of his devoted followers as they sought to get out of Egypt. And they finally moved on to the wilderness and toward the Promised Land. This is something of the story of every people struggling for freedom. It is the first story of man's explicit quest for freedom. And it demonstrates the stages that seem to inevitably follow the quest for freedom.

Prior to March the sixth, 1957, there existed a country known as the Gold Coast. This country was a colony of the British Empire. This country was situated in that vast continent known as Africa. I'm sure you know a great deal about Africa, that continent with some two hundred million people, and it extends and covers a great deal of territory. There are many familiar names associated with Africa that you would probably remember, and there are some countries in Africa that many people never realize. For instance, Egypt is in Africa. And there is that vast area of North Africa with Egypt and Ethiopia, with Tunisia and Algeria and Morocco, and Libya. Then you might move to South Africa, and you think of that extensive territory known as the Union of South Africa. There is that capital city Johannesburg that you read so much about these days. Then there is central Africa with places like Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. And then there is East Africa with places like Kenya and Tanganyika, and places like Uganda and other very powerful countries right there. And then you move over to West Africa where you find the French West Africa and Nigeria, and Liberia and Sierra Leone and

1. King spoke of his travels at a 1 April MIA mass meeting and a 17 April slide show presentation at Dexter (Graetz, Pastoral ledger, 25 March–3 April 1957; *Dexter Echo*, 1 May 1957).

7 Apr 1957 places like that. And it is in this spot, in this section of Africa, that we find the Gold Coast, there in West Africa.

You also know that for years and for centuries, Africa has been one of the most exploited continents in the history of the world. It's been the "Dark Continent." It's been the continent that has suffered all of the pain and the affliction that could be mustered up by other nations. And it is that continent which has experienced slavery, which has experienced all of the lowest standards that we can think about, and it's been brought into being by the exploitation inflicted upon it by other nations.

And this country, the Gold Coast, was a part of this extensive continent known as Africa. It's a little country there in West Africa about ninety-one thousand miles in area, with a population of about five million people, a little more than four and a half million. And it stands there with its capital city, Accra. For years the Gold Coast was exploited and dominated and trampled over. The first European settlers came in there about 1444, the Portuguese, and they started legitimate trade with the people in the Gold Coast. They started dealing with them with their gold, and in turn they gave them guns and ammunition and gunpowder and that type of thing. Well, pretty soon America was discovered a few years later in the fourteen hundreds, and then the British West Indies. And all of these growing discoveries brought about the slave trade.

You remember it started in America in 1619. And there was a big scramble for power in Africa. With the growth of the slave trade, there came into Africa, into the Gold Coast in particular, not only the Portuguese but also the Swedes and the Danes and the Dutch and the British. And all of these nations competed with each other to win the power of the Gold Coast so that they could exploit these people for commercial reasons and sell them into slavery.

Finally, in 1850, Britain won out, and she gained possession of the total territorial expansion of the Gold Coast. From 1850 to 1957, March sixth, the Gold Coast was a colony of the British Empire. And as a colony she suffered all of the injustices, all of the exploitation, all of the humiliation that comes as a result of colonialism. But like all slavery, like all domination, like all exploitation, it came to the point that the people got tired of it.

And that seems to be the long story of history. There seems to be a throbbing desire, there seems to be an internal desire for freedom within the soul of every man. And it's there; it might not break forth in the beginning, but eventually it breaks out. Men realize that, that freedom is something basic. To rob a man of his freedom is to take from him the essential basis of his manhood. To take from him his freedom is to rob him of something of God's image. To paraphrase the words of Shakespeare's *Othello*: "Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis, something, nothing; 'twas mine, 'tis his, has been the slave of thousands; But he who filches from me my freedom robs me of that which not enriches him, but makes me poor indeed."²

There is something in the soul that cries out for freedom. There is something deep down within the very soul of man that reaches out for Canaan. Men cannot

2. Cf. William Shakespeare's *Othello*, III, iii, 163-165.

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be satisfied with Egypt. They tried to adjust to it for a while. Many men have vested interests in Egypt, and they are slow to leave. Egypt makes it profitable to them, some people profit by Egypt. The vast majority, the masses of people never profit by Egypt, and they are never content with it. And eventually they rise up and begin to cry out for Canaan's land.

And so these people got tired. It had a long history. As far back as 1844, the chiefs themselves of the Gold Coast rose up and came together and revolted against the British Empire and the other powers that were in existence at that time dominating the Gold Coast. They revolted, saying that they wanted to govern themselves. But these powers clamped down on them, and the British said that we will not let you go.

