

## 5. Time to envision a new world

Let me restate how I summed up Dr. King with a challenge for all of us here today:

The main meaning of our lives is advanced when we become conscious men and women who take a moral and political position in thought and action to confront evil and the structures of oppression and exploitation faced by Black people, the American people as a whole, indeed all of humanity on a world scale.

Brothers and sisters, if Dr. King was what we say, then we can be what he wanted us to be.

As the Chicago musicians of the AACM say, we are ancient to the future. The message we want to send to the future is that King didn't die, Malcolm didn't die, the radical Black tradition lives through each generation as we reproduce the values and thinking and the action of those who came before us.

Long live the legacy of Dr. King!

Stand tall, Black men and women, and live the legacy!

**Abdul Alkalimat** (Gerald A. McWorter, mcworter@illinois.edu) is a founder of the field of Black Studies and author of many books and papers about Black liberation. He wrote the first college textbook for the field, *Introduction to Afro-American Studies*, which has seen seven editions, the last one free and online. A lifelong scholar-activist with a PhD from the University of Chicago, he has lectured, taught, and directed academic programs across the US, the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and China. Two of his early contributions were serving as chair of the Chicago chapter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and co-founding the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) in 1967. Raised in Chicago's Cabrini Rowhouses, he is now professor emeritus at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. His most recent book is *The Wall of Respect: Public Art and Black Liberation in 1960s Chicago*, co-edited with Romi Crawford and Rebecca Zorach and published by Northwestern University Press. Much of his work is freely available at <http://www.alkalimat.org>.



Martin Luther King, Jr. sculpture in Washington, D.C.

# Martin Luther King in 2018

Remarks by Abdul Alkalimat

at the Gary Comer Youth Center, 7200 S Ingleside, Chicago

January 18, 2018

Thank you for inviting me to give these remarks. What a wonderful opportunity, to speak of freedom at a time when we so desperately need more clarity on the subject.

I was active in the 1960s movement as a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, serving for a time as chairperson of its branch here in Chicago. It was my honor to march with and get to know Dr. King and his many associates from C.T. Vivian and Ralph Abernathy to right here in Chicago with

Jesse Jackson and Al Sampson. This was a time that helped shaped me and affirm my life's purpose. It is a legacy for all of us to learn from, to be inspired by, and to keep alive for the generations to come.

My brief remarks will focus on why the legacy of Dr. King is a dangerous but necessary path to march down if we are to have a serious reflection on freedom in this land that continues to face us with a legacy of slavery, exploitation and oppression.

You have a copy of what we called the Black Liberation Month News that we published 32 years ago on Dr. King. We renamed Negro History Week to Black Liberation Month to answer the question "Black history for what?"

The main meaning of Dr. King is that he was a conscious Black man who took a moral and political position in thought and action to confront evil and the structures of oppression and exploitation faced by Black people, the American people as a whole, indeed all of humanity on a world scale. Let me break that down.

### **1. A conscious Black man**

- a. He was a serious student: Morehouse for BA, Boston for his PhD
- b. He was a reader
- c. He learned from others
- d. He was a teacher

### **2. A moral and political position**

- a. Politics without morality becomes opportunism and pragmatism
- b. Forces one to define the meaning of life as both

### **3. Thought and action**

- a. Connecting the mind and the body
- b. Theory and practice

### **4. Evil and the structures of oppression and exploitation**

- a. Strategy for revolutionary transformation – fighting evil
- b. Tactical struggle to transform the world one step at a time

### **5. Black people, American people and all of humanity**

- a. There is a Black particularity
- b. We represent universal values

So let me repeat my summation: The main meaning of Dr. King is that he was a conscious Black man who took a moral and political position in thought and action to confront evil and the structures of oppression and exploitation faced by Black people, the American people as a whole, indeed all of humanity on a world scale.

Let me now turn to us.

These are the same five challenges we face today:

### **1. Being conscious**

- a. Fight ignorance and yes "fake news" and "alternative facts"
- b. Stand on the radical Black tradition, Black intellectual history

### **2. Aligning our moral values with our political understanding**

- a. Form of democracy is used to cover over evil
- b. Time to call out what's wrong

### **3. Activism is the way to change the world**

- a. We have history here in Chicago – school boycotts, Harold Washington
- b. Time to get rid of Trumpism

### **4. Time to think beyond capitalism**

- a. Technology and the end of work
- b. Time to share the abundance