

**Rep. John Lewis
First Douglass/O'Connell Speech
Iveagh/Dublin, Ireland
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It is a great pleasure for me to be here today to honor two champions of peace, who struggled and suffered, not just for a people or for one nation, but for the liberation of all humankind. Frederick Douglass and Daniel O'Connell lived almost two centuries ago, but their example still lights up the minds of communities today. What is it about what they gave and what they sacrificed that makes their legacy one we still honor down through the ages?

After the events of March 7, 1965, what we call Bloody Sunday and named after a conflict here in Ireland in 1887 between police and demonstrators....

...President Lyndon Johnson made one of the most powerful statements any American president has ever made about the quest for freedom and the issue of equal justice in the United States.

He said, "I speak tonight for the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy.... At times history and fate meeting in a single place and a single time in man's unending search for freedom... Our mission is at once the oldest and the most basic of this country--to right wrong, to do justice, to serve man.. In our time we have come to live with the moments of great crisis. Our lives have been marked with debate about great issues, issues of war and peace, issues of prosperity and depression.

*But rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of [a nation] itself. ... The issue of equal rights [for every human being] is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, and should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation." For...what does a nation profit, if it shall gain the whole world, and lose its own soul? And at the end of the speech Johnson uses the words of the Civil Rights Movement saying, *And we shall overcome.**

With these words, a man you may feel is an unlikely prophet, summed up the entire course of recorded history.

The search for freedom is the core of every conflict. It is the foundation of every great speech. It is written on the heart of every man. It calls from the depths of every woman's soul. It is captured by the poetic innocence that fills the mouths of babes. It is a divine right that can never be taken away, no matter what king or queen, corporate giant or multinational power may do. No matter what politics or evil scheme may be devised. War and epidemic may try to dam it up or press it down. It can be delayed, but it will never be denied.

And that is why the lives of Daniel O'Connell and Frederick Douglass remain relevant today.

Because we are still on that journey down a long road toward the liberation of all human kind. That's why the work of Cesar Chavez and Father Daniel Berrigan, Betty Williams and Nelson Mandela leave lessons for all of us that are meaningful today. We are still on that journey begun thousands of years ago, a march toward justice to redeem the soul of every nation until the whole world community finally accepts one simple truth-- we are one people, one family, the human family. And we all live in one house, the same house, the world house.

O'Connell and Douglass only met once, but their meeting was transformative.

It was 1845, about seven years after Douglass had run away from a Maryland plantation, with hell hounds barking at his heels, to declare himself a free man in the North. This Emerald Isle was his refuge, and he traveled throughout these beautiful shores to finally settle his fate as a free man. About his visit to Dublin, he said, "I find myself not treated as a color, but as a man--not as a thing, but as a child of the common Father of us all."

Daniel O'Connell and other Irishmen had been early advocates against the trafficking of slaves. Though O'Connell never traveled to America and may have never seen the brutality of American slavery.....
...somehow he saw a connection between his struggle and their struggle. Somehow he realized they were all oppressed by the same hand.

Douglass felt that same connection. He saw the suffering of Irish citizens who were left out and left behind, and through that suffering he discovered an immutable bond that joined him to all the human suffering everywhere. So when he heard O'Connell speak so passionately about the freedom of slaves, about men and women he had never met, he was transformed. He became convinced that the struggle for liberation, was one struggle, a worldwide struggle to free all humanity from the vile hand of oppression.

And it was also Daniel O'Connell, who convinced Douglass that non-violence was the most excellent way to meet their common enemy. The longer I live I have come to believe that non-violence is one of those immutable principles that should never be violated. It is the natural companion of the highest values of love, peace, and compassion. And it seems that the message constantly put before us as the key to our ultimate freedom.

Almost 25 years later, when Frederick Douglass was still alive, in another corner of the world another man was born into the same struggle against the same human foe.

Mohandas Gandhi was born in 1869, and the work of Gandhi would go on to impact the life of Martin Luther King Jr. The work of King changed my life, and that is why I am standing here today.

You see there is a lineage of struggle passed down through the ages, and every one who is a part of it comes to this planet with the same purpose, to share the one great truth about the brotherhood of all humankind.

Dr. King put it one way, he said, "We must learn to live as brothers and sisters or we will perish as fools." Gandhi put it another way. He said, "It is either non-violence or non-existence."