About 1909, a young man was born on the twelfth of September. History didn't know at that time what that young man had in his mind. His mother and father, illiterate, not a part of the powerful tribal life of Africa, not chiefs at all, but humble people. And that boy grew up, he went to school at Achimota for a while in Africa, and then he finished there with honors and decided to work his way to America. And he landed to America one day with about fifty dollars in his pocket in terms of pounds, getting ready to get an education. And he went down to Pennsylvania, to Lincoln University. He started studying there, and he started reading the great insights of the philosophers, he started reading the great insights of the ages. And he finished there and took his theological degree there and preached awhile around Philadelphia and other areas as he was in the country. And went over to the University of Pennsylvania and took up a masters there in philosophy and sociology. All the years that he stood in America, he was poor, he had to work hard. He says in his autobiography how he worked as a bellhop in hotels, as a dishwasher, and during the summer how he worked as a waiter trying to struggle through school.³ [*recording interrupted*]

"I want to go back home. I want to go back to West Africa, the land of my people, my native land. There is some work to be done there." He got a ship and went to London and stopped for a while by London School of Economy and picked up another degree there.⁴ Then while in London, he came, he started thinking about Pan-Africanism, and the problem of how to free his people from colonialism. For as he said, he always realized that colonialism was made for domination and for exploitation. It was made to keep a certain group down and exploit that group economically for the advantage of another. He studied and thought about all of this, and one day he decided to go back to Africa.

He got to Africa and he was immediately elected the executive secretary of the United Party of the Gold Coast. And he worked hard, and he started getting a following. And the people in this party, the old, the people who had had their hands on the plow for a long time, thought he was pushing a little too fast, and they got a little jealous of his influence. And so finally he had to break from the United Party of the Gold Coast, and in 1949 he organized the Convention People's Party. It was this party that started out working for the independence of the Gold Coast.

3. Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), pp. 35-38.

4. Nkrumah attended the London School of Economics and Political Science from 1945 to 1946.

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He started out in a humble way, urging his people to unite for freedom. And urging the officials of the British Empire to give them freedom. They were slow to respond, but the masses of people were with him, and they had united to become the most powerful and influential party that had ever been organized in that section of Africa.

He started writing, and his companions with him and many of them started writing so much that the officials got afraid and they put them in jail, and Nkrumah himself was finally placed in jail for several years because he was a seditious man. He was an agitator. He was imprisoned on the basis of sedition. And he was placed there to stay in prison for many years, but he had inspired some people outside of prison. They got together just a few months after he'd been in prison and elected him the prime minister while he was in prison. For a while the British officials tried to keep him there, and Gbedemah says—one of his close associates, the minister of finance, Mr. Gbedemah—said that that night the people were getting ready to go down to the jail and get him out, but Gbedemah said, “This isn't the way, we can't do it like this, violence will break out and we will defeat our purpose.”⁵ But the British Empire saw that they had better let him out. And in a few hours Kwame Nkrumah was out of jail, the prime minister of the Gold Coast. He was placed there for fifteen years but he only served eight or nine months. And now he comes out, the prime minister of the Gold Coast.

And this was the struggling that had been going on for years. It was now coming to the point that this little nation was moving toward its independence. Then came the continual agitation, the continual resistance, so that the British Empire saw that it could no longer rule the Gold Coast. And they agreed that on the sixth of March, 1957, they would release this nation, that this nation would no longer be a colony of the British Empire, that this nation would be a sovereign nation within the British Commonwealth. All of this was because of the persistent protest, the continual agitation on the part of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and the other leaders who worked along with him and the masses of people who were willing to follow.

So that day finally came. It was a great day. The week ahead was a great week. They had been preparing for this day for many years, and now it was here. People coming in from all over the world. They had started getting in by the second of March. Seventy nations represented to come to say to this new nation: “We greet you. And we give you our moral support. We hope for you God's guidance as you move now into the realm of independence.” From America, itself, more than a hundred persons. And the press, the diplomatic guests and the prime minister's guests. And oh, it was a beautiful experience to see some of the leading persons on the scene of civil rights in America on hand to say, “Greetings to you,” as this new nation was born. Look over, to my right is Adam Powell, to my left is Charles Diggs, to my right again is Ralph Bunche. To the other side is Her Majesty's First

5. Komla Agbeli Gbedemah (1912–1998), born in Warri, Nigeria, was a long-time ally of Nkrumah. In 1951 he engineered the successful campaign of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party in the Gold Coast's first general election. He served as Ghana's minister of finance until a dispute with Nkrumah led to his exile in 1961.

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Minister of Jamaica, Manning, Ambassador [*Richard L.*] Jones of Liberia.⁶ All of these people from America, Mordecai Johnson, Horace Mann Bond, all of these people just going over to say: "We want to greet you and we want you to know that you have our moral support as you grow."⁷ Then you look out and see the vice-president of the United States, you see A. Philip Randolph, you see all of the people who have stood in the forefront of the struggle for civil rights over the years, coming over to Africa to say we bid you godspeed. This was a great day not only for Nkrumah, but for the whole of the Gold Coast. There, then came Tuesday, December the fifth, many events leading up to it.⁸ That night, we walked into the closing of Parliament. The closing of the old Parliament. The old Parliament which was, which presided over by the British Empire. The old Parliament which designated colonialism and imperialism. Now that Parliament is closing. That was a great sight and a great picture and a great scene. We sat there that night, just about five hundred able to get in there. People, thousands and thousands of people waiting outside, just about five hundred in there, and we were fortunate enough to be sitting there at that moment as guests of the prime minister. At that hour we noticed Prime Minister Nkrumah walking in, with all of his ministers, with his justices of the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast, and with all of the people of the Convention People's Party, the leaders of that party. Nkrumah came up to make his closing speech to the old Gold Coast. There was something old now passing away.

The thing that impressed me more than anything else that night was the fact that when Nkrumah walked in, and his other ministers who had been in prison with him, they didn't come in with the crowns and all of the garments of kings, but they walked in with prison caps and the coats that they had lived with for all of the months that they had been in prison.⁹ Nkrumah stood up and made his closing speech to Parliament with the little cap that he wore in prison for several months and the coat that he wore in prison for several months, and all of his ministers round about him. That was a great hour. An old Parliament passing away. And then at twelve o'clock that night we walked out. As we walked out, we noticed all over the polo grounds almost a half a million people. They had waited for this hour and this moment for years.

As we walked out of the door and looked at that beautiful building, we looked up to the top of it. And there was a little flag that had been flowing around the sky for many years. It was the Union Jack flag of the Gold Coast, the British flag, you see. But at twelve o'clock that night we saw a little flag coming down and another flag went up. The old Union Jack flag came down and the new flag of Ghana went up. This was a new nation now, a new nation being born. And when Prime Minister Nkrumah stood up before his people out in the polo ground and said, "We are no longer a British colony, we are a free, sovereign people," all over

6. King refers to Norman Washington Manley, who worked for Jamaican independence as the country's chief minister (1955–1959) before becoming the country's first prime minister.

7. Horace Mann Bond was president of Lincoln University, Nkrumah's alma mater.

8. King means 5 March 1957.

9. Gbedemah and other members of Nkrumah's cabinet served prison terms for their work in the nationalist struggle.

7 Apr 1957 that vast throng of people we could see tears. And I stood there thinking about so many things. Before I knew it, I started weeping. I was crying for joy. And I knew about all of the struggles, and all of the pain, and all of the agony that these people had gone through for this moment.

After Nkrumah had made that final speech, it was about twelve-thirty now. And we walked away. And we could hear little children six years old and old people eighty and ninety years old walking the streets of Accra crying: "Freedom! Freedom!" They couldn't say it in the sense that we'd say it, many of them don't speak English too well, but they had their accents and it could ring out "free-doom!" They were crying it in a sense that they had never heard it before. And I could hear that old Negro spiritual once more crying out: "Free at last, free at last, Great God Almighty, I'm free at last." They were experiencing that in their very souls. And everywhere we turned, we could hear it ringing out from the housetops. We could hear it from every corner, every nook and crook of the community. "Freedom! Freedom!" This was the birth of a new nation. This was the breaking aloose from Egypt.

Wednesday morning the official opening of Parliament was held. There again we were able to get on the inside. There Nkrumah made his new speech. And now the prime minister of the Gold Coast with no superior, with all of the power that [Harold] MacMillan of England has, with all of the power that [Jawaharlal] Nehru of India has, now a free nation, now the prime minister of a sovereign nation. Duchess of Kent walked in, the Duchess of Kent who represented the Queen of England, no longer had authority now. She was just a passing visitor now. The night before she was the official leader and spokesman for the Queen, thereby the power behind the throne of the Gold Coast. But now it's Ghana, it's a new nation now, and she is just an official visitor like M. L. King and Ralph Bunche and Coretta King and everybody else, because this is a new nation. A new Ghana has come into being. And now Nkrumah stands the leader of that great nation, and when he drives out, the people standing around the streets of the city after Parliament is open, cry out: "All hail, Nkrumah!" The name of Nkrumah crowning around the whole city, everybody crying this name because they knew he had suffered for them, he had sacrificed for them, he'd gone to jail for them. This was the birth of a new nation.

This nation was now out of Egypt and had crossed the Red Sea. Now it will confront its wilderness. Like any breaking aloose from Egypt, there is a wilderness ahead. There is a problem of adjustment. Nkrumah realizes that. There is always this wilderness standing before him. For instance, it's a one-crop country, cocoa mainly. Sixty percent of the cocoa of the world comes from the Gold Coast or from Ghana. In order to make the economic system more stable, it will be necessary to industrialize. Cocoa is too fluctuating to base a whole economy on that. So there is the necessity of industrializing. Nkrumah said to me that one of the first things that he will do is to work toward industrialization.

And also he plans to work toward the whole problem of increasing the cultural standards of the community. Still ninety percent of the people are illiterate, and it is necessary to lift the whole cultural standard of the community in order to make it possible to stand up in the free world. Yes, there is a wilderness ahead, though it is my hope that even people from America will go to Africa as immigrants, right there to the Gold Coast and lend their technical assistance. For there

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is great need and rich, there are rich opportunities there. Right now is the time that American Negroes can lend their technical assistance to a growing new nation. I was very happy to see already, people who have moved in and making good. The son of the late president of Bennett College, Dr. Jones, is there, who started an insurance company and making good, going to the top.¹⁰ A doctor from Brooklyn, New York, had just come in that week and his wife is also a dentist, and they are living there now, going in there and working, and the people love them. There will be hundreds and thousands of people, I'm sure, going over to make for the growth of this new nation. And Nkrumah made it very clear to me that he would welcome any persons coming there as immigrants and to live there. Now don't think that because they have five million people the nation can't grow, that that's a small nation to be overlooked. Never forget the fact that when America was born in 1776, when it received its independence from the British Empire, there were fewer, less than four million people in America, and today it's more than a hundred and sixty million. So never underestimate a people because it's small now. America was smaller than Ghana when it was born.

There is a great day ahead. The future is on its side. It's going now through the wilderness. But the Promised Land is ahead.

And I want to take just a few more minutes as I close to say three or four things that this reminds us of and things that it says to us. Things that we must never forget as we ourselves find ourselves breaking aloose from an evil Egypt, trying to move through the wilderness toward the promised land of cultural integration: Ghana has something to say to us. It says to us first, that the oppressor never voluntarily gives freedom to the oppressed. You have to work for it. And if Nkrumah and the people of the Gold Coast had not stood up persistently, revolting against the system, it would still be a colony of the British Empire. Freedom is never given to anybody. For the oppressor has you in domination because he plans to keep you there, and he never voluntarily gives it up. And that is where the strong resistance comes. Privileged classes never give up their privileges without strong resistance.

So don't go out this morning with any illusions. Don't go back into your homes and around Montgomery thinking that the Montgomery City Commission and that all of the forces in the leadership of the South will eventually work out this thing for Negroes, it's going to work out, it's going to roll in on the wheels of inevitability. If we wait for it to work itself out, it will *never* be worked out! Freedom only comes through persistent revolt, through persistent agitation, through persistently rising up against the system of evil. The bus protest is just the beginning. Buses are integrated in Montgomery, but that is just the beginning. And don't sit down and do nothing now because the buses are integrated, because if you stop now, we will be in the dungeons of segregation and discrimination for another hundred years. And our children and our children's children will suffer all of the bondage that we have lived under for years. It never comes voluntarily. We've got to keep on keeping on in order to gain freedom. It never comes like that. It would

10. David Dallas Jones was president of Bennett College from 1926 to 1956. His son David established the Ghana Insurance Company in Accra.

7 Apr 1957 be fortunate if the people in power had sense enough to go on and give up, but they don't do it like that. It is not done voluntarily, but it is done through the pressure that comes about from people who are oppressed.

If there had not been a Gandhi in India with all of his noble followers, India would have never been free. If there had not been an Nkrumah and his followers in Ghana, Ghana would still be a British colony. If there had not been abolitionists in America, both Negro and white, we might still stand today in the dungeons of slavery. And then because there have been, in every period, there are always those people in every period of human history who don't mind getting their necks cut off, who don't mind being persecuted and discriminated and kicked about, because they know that freedom is never given out, but it comes through the persistent and the continual agitation and revolt on the part of those who are caught in the system. Ghana teaches us that.

It says to us another thing. It reminds us of the fact that a nation or a people can break alose from oppression without violence. Nkrumah says in the first two pages of his autobiography, which was published on the sixth of March—a great book which you ought to read—he said that he had studied the social systems of social philosophers and he started studying the life of Gandhi and his techniques. And he said that in the beginning he could not see how they could ever get alose from colonialism without armed revolt, without armies and ammunition, rising up. Then he says after he continued to study Gandhi and continued to study this technique, he came to see that the only way was through nonviolent positive action. And he called his program “positive action.” And it's a beautiful thing, isn't it? That here is a nation that is now free, and it is free without rising up with arms and with ammunition. It is free through nonviolent means. Because of that the British Empire will not have the bitterness for Ghana that she has for China, so to speak. Because of that when the British Empire leaves Ghana, she leaves with a different attitude than she would have left with if she had been driven out by armies. We've got to revolt in such a way that after revolt is over we can live with people as their brothers and their sisters. Our aim must never be to defeat them or humiliate them.

On the night of the State Ball, standing up talking with some people, Mordecai Johnson called my attention to the fact that Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah was there dancing with the Duchess of Kent. And I said, “Isn't this something? Here it is the once-serf, the once-slave, now dancing with the lord on an equal plane.” And that is done because there is no bitterness. These two nations will be able to live together and work together because the breaking alose was through nonviolence and not through violence.

The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence are emptiness and bitterness. This is the thing I'm concerned about. Let us fight passionately and unrelentingly for the goals of justice and peace. But let's be sure that our hands are clean in this struggle. Let us never fight with falsehood and violence and hate and malice, but always fight with love, so that when the day comes that the walls of segregation have completely crumbled in Montgomery, that we will be able to live with people as their brothers and sisters. Oh, my friends, our aim must be not to defeat Mr. Engel-

hardt, not to defeat Mr. Sellers and Mr. Gayle and Mr. Parks.¹¹ Our aim must be to defeat the evil that's in them. But our aim must be to win the friendship of Mr. Gayle and Mr. Sellers and Mr. Engelhardt. We must come to the point of seeing that our ultimate aim is to live with all men as brothers and sisters under God, and not be their enemies or anything that goes with that type of relationship. And this is one thing that Ghana teaches us: that you can break alose from evil through nonviolence, through a lack of bitterness. Nkrumah says in his book: "When I came out of prison, I was not bitter toward Britain. I came out merely with the determination to free my people from the colonialism and imperialism that had been inflicted upon them by the British. But I came out with no bitterness."¹² And because of that, this world will be a better place in which to live.

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There's another thing that Ghana reminds us. I'm coming to the conclusion now. Ghana reminds us that freedom never comes on a silver platter. It's never easy. Ghana reminds us that whenever you break out of Egypt, you better get ready for stiff backs. You better get ready for some homes to be bombed. You better get ready for some churches to be bombed. You better get ready for a lot of nasty things to be said about you, because you getting out of Egypt. And whenever you break alose from Egypt, the initial response of the Egyptian is bitterness. It never comes with ease. It comes only through the hardness and persistence of life. Ghana reminds us of that. You better get ready to go to prison. When I looked out and saw the prime minister there with his prison cap on that night, that reminded me of that fact, that freedom never comes easy. It comes through hard labor and it comes through toil. It comes through hours of despair and disappointment.

And that's the way it goes. There is no crown without a cross. I wish we could get to Easter without going to Good Friday, but history tells us that we got to go by Good Friday before we can get to Easter. That's the long story of freedom, isn't it? Before you get to Canaan you've got a Red Sea to confront. You have a hardened heart of a pharaoh to confront. You have the prodigious hilltops of evil in the wilderness to confront. And even when you get up to the Promised Land, you have giants in the land. The beautiful thing about it is that there are a few people who've been over in the land. They have spied enough to say, "Even though the giants are there we can possess the land, because we got the internal fiber to stand up amid anything that we have to face."