I grew up on a farm in rural Alabama outside the city limits of a little town named Troy. When my father and I would go into town, I saw those signs that said WHITE MEN, COLORED MEN, WHITE WOMEN, COLORED WOMEN, WHITE WAITING, COLORED WAITING. I used to ask my mother, my father, my grandparents and great-grandfather, "Why segregation? Why racial discrimination?"

And they would say, "That's the way it is. Don't get in trouble. Don't get in the way." But when I was 15 years old, I heard the voice of Martin Luther King Jr. on an old radio. He was talking about Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

He was talking about the ability of a committed, determined people to make a difference in society. When I heard his voice, I felt like he was talking directly to me. I knew then I could strike a blow against legalized segregation and racial discrimination. I decided to get in trouble. I decided to get in the way. But it was good trouble, necessary trouble.

In the Civil Rights Movement, as many of you know, we didn't just wake up one day and decide to March on Washington or march from Selma to Montgomery.

We studied what Gandhi attempted to do in South Africa and what he accomplished in India. We studied what Dr. King accomplished in Montgomery. We studied Thoreau and Civil Disobedience. We studied Emerson and Rauschenbush and others. We studied the lineage of struggle and the many philosophies of non-violent confrontation to plot our steps to freedom.

The purpose of non-violent discipline is to stop the cycle of injury and destruction, to stop the pain in an attempt to wake up the abuser to the truth, to the truth of human unity.

There are very few people who would ever question this philosophy. They might call it brilliant, beautiful and right. But in their hearts most people doubt whether peace can really work. But let me tell you a story about Bloody Sunday--March 7, 1965--in Selma, Alabama.

[Story of Edmund Pettus Bridge]

Because of the discipline and philosophy of non-violence, not one person died on the Edmund Pettus Bridge that day, but millions of Americans, not only African Americans, but Latino, Asian and Native Americans, senior citizens, rural voters, and millions of others were ushered into the democratic process because of what happened in Selma that day.

It took years of non-violent protests, years of standing in unmovable lines, and the final push on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday, but change did come. Peace does work.

Not only does it changes laws, but it changes hearts and minds. Last year on a Faith and Politics pilgrimage I lead to Alabama I attended a program at First Baptist church in Montgomery like I always do. But this time Kevin Murphy, the Montgomery police chief, went to the podium....

[POLICE CHIEF APOLOGY STORY]

There is still a lot of work to do in Alabama, still a lot more ground to cover, but the work we did almost 50 years ago, is still transforming lives.

In 1961 in America it was against the law for blacks and whites to sit together on a public bus in the Deep South. We had to change that. we developed something called the Freedom Rides. You may have heard about it.

I was one of the original 13 Freedom Riders

On May 4, 1961, we left Washington, seated in an integrated fashion on a Greyhound bus.

We had few problems riding through Virginia and North Carolina until we got to Rock Hill, South Carolina.

[Freedom Rides in Rock Hill story]

After President Obama was elected in the fall of 2008, I got a phone call from a man named Elwin Wilson. He said he was one of the men who had beaten me in Rock Hill and he wanted to come visit me in Washington, and I said I would be happy to see him.

[Elwin Wilson Apology]

Elwin Wilson died last year, but his wife said he was so relieved that he had made peace with his own soul. Even though he was a racist, even though he had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan, even though he represented what some of us might feel is the worst of humanity, he became the only individual person who attacked me who has ever come forward to apologize.

So when your days seem long, and the settlement you are trying to reach seems like it's so hard to come by, remember Kevin Murphy, the Montgomery police chief and remember Elwin Wilson.

Sometimes the reconciliation we seek may take years to see, but you must know your work is not in vain. I want to leave you with a story from my childhood that describes how we must hold to our belief in the power of peace and non-violence to transform humanity.

[WALKING WITH THE WIND]

My friends, the storms may come. The winds may blow. The rain may beat down on this old house we call Dublin. Call it the House of Ireland. Call it the house of Alabama, Georgia or the United States. Call it our commitment to peace and non-violence in the world community.

We must never, ever leave that house. We all live in the same house, one house, the world house. In the final analysis, we are one people, one family, the human family.

So my friends, keep the faith. Don't give up, give in or give out. Don't get lost in a sea of despair, but keep your eyes on the prize. Walk with the wind, and let the spirit of Frederick Douglass and Daniel O'Connell be your guide. Thank you.