The road to freedom is a difficult, hard road. It always makes for temporary setbacks. And those people who tell you today that there is more tension in Montgomery than there has ever been are telling you right. Whenever you get out of Egypt, you always confront a little tension, you always confront a little temporary setback. If you didn't confront that you'd never get out. You must remember that, that the tensionless period that we like to think of was the period when the Negro was complacently adjusted to segregation, discrimination, insult and ex-

11. Sam Engelhardt, Jr., Clyde Sellers, William Gayle, and Franklin Parks were among the political leaders of Montgomery's white community during the bus boycott.

12. "I came out of gaol and into the Assembly without the slightest feeling of bitterness to Britain. I stand for no discrimination against any race or individual, but I am unalterably opposed to imperialism in any form" (*Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, p. 138).

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ploitation. And the period of tension is the period when the Negro has decided to rise up and break aloose from that. And this is the peace that we are seeking. Not an old negative obnoxious peace, which is merely the absence of tension, but a positive lasting peace, which is the presence of brotherhood and justice. And it is never brought about without this temporary period of tension.

The road to freedom is difficult, but finally, Ghana tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice. That's what it tells us, now. You can interpret Ghana any kind of way you want to, but Ghana tells me that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice. That night when I saw that old flag coming down and the new flag coming up, I saw something else. That wasn't just an ephemeral, evanescent event appearing on the stage of history. But it was an event with eternal meaning, for it symbolizes something. That thing symbolized to me that an old order is passing away and a new order is coming into being. An old order of colonialism, of segregation, of discrimination is passing away now. And a new order of justice and freedom and good will is being born. That's what it said. Somehow the forces of justice stand on the side of the universe, so that you can't ultimately trample over God's children and profit by it.

I want to come back to Montgomery now, but I must stop by London for a moment. For London reminds me of something. I never will forget the day we went into London. The next day we started moving around this great city, the only city in the world that is almost as large as New York City. Over eight million people in London, about eight million, three hundred thousand; New York about eight million, five hundred thousand. London larger in area than New York, though. Standing in London is an amazing picture. And I never will forget the experience I had, the thoughts that came to my mind. We went to Buckingham Palace. And I looked there at all of Britain, at all of the pomp and circumstance of royalty. And I thought about all of the queens and kings that had passed through here. Look at the beauty of the changing of the guards and all of the guards with their beautiful horses. It's a beautiful sight. Move on from there and go over to Parliament. Move into the House of Lords and the House of Commons. There with all of its beauty standing up before the world is one of the most beautiful sights in the world.

Then I remember, we went on over to Westminster Abbey. And I thought about several things when we went into this great church, this great cathedral, the center of the Church of England. We walked around and went to the tombs of the kings and queens buried there. Most of the kings and queens of England are buried right there in the Westminster Abbey. And I walked around. On the one hand I enjoyed and appreciated the great gothic architecture of that massive cathedral. I stood there in awe thinking about the greatness of God and man's feeble attempt to reach up for God. And I thought something else. I thought about the Church of England. My mind went back to Buckingham Palace, and I said that this is the symbol of a dying system. There was a day that the queens and kings of England could boast that the sun never sets on the British Empire. A day when she occupied the greater portion of Australia, the greater portion of Canada. There was a day when she ruled most of China, most of Africa, and all of India. I started thinking about this empire.

I started thinking about the fact that she ruled over India one day. Mahatma Gandhi stood there at every hand, trying to get the freedom of his people. And they never bowed to it. They never, they decided that they were going to stand up

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and hold India in humiliation and in colonialism many, many years. I remember we passed by Ten Downing Street. That's the place where the prime minister of England lives. And I remember that a few years ago a man lived there by the name of Winston Churchill. One day he stood up before the world and said, "I did not become his Majesty's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire."¹³

And I thought about the fact that a few weeks ago a man by the name of Anthony Eden lived there. And out of all of his knowledge of the Middle East, he decided to rise up and march his armies with the forces of Israel and France into Egypt. And there they confronted their doom, because they were revolting against world opinion. Egypt, a little country. Egypt, a country with no military power. They could have easily defeated Egypt. But they did not realize that they were fighting more than Egypt. They were attacking world opinion, they were fighting the whole Asian-African bloc, which is the bloc that now thinks and moves and determines the course of the history of the world.¹⁴

I thought of many things. I thought of the fact that the British Empire exploited India. Think about it! A nation with four hundred million people and the British exploited them so much that out of a population of four hundred million, three hundred and fifty million made an annual income of less than fifty dollars a year. Twenty-five of that had to be used for taxes and the other things of life. I thought about dark Africa. And how the people there, if they can make a hundred dollars a year, they are living very well they think. Two shillings a day—one shilling is fourteen cents, two shillings, twenty-eight cents—that's a good wage. That's because of the domination of the British Empire.

All of these things came to my mind, and when I stood there in Westminster Abbey with all of its beauty, and I thought about all of the beautiful hymns and anthems that the people would go in there to sing. And yet the Church of England never took a stand against this system. The Church of England sanctioned it. The Church of England gave it moral stature. All of the exploitation perpetuated by the British Empire was sanctioned by the Church of England.

But something else came to my mind. God comes in the picture even when the Church won't take a stand. God has injected a principle in this universe. God has said that all men must respect the dignity and worth of all human personality, "And if you don't do that, I will take charge." It seems this morning that I can hear God speaking. I can hear Him speaking throughout the universe, saying, "'Be still, and know that I am God.'¹⁵ And if you don't stop, if you don't straighten up, if you don't stop exploiting people, I'm going to rise up and break the backbone

13. Winston Churchill was prime minister of Great Britain from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955. The quote is from Churchill's "The End of the Beginning," 10 November 1942 (Churchill, *The End of the Beginning: War Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill* [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1943], p. 268).

14. King refers to the 1956 Suez Canal controversy. After Egyptian head of state Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company, an Israeli-British-French force attacked the Egyptians in an unsuccessful attempt to retain control of the Suez. Shortly thereafter, British prime minister Anthony Eden resigned, citing ill health.

15. Psalms 46:10.

7 Apr of your power.¹⁶ And your power will be no more!" And the power of Great
1957 Britain is no more. I looked at France. I looked at Britain. And I thought about
the Britain that could boast, "The sun never sets on our great Empire." And I say
now she had gone to the level that the sun hardly rises on the British Empire. Be-
cause it was based on exploitation. Because the God of the universe eventually
takes a stand.

And I say to you this morning, my friends, rise up and know that as you struggle
for justice, you do not struggle alone. But God struggles with you. And He is work-
ing every day. Somehow I can look out, I can look out across the seas and across
the universe, and cry out, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the
Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." Then
I think about it because His truth is marching on, and I can sing another chorus:
"Hallelujah, glory hallelujah! His truth is marching on."¹⁷

Then I can hear Isaiah again, because it has profound meaning to me, that some-
how "every valley shall be exalted, and every hill shall be made low; the crooked
places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; and the glory of the
Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."¹⁸

That's the beauty of this thing: all flesh shall see it together. Not some from the
heights of Park Street and others from the dungeons of slum areas. Not some
from the pinnacles of the British Empire and some from the dark deserts of
Africa. Not some from inordinate, superfluous wealth and others from abject,
deadening poverty. Not some white and not some black, not some yellow and not
some brown, but all flesh shall see it together. They shall see it from Montgomery.
They shall see it from New York. They shall see it from Ghana. They shall see it
from China.

For I can look out and see a great number, as John saw, marching into the great
eternity, because God is working in this world, and at this hour, and at this mo-
ment. And God grants that we will get on board and start marching with God be-
cause we got orders now to break down the bondage and the walls of colonialism,
exploitation, and imperialism. To break them down to the point that no man will
trample over another man, but that all men will respect the dignity and worth of
all human personality. And then we will be in Canaan's freedom land.

Moses might not get to see Canaan, but his children will see it. He even got to
the mountain top enough to see it and that assured him that it was coming. But the
beauty of the thing is that there's always a Joshua to take up his work and take
the children on in. And it's there waiting with its milk and honey, and with all of the
bountiful beauty that God has in store for His children. Oh, what exceedingly mar-
velous things God has in store for us. Grant that we will follow Him enough to gain
them. [*recording interrupted*]

O God, our gracious Heavenly Father, help us to see the insights that come from
this new nation. Help us to follow Thee and all of Thy creative works in this world.
And that somehow we will discover that we are made to live together as brothers.

16. Cf. Leviticus 26:19

17. Julia Ward Howe, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (1862).

18. Cf. Isaiah 40:4-5.

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And that it will come in this generation: the day when all men will recognize the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Amen. 10 Apr 1957

At. MLKEC